

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 5, inclusive, answered orally.

Youth Services

6. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will report on the implementation of consent courses in youth organisations and youth clubs (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45879/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I fully support the inclusion of sexual consent courses in our schools, youth organisations and clubs.

Through Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, my Department actively supports the Manuela Programme aimed at 15-16 year olds.

Developed in partnership with the Rape Crisis Network and the Manuela Foundation the programme focuses on healthy relationships, awareness and understanding of consent.

During the course of six weeks students are asked to challenge ideas of what consent is, debate their opinions on sexual violence and examine how it affects them in their lives.

The sessions also explore a range of ways to prevent sexual violence from happening. This includes developing a shared respect for boundaries, the right to say no and bodily integrity.

In the first half of this year this has reached 45-schools.

We intend reaching 1,500 transition students during the year.

It is envisioned that out of this work an evidence based quality assured programme aimed at preventing sexual violence will be included in mainstream education.

As Minister I am also greatly encouraged by the large numbers of young people learning about consent through projects in local youth clubs.

My Department also provides funding to the B4U Decide Sexual Health Programme in the youth sector.

This 16 session programme trains our youth leaders is to support young people to delay the onset of early sex until they feel ready.

In terms of responding to the needs of victims of Domestic Sexual and Gender based Violence a further €1.5m has been secured in Budget 2019 – building on the increases of recent

years.

Questions Nos. 7 to 13, inclusive, answered orally.

Child and Family Agency Staff

14. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans being put in place to employ a new chief executive for Tusla. [45919/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Under the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013, the Board of Tusla is responsible for the appointment of the new Chief Executive Officer.

The Act requires my approval and the approval of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for the terms and conditions of the job that the Board may wish to set. However, I have no function in the selection process.

Following the resignation of the previous Chief Executive, Tusla consulted with my Department and the Public Appointments Service and discussed the process of recruiting a new permanent Chief Executive Officer.

Given the likely timelines associated with recruitment of this senior post, my Department secured approval from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for Tusla to appoint an interim chief executive officer from within Tusla's senior management team.

The successful candidate at interview was Mr Pat Smyth. He was appointed to the role in an interim capacity with effect from 1st of October 2018. His appointment ensures continuity in the operations of Tusla's functions.

I met with members of the Board on 1st October. Among other things, we discussed the Board's plans, considerations as to the specifications of the role and the intended recruitment process. This process will involve the Public Appointments Service running an open competition. It will also involve an element of executive search to help to identify suitable applicants.

My Department will work with Tusla and the Public Appointments Service to assist as required with this recruitment. My Department will shortly engage with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to seek approval of the terms and conditions for the permanent Chief Executive post.

This is one of the most challenging and important roles in the country. Tusla will have a budget next year of some €786m, with more than 4,000 staff providing frontline services to vulnerable children and their families.

It is essential that a candidate of the highest calibre is recruited to lead on the transformation and delivery of effective child and family services in Ireland.

I appointed two new members to the Board in 2018 who have a professional background in Human Resource Management. I am confident that the Board will find the most suitable candidate for this important role.

Departmental Reports

15. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the sta-

tus of a report into an organisation (details supplied); the implications for the funding of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45928/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Scouting Ireland commissioned Mr Ian Elliott to carry out a review into the organisation's handling of an allegation of a serious sexual assault on an adult volunteer by another adult volunteer.

While this alleged assault took place in 2009, it was only reported within the organisation in 2016. Following on from Mr Elliott's report of his review, Scouting Ireland engaged a barrister to conduct a full investigation into this allegation, particularly with regard to the handling of the matter by certain senior volunteers. I expect to receive both reports once the barrister's investigation is completed.

In 2017 Scouting Ireland previously engaged Mr Ian Elliott to conduct a review of its child safeguarding/ protection policies and procedures. An interim report was produced in October 2017 and a final report was produced in January 2018. Both of these reports were subsequently submitted to my Department in March 2018.

In view of the information available to me relating to the governance arrangements within Scouting Ireland I decided, in April this year, to withhold the drawdown of further funding to the organisation under the Youth Service Grant Scheme until I could be satisfied that the organisation's governance standards were up to the required level.

In May I appointed Ms Jillian van Turnhout, as an independent expert, to examine the governance and related issues within Scouting Ireland. Ms van Turnhout submitted her final report to me on 14th June.

It contained a number of recommendations in the areas of safeguarding, management of the organisation, governance proposals and charities regulation. The report suggested that the restoration of funding to Scouting Ireland should be clearly linked to the successful implementation of these recommendations.

The Board of Scouting Ireland subsequently confirmed its decision to fully implement all the recommendations contained in the Review of Scouting Ireland report. On this basis I decided on 25th June to provide Scouting Ireland with interim funding for a further three month period, up until the end of September.

In providing this interim funding I requested that Scouting Ireland provide me with a further report by 24th September detailing progress in the implementation of the outstanding recommendations contained in the Review of Scouting Ireland. This report was subsequently submitted to me on 24th September for consideration.

At the end of September the former Board of Scouting Ireland voted to reinstate the Chief Scout as Chair of their forthcoming EGM. Shortly afterwards I received letters from the then Interim Chair & Mr Ian Elliott setting out their serious concerns about the Board's actions and its ability to properly govern the organisation. Based on this correspondence and discussions I had with both I decided to further suspend funding for as long as the then Board was in place. A new board was elected at the EGM on the 6th of October.

I am satisfied with the significant progress made by Scouting Ireland in terms of the implementation of the Jillian van Turnhout recommendations and in the essential governance changes committed to by the organisation.

For this reason I have restored funding to Scouting Ireland until the end of April 2019. I have requested a further progress report from the organisation by the end of March 2019 as well

as copies of the independent barrister's report and the final Ian Elliott report of the individual case review he conducted.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Implementation

16. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the implementation of the affordable childcare scheme; the date by which the information and communications technology system will be operational; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45934/18]

17. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the affordable childcare scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45833/18]

26. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the start date in 2019 for the new affordable childcare scheme. [45921/18]

32. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the affordable childcare scheme will launch in September 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45929/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 16, 17, 26 and 32 together.

I am delighted to report positive progress in relation to the development of the Affordable Childcare Scheme, and to confirm that I plan to introduce the Scheme in October 2019. The scheme will open to applications in October 2019, with payments flowing from November 2019.

The scheme will provide financial support for parents, establish a sustainable platform for investment in the childcare sector for decades to come and- crucially- allow us to continue to invest in giving our children the best start in life. Its launch will mark a milestone in our quest to transform Ireland's childcare system from one of the most expensive in the world into one of the best.

The legislation establishing the new Affordable Childcare Scheme, the Childcare Support Act 2018, was signed by the President on Monday, 2nd July. The Act will be underpinned by detailed secondary legislation and formal policy guidelines.

Work is currently ongoing on both of these and also on the development of regulations to provide, for the first time, for the registration of school-age childcare services by the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate.

These latter regulations will be introduced in advance of the Affordable Childcare Scheme to allow school-age childcare services to register and thereby participate in the scheme from its inception.

With regard to the scheme's ICT system, my Department concluded a full open tender public procurement process earlier this year. A contract was awarded and our IT development contractor, Codec, are busy working with officials from DCYA and Pobal to develop the system.

Work is also underway on the governance, administrative and communication elements of the scheme. Consultation and engagement with stakeholders is ongoing and, in the new year, a comprehensive awareness campaign will be launched for parents and the public, alongside training and information supports for childcare providers and other key stakeholders.

Finally, Budget 2019 provided for enhancements to the scheme which will ensure that an even greater number of families will now benefit from the scheme once launched.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data

18. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in care accessing CAMHS services; if there are waiting lists to access mental health services for children in care; if so, the average time of waiting to access; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45727/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I thank the Deputy for his important question. Children in care are among the most vulnerable in our society. It is the role of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency to ensure that their needs - in some cases very complex needs - are met. Some children in care demonstrate a range of emotional, psychological and mental health problems.

This is particularly the case where they have experienced prolonged neglect and where they come into care at an older age, or where they have other needs to be met, such as speech and language and learning difficulties.

When a child enters care, Tusla social workers consult with all of the key people involved in their lives, which of course includes the child themselves, relevant adults and professionals. This consultation helps Tusla develop a Care Plan that is tailored to the child's needs and to set out the best way to address these.

If a child is presenting with a mental health problem, the child's GP may refer them to their local CAMHS service.

If CAMHS support is not available, Tusla may seek other HSE counselling and therapeutic support. Tusla have also separately engaged private therapists to work with children, where their needs are not met elsewhere. Tusla do not collate national data on referrals of children in care to health services.

I would like to note that CAMHS is a function of the Health Services Executive, which comes under the remit of the Department of Health. As data on the waiting times for CAMHS is not reported to my Department, I would suggest that questions on waiting lists are better directed to my cabinet colleague, the Minister for Health.

Child and Family Agency

19. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the findings of a report (details supplied) which found that the adversarial nature of cases involving child welfare threatens the principle of securing the best outcomes for children; if she has liaised with Tusla with regard to this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45875/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I welcome the publication of a new report, 'A Social and Economic Analysis of the use of Legal Services in the Child and Family Agency (Tusla)', which explores the complex and sometimes fraught interaction of social work practice and the legal system.

I believe that empirical research which contributes to our understanding of child care pro-

ceedings is vital in furthering their improvement and development.

I would like to thank the report's authors Drs Carmel Halton, Gill Harold, Aileen Murphy, and Edel Walsh, all of UCC. The study was funded by the Irish Research Council, with Tusla as the partner organisation.

The report provides thought-provoking perspectives on a number of issues. While its recommendations are principally directed towards Tusla's social work services, Tusla's educational welfare services, and to solicitors, the issues raised will also usefully inform officials in my Department and others as we continually seek to secure the best possible outcomes for children.

These issues raised include, among others, problems surrounding court delays, court schedules, and regular adjournments; a need for training to allow social workers and legal professionals to develop a mutual understanding of each other's disciplines; and a need for increased specialisation among the judiciary.

As an overarching theme, the report compellingly suggests that the increasingly adversarial nature of the legal system is obscuring the principle that in the resolution of all proceedings, the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Supreme Court has previously held that child care proceedings should be "in essence an inquiry as to what is best to be done for the child", but the evidence of this report suggests that this worthy aspiration is not always achieved in current practice.

In this light, I am pleased to remind the Deputy of my Department's ongoing Review of the Child Care Act 1991. The Review is a thorough examination of the legislation governing the child care and protection system.

Through this, we hope to address many of the systemic issues raised in this report. The report will assist my Department in the review of this Act, and its findings will help ensure that any new child protection and welfare legislation will work, in an improved way, for the benefit of our most vulnerable children.

Tribunals of Inquiry Reports

20. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the action she has taken to hold Tusla, collectively and named persons, to account for the serious deficiencies and problems highlighted in the disclosures tribunal report. [45830/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy will be aware that I strongly welcome the report of the Disclosures Tribunal that has fully vindicated Garda Sergeant Maurice McCabe.

I have been extremely disappointed by the findings in relation to Tusla. The Tribunal quite properly finds that the performance of Tusla and certain individuals within fell far short of the standard we should expect from a public body with such an important role.

I have raised the Tribunal's findings with the Board of Tusla and have asked for a formal response to the report. I want the response to set out the evidence of change that will prevent a person's reputation being traduced in this way from ever happening again.

I have also secured funding in 2019 that will enable the fundamental changes needed, some of which I am informed are already underway.

Tusla has accepted that the practice and governance in this case was exceptionally poor and has commenced a HR process around the allegations of serious misconduct. It would not be appropriate for me to comment any further on this process prior to its completion.

The performance by named members of staff in the evidence before the Tribunal is a matter for Tusla to manage, utilising its internal disciplinary and performance management procedures.

I met with the Board of Tusla following the publication of the Disclosures Tribunal report, and expressed serious concerns about the Tribunal's strong criticisms of what it saw as poor and inadequate co-operation by Tusla with its work. The Board of Tusla has undertaken to communicate with the Tribunal in order to understand the nature of these findings and learn from them.

The original notification which concerned an allegation of abuse in this case concerned a person who was an adult at the time of notification. The case was therefore managed under the policy for retrospective cases.

This is a challenging area for Tusla, as social workers must balance child protection and fair procedures towards the person who is the subject of the allegation. A revised Tusla policy for such cases, which will replace the 2014 policy, will be published shortly.

I want to reiterate that a culture of openness and integrity is essential in order to learn from the grievous mistakes of the past. It is the duty of management and staff to correct mistakes when they happen, and the duty of the Board to hold management to account to ensure that this happens. It is my duty as Minister to hold the Board to account, and I will continue to do this.

Tribunals of Inquiry Reports

21. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she is taking to address the administrative incompetence at Tusla referred to by a person (details supplied) in the Disclosures Tribunal. [45831/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Once again, I can inform the Deputy at the outset that I strongly welcome the report of the Disclosures Tribunal that has fully vindicated Garda Sergeant Maurice McCabe, who has now retired.

There is no denying of the facts or findings in the report. The mishandling of the referral that related to Sergeant Maurice McCabe was properly described by Justice Charlton for what it was - administrative incompetence.

Many of the concerns to emerge from the Disclosures Tribunal report had already been identified in the recent report of HIQA's statutory investigation into the management of allegations of child sexual abuse against adults of concern.

The Deputy will be aware that, after I was briefed early in 2017 on the appalling handling of a referral made about Sergeant McCabe, I directed HIQA to provide me with this report which was published earlier this year.

Tusla has developed a comprehensive Action Plan in response to the HIQA report. The Action Plan was approved by the Board in September. Each action has a designated owner and a timeframe. The interim Chief Executive Officer, Mr Pat Smyth, has assumed responsibility for the implementation of the Tusla Action plan. I have established an independent Expert Assurance Group to oversee the implementation of this Action Plan. Work is ongoing in relation to this.

While the Action Plan addresses a range of themes, with appropriate actions under each theme, a number of actions in particular aim to address the factors that can be attributed to the administrative incompetence that occurred. These include:

the improved management of retrospective cases,

the development of robust systems to strengthen interagency working on child protection referrals,

the introduction of a formal performance management system,

ensuring consistent implementation and quality assurance of policies at local level,

and the implementation of secure and effective information management systems to support case work and best practice.

Record management is a particular area for reform. It will be underpinned by the new National Child Care Information System (NCCIS) that went live nationwide in July of this year. For the first time, Tusla social workers are working off an integrated national IT system for child protection and welfare services. The system replaces all previous methods of record-keeping, which varied from area to area.

One of the findings of the Tribunal was that there were serious practice issues at local level. It is clear that while policies and procedures were in place, they were not followed in the instances which led to the horrendous allegations against Sergeant McCabe. Tusla has accepted that the practice and governance in this case was exceptionally poor and has commenced a HR process around the allegations of serious misconduct in this case. It would not be appropriate for me to comment any further on this process prior to its completion. However, I have raised my concerns with the Board of Tusla regarding these practice issues. Tusla is to provide me with a report outlining its planned actions in this area.

I recently announced a significant increase in the funding allocation to Tusla in Budget 2019. Tusla will have some €786 million in funding, representing an increase of €33 million over 2018. This will support the implementation of actions in the Action Plan. I will shortly issue my Performance Statement to Tusla setting out the issues I want to be addressed in its Business Plan for 2019. I can assure the Deputy that the issues arising from the Disclosures Tribunal and the HIQA statutory investigation will be appropriately prioritised.

In the interest of balance, I must note that there is also a recognition for the good work of Tusla professionals in the report. I believe that the majority of Tusla front line social workers act in good faith, and do very important work, to the best of their abilities. The dedication demonstrated by these front line workers, on a daily basis, makes a real difference to the lives of children and young people in Ireland.

Childcare Costs

22. Deputy James Browne asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to develop targeted supports for parents and guardians in County Wexford paying for childcare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45828/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As previously advised to the Deputy in Parliamentary Question 37905-18 (20th September 2018) my Department's childcare schemes are run on a national basis and hence are available to all counties. The

staff and Boards of 30 City and County Childcare Committees assist my Department in ensuring that schemes and other initiatives we operate nationally meet local need.

The Government is committed to continuing to increase investment in high-quality childcare, prioritising families on low incomes. As part of our commitment to improving access to high quality and affordable childcare we have introduced a number of new developments:-

The universal Early Childhood Care and Education programme (ECCE) has been expanded to two full programme years from September 2018.

A new universal subvention payment worth up to €1040 per annum for children under 3 was introduced from September 2017.

A variety of targeted programmes provide for the most vulnerable children in Ireland and reinforce our strong social inclusion and equality agenda. The Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) Programme is a childcare programme targeted to support parents/guardians on a low income to avail of reduced childcare costs at participating community childcare services.

This scheme was expanded to the Community Childcare Subvention Plus (CCSP) Programme to enable privately owned childcare services to provide the same level of targeted subvention childcare for lower income families.

My Department is making strong progress in developing the new Affordable Childcare Scheme. The ACS will replace all of the existing targeted schemes. Officials from my Department, along with colleagues in Pobal, have been working to develop the legal, technical and administrative infrastructure required.

The scheme will provide financial support for parents, establish a sustainable platform for investment in the childcare sector for decades to come, and crucially allow us to continue to invest in giving our children the best start in life.

Departmental Funding

23. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the process for the restoration of funding to an organisation (details supplied). [45922/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy is aware, in view of the information available to me relating to the governance arrangements within Scouting Ireland, I decided in April this year to withhold the drawdown of further funding by the organisation under the Youth Service Grant Scheme, until I could be satisfied that the organisation's governance standards were up to the required level.

In May, I appointed Ms Jillian van Turnhout, as an independent expert, to examine the governance and related issues within Scouting Ireland. In accordance with her Terms of Reference she was asked to provide me with a clear assessment of Scouting Ireland's governance arrangements. Ms van Turnhout submitted her final report on the Review of Scouting Ireland to me on 14th June. The report contained a number of recommendations in the areas of safeguarding, management of the organisation, governance proposals and charities regulation. Ms van Turnhout also indicated that the restoration of funding to Scouting Ireland should be clearly linked to the successful implementation of these recommendations.

The Board of Scouting Ireland subsequently confirmed its decision to fully implement all the recommendations contained in the Review of Scouting Ireland report. On 25th June I de-

cided to provide Scouting Ireland with interim funding for a further three month period up until the end of September. This funding was provided in view of the significant progress achieved by Scouting Ireland in the implementation of a number of the required recommendations and to provide it with an opportunity to implement the outstanding recommendations.

In providing this interim funding I requested that Scouting Ireland provide me with a further report by 24th September detailing progress in the implementation of the outstanding recommendations contained in the Review of Scouting Ireland. This report was subsequently submitted to my Department on 24th September for consideration.

At the end of September the former Board of Scouting Ireland voted to reinstate the Chief Scout as Chair of their forthcoming EGM. Shortly afterwards I received letters from the then Interim Chair & Mr Ian Elliott setting out their serious concerns about the Board's actions and its ability to properly govern the organisation. Based on this correspondence and discussions I had with both I decided to further suspend funding for as long as the then Board was in place. A new board was elected at the EGM on the 6th of October.

I am satisfied with the significant progress made by Scouting Ireland in terms of the implementation of the Jillian van Turnhout recommendations and in the essential governance changes committed to by the organisation. For this reason I have restored funding to Scouting Ireland until the end of April 2019. I have requested a further progress report from the organisation by the end of March 2019, as well as copies of the independent barrister's report and the final Ian Elliott report of the individual case review he conducted.

Question No. 24 answered with Question No. 8.

Childcare Services Funding

25. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will meet with key stakeholders of an organisation (details supplied) with a view to ensuring that it can continue to offer the full range of crucial support services to vulnerable children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45827/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have received correspondence from several members of the Oireachtas, regarding the organisation referred to by the Deputy. I have also received detailed correspondence from the management of the organisation detailing the nature of the valuable work that they do, the cost pressures they are under and the reasons they wish to receive State funding for their family support service in order to ensure its sustainability.

The provision of family support services is a matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have raised the concerns of the Deputy and others regarding the future funding of this organisation with Tusla.

Tusla has advised me that senior staff members met with representatives of the organisation in question in relation to its request for funding. At present, Tusla provides some €1.6m in funding to that organisation for the provision of residential care and services to children and young people. Tusla also funds a range of family support services in communities throughout the South Dublin area and will continue to keep the need for family support services under review.

Tusla has also advised the organisation of the Counselling Grants Scheme, which provides funding for counselling or therapeutic support services. Tusla has provided details on how to access this funding. Tusla understands that access to this particular funding would provide some

support.

Following contact with some of my colleagues, arrangements are being made for me to meet with stakeholders of the organisation over the coming weeks.

Question No. 26 answered with Question No. 16.

School Completion Programme

27. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether the school completion programme is sufficiently funded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45937/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The School Completion Programme (SCP) continues to deliver a valuable service for some of our most vulnerable young people at risk of early school leaving throughout the education process.

It was established in 2002 and became a programme operating under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme in 2005. Responsibility for the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) which included the SCP was transferred to my Department on its establishment in 2011. Operational responsibility for the SCP was transferred to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency on its establishment in 2014.

The annual SCP fund is currently 24.7m. My Department works with the Educational Welfare Service of Tusla to ensure necessary resources are available to support the programme and to ensure staffing levels are sufficient to deliver a high quality service to those young people most at risk of early school leaving.

In recognition of the need for a strong policy platform for educational welfare services, including the School Completion Programme, I have requested my officials to establish a Task Group to support the further development and integration of these services. The work of this group is now commencing and I am eager to ensure that output will result in a clear blueprint for the development of the School Completion Programme so that its reach, resources and impact are maximised in supporting young people at risk of early school leaving.

Childcare Services Data

28. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of new and or upgraded childcare places that will be provided through her Department's capital programme in 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45877/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Officials in my Department are currently in the process of developing the capital offering for 2019. It is not possible at this early stage to give a precise figure as to what it will achieve in the coming year.

However, I can confirm that I have secured €8.86m in capital funding for childcare in 2019. This will be used, as ever, in meeting the most pressing needs of the sector and delivering an improved childcare infrastructure for the benefit of the children and parents of Ireland. Part of this allocation is also intended to be used to support the roll-out of the new Affordable Childcare Scheme.

By way of comparison, the total capital allocation for Early Years and school-age childcare

sector in 2018 was €6.86m. Capital funding in 2018 was used, amongst other things, to create 1,950 new early years places and 807 new school-age places. It should be noted that these figures are provisional, as work is on-going on the 2018 Capital Programmes, and final reporting has not been completed.

The precise goals and priorities of the childcare capital offering for 2019 have yet to be finalised. An announcement will be made public as soon as the project development process has been completed.

HIQA Inspections

29. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the findings of the latest HIQA report on Tusla which found that 103 unauthorised absences took place over a 12 month period and that certain premises were unkempt in places and in urgent need of refurbishment; if she has made these concerns known to Tusla; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45874/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I believe that the Deputy is referring to HIQA's inspection report of a children's residential centre in the South region which was published on the 10th of October. There were four young people, two aged 17 and two aged 16, living in the centre when the inspection was carried out. While the inspection report was critical of aspects of the centre, I was pleased to read that the young people in the centre were well cared for and, overall, their quality of life was good.

It is important to recognise that there is a difference between a young person being absent without authority from a residential centre and being missing from care. Children are not detained in a residential centre. As with any child, they may come and go to attend education, recreation or to meet with friends. As with many young person, boundaries will be tested. Young people may be recorded as being absent without authority if they do not comply with their curfew.

The data provided by the centre showed that there had been 220 absences from the centre without authority in the 28 months since the last inspection, in March 2016, and that 103 had occurred in the previous 12 months. The report did not state how many instances were missing from care, but noted that the 'missing from care' procedures were followed appropriately. A child in care is considered to be missing when his or her whereabouts are unknown and the Absence Management Plan indicates concern for the child's safety. The report also says that managing challenging behaviour was an issue, but the young people were "not placed at risk".

Inspectors found in one case, a young person went for family contact and used the opportunity to abscond and placed themselves at risk by misusing substances. The report also noted that there was evidence that repeated high levels of risk taking behaviour by one child had prompted a response which resulted in an intensive residential program, which was due to begin. If a child is missing from care the assistance of An Garda Síochána to return the child may be required. These cases will require the following circumstances to exist:

the child's Absence Management Plan suggests that there is a serious and immediate risk to the child;

all efforts to return the child by staff/carer have failed;

it is unsafe for staff to attend the location where the child is.

I was disappointed to read of the accommodation's deficiencies as it is important that all young people in residential care are provided with a high standard of care however I note that the inspectors found that the centre is making plans to move to new premises. In the period before the move, the centre outlined in their action plan that upgrades to kitchen facilities and furniture for other rooms have been planned and approved.

Following the publication of this report, my officials have received assurances from Tusla on the findings. Tusla has advised that a follow-up from HIQA with respect to the premises acknowledged the progress made to date.

Tusla's services are assessed against standards on how the children and young people are cared for in all respects. This includes their well being, health and medication, their education and their accommodation. An action plan to address any findings from the inspection is submitted to HIQA, and this is published alongside the inspection report. Tusla is aware of the findings from all HIQA inspections and monitors actions being taken to address the findings.

Child Detention Centres

30. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she is satisfied with the most recent HIQA report into Oberstown child detention campus and the progress made at the centre; her views on whether additional resources are required in order for the centre to meet HIQA compliance standards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45723/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I welcome the most recent inspection report from the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) into Oberstown Children Detention Campus, which was published on the 9th of October. HIQA had conducted a full inspection over five days, last March, and this report was the outcome of that inspection.

This report acknowledges that having undergone major change over the past few years, the campus is now enjoying a period of relative stability. Overall the inspection found that, where the focus of campus management and resources had been applied to address identified issues within the campus, improvements were evident.

I note the improvements in the management of challenging behaviours and a reduction in the use of restrictive practices found by this report (a reduction of 56% when compared to 2017 report).

I also welcome the management of risk, health and safety and other important changes in the development of the new management structures at Oberstown.

I also note that HIQA has raised issues for improvement. These include up-to-date training for staff in fire safety, adherence to placement planning system procedures to ensure comprehensive assessment of children's needs and risks, and deficits in the recording, monitoring and management oversight of some restrictive practices.

In this regard, I welcome the very comprehensive Action Plan, which has been agreed between HIQA and Oberstown Management. This outlines the range of issues raised which will be addressed, following the timescale outlined in the agreed Action Plan. There has not been a request from Oberstown for additional resources to deliver this Action Plan.

I see this Plan as one of the ongoing measures which will bring about positive change in

Oberstown and make it a safer environment for both young people and staff.

Youth Services

31. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to Tusla's decision to terminate its service level agreement with a programme (details supplied) in County Galway and the negative impacts this will have with young persons in the county. [45933/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has an annual Service Level Agreement in place with the organisation to which the Deputy refers, YAP Ireland.

Under the terms of the current Agreement, the organisation is contracted in the Galway/Roscommon area to provide a support service to 18 young people in need. The young people are assigned an advocate that will work with them over a 6 month period.

During the course of this year, Tusla developed an initiative called Creative Community Alternatives (CCA) which is designed to support the planned exit of children and young people who are in residential care or foster care, and to avoid those at risk being placed in residential care. The overall aim of the Community Care Alternatives is to enable children and young people at risk to live in their own communities with wrap around supports.

Children and young people with extremely complex needs can display challenging and high risk taking behaviours, drug and alcohol issues, mental health issues, attachment issues, educational problems and family environmental issues.

The broad ranging intensive wrap around supports provided through the Creative Community Alternatives are designed to meet the identified needs of each child or young person.

One example is a nine month programme which works intensively with a child or young person who is identified at high risk of admission to care. It is a partnership between Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board, Foroige and Tusla. The programme sets goals and measurable outcomes for each young person. There is a heavy emphasis on participation and citizenship.

With the roll out of Community Care Alternatives in Galway, Tusla made a decision not to renew its Service Level Agreement in the Galway/Roscommon area with YAP Ireland.

Tusla has also advised me that the decision not to renew the Service Level Agreement was communicated to the CEO of YAP Ireland and the Director of Services on 28 June, 2018 and a meeting was held in September 2018.

I believe it is good practice for Tusla to review its services on a continuous basis, including the work carried out by Tusla staff in the Galway/Roscommon area through its Creative Community Alternatives plan. I have been assured by Tusla that the needs of children and young people in Galway will be met under the new arrangements.

Tusla will continue to work with YAP Ireland in the region until the end of 2018 in line with the Service Level Agreement signed by both parties.

Tusla is currently engaged with YAP Ireland in relation to the termination of the Service Level Agreement.

Question No. 32 answered with Question No. 16.

Youth Services Provision

33. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will provide assistance to youth clubs and sports clubs orientated to young persons in Tyrrelstown, Dublin 15, following the closure of a centre (details supplied) due to building defects being found; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45878/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My officials made enquiries with Dublin/Dun Laoghaire ETB who are the intermediary body for youth projects in the Tyrrelstown area and have been advised that the Foróige projects and clubs in Tyrrelstown were in a fortunate position as the closure of the Centre coincided with the Halloween mid-term. Outreach and Halloween trips went on as planned and staff relocated themselves to the Blanchardstown Youth Service offices. My officials have been advised that the situation is manageable in the short term. However, if the situation was to continue in the long term then the issue for the young people would be lack of alternative suitable space in Tyrrelstown. My officials will continue to engage with the relevant parties and monitor the situation.

Departmental Funding

34. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the capital funding available to her Department for 2019; the level of expenditure per scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45876/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Budget 2019 has made provision for a total allocation of €32 million in capital funding for my Department. The allocation is split between two programmes areas within my Department's Vote:

Programme	Capital Allocation
Children & Family Support	€20.140m
Sectorial Programmes for Children and Young People	€11.860m
Total	€32.000m

It is not possible at this time to identify the specific amounts that will be allocated to each project as this will be considered in the context of the finalisation of the REV 2019 in December next. However, at this stage I can confirm to the Deputy that the resources will support the continued investment in the following areas:

Early Years and School Age Capital Grant Schemes - to ensure the quality and supply of childcare places;

Youth Capital Funding Scheme - to support targeted youth projects across the country; and

a Capital Grant Scheme to support new and existing play and recreational amenities for children and young people.

Oberstown Children Detention Campus through the provision of safe and secure places.

Child and Family Agency Staff

35. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress that has been made in terms of recruitment and retention of staff at Tusla over the past year; if steps have been taken to ensure adequate resources are in place in order to provide counselling supports for victims; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45724/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla has advised me that by the end of September 2018 a total of 678 appointments were made. 366 of the 678 were new hires to Tusla, with internal recruitment accounting for the remainder. I understand that 225 staff have retired or left Tusla during the same period.

I strongly support Tusla's important work and by 2019 I will have secured an additional €110m for pay and service provision since becoming Minister in 2016. It must be acknowledged that Tusla is operating in a difficult recruitment environment. I am aware that Tusla Recruit, the Agency's in-house recruitment function, continues to be very proactive and I am advised that it has created or is in the process of creating panels for all grades.

I understand Tusla's overall staff turnover rate was approximately 5.1% in September and this is a marginal improvement compared to September 2017 when it was approximately 5.9%. Tusla has established a Retention Steering Group to develop a new retention strategy and to implement an integrated approach to retention throughout the Agency. In addition, I am aware that Tusla has a Health, Wellbeing and Employee Assistance Programme, a Continuous Professional Development Strategy and the National Transfer Policy to support its retention strategy. Ultimately, Tusla expects these actions to increase its attractiveness as an employer of choice.

With regard to counselling supports, I am aware that the range of supports available across areas include social work support, family therapy, play therapy and one to one child counselling, such as that provided by CARI. Children with a mental health problem may be referred to their local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Family support or family resource centres can also provide significant support for both children and families and will often work closely with the child's social worker.

I have also committed to establishing centres for supporting children who have suffered sexual abuse. These centres should minimise trauma while accessing care or health services, and engaging with the criminal justice system. The centres will bring together the protection, health, therapeutic and policing services and ensure child-centred services that minimise, as far as possible, any additional trauma for the child and their family. I also expect to see improved efficiency and effectiveness for the child being cared for by child sexual abuse support services. This proposal has the agreement of the Minister for Justice and Equality, Charles Flanagan TD and Minister for Health, Simon Harris TD. An inter-departmental working group has been established to explore the arrangements associated with setting up these cross-agency centres to support children and families who have suffered from child sexual abuse and I expect a pilot project to be established in early 2019.

Childcare Services Staff

36. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether there is a staffing crisis in the early years sector; the steps she is taking to combat same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45932/18]

41. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way in which she will address the need for quality childcare and the low pay levels of staff in view of the fact that additional funding was announced for early years mostly targeted at the

affordable childcare scheme. [45786/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 36 and 41 together.

Supporting the delivery of high quality early learning and care for children and families is at the centre of my Department's work. In recent years, we have enhanced supports for quality childcare provision in many ways, including:

Funding to support further and higher education, as well as continuing professional development, for staff in the sector;

Increases in capitation funding across all programmes;

Provision of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), which supports service providers to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience;

Introduction of the Better Start national quality development service, which provides mentoring and training for providers to improve quality standards;

Statutory inspection of services by Tusla (the statutory regulator) as well as the introduction in 2016 of early years education-focussed Inspections undertaken by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills; and

Capital grants to enable service providers to expand and improve their premises.

Regarding the pay and conditions of staff, I have been unequivocal in my support for better pay and conditions for staff in the sector. However, there are 4,500 childcare businesses nationwide. Those businesses are the employers of the early years sector staff. Given this context, I must be clear that there are limits to the action my Department can take.

I have engaged directly with the sector, and have suggested that one approach the sector could consider is applying for a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO) through the Labour Court, seeking a recommendation in relation to pay for the whole early years' sector. Under a SEO process, organisations substantially representative of employers and employees come together to agree a way forward and submissions are sought from key stakeholders. My Department would not be a party to the SEO process. However, as a significant funder, and with policy responsibility for quality, my Department would be well placed to make a submission to the Court once it publishes its notice in relation to the matter of the application for a SEO for the sector.

I have also introduced practical steps to improve the conditions of staff in any way I can. I have introduced additional capitation into our childcare programmes wherever possible, such as:

the higher rate of ECCE capitation for graduate-led pre-school rooms;

the recent 7% rise in ECCE capitation;

the increased capitation for services with qualified Inclusion Coordinators as part of AIM; and

the programme support payment in recognition the administrative roles services play in delivering my department's programmes.

I have encouraged services to use additional funding to support the pay and conditions of the hard-working frontline staff that make such a lasting difference to children's lives. While I

am aware that some service providers are reporting difficulties with recruitment and retention of staff, I am confident that the changes being brought forward by my Department will lead not just to higher quality early learning and care, but to a more robust professional environment for both staff and employers.

I have outlined the Affordable Childcare Scheme in detail to the House on previous occasions; the development of the scheme, the expansion of the ECCE programme and the provision of increased funding and support measures for the Early Years sector are all aimed at increasing access to quality early learning and care for children while reducing the cost for parents, and providing greater income and stability for service providers. The development of the Affordable Childcare Scheme should not be seen as separate from the questions of quality and staff pay, as the scheme is intended to subsidise the cost of delivery of quality childcare, including helping services to meet the cost of staff wages, which are the main driver of overall costs.

My Department has also commissioned an Independent Review of the Cost of Delivering Quality Childcare, which is examining the factors that impact on the cost of delivering quality childcare, including staff wages. When complete, this will inform future policy development and funding decisions.

Childcare Services Provision

37. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she is satisfied regarding the availability of childcare facilities in view of the increasing necessity for both parents to be at work and to meet the requirements of one parent families; the ongoing work being undertaken to improve provisions in this area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45722/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): A key priority for me as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs is to ensure access to high quality and affordable early years and school-age childcare services.

Each year Pobal conducts research on behalf of my Department to examine a number of factors related to childcare services in Ireland, including the monitoring of capacity. The most recent Early Years Sector Profile 2016/2017 indicates that existing childcare provision in general meets the needs nationwide in terms of capacity. Latest available data from Pobal indicates that in general there remains no issue in relation to capacity.

I am delighted to have secured €8.86m in capital funding for childcare in 2019. While the precise details of 2019's Capital offering have yet to be finalised, this funding will be used to meet the most pressing needs of the sector with the ultimate aim of benefitting parents and children through improving our childcare infrastructure.

Furthermore, under the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan published earlier this year, I ensured that Childcare was identified as one of our nation's strategic priorities with €250 million in additional funding to expand childcare capacity over the duration of the Plan.

I am also aware that many parents opt to use childminders to care for their pre-school and school-age children. In recognition of this, I commissioned a Childminding Working Group whose report was published in March 2018. In response, I have made a commitment to develop and publish by the end of the year a childminding action plan containing short, medium and long term goals for the childminding sector. This action plan will set out steps to move incrementally over the years ahead towards the wider regulation, support and professional develop-

ment of childminders, along with a timescale for these to be carried out. My Department is currently developing the action plan, with the intention of publication before the end of December.

Another significant element of the increased childcare provision in Budget 2019 is the allocation of €0.5m to create a team of Childminding Support Officers to support the registration of childminders with Tusla and to help them upskill to the required regulatory standards to be introduced in the coming years. Only childminders registered with Tusla will be able to offer the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS).

The scheme will provide financial support for parents, establish a sustainable platform for investment in the childcare sector for decades to come and- crucially- allow us to continue to invest in giving our children the best start in life. Its launch will mark a milestone in our quest to transform Ireland's childcare system from one of the most expensive in the world into one of the best.

As part of Budget 2019 my Department again delivered as promised on the commitment to continue investing in our children and young people. Budget 2019 represents another significant step in ensuring access to high quality, affordable childcare and early years education. The additional €89m in 2019 will allow for thousands of families to benefit under the Affordable Childcare Scheme.

Guardians Ad Litem

38. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of her Department's reform of the guardian ad litem service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45936/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department is currently finalising the drafting of the Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2018, which provides for reform of the Guardian ad litem service, with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel. Work is being progressed with a view to publishing the Bill as soon as possible.

A small project team is also working to plan for the establishment of the Guardian ad litem service within an executive office in my Department at the earliest possible date following enactment of the legislation.

My Department has established an Expert Reference Panel to provide additional specialised advice and opinion to the Department on a number of key operational aspects of the new Guardian ad litem service.

Officials are also organising a consultation with children and young people who are or have been involved in child care proceedings, with the assistance of the Child and Family Agency, to ensure that the views and opinions of children and young people play a central role in the design of the new service.

Childcare Services Funding

39. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will make the necessary funds available to an organisation (details supplied) in order that it can continue to offer the full range of crucial support services to vulnerable children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45826/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I thank the Deputy for his question about the Cottage Home Family Support Service, which provides family support services to children and families in the South Dublin area. The organisation also provides a residential care service for young people. In 2018, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is providing €1.6 million in funding for the residential component of this service.

I have received correspondence from several members of the Oireachtas, including the Deputy, on this matter. I have also received detailed correspondence from the management of the Cottage Home detailing the nature of the valuable work that they do, the cost pressures they are under and the reasons they wish to receive State funding for their family support service in order to ensure its sustainability.

The provision of family support services is a matter for Tusla. I have raised the concerns of the Deputy and others regarding the future funding of this organisation with Tusla.

I have been informed that the family support service has been in operation for a number of years and to date, has been privately funded by the Cottage Home. It has not received funding from Tusla, or the Health Service Executive (HSE), which provided child and family services prior to the establishment of Tusla in January 2014.

Tusla acknowledges the value and benefits of this service in the community it serves. Tusla has advised me that the Service Director and the Area Manager are familiar with services provided by the Cottage Home and have visited the service.

I understand that, at the time when the Cottage Home made a request for funding, available resources for family support services had been allocated to services in the area. Tusla did, however, advise the Cottage Home to apply for funding through one of its funding streams, including support for Counselling, which would assist in the provision of some of its services.

Tusla has advised that it is currently compiling a Commissioning Plan for services in the area, which seeks to assign resources to areas of the greatest need, ensuring the best possible outcomes. Requests for funding from the Cottage Home will be considered in this context. The planning process will help inform any future spending in the area based on evidenced needs. Tusla has invited the Cottage Home to be involved in stakeholder consultations on the planning process early next year.

As previously highlighted, Tusla is committed to working with service providers in the area to ensure services are available to vulnerable children and families.

School Absenteeism

40. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she is satisfied that the level of absenteeism from school is acceptable; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45920/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy may be aware, Tusla Educational Welfare Services (EWS) is responsible for addressing issues in relation to participation, retention and attendance in schools.

Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) work with young people and their families who are experiencing difficulty with school attendance. The main priority of their work is around the welfare of children and young people and on ensuring that concerns and problems around attendance are addressed before attendance becomes a crisis issue.

In schools participating in the Department of Education and Skill's DEIS initiative (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the EWS has responsibility for operational management of two school-based support services: the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCLS) and the School Completion Programme (SCP).

The thrust of the HSCLS is preventative - to enhance pupils' outcomes, through improved attendance, participation and retention in the education system.

The SCP aims to increase the numbers of young people staying in primary and second level school and in doing so improve the numbers of pupils who successfully complete the Senior Cycle or the equivalent.

The latest figures available in the School Attendance Data suggest that whilst overall school attendance rates are very high there has been a very slight increase in the level of absenteeism between the 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 school years. These being the latest figures available.

The percentage of overall student/days lost through absence in a school year was 5.9% in primary schools and 7.9% in post-primary schools. These figures represent an increase of 0.3 percentage points in primary schools and of 0.2 percentage points in post-primary schools.

I am conscious that it is vital that all children are provided with all the assistance possible with attending school and in this regard my Department will continue to work with colleagues in the EWS and the Department of Education and Skills to ensure that supports are available to those that need them.

Question No. 41 answered with Question No. 36.

Child Support Payments

42. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she is taking to support stay-at-home parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45832/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Government is committed to supporting parents in caring for young children at home in a range of ways.

Within the remit of my Department, a number of schemes provide support to parents whether they work full time, part time, or look after their children at home.

For example, from September of this year, all children are eligible to avail of two years of universal pre-school, without cost, through the Early Childhood Care and Education programme (ECCE) prior to beginning primary school. Some 114,000 children are expected to benefit, many of whom will be children of stay-at-home parents.

Furthermore the current targeted early learning and care subsidy schemes are available to families where parents are in receipt of certain social welfare payments, medical cards, or GP Visit cards, again many of whom are stay-at-home parents.

A universal subsidy is available to all parents of children under the age of three, or whenever the child becomes eligible for the universal preschool programme, regardless of whether parents are working or not. The Affordable Childcare Scheme, ACS, which is under development will make early learning and care subsidies available on the basis of family income and will be available to stay-at-home parents. This is underpinned by the Childcare Support Act 2018.

My Department also provides funding for local parent and toddler groups to organise activities for parents and young children in the community to support their development through play. Both working parents and stay-at-home parents participate.

More widely across Government, there are various initiatives that support stay-at-home parents. A child benefit payment of €140 per child per month is available for all children. Budget 2019 announced an increase to the home carer tax credit to €1,500 per year.

There has also been a number of new measures to support parents to spend time at home with children in their early years. Two weeks of paternity leave and benefit for fathers was introduced in 2016. In 2017, there was an extension to maternity leave and benefit to mothers of babies born prematurely. Budget 2019 also announced the introduction of a new parental leave scheme which will be available to both fathers and mothers.

My Department has recently led the development of a Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families. The Strategy will include a range of measures to support families given the fundamental importance they play in shaping children's outcomes. I look forward to updating the House on those developments later this year.

Human Rights

43. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he or officials on his behalf were in contact with President Erdogan of Turkey following the murder of a person (details supplied). [45883/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Our thoughts and condolences in recent weeks have been with Jamal Khashoggi's fiancée, family, friends and colleagues, all of whom have been affected by this appalling and outrageous crime. Neither I nor my officials have been in contact with President Erdoğan or other Turkish political leaders in relation to the death of Mr. Khashoggi. However, we are closely following the facts as they emerge through our Embassies in Riyadh and Ankara. In addition, I met with the Saudi Ambassador on 18 October and stressed the widespread shock caused by the case and the necessity for a credible and open investigation, echoing High Representative Mogherini's call for a thorough, credible and transparent investigation into the circumstances surrounding this case, and for the perpetrators of the crime to be held fully accountable. The Secretary General of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade also met with the Saudi Ambassador on 30 October and again reiterated our concerns.

The horrific details that are coming to light in relation to Mr. Khashoggi's death are of grave concern, and Ireland is deeply troubled by the egregious attack on press freedom that this killing represents.

Press freedom is a fundamental right, and it is essential that journalists feel safe to pursue their work in any country. Together with our European partners, Ireland will continue to raise our serious concerns about all actions that undermine freedom of expression, including media expression, across the globe.

I discussed this case with my EU colleagues at the October meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and I anticipate that we will return to the issue at the next meeting of the FAC on 19 November.

Brexit Documents

44. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the findings of a study (details supplied) are available to the Government; and if these findings will be made available to persons and members of Dáil Éireann. [46011/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The North South cooperation we enjoy today brings tangible benefits to the daily lives of people in the border region and contributes to economic opportunity and development. It is also a very practical outworking of the peace process which allows for the normalisation of relationships between people across the island, to mutual benefit. The Government is therefore firmly focused on protecting the full range of areas in which North South cooperation exists today in the context of the ongoing negotiations between the EU and the UK, and in doing so works closely with the Commission Taskforce. This includes our involvement in discussions, where appropriate, while respecting the negotiations structures that have been mandated by the European Council. At the request of the EU and UK Coordinators for the High Level Dialogue on Ireland/Northern Ireland, officials carried out detailed work over October and November 2017 to map out areas of cooperation that operate on a North South basis on the island of Ireland and which rely on EU law and policies.

This included looking at the six North South implementation bodies, the areas of cooperation under the North South Ministerial Council, which cover agriculture, environment, health, education, transport and tourism; as well as other areas where there is practical cooperation between North and South, including justice and security, energy, broadcasting and communications, inland fisheries, sport and culture.

It has been made public that an initial listing established over 140 areas of North-South cooperation within this framework. This number was identified in the early stages of the process and was not prepared by the Irish Government. The listing provided a basis for further discussions in the course of the dialogue.

The exercise overall highlighted how the maintenance and future development of meaningful North South cooperation relies on the EU legal and policy frameworks to give direction to this cooperation and to facilitate its operation. The EU frameworks are both overarching and the foundation to North South cooperation in many instances. Much of the cooperation is interconnected, mutually supporting and complementary; it is not easily quantifiable.

The Joint Report agreed by the EU and UK negotiators on 8 December 2017 acknowledged that cooperation between Ireland and Northern Ireland is a central part of the Good Friday Agreement, and that the UK departure from the Union gives rise to substantial challenges to the maintenance and development of North-South cooperation. The UK has accordingly committed to protecting and supporting continued North-South cooperation across the full range of contexts and frameworks of cooperation, including the continued operation of the North-South implementation bodies. This is further reflected in the draft Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, including in Article 8, the text of which has been marked green, meaning that it is agreed at negotiator level.

As the mapping exercise was conducted by the EU and UK in the course of their dialogue on Ireland and Northern Ireland, joint publication of a final report is ultimately a matter for the EU and UK.

Departmental Staff Data

45. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and

Trade the number of staff in each consulate and embassy in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46031/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland's diplomatic network of missions around the world is critical to the achievement of our foreign policy and trade goals such as ensuring the efficient delivery of passport and consular services to our citizens, supporting emigrant organisations and outreach to the diaspora and other networks of influence. Our Embassies and Consulates contribute directly to safeguarding our interests in negotiations on the UK exit from the European Union and they are helping to ensure that Ireland plays a full part in shaping the future development of the European Union. The work of my Department in promoting a more just, fair, secure and sustainable world continues through mission engagement with multilateral institutions and agencies, including those of the United Nations, and via implementation of the Irish Aid programme in partner countries.

Our staff in Embassies and Consulates also make a strong contribution to job creation, exports, tourism and education in Ireland by assisting Irish businesses overseas in close cooperation with State agencies.

Our capacity to deliver on these key goals will increase with the expansion of my Department's mission network abroad under the Global Ireland Initiative announced in June of this year. This includes the opening of an Embassy in New Zealand in August, the opening of a Consulate General in Vancouver in October and the opening of new missions in Bogotá, Santiago, Amman, Mumbai and Cardiff early in 2019 and in Los Angeles, Frankfurt, Rabat, Kyiv and Manila by the end of 2020.

Our missions are staffed by Departmental officers posted from headquarters; by staff seconded from other Government departments in certain missions including the Permanent Representation in Brussels and Visa Officers seconded to missions from the Department of Justice, and by locally recruited staff.

Mission	Number of Staff 2016	Number of Staff 2017	Number of Staff 2018 to date
Abu Dhabi	12.5	13	14
Abuja	11	14	11
Addis Ababa	8	9	11
Ankara	11	12	12
Athens	6.3	8	7
Atlanta CG	3	3	4
Austin CG	3	4	4
Bangkok	8	9	10
Beijing	23	25	24
Berlin	13.6	20.6	18.6
Berne	5	5	5
Boston CG	5	7	6
Brasilia	5	6	4 + 1 Vacancy
Bratislava	4	3	3
Brussels incl Brussels PFP	12	12	12
Brussels PR	91	99	100
Bucharest	6	7	6

Mission	Number of Staff 2016	Number of Staff 2017	Number of Staff 2018 to date
Budapest	6	6	6
Buenos Aires	6	5 + 1 Vacancy	5
Cairo	9	9	7
Canberra	10.6	11	11
Chicago CG	6.4	5.4	6.4
Copenhagen	5.9	6.9	6.5
Dar-es-Salaam	8	8	9
Edinburgh CG	4	3 + 1 Vacancy	5
Edinburgh BIC	1	1	1
Freetown	4	4	5
Geneva PMUN	15.5	16	17
Hanoi	9	10	11
Helsinki	5	5	5
Holy See	2.75	2.75	3.75
Hong Kong CG	5	5	5
Jakarta	8	7	6
Kampala	7	8	9
Kuala Lumpur	5	6	6
Lilongwe	7	7	9
Lisbon	6	6	6
Ljubljana	5	5	5
London	56.5	66.6	64.6
Lusaka	7	7	7
Luxembourg	4.5	3.5	3.5
Madrid	13.5	14	15
Maputo	7	11	13
Mexico	9	9	8
Monrovia	0	0	3
Moscow	17	18	17
Nairobi	3	9	8
New Delhi	14	14	15
New York CG	17.5	16.5	16
New York PMUN	17	17	29*
Nicosia	4	4	4
Oslo	5	5	4
Ottawa	10	10	10
Paris	18	21.2	19.2
Paris OECD	4	6	5
Prague	7.5	7	7
Pretoria	10	13	13
Ramallah	6	6	6
Riga	3	3	3
Riyadh	9	10	9

Mission	Number of Staff 2016	Number of Staff 2017	Number of Staff 2018 to date
Rome	13.3	13.42	14.72
San Francisco CG	6	6	9
Sao Paulo CG	4	4	4
Seoul	6	6	6
Shanghai CG	8	7	8
Singapore	6.5	6.3	6.3
Sofia	6	6	6
Strasbourg CoE	5	6	6
Stockholm	5.62	5.62	5.62
Sydney CG	5	6	6
Tallinn	3	5	3
Tel Aviv	5	5	6
The Hague	9	10.8	11.6
Tokyo	10	10	11
Valletta	4	4	4
Vancouver CG	0	0	1
Vienna	9	9	9
Vienna OSCE	4	4	5
Vilnius	4	4	5
Warsaw	8	8	10
Washington DC	20	18	17
Wellington	0	0	1
Zagreb	3	3	3
TOTAL	750.47	811.59	833.79

*11 of these new positions are temporary advisor roles.

British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference

46. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the issues discussed at the recent British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference; the outcome of such discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46120/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): A meeting of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC) took place in Dublin on 2 November. The Minister for Justice and Equality, Charles Flanagan TD, and I represented the Government. The UK Government was represented by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, David Lidington MP, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley MP. Set up under the Good Friday Agreement, the Conference brings together the Irish and UK Governments to promote bilateral co-operation at all levels on all matters of mutual interest within the competence of both Governments. Following on from the most recent meeting of the BIIGC, in London on 25 July, last week's meeting provided the opportunity to continue our discussions on legacy issues, security co-operation, East-West matters, and political stability in Northern Ireland. At the meeting, we reaffirmed our commitment to implementing the framework established in the 2014 Stormont House Agreement to comprehensively address the legacy of Northern Ireland's past, taking account of the UK Government's public consultation

on establishing the legacy institutions.

On security-cooperation, both Governments recalled the commitments made in the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement to ending paramilitarism and welcomed the first report of the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC) established under that Agreement. In considering the findings and recommendations contained in the report, the Conference noted in particular the IRC's view that the full operation of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement is essential to ending paramilitarism and achieving community transformation.

The Conference discussed a joint paper by Irish and British officials which outlined a number of possible models to maintain and strengthen the high level of bilateral co-operation between the UK and Ireland post-Brexit. Both Governments agreed that these new structures for systemic bilateral co-operation should demonstrate the strength and depth of the relationship, provide opportunities for ministers and officials to continue to engage with each other, and provide an overall architecture for cooperation that is both meaningful and sustainable in the future. As announced following the Conference, this model would include top level summits involving Heads of Government and senior ministers and would alternate between Ireland and the UK. These summits would be supported by close bilateral work by ministers. Officials on both sides have been asked to turn these ideas into a detailed practical plan of work with a view to presenting a fully worked through proposal for future East-West cooperation for consideration at the next meeting of the Conference.

The Conference provided both Governments the opportunity to reaffirm our strong support for the Good Friday and subsequent Agreements. It was recognised that the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement have been essential for the progress made in Northern Ireland over the past two decades and that they remain the indispensable framework for the political process in Northern Ireland. Both Governments reiterated their shared commitment to securing the operation of the devolved power-sharing Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly and the consequent resumption of meetings of the North-South Ministerial Council at the earliest opportunity.

It was agreed that the BIIGC would reconvene in spring 2019.

Northern Ireland

47. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the outcome of the most recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and with the political parties in Northern Ireland on the need to have the Assembly and Executive restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46121/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since the Northern Ireland Assembly elections of March 2017, the Irish and British Governments, as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, have worked tirelessly to support and facilitate the parties in their efforts to form a new power-sharing Executive. Unfortunately, to date, it has not proved possible to reach an agreement on the formation of an Executive, despite intensive engagement. The absence of the Executive also means that North South Ministerial Council cannot meet. I am currently engaging with Secretary of State Bradley on how both Governments can most effectively secure the full operation of all of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement. I met with Secretary of State Bradley in Dublin on 17 September, in Belfast on 8 October and most recently in Dublin last Friday 2 November at the British Irish Inter-Governmental Conference.

Both Governments are continuing to engage with all of the political parties to seek a way forward to get the Institutions up and running again. All parties have re-affirmed their commitment to operating the devolved institutions and have provided views on their key concerns and issues.

In the period ahead, I believe a new political process is required to get beyond the current impasse and secure the necessary agreement between the parties on operating the devolved institutions again.

I do not underestimate the way to go in achieving that, but I firmly believe that a resolution is possible and that the calls from across all sections of the community in Northern Ireland for the devolved institutions to operate will be heeded.

The Government will continue to do everything in its power, in accordance with its responsibilities as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to secure the effective operation of all of the institutions of the Agreement.

EU Issues

48. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Finance his most recent engagement with his EU counterparts on the proposed digital tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45975/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that the Commission proposal for an interim Digital Services Tax, which imposes a 3% levy on the turnover of certain companies' digital activities, is currently being debated among Member States – both at a technical and political level.

I recently reiterated Ireland's opposition to the proposal at ECOFIN on 6 November where I highlighted particular concerns I have regarding the negative consequences for Europe, as a predominantly exporting bloc, from creating a precedent of taxation at point of consumption rather than where value is created. I also pointed out that taxing revenue rather than profits would undermine European competitiveness and could intensify already heightened trade tensions.

While Ireland is among a number of Member States which object to the fundamental nature of the proposal, we are joined by a wider group which share our concerns on a series of technical issues yet to be resolved.

Ireland remains committed to global tax reform and believes that global solutions are needed to ensure tax is paid by companies where value is created. That is why Ireland has been a committed participant in, and strong supporter of, tax reform efforts led by the OECD through the BEPS process. Ireland will continue to actively engage with work in the area of the digital economy at both OECD and EU level.

Fiscal Data

49. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance if he will complete a table (details supplied). [45997/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware the projections set out by my Department in Budget 2019 *Economic and Fiscal Outlook* run to 2023. Projec-

tions beyond 2023 are not available at this stage.

Annex 4 of the *Economic and Fiscal Outlook* contains the nominal GDP and GNI* series used in the calculations below.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
a. National Development Plan (NDP), € million	7,300	7,900	8,600	8,900	9,400
b. NDP, per cent GNI*	3.5	3.6	3.8	3.7	3.8
c. NDP, per cent GDP	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.3
d. alternative plan, € million	7,300	9,500	10,100	10,800	11,500
e. alternative plan, % GNI*	3.5	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6
f. alternative plan, % GDP	2.1	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.8
g. (=d-a) additional capital expenditure, € millions	0	1,600	1,500	1,900	2,100
h. impact of g on expenditure benchmark (after smoothing), € millions	0	400	775	1,250	1,775

Help-To-Buy Scheme Data

50. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance the number of help-to-buy grant applications received; the number of applications that reached claim stage; and the number of claims approved under the help-to-buy scheme since its inception in July 2016. [46007/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that Revenue publishes a monthly update on the Help to Buy (HTB) scheme on the Revenue website. The most recent update to 01 October 2018 in respect of applications, both approved and pending, and claims made can be found at: www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/tax-expenditures/help-to-buy-stats.pdf.

Revenue's statistics show the number of applications received at 20,298 and the number of approved applications at 14,656 or 72.2%. Compliant taxpayers who complete their HTB application are provided with an application number and a summary of the maximum relief available to them under the incentive. Revenue encourages prospective applicants to file any necessary tax returns, and resolve any outstanding issues, before making the HTB application. This reduces processing delays when a person makes their HTB application.

When an applicant has purchased a qualifying property from a qualifying contractor, or a self-builder has drawn down the first tranche of his or her mortgage on a qualifying property, the application can progress to the claim stage. Details of claims made and approved as well as the value of approved claims are also provided in the monthly statistics referenced above. To the end of September, 9,034 HTB claims had been made, of which 8,841 had been approved.

Tax Data

51. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration will be given to the establishment of a high pay and wealth commission to assemble data to review the levels of high pay, bonuses, dividend and other incomes in the property, financial, information technology, pharma and other industries and the accumulation of wealth resulting from these

payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46048/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy may be aware, there is already considerable work undertaken in the area of high wealth individuals and high income earners.

In terms of policy measures to support equity in the tax system, Finance Act 2011 outlined a ‘super tax’ on banking bonuses in the aftermath of the financial crises. A tax rate of 89 per cent is applied to any variable remuneration in the banking sector which is not regular salary, including remuneration awarded in shares. While this restriction on banking bonuses remains in place, I have committed my Department to tender for an external evaluation to determine whether the remuneration policy remains fit for purpose.

In addition, a high income individual’s restriction (HYIR) has been in place since Budget 2007, limiting the use of certain tax reliefs and exemptions by high income earnings individuals. Its aim is to balance the promotion of tax equity in relation to those on high incomes with the incentive effect of specified tax reliefs. The restriction works by limiting the total amount of specified reliefs that a high income individual can use to reduce their tax liability in any one tax year. A recent report on its operation in 2016, published by the Revenue Commissioners signals that the measure continues to work as intended. The declining levels of tax revenue associated with the restriction signify that the amount of income being sheltered from tax (and as a result falling within the HYIR) continues to fall. Those on incomes over €400,000 (149 individuals) face an effective tax rate of 30 per cent, with average tax rates rising to 40.9 per cent once the USC is included. Some 372 individuals on incomes between €125,000 and €400,000 paid an average tax rate of 28.6 per cent once USC was included.

From a wealth monitoring perspective, the Revenue Commissioners have a dedicated High Wealth Individuals (HWI) unit within their Large Cases Division, which has been in operation since 2003. This is supported by an Anti-Avoidance function allowing for the specialised focus highlighted by the 2009 OECD report *Engaging with High Wealth Individuals on tax compliance*. As of June 2018, this unit which is responsible for profiling, risk assessment and tax compliance, was actively monitoring 480 high wealth individuals with wealth in excess of €50 million. A sectorial decomposition of these individuals reveals a third are predominantly active in the real estate sector, with just 4 per cent active in the financial and insurance sector. The operations of this unit were reviewed in 2007 and again in 2015 with no change recommended.

Furthermore, the Controller & Auditor General’s *Report on the Accounts of the Public Services 2017* outlines the State’s management of high wealth individuals tax liabilities and notes the relatively high effective tax rate on income earned by HWIs who face a rate of 39 percent, compared to an average rate of 16.3 per cent for all tax payers.

As regards transparency of information, from a data collection perspective the CSO publish earnings by NACE sector, including the Information and Communication, the Professional, Scientific and Technical, and the Financial Insurance and Real estate sectors. This forms part of the *Earnings Hours and Employment Costs Survey* (EHECS). Data are published on irregular earnings (bonuses), non-statutory social contributions (i.e. employer contributions to pension funds, life assurance and income continuance insurance), and benefits-in-kind (covering for example stock options, share purchase schemes, voluntary health insurance and company cars).

As regards data on wealth, the Central Bank publish a quarterly net worth of Irish households series. In addition, the CSO conduct the Household Finance and Consumption Survey (HFCS 2013), compiling comprehensive data on Irish household wealth. The net wealth Gini coefficient - a commonly used measure of inequality (where a figure of 100 indicates that one household holds all the wealth and 0 indicates that wealth is evenly divided among all house-

holds) indicates that wealth inequality in Ireland was lower (64) than the euro area average (69). The HFCS results also indicate that wealth in Ireland was less concentrated at the top of the distribution than the euro area average.

Motor Insurance Claims

52. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46066/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Setanta Insurance was placed into liquidation by the Malta Financial Services Authority on 30 April 2014. As it was a Maltese incorporated company, the liquidation is being carried out under Maltese law. The Deputy will be aware that the Insurance (Amendment) Act 2018 (Act 21 of 2018) was signed into law in July this year. The Act, inter alia, provides for the payment of 100% of the compensation due to Setanta third party personal injury motor insurance claimants including the additional 35% to those who have settled their claims and have already received compensation of 65% of their claim. The Act also provides for revised arrangements for the on-going administration of the Insurance Compensation Fund, including for the relevant applications to the President of the High Court. These revised arrangements have now been put in place.

I have been informed by the State Claims Agency that a High Court date has been agreed for Monday, 19 November. Payments can then be issued to qualifying Setanta claimants by the Agency within 10 working days of obtaining the funds from the Central Bank on foot of the High Court order. Therefore, based on this information, I anticipate that the next tranche of payments will be made to claimants in the late November/early December period.

While I cannot comment on individual cases, the Agency has advised that the next tranche will comprise of: (a) newly settled claims requiring 100% payment, (b) all those cases where 65% was previously paid and where the balance of 35% is due and (c) a number of third party legal costs payments. In total, it is expected that next tranche of claims will comprise in the region of 1,500 separate payments with a value of approximately €21 million. Finally, it should be noted that the process of settling claims is still ongoing and is subject in some cases to court procedures. The liquidator of Setanta estimates that the process of settling the vast majority of these outstanding claims should be completed by end-2019.

Revenue Commissioners

53. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance if it is standard practice for the Revenue Commissioners to request from a person a completed tax return and letters of administration for their deceased spouse who was only in receipt of a State pension and had no assets other than the family home. [46077/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it would not be normal to seek tax returns and letters of administration relating to a deceased individual, where that individual's income consisted solely of a State pension and he or she had no assets, other than the family home.

However, there are situations where such documentation may be required, for example, in a case where the deceased individual did not have income, other than a State pension, but his or her spouse or civil partner may have other income or assets.

The information provided in the question is not sufficient to allow Revenue to review a particular case. If the Deputy has a specific case in mind and provides relevant details to my officials, I will arrange to have this information passed to Revenue.

Tax Code

54. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the costs of sending children to college are not allowable against tax (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46141/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 473A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for tax relief at the standard rate of income tax (20%) in respect of qualifying fees paid by an individual for a third level education course, subject to the terms and conditions set out in that section. Qualifying fees mean tuition fees in respect of an approved course at an approved college, reduced by the amount of the “student contribution” which, in the case of a full-time course, is currently €3,000. Full details of the relief, including the terms and conditions that apply, are set out on the Revenue website at

www.revenue.ie/en/personal-tax-credits-reliefs-and-exemptions/education/tuition-fees-paid-for-third-level-education/index.aspx.

There is no specific provision for tax relief in relation to the living costs associated with attending college e.g. accommodation costs. However, the rent-a-room scheme provides significant levels of relief to the providers of accommodation within their own home to persons on both a 7 day a week and “digs” basis.

Election Expenditure

55. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost to send out voting cards to each registered voter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46027/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The most recent information available relates to the Referendum to repeal the 8th Amendment held on the 25 May 2018. For that election event, polling cards were delivered to an electorate of 3.3m at a total cost of €2.5m.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

56. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the issue of pension provision for community employee supervisors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46028/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I would refer the Deputy to my response to PQs 43892/18 and 43895/18 given on 24 October 2018.

Public Procurement Regulations

57. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a

company (details supplied) is eligible to engage in future State tenders for construction projects. [46075/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Public Procurement is governed by EU and National rules. The aim of these rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers transparency and value for money outcomes.

As Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform I have responsibility for the formulation of policy, dissemination of best practice and guidance in public procurement. I am not in a position to comment on whether or not a particular business is eligible to engage in future public contracts as it will depend on the circumstances of the business and the criteria that have been established for a particular procurement.

An applicant's eligibility to participate in public procurement competitions must be determined in a manner that meets the principles of transparency, non-discrimination and mutual recognition. Criteria for qualitative selection are defined in the EU Procurement Directive and essentially break down into two categories; exclusion grounds and selection criteria.

Applicants may be excluded from a procurement where their particular circumstances meet the grounds for exclusion defined in the Directive. These break down to grounds that must be applied by the contracting authority which typically cover convictions for crimes such as money laundering, corruption, etc. They also include an applicant's failure to meet its obligations with respect to tax and social welfare payments. There is a further range of grounds that a contracting authority may choose to apply covering such matters as insolvency, poor past performance, serious misrepresentation, etc.

Selection criteria are applied to determine an applicant's financial and economic standing and their professional and technical capacity. All requirements should be relevant and proportionate to the specific contract. Those who do not meet the minimum standards set for the applied criteria may be excluded from further participation in a tender competition.

There is no provision in the Directive to exclude a business from all procurement procedures. The assessment as to whether a business is excluded or not is made on a case by case basis for each competition.

The management of the tendering process for a public contract including the application of certain exclusion grounds and selection criteria is a matter for each contracting authority. It is the responsibility of each contracting authority to ensure that tenderers comply with all the requirements of the process.

When evaluating responses to the eligibility criteria the contracting authority must consider the facts and must arrive at a decision based on evidence.

Office of Public Works Properties

58. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the rationale for the OPW's decision to dispose of sites zoned for development on Church Avenue, Dublin 9, and Herbert Lane, Dublin 2, instead of reserving them for affordable housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46144/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Public Works policy with regard to non-operational (vacant) State property and sites is to:

1. Identify if the property is required/suitable for alternative State use by either Government departments or the wider public sector.
2. If there is no other State use identified for a property, the OPW will then consider disposing of the property on the open market if and when conditions prevail, in order to generate revenue for the Exchequer.
3. If no State requirement is identified or if a decision is taken not to dispose of a particular property, the OPW may consider community involvement (subject to detailed written submission, which would indicate that the community/voluntary group has the means to insure, maintain and manage the property and that there are no ongoing costs for the Exchequer).

The former Model School at Church Avenue, Glasnevin and the site at Herbert Lane, Dublin were evaluated in line with above disposals policy. As the OPW had no further use for these properties they were offered to all other State sectors to determine if they might have a need to utilise the properties. Neither Dublin City Council, the HSE or the education sector declared an interest in acquiring the properties. As such, the properties were deemed surplus to requirements and a decision was taken to place the property on the open market. All proceeds from the disposal of these properties is returned directly to the Exchequer for appropriate further distribution to public needs such as housing, health and education.

Youth Guarantee

59. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of EU funding made available to Ireland under the Youth Guarantee; the reason this has not been drawn down to date; when it will be drawn down; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45966/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is one of the main EU financial resources to support the implementation of the EU Youth Guarantee. It is integrated into European Social Fund (ESF) programming as a dedicated priority axis within the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020 (PEIL). The specific YEI allocation for Ireland of €68m is matched by equal amounts from our ESF allocation and from the Exchequer, giving an overall allocation of €204m.

All ESF activities, including YEI activities, are fully funded up-front by the Exchequer with the EU (ESF/YEI) funding being claimed in arrears. While no payment application has been made to date to the Commission under the PEIL, it is expected that the funding will be fully drawn down.

The ESF authorities must be designated in accordance with the EU regulations prior to making the first payment application. This designation is based on the opinion of the Independent Audit Body (IAB) which must be satisfied across a range of criteria that systems are in place to allow the ESF authorities to perform their required functions. These systems requirements include the provision of a computerised accounting and information system for EU funds to meet the 2014-2020 functionality requirements. The final phase of the IT system went live at the end of March 2018 and the consultants retained to conduct an independent review of the eCohesion IT System so as to provide assurance that the system is sufficient to meet the Designation Criteria, submitted their final report in September 2018. The ESF authorities have had extensive engagement with the IAB on the designation process which is expected to conclude very shortly.

At the same time, preparations are being finalised for the submission of a first payment application to the Commission and the ESF authorities will ensure that sufficient payment applications are submitted to fully drawdown the EU funding allocations.

Apprenticeship Data

60. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the budget allocation for apprenticeships in 2018 and 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45967/18]

61. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons who registered on newly developed apprenticeship programmes in 2018. [45968/18]

62. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of the new apprenticeship programmes that were introduced in 2018. [45969/18]

63. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the apprenticeship population to date in 2018. [45970/18]

64. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeship registrations to date in 2018. [45971/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 to 64, inclusive, together.

The information sought by the Deputy is set out in the following tables.

Apprenticeships that became operational in 2018

Trades	NFQ Level
AUCTIONEERING	
Auctioneering & Property Services	6
BIOPHARMACHAM	
Laboratory Analyst	7
Laboratory Technician	6
FOOD MANUFACTURING	
Butcher	5
HOSPITALITY	
Chef de Partie	7
ICT	
ICT Associate Professional Network Technician	6
ICT Associate Professional Software Developer	6
LOGISTICS	
Logistics Associate	6

APPRENTICESHIPs AS OF 31st October 2018	
Total Apprenticeship Registrations	4,655

APPRENTICESHIPs AS OF 31st October 2018	
New Consortia Apprenticeship Registrations	520
Total Apprenticeship Popoulation	14,953
APPRENTICESHIP BUDGET ALLOCATIONS	
2018	€122m
2019	€142m

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

65. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to ensure provision of adequate supports at a school (details supplied) for children with special educational needs attending this school; the further steps he will take to address the lack of suitable educational placements at primary level for children with special educational needs and the lack of future educational placements at second-level for children with special educational needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45973/18]

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

The greater proportion of children with special educational needs (SEN) attend mainstream class, where they may access additional supports if required.

Some students with SEN, although academically able to access the curriculum in mainstream, may find it too difficult to manage full-time placement there and placement in a special class should be considered.

Special school placements are provided for other students with SEN and very complex special needs who wouldn't manage in a mainstream school even for part of the week. Enrolment of a child in a special school is based on a professional assessment in consultation with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

There is therefore not one preferred educational environment for children with SEN, rather there is a model which takes into account the assessed educational needs of individual pupils.

The range of supports and services which are made available to schools include additional special educational support teaching, Special Needs Assistants support, funding for the purchase of specialised equipment, services of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), enhanced levels of capitation in Special schools and Special Classes and additional teacher training.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where there is an identified need, in consultation with the relevant education partners and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

Since 2011, the NCSE has increased the number of special classes by over 150% from 548

in 2011 to 1,459 across the country now.

While most schools fully embrace an open and inclusive policy, some students with Special Educational Needs continue to experience difficulties in securing enrolment. My Department has acknowledged that in recent years the establishment of special class provision in some schools and communities has been challenging.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 when fully commenced will assist in addressing these issues.

The Deputy will be aware that, on the 3rd October 2018, my predecessor Minister Bruton, commenced a number of sections of the Act. On that date the Minister also announced the commencement of Section 8 of the Act, from Monday 3rd December 2018, which will provide the Minister with a power, after a process of consultation with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the board of management and the patron of the school, to compel a school to make additional provision for the education of children with special educational needs.

This power will come into effect on Monday 3rd December 2018. The NCSE will engage with the education partners and finalise procedures in advance of this date. This new power will build on the work which has been done in recent years to facilitate schools to open special classes.

Section 67 of the Act will provide certain powers to the NCSE to designate a school placement for a child in circumstances where a child is experiencing difficulties in securing enrolment.

A number of the remaining sections of the Act which have not yet been commenced including Section 67, require regulations and procedures to be drafted, and will require consultation with the Education Partners prior to commencement.

I intend to have the other remaining sections of the Act commenced in time for admissions to the 2020/21 school year.

DES Circular 0010/2018 for primary schools set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools to support students with SEN enrolled in mainstream classes.

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

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

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

The criteria for qualification for mainstream school developing school posts for the 2018/19 school year were set out in DES Circular 10/2018 (Primary School Staffing Schedule) and DES 7,8,9/2018 (Post Primary School Staffing Schedule).

The National Council for Special Education will be available to support schools where schools have developed and implemented appropriate plans for the deployment of their spe-

cial education needs teaching resources, but the school considers that further support may be required.

The NCSE has published details of how schools can seek a review of their allocations, including the utilisation of their allocations, in circumstances where a school considers that very exceptional circumstances have arisen subsequent to the development of the profile.

Should schools consider that they fulfil the criteria for a review on the grounds of exceptional circumstances, details of this review process are available at:

<http://ncse.ie/review-of-special-education-teacher-supports-where-there-are-exceptional-circumstances-or-needs-arising-in-a-school> .

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

School Accommodation Provision

66. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the new school premises for a school (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that an organisation was first granted patronage of this school in March 2013 and it has been located at a temporary premises since August 2016; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the lease on this temporary premises expires in April 2019 and its first junior certificate exams are due in June 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45987/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, a major capital project to provide permanent accommodation for the school in question is being addressed through my Department's Capital Programme.

It is envisaged that this accommodation 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, the Department is liaising with Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board. The Department will also continue to liaise with the school's Patron in this regard.

Fiscal Data

67. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the deficit accumulated at Waterford Institute of Technology; his plans to address the deficit; the measures that may be considered in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46016/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The audited accounts for 2015/16 for Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) has a significant accumulated deficit (€4.4m deficit after FRS 102 adjustments). The draft accounts for 2016/17 and projections for 2018/19 continue to show an operating deficit which will further impact on the accumulated deficit position of the institute.

In order to address these financial issues the HEA is liaising closely with WIT and has agreed a financial plan to bring the institute back into a balanced budget. The plan includes new

programme development linked to industry engagement, restructuring of campus companies, recruitment strategy to return student base to 2012 levels and the implementation of a plan to address retention weaknesses.

A quarterly financial report is submitted to the HEA by the President in relation to the financial position. The issues which have affected WIT financial position are a continued reduction in student numbers, reduction in completion rates, restructuring costs, on-going cashflow issues, a reliance on research income and repayment of a capital loan to DES.

My Department has agreed to defer repayments of the WIT loan in 2018 to aid the financial situation at the institute. The HEA is receiving quarterly reports and monitoring the situation closely in consultation with my officials.

Institutes of Technology

68. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students at Waterford Institute of Technology in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46017/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The number of student enrolments at Waterford Institute of Technology from 2014 to 2018 is set out in the following table. Enrolment statistics are available on the HEA website for all HEA funded institutions.

Enrolments	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018
Waterford IT	8,201	7,980	7,792	7,550	7,779
Full-time	6,969	6,826	6,453	6,313	6,501
Postgraduate	430	411	426	451	437
Undergraduate	6,539	6,415	6,027	5,862	6,064
Part-time	1,232	1,154	1,339	1,237	1,278
Postgraduate	438	381	426	483	497
Undergraduate	794	773	913	754	781

Technological Universities

69. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to advance a technological university of the south east; the stage at which the process is at; the next steps; the costs associated with the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46018/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): It is a matter for the relevant Institutes of Technology in a consortium to lead on the progression of their plans to seek designation as a technological university under the Technological Universities Act 2018.

In relation to the Technological University of South East Ireland (TUSEI) consortium comprising Waterford Institute of Technology and the Institute of Technology Carlow, the Minister of State for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor T.D., has met with the Presidents and Chairs of both IoTs on a number of occasions this year with a view to encouraging the progression of the TUSEI development project. It is understood that, as has been stated publicly, the consortium through its joint steering group is continuing to progress its work with a view to submitting an application for TU designation by the end of 2018.

The TUSEI consortium has received some €1.72 million in Exchequer funding to date to advance their project, of which the most recent tranche of €1m in higher education landscape restructuring funding was announced by the Minister of State for Higher Education on 21 September 2018.

Technological Universities Data

70. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the consultancy firms commissioned to carry out work associated with the development of technological universities by his Department, the HEA and each institute of technology, by institute; the name of the consultancy firm; the costs associated and the work involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46019/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): A report by Mr. Michael Kelly of Governance Ireland Ltd. on an engagement and consultation process on a technological university for the south east was commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills and published on 27 July 2015. The total cost incurred in the preparation of this report was €32,782.65 (including VAT), which was met by the Department of Education and Skills. As outlined at the time of publication and recommended in the Kelly report, a facilitation process between the leadership group in Waterford Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Carlow was subsequently commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills and undertaken by the consultancy firm, SIA Partners, commencing in September 2015 and finalised in May 2016. The total amount paid to SIA Partners for this work was €12,779 (including VAT), which cost was met by the Department of Education and Skills.

In 2017 two studies were commissioned by the Connacht Ulster Alliance of Galway Mayo Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Sligo and the Letterkenny Institute of Technology in the context of a potential expansion of that consortium by a number of additional institutes of technology. These reports were paid for by the Department of Education and Skills. The reports were “The Economic Impact of a Technological University in Ireland: An exploratory study” by Viewforth Consulting Ltd. Cost: €21,600.00 (VAT inclusive) and “Development of the Technological University TU5: International perspectives and options” by Emeritus Professor John L. Davie. Cost: €7,961 (VAT inclusive).

Since 2013 Exchequer co-funding has been provided in relation to the development of technological university projects by consortia of institutes of technology. The most recent Exchequer allocations were made following funding calls in 2017 and 2018 administered by the Higher Education Authority in support of higher education landscape restructuring. In this context the details of any consultancy work commissioned by the Authority itself, including in the wider context of technological university development, or by consortia of institutes of technology, are matters for those bodies.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

71. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a secondary school place will be provided for a person (details supplied) in a city school; and if their parent will be informed in view of the fact that preparations must be made for them relative to the change of school. [46055/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department provides for a range of placement options and supports for schools, which have enrolled students with spe-

cial educational needs, including those with Autism, in order to ensure that wherever a child is enrolled, s/he will have access to an appropriate education.

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

My Department therefore provides for a continuum of provision which includes mainstream school placements with additional supports, or for pupils who require more specialist interventions, special class and special school placements. This decision is based a recommendation contained within a professional assessment in consultation with the National Council for Special Education(NCSE).

Students enrolling in specialised placements must have a report from a relevant professional or team of professionals stating that:

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

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

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 direct reply. My Department has no role in such determinations.

Schools Building Projects

72. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when concerns regarding structural flaws first became apparent in a school (details supplied). [46059/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Department of Education and Skills initiated fire safety assessments across 30 WBS built schools and a representative sample of 25 other schools last year. Following on from this, checks in the wall cavities for fire barriers at Tyrrelstown ETNS (in late August) raised questions relating to the adequacy of wall ties. At that point, it was decided that a separate structural investigation was warranted, and arrangements were made for same. This ultimately led to the broader programme of structural assessments.

Emergency Works Scheme Data

73. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applications for emergency works which include a fire safety element currently being considered. [46063/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): To date in 2018 my Department has received 63 applications for fire safety works in schools.

49 applications have been approved. The remainder are either awaiting additional informa-

tion from the school authority or revised applications.

One school was unsuccessful because it already had adequate fire safety measures in place in the school.

Emergency Works Scheme Data

74. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applications for emergency works which include a structural safety element currently being considered. [46064/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department is currently considering 36 applications under its Emergency Works Scheme for works containing some structural elements.

19 of these applications are for works to enable access for all pupils and staff. The type of work involved here is appropriate toileting facilities, door widening and ramps.

13 applications relate to roof repairs. The remaining 4 applications relate to issues such as mould remediation and plaster and brickwork repairs.

Schools Building Projects Status

75. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the recently announced new second-level school for Dunshaughlin, County Meath. [46065/18]

94. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the significant shortage of school places in the Dunshaughlin catchment area in County Meath; and the measures he plans to take to counteract same. [46095/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 75 and 94 together.

My Department recently announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next 4 years (2019 to 2022), including a new 8 classroom primary school to be established in 2019 to serve the Dunshaughlin school planning area.

The announcement followed nationwide, demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country. The requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular would have regard to the impact of the increased roll-out of housing provision to meet balanced regional development as outlined in Project Ireland 2040. My Department will also continue to monitor areas where the accommodation of existing schools may need to be expanded in order to meet the needs of the local population. Approximately 40% of extra school places are delivered by extending existing schools.

Regarding the new primary school announced to serve the Dunshaughlin school planning area, this will be established in September 2019 in suitable interim accommodation, pending the delivery of the school's permanent school building.

Schools Building Projects

76. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the costs to date of structural audits in schools built by a company (details supplied). [46067/18]

89. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost to complete works on schools built by a company (details supplied) identified as needing remedial works; the estimated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46087/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 76 and 89 together.

The Deputy will appreciate that the priority over the mid-term break was to ensure that the structural assessments were conducted on the schools built by the company referred to by the Deputy, and any precautionary measures implemented, to facilitate safe reoccupation of schools this week.

Precautionary measures to address structural issues were implemented by Sunday, 4 November. This involved a significant logistical exercise across the various schools.

Further detailed structural investigations will be required to determine the nature and scale of the permanent remediation works required across the schools in question.

The cost of these works is therefore not yet available.

Public Procurement Regulations

77. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a company (details supplied) is eligible to continue to bid for State contracts. [46068/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Department of Education and Skills at all times acts in accordance with public procurement legislation.

Under the EU Procurement Directives, it is very difficult to exclude a contractor from a tendering process. The grounds for exclusion would need to be objectively demonstrable and the burden of proof is quite high.

In terms of future contracts, the Department will at all times act in accordance with the legislation governing public procurement and will take legal advice as necessary.

Schools Building Projects

78. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his officials or his predecessor ever met with professional bodies or persons prior to September 2018 at which warnings were issued about the standard of school construction. [46069/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Arising from the fire risk assessment programme initiated by my Department, officials from my Department met, earlier this year, with representative Professional Associations, principally the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland ((RIAI), Engineer's Ireland (IEI) and the Association of Consulting Engineers of Ireland (ACEI) to discuss the operation of the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations (2014) to reiterate the responsibilities of Design Teams to fully engage in a complete and comprehensive way with the inspection and certification requirements of BC(A)R (2014).

It is the responsibility of the Design Team appointed to build a school to ensure that a newly

constructed building is compliant with its Fire Certificate.

My Department subsequently wrote to these associations to remind them of their members' legal duties in this regard.

There were no warnings issued by anyone attending those meetings.

Schools Health and Safety

79. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the costs to date of fire safety audits in schools announced in September 2017. [46071/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Department has expended over €220,000 on the Fire Safety Assessment Reports for the schools announced in September 2017 as part of the Fire Safety Assessment Programme .

Fire Safety Consultants have visited all 55 schools and to date 51 initial Fire Safety Assessment reports have been received in my Department with the remaining 4 reports due in the coming weeks.

Schools Building Projects Administration

80. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of clerks of works appointed pursuant to an announcement in September 2017; and the details of the projects which have their own clerk of works or grouped with a single clerk of works. [46072/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm that a full time Clerk of Works has been appointed on all large scale school building projects that have commenced on site since September 2017.

Details in relation to these projects are set out below

County	Roll Number	School	Contract Start Date
Cavan	19439B	Holy Family SS, Cootehill	28/06/2018
Clare	16677C	CBS Primary School Ennis	29/08/2018
Cork	19993E	Gaelscoil An Ghort Alainn, Aibinne Murmont, Gort Alainn, Corcaigh.	10/09/2018
Cork	71020G	Davis College, Summerhill, Mallow, Co Cork	25/06/2018
Cork	14839P	Clondrohid National School	05/02/2018
Dublin	16567S/ 17279S	St Brigid's Convent NS & Scoil Mhuire NS, Haddington Road, Dublin 4.	11/06/2018
Dublin	76213T	Lusk Community College, Lusk - Phase 2	03/01/2018

County	Roll Number	School	Contract Start Date
Dublin	76130P	Phase 2 - Luttrellstown Community College, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15 (See 2012 List of Projects for Phase 1)	01/02/2018
Dublin	20304I	St Francis of Assisi, Balgriffen Park, Belmayne, D 13	28/03/2018
Dublin	20308Q	Belmayne Educate Together NS, Balgriffen Park, Belmayne, D 13	28/03/2018
Dublin City	20441S	Shellybanks ETNS (Temp)	24/08/2018
Galway	18746F	Scoil Mhuire, Monivea N.S.	22/09/2017
Kildare	20292E	Maynooth ETNS	17/08/2018
Laois	19337Q	St Francis Special School Portlaoise	13/08/2018
Laois	17827A	Scoil Phadraig Portarlinton	28/03/2018
Limerick	71840V	Coláiste Chiarain, Croom.	05/11/2018
Limerick	19336O	Scoil Phoil Naofa, Dooradoyle	09/04/2018
Louth	16208N	Scoil Naomh Feichin, Termonfeckin	04/09/2017
Westmeath	17327D	Curraghmore NS, Mullingar	18/09/2017
Wexford	19240B	St Patrick's Special School, Enniscorthy, Co Wexford	22/10/2018
Wicklow	20473I	Greystones Community National School	10/08/2018

Schools Building Projects Administration

81. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a clerk of works has been appointed for each building project under the auspices of his Department. [46073/18]

82. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are clerks of works within his Department staff; and if not, if they are private contractors. [46074/18]

85. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of site visits carried out of schools built by a company (details supplied) identified as needing remedial works by school during construction as part of certification processes; the dates of these inspections in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46083/18]

86. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the procedures in place for the issuing of completion certificates for schools built in each of the years, 2009 to 2014, 2014 to September 2017 and September 2017 to date in 2018; if this expressly required site visits by clerks of work; if the number or nature of inspections was prescribed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46084/18]

96. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the oversight exercised in respect of various school building projects before September 2017. [46100/18]

97. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department independently, as a customer, ever engaged in quality checking of major school building projects before 2017. [46101/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 81, 82, 85, 86, 96 and 97 together.

Under my Departments Design Team Procedures, the primary objective during Stage 4 – Construction is “to administer the Contract effectively so as to achieve a high quality of construction and bring the project to substantial completion on time and within budget all in accordance with the conditions of contract and the Works Requirements”.

When a contract is awarded the Contractor must provide the Employers Representative, before the Starting Date, a detailed programme, in the form set down in the Contract, that will permit effective monitoring of the works.

The Contractor is obliged to submit to the Employer’s Representative monthly progress reports, in the form set down in the Contract, within 7 days after the end of the month.

The Employer’s Representative must schedule regular meetings attended by the Contractor’s Representative and the Employer’s Representative and attended by the Employer’s and Contractor’s personnel, as required. The standard approach on school building projects is to schedule such site meetings on a fortnightly basis through the construction period. A per project schedule of such meetings for the relevant projects is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy.

Separate to the role of Employer’s Representative, which is an external party appointed by the Department under the Public Works Contract, the Department’s own technical staff act as client liaison on school building projects constructed under the Design & Build process. The responsibilities of the client liaison include reporting on progress to the Department; bringing any potential programme delays to the attention of the Department; keeping the school community awaiting completion of the building informed of progress; involving the School Authorities in selecting of internal colour schemes, and ensuring that the contractor is aware of any particular project or school requirements. The client liaison is not involved in the certification of the works.

Under the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations introduced in 2014, an Assigned Certifier must be appointed. Since 2014, the Department has appointed an independent qualified third party to act as Assigned Certifier on all Design and Build school projects.

On school projects designed by the Employer, the lead Architect on the design team usually acts as the Assigned Certifier.

The Assigned Certifier coordinates and implements an inspection plan through the construction process.

At project completion, the Assigned Certifier gathers the ancillary certificates, which are provided by the contractor, its subcontractors and design team, and executes a Certificate of Compliance on Completion.

The Assigned Certifier is not, however, responsible for the supervision of the builder.

Since September 2017, in addition to the Assigned Certifier, the Department now appoints a full-time resident Clerk of Works on all major school construction projects. The role of a Clerk of Works is to represent the interests of the client with regard to ensuring that the quality of

both materials and workmanship is in accordance with the architect's/engineer's drawings and specifications. This includes inspection of materials and workmanship through the construction process. Clerks of Works are external appointments and are not Department staff.

Protected Disclosures

83. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to a protected disclosure regarding Waterford and Wexford Education Training Board; and the steps he will take to ensure the person is protected in this case (details supplied). [46079/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): My Department is aware of correspondence received from an individual employed by Waterford Wexford Education and Training Board (WWETB) in relation to the area of further education and training.

My Department is considering the issues raised but has advised the individual that on an initial review it does not appear that issues referred to in this correspondence contain details of a protected disclosure, but rather relate to ongoing employment difficulties between the individual and their employer WWETB.

As such my Department has advised this individual to write to the Adjudicator of the Workplace Relations Commission.

Arts in Education Charter

84. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a stock take of existing facilities for arts in education was undertaken as recommended by the Arts in Education Charter; the findings of the stocktake; the steps taken in relation to those findings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46082/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Arts in Education Charter, launched in 2013, is a joint initiative of the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht working in association with the Arts Council to promote arts-in-education. The Charter sets out a number of commitments, including section 4.10 which stated that “the Minister for Education and Skills will also consider a stock-take of existing facilities. That stock-take would inform future provision, co-location and shared use of facilities”.

An initiative to map organisations, events, artists and locations at national, regional and local level throughout the country, as outlined in the Arts in Education Charter, is currently under development, and will be drawn upon for arts-in-education purposes. This mapping will be in the form of a national digital mapping/directory. This will be incorporated on the Arts-In-Education Portal (www.artsineducation.ie) on an incremental basis, but with a substantial amount of the work completed by the end of this year. This will be a major resource for schools and all stakeholders and will also help to highlight areas of low provision, with a view to its remediation. This work is being overseen by the Arts in Education Portal Editorial Committee which was established under the auspices of the Charter.

As the Deputy will be aware, Creative Youth, a plan to enable the creativity of every child and young person was published in December 2017. This Plan aims to ensure that every child

in Ireland has practical access to tuition, experience and participation in music, drama, arts and coding by 2022. The actions in the Creative Youth Plan extend to both the formal and non-formal education sectors and are being delivered by my Department, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Arts Council. The Creative Youth is building on the Arts in Education Charter and aims to resource, fast-track and implement the objectives of the Charter.

Questions Nos. 85 and 86 answered with Question No. 81.

Schools Building Projects Data

87. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of pupils displaced from schools built by a company (details supplied) identified as needing remedial works during construction that will be moved from the site of their current school; the distance from each school they have been moved from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46085/18]

88. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeline for the completion of works on schools built by a company (details supplied) identified as needing remedial works; and the estimated date for the return of all pupils to their classrooms. [46086/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 87 and 88 together.

Structural assessments have now been completed at all 42 schools constructed by the company referred to by the Deputy.

The Department's priority since these issues were first identified has been to ensure the safety of students and staff, while minimising disruption to education provision.

The precautionary measures to address structural issues are in place.

Off-site interim accommodation has been arranged for classes displaced from three schools which are initially opening at ground floor level only, i.e. Tyrrelstown ETNS, St Luke's National School Tyrrelstown, and Gaelscoil Eiscir Riada, Lucan. This involves some 980 pupils. Further assessments are ongoing to determine the approach to facilitating the occupation of the remainder of the buildings as soon as possible.

While some of these children are within walking distance of their interim accommodation, other children may have to travel up to 9 kilometres. Where travel is involved, the Department has arranged transportation.

Arrangements have also been made for the accommodation of some 180 students at Ardgillan Community College while Phase 1 of the school building remains closed. The arrangements include use of a shared community centre next door to the school and some facilities at another school.

Question No. 89 answered with Question No. 76.

Schools Building Projects Data

90. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of de-

sign, build and operate contracts issued; the builder of each project; the year the contract was issued; the school for which the contract was issued in each of the years 2009 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46088/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): A list of all Design and Build contracts is attached for the years in question. The operation of schools is not a function of the Design and Build contracts and is relevant only in the context of PPP projects.

	County	Roll Number	School	Contractor Name	Contractor Appointed
1	Cork	00512D	Midleton Convent NS	Sammon Contracting	2009
2	Cork	20335T	Scoil Phadraig Naofa, Rochestown	ABM Design and Build	2009
3	Dublin	20131D	Dublin 7 Educate Together NS	Roankabin	2009
4	Kildare	06209J	Athy Model School	CLG Developing LTD	2009
5	Louth	20146Q	Le Cheile Educate Together	Sammon Contracting	2009
6	Wexford	20214H	Gorey Educate Together National School	Sammon Contracting	2009
7	Dublin Fingal	76129H	Ardgillan CC	Western Building Systems	2009
8	Dublin Fingal	20202A	Balbriggan ETNS, Flemington, Balbriggan	Sammon Contracting	2009
9	Kildare	20271T	Phase 1: Scoil na Naomh Uilig, Rickardstown, Newbridge	Sammon Contracting	2009
10	Phibblestown	76098W	Phibblestown PP	PJ Hegarty & Sons	2009
11	Phibblestown	20247W	Scoil Grainne, Phibblestown	PJ Hegarty & Sons	2009
12	Dublin Fingal	20145O	Swords ET	Glasgивen McAvoy	2010
13	Dublin Fingal	20095C	GS Bhriain Boromhe	Glasgивen McAvoy	2010
14	Dublin	20201V	Tyrrelstown ETNS	Western Building Systems	2011
15	Dublin	15315J	St. Georges National School, Balbriggan, Dublin 15	Glasgивen McAvoy	2011
16	Meath	20215J	St Pauls NS, Ratoath	Western Building Systems	2011

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	County	Roll Number	School	Contractor Name	Contractor Appointed
17	Galway	19858V	Gaelscoil Dara	ABM Design and Build	2011
18	Dublin	20161M	Donabate Portrane	Glasgiven McAvoy	2011
19	Kildare	16705E	Scoil Phadraig Naofa New School +GP & Ancillary for GS Atha Í RN 20192A and Athy Model School 06209J	Western Building Systems	2011
20	Dublin	20303G	Lucan East ETNS	Western Building Systems	2011
21	Dublin Fingal	20252P	GS Baile Brigán	Glasgiven McAvoy	2011
22	Dublin Fingal	20282B	Bracken ETNS	Glasgiven McAvoy	2011
23	Kildare	20271T	Scoil na Naomh Uilig Phase 11	ABM Design and Build	2011
24	Louth	20294I	Aston Village	ABM Design and Build	2011
25	Wexford	72127D	Gorey CC	Sammon Contracting	2011
26	Cork County	19839R	Gael Scoil Ui Riordain	Glenman Corporation Limited	2012
27	Laois	15556I	Portarlinton Convent NS	Western Building Systems	2012
28	Sth Dublin	20223I	Gaelscoil Eiscir Riada	Western Building Systems	2012
29	Dublin Fingal	16675V	Mulhuddart NS	Western Building Systems	2012
30	Dublin Fingal	20302E	Thornleigh ETNS, Swords	ABM Design and Build	2012
31	Dublin Fingal	20348F	Holywell ETNS	ABM Design and Build	2012
32	Dublin Fingal	20269J	Scoil Chormaic	Western Building Systems	2012
33	Wexford	20057R	Gaelscoil Inis Corthaidh, Bothar Ros Mhic Thriuin, Inis Corthaidh, Co Loch Garman.	ABM Design and Build	2012
34	Dublin Fingal	20241K	Scoil Choilm NS	Western Building Systems	2012

	County	Roll Number	School	Contractor Name	Contractor Appointed
35	Dublin Fingal	76130P	Luttrellstown Community College -Phase 1	Western Building Systems	2012
36	Wexford	20165U	Gaelscoil Moshíológ, An Chraobhach, Bothar Charn an Bhua, Guaire, Co Loch Garman.	Stewart	2012
37	Dublin	76213T	Lusk Community College, Lusk - Phase 1	ABM Design and Build	2012
38	Laois	20347D/ 20081O/ 14838N	Portlaoise Educate Together NS, Gaelscoil Phortlaoise, Maryborough NS, Portlaoise.	Western Building Systems	2012
39	Dublin	20307O	Skerries Educate Together NS, Barnageeragh Cove, Kellys Bay, Skerries.	ABM Design and Build	2012
40	Meath	76173K	Coláiste na Mí, Navan. (Phase 1)	Sammon Contracting Ltd.	2012
41	Meath	20179I	St Stephen's NS, c/o St Martha's College, Johnstown.	Sammon Contracting Ltd.	2012
42	Dublin	60450U	Coláiste Mhuire, Cabra	Sammon Contracting Ltd.	2012
43	Cork	16746S	Ballygarvan NS	Sammon Contracting	2012
44	Galway	76233C	Claregalway - Colaiste Bhaile Chlair (Phase 1)	JSL Group/ Stewart	2013
45	Carlow	20295K	Carlow Educate Together NS	Sammon Contracting Ltd	2013
46	Wicklow	20300A	Greystones Educate Together NS, Blacklion, Greystones.	Stewart	2013
47	Wicklow	20301C	Gaelscoil na gCloch Liath, Blacklion, Greystones.	Stewart	2013

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	County	Roll Number	School	Contractor Name	Contractor Appointed
48	Louth	20259G	St. Francis National School	Stewart	2013
49	Cork County	20006A	Gaelscoil Chloich Na Coillte	Western Building Systems	2013
50	Cork County	20335T	Rochestown Primary School	Western Building Systems	2013
51	Cork	20310D	Carrigaline Educate Together NS.	Western Building Systems	2013
52	Meath	17821L	St Mary's NS, Enfield, Co Meath	ABM Design and Build	2013
53	Galway	19998O	Gaelscoil de hÍde, Oranmore, Co na Gaillimhe	Stewart	2013
54	Dublin	20274C	Esker Educate Together NS, Lucan.	ABM Design and Build	2013
55	Cork	20354A	Cara Special School, c/o Brothers of Charity, Administrative centre, Lota, Glanmire, Co Cork	Western Building Systems	2013
56	Kildare	76194S	New PP school Craddockstown, Naas	Glasgiven McAvoy	2013
57	Galway	76233C	Claregalway - Colaiste Bhaile Chlair (over 3 Phases)	JSL Group/ Stewart	2013
58	Dublin	17055T	Naomh Mhuire NS, Saggart, Co Dublin	ABM Design and Build	2014
59	Dublin	20425U	GS Sliabh Rua, Stepside, Co Dublin	Western Building Systems	2014
60	Dublin	16461C	Caislean Nua Liamhna NS, Newcastle Lyons, Dublin Sth	ABM Design and Build	2014
61	Kildare	20403K	Kildare Educate Together NS, Kildare Town.	Glasgiven McAvoy JV Ltd	2014
62	Meath	20082Q	Gaelscoil Tulach na nÓg, Dunboyne	Western Building Systems	2015
63	Offaly	20189C	Tullamore ETNS, Collins Lane, Tullamore	ABM Design and Build	2015

	County	Roll Number	School	Contractor Name	Contractor Appointed
64	Dublin	19624T	SN Caitriona NS, Kenure, Rush.	ABM Design and Build	2015
65	Wicklow	20178G	Wicklow ETNS, Marine House, The Murrough, Wicklow	Sammon Contracting Ireland Ltd	2015
66	Dublin	19872P	Caitlín Maude, Tallaght	Western Building Systems	2015
67	Cork	20107G	Gaelscoil Mainistir na Corann, Ionad an Phobail, Mainistir na Corann	JSL Group t/a Stewart	2015
68	Meath	76196W	Ashbourne Post Primary School, Ashbourne. (Phase 1)	Western Building Systems	2015
69	Meath	20382F	Gaelscoil Na Mí, c/o Donaghmore Ashbourne GAA, Ashbourne.	Western Building Systems	2015
70	Meath	20396Q	Ashbourne ETNS, Ashbourne	Western Building Systems	2015
71	Dublin City	20453C	Broombridge ETNS (Cabra Primary School)	Western Building Systems	2015
72	Dublin	68082L	Coláiste Glór na Mara, Stephenstown.	ABM Design and Build	2015
73	Dublin	20384J	Powerstown ETNS, Powerstown Rd, Tyrellstown, D 15	ABM Design and Build	2015
74	Dublin	20394M	Gaelscoil an Chuillann, Mulhuddart, D 15	ABM Design and Build	2015
75	Dublin	20422O	Scoil Aoife, Tallaght West CNS, D 24	Western Building Systems	2015
76	Dublin	20426W	Lucan CNS, Lucan	Western Building Systems	2016
77	Galway	76233C	Claregalway Community College, Claregalway (Phase 2)	JSL Group t/a Stewart	2016

Questions - Written Answers

	County	Roll Number	School	Contractor Name	Contractor Appointed
78	Cork County	19433M	Holy Family Special School Charleville	JJ Rhatigan & Co	2016
79	Cork	19851H	Gaelscoil de hÍde, Fermoy	JJ Rhatigan & Co	2016
80	Cork	68264R	Carrigaline Post Primary, Carrigaline	ABM Design and Build	2016
81	Galway City	20061I	Gaelscoil Iafhlarta	JSL Group t/a Stewart	2016
82	Limerick	20175A	Limerick ET, Mungret	JJ Rhatigan & Co.	2016
83	Limerick	20181S	Gaelscoil an Raithin, Dooradoyle Road, Garryowen	JJ Rhatigan & Co.	2016
84	Donegal	20235P	Letterkenny ETNS, Ballyraine Halls, Letterkenny	Western Building Systems	2016
85	Galway	19994G	Gaelscoil Mhic Amhlaigh, Knocknacurra	JSL Group t/a Stewart	2016
86	Cork	20440Q	Mallow CNS, Mallow	JSL Group t/a Stewart	2016
87	Galway	20000L	Galway Educate Together NS, Thomas Hynes Road, Newcatle, Galway City	Western Building Systems	2016
88	Cork	20336V	Midleton ET, Market Green, Midleton	ABM Design and Build	2016
89	Dublin	20411J	Firhouse/ Oldbawn ETNS, Tallaght, D 24	Western Building Systems	2016
90	Dublin	20412L	Gaelscoil Oldbawn, Tallaght, D 24	Western Building Systems	2016
91	Galway	20123E	Gaelscoil Riabhach, Loughrea	ABM Design and Build	2017
92	Dublin	20401G	Stepaside ET, Stepaside	ABM Design and Build	2017
93	Kildare	20428D	Gaelscoil Mhic Aodha, Kildare	Western Building Systems	2017
94	Wexford	18280I	St Joseph's Gorey	Western Building Systems	2017

	County	Roll Number	School	Contractor Name	Contractor Appointed
95	Clare	19559L	Scoil Chríost Rí	ABM Design and Build	2017
96	Leitrim	20212D	Gaelscoil Liatroma, St Mary's GAA, Attyfinlay, Carrick-on-Shannon	JJ Rhatigan & Co	2017
97	Dublin	76130P	Phase 2 - Luttrellstown Community College, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15 (See 2012 List of Projects for Phase 1)	ABM Design and Build	2018
98	Dublin	20304I	St Francis of Assisi, Balgriffen Park, Belmayne, D 13	ABM Design and Build	2018
99	Dublin	20308Q	Belmayne Educate Together NS, Balgriffen Park, Belmayne, D 13	ABM Design and Build	2018
100	Laois	17827A	Scoil Phadraig Portarlinton	ABM Design and Build	2018
101	Wicklow	20473I	Greystones Community National School	Western Building Systems	2018
102	Laois	19337Q	St Francis Special School Portlaoise	MEIC Ltd	2018
103	Kildare	20292E	Maynooth ETNS	MEIC Ltd	2018
104	Dublin City	20441S	Shelleybanks ETNS (Temp)	Western Building Systems	2018
105	Clare	16677C	CBS Primary School Ennis	JJ Rhatigan & Co	2018

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

91. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is required to consult with the Arts Council and or be represented on its committees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46089/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Under section 42 of the Education Act the Minister for Education and Skills may designate an organisation which has a special interest in the exercise by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) of its functions. Such designation entitles the designated body to be consulted by the NCCA. The Arts Council are a designated body of the NCCA under section 42 of the Education Act.

Section 4.11 of the Arts in Education Charter outlined that “the Arts Council shall be con-

sulted by the NCCA and, where appropriate, represented on its committees that address art education, creative entrepreneurship, digital media, and cognate areas of arts in education. The Charter, launched in 2013, is a joint initiative of the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht working in association with the Arts Council to promote arts-in-education.

The NCCA is not represented on any of the Arts Council's committees. However, the NCCA have regular contacts with the Council on a range of relevant work and matters. For example, the Arts Council had a representative on each of the NCCA's Subject Development Groups for development of the Junior Certificate Visual Art and Leaving Certificate Art specifications recently. Most recently, the Arts Council have been consulted on the NCCA's draft Strategic Plan 2019 – 2021.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

92. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person or family household is required to be on a social welfare payment to qualify for the special rate of SUSI grants when their income does not exceed €23,500; his views on whether this restriction is penalising for families that are working; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46091/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education made detailed recommendations concerning the introduction of special rates of maintenance grants for disadvantaged students.

The target group of “those most in need” was defined in terms of the dependants of people receiving long-term welfare payments, where the necessary conditions are fulfilled.

The decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter for SUSI to determine. In assessing an application for the 2018/19 academic year, SUSI will have regard to the following qualifying criteria for the special rate of maintenance grant:

1. The student must qualify for the standard rate of grant;
2. Total reckonable income, after income disregards and Child Dependant Increase(s) are excluded, must not exceed €23,500;
3. As at 31st of December 2017, the reckonable income must include one of the eligible long-term social welfare payments prescribed in the Student Grant Scheme.

Families on low incomes may wish to enquire with the Department of Social Protection as to their eligibility for the Working Family Payment/Family Income Supplement (FIS). FIS is an eligible payment for the purposes of the Special Rate of Maintenance Grant.

In addition to the maintenance grant support, 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. Details of this fund are available from the Access Office in the institution attended.

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 including approved undergraduate and postgraduate courses in EU Member States and in non-EU countries. Further information on

this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners.

Schools Building Projects Status

93. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he plans to finalise plans for a new primary school in Ashbourne, County Meath. [46094/18]

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

Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools,
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools,
- Provision of a new school or schools.

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

In line with the ongoing review of school planning areas generally, I can confirm that my Department is currently reviewing the position in relation to primary provision for the Ashbourne school planning area. This review is now well advanced and nearing completion. The outcome of the review will be finalised and made available as soon as possible.

Question No. 94 answered with Question No. 75.

School Funding

95. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the financial support and subvention which will be made available to the four recently announced Educate Together schools in setting up their schools. [46096/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Pre-opening capitation funding of €25,000 is provided for each new post-primary school in recognition of the fact that costs are incurred in the period prior to the opening of a new school. This funding is made available to the Patron to hold on behalf of the newly recognised school. In addition to this a Start-up grant of €20,000 is payable directly to the school.

The interim and permanent accommodation costs of new primary and post-primary schools are met by the Department. My Department also provides furniture & equipment and ICT grants to the schools.

Questions Nos. 96 and 97 answered with Question No. 81.

Schools Building Contractors

98. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the name of the assigned certifier in respect of each school building project subject to 2014 building regulations constructed by a company (details supplied); if an inspection plan and inspection notification framework was in place and acted upon in respect of each project; and if he was informed of any issues as they arose. [46102/18]

99. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if, in the case of each project undertaken by a company (details supplied) and in which remedial works have been deemed necessary, contact has been made with the assigned certifiers under 2014 building regulations since the recent difficulties were uncovered. [46103/18]

100. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if, in the case of each project undertaken by a company (details supplied) and in which remedial works have been deemed necessary, if the assigned certifiers under 2014 building regulations also took part in recent examinations of construction standards. [46104/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 to 100, inclusive, together.

MLM Ireland is the Department appointed Assigned Certifier on 4 of the 19 schools in which precautionary health and safety measures were required. These schools are Ashbourne Post Primary School (De Lacy College), Ashbourne ETNS, Gaelscoil Na Mi, Ashbourne and Scoil Caitlin Maude in Tallaght.

An inspection plan and inspection notification framework was in place and acted upon in respect of all 4 schools.

During Construction issues were dealt with on-site as they arose. It is not considered necessary to inform a Minister of such operational issues as they arise and are dealt with.

The Assigned Certifier was contacted in relation to the three schools in Ashbourne and attended the opening up works which took place on Monday 31st October. The assigned certifier was not required to be present in respect of the opening up works which took place in Scoil Caitlin Maude.

However, it is important to note that the works which have been carried out are precautionary rather than remedial.

Now that precautionary measures are in place, the Department will move quickly to initiate the next phase of more detailed structural investigations. These investigations will determine the nature and scope of the permanent remediation measures required and will involve contact with all parties including the Assigned Certifier.

Education and Training Boards Administration

101. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide information on an education and training centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46111/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): ETBs procure a wide range of goods and services in order to meet the needs of the administra-

tive offices, schools and further education and training centres under their remit. In this regard ETBs operate in accordance with national and European procurement regulations and guidelines.

I have contacted Tipperary Education Training Board with regard to the Deputy's question and I can confirm that Tipperary ETB staff in consultation with a firm of procurement consultants drafted the invitation to tender document with advice from SOLAS Technical Staff. The tender was set out in eleven individual lots which I have outlined in the table attached. I am informed that all unsuccessful tender respondents were notified in writing stating the reason that they were not successful in the tender process. HRP Limited were successful in five of the lots and therefore were awarded one contract which was in excess of one million euro.

A member of the Tipperary Education Training Board was present at the tender opening. Tipperary ETB staff members were involved in the tender evaluation. The tender was reported and noted by the board of the Tipperary ETB. The Chief Executive, signed the HRP Limited contract. The minutes of the board meeting and that of the audit and risk committee are attached to this response.

I can also confirm that a professionally qualified financial person is on the Audit Committee of Tipperary ETB. Payments are made on the basis of approved invoices. All payments from Tipperary ETB are processed by Electronic Fund Transfer and are authorised by the Training Services Manager and where payments exceed €100,000, the CEO authorises the payment.

I can report that the board of Tipperary ETB and the CEO are satisfied that is no conflict of interest in relation to this contract.

Tipperary ETB's invitation to tender for supply of vehicles, plant and tools for Thurles Further Education and Training Centre, County Tipperary on etenders.gov.ie on 22 January 2018.

Responses to tender received

Lot Number	Number of Responses	Value	Successful
1	2	490,600	HPR Ltd
2	3	16,721	Air Impact Ltd
3	3	16,310	HPR Ltd
4	1	233,455	HPR Ltd
5	1	192,500	HPR Ltd
6	5	5,944	Air Impact Ltd
7	4	26,972	All Grip
8	1	67,250	HPR Ltd
9	4	3,536	Air Impact Ltd
10	4	6,117	All Grip
11	2	21,750	PJ Fallon & Sons

Contracts Awarded.

Contract Amount €	Company Awarded
1,000,115	HPR Ltd
21,750	PJ Fallon & Sons
26,201	Air Impact Ltd

Contract Amount €	Company Awarded
33,089	All Grip

Arts in Education Charter

102. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of meetings he and his predecessor had with the Arts in Education Charter implementation group since the report was published; the dates of those meetings; the persons that attended those meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46112/18]

103. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of reports received from the Arts in Education Charter implementation group since the report was published; if these reports are publicly available; if not, the reason therefore; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46113/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 102 and 103 together.

The Arts in Education Charter was launched in 2013 as a joint initiative of the Department of Education and Skills and the then Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, working with the Arts Council. The Charter recognised the value of arts in education and committed to cross-departmental co-operation in this area. A number of commitments were made as part of this process and much progress has been made across all areas of the Charter since its publication.

An High Level Implementation Group, chaired by the late Professor John Coolahan, was appointed by the Ministers of both Departments in 2013 to provide a strategic, high-level and ongoing point of contact with them to ensure the delivery of the Charter objectives. The Group was made up of senior officials from the Department of Education and Skills, the then Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Director of the Arts Council, members also included Mary Nunan, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick (and Chair of the Points of Alignment Committee) and Dr Katie Sweeney, National Director for the integration of the Arts in Education. Michael Finneran, Head of Drama and Theatre Studies, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick replaced Mary Nunan on this group in 2016.

The Group has been active since 2013 and met with my predecessors and the previous Ministers for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Six formal reports were submitted to the Minister for Education and Skills and to the then Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. These reports will be uploaded to the Arts in Education Portal and will be available to view.

As the Deputy will be aware, Creative Youth, a plan to enable the creativity of every child and young person was published in December 2017. This Plan aims to ensure that every child in Ireland has practical access to tuition, experience and participation in music, drama, arts and coding by 2022. The actions in the Creative Youth Plan extend to both the formal and non-formal education sectors and are being delivered by my Department, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Arts Council. This Plan is building on the Arts in Education Charter and aims to resource, fast-track and implement the objectives of the Arts in Education Charter as well as rolling out a range of other initiatives.

In addition, a new Expert Advisory group chaired by Dr. Ciaran Benson has been established by Minister Bruton, in his previous role as Minister for Education and Skills, Minister Madigan and Minister Zappone. Their role is to drive the implementation of Creative Youth and

the continued roll out of the Arts in Education Charter. They will also advise on the broader long-term objective for the Creative Ireland Programme: to enhance cultural and creative education for all our children and young people.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

104. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) will be accepted as a pupil at a school. [46140/18]

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

The greater proportion of children with ASD attend mainstream class, where they may access additional supports if required.

Some students with ASD, although academically able to access the curriculum in mainstream, may find it too difficult to manage full-time placement there and placement in an ASD special class should be considered.

Special school placements are provided for other students with ASD and very complex special needs who wouldn't manage in a mainstream school even for part of the week. Enrolment of a child in a special school is based on a professional assessment in consultation with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

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

The NCSE is responsible for the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where there is an identified need, in consultation with the relevant education partners and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

There are 4 special schools and 27 special classes in mainstream schools in Co. Westmeath.

The school referred to by the Deputy supports students with ASD and complex needs who wouldn't manage in a mainstream school even for part of the week. The Department consulted with the NCSE when planning the new school build for this school. The NCSE is satisfied that the additional accommodation this project will deliver will meet future potential need for such placements.

The new school project will deliver a new 2-storey 6-classroom base Special Needs School including a General Purpose Hall, all staff and pupil facilities, allowing for the school to accommodate an additional class for 6 students with ASD and complex needs, should it be required in future years.

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. My Department has no role in making such determinations.

Work Permits Eligibility

105. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if persons who have been granted temporary permission to remain here for four months on stamp 1 conditions to enable an employer apply for an employment permit on their behalf are eligible to apply for this employment permit despite the fact that they are employed in a category that is deemed ineligible for employment permits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45976/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation & Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there are a range of circumstances where it may consider an application for permission to reside in this State to facilitate an application for an employment permit to the Department of Business Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI).

These include cases where a person previously held an employment permit but fell out of the system through no fault of their own and they intend to apply to DBEI for an Employment Reactivation Permit. Other circumstances may involve individuals who want to apply for a new employment permit with a new employer or had a change in their personal circumstances and their permission to reside in this State has expired or is due to expire.

I am further informed that such applications are dealt with on a case by case basis by INIS and may result in the grant of temporary permission to remain in the State on Stamp 1 conditions in order to allow the individual concerned to apply to DBEI for an employment permit. However, the Deputy will appreciate that INIS has no role in deciding whether the person concerned will be granted an employment permit.

Garda Data

106. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí and reservists in each Garda station in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46029/18]

107. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí and reservists in each Garda station in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46030/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 106 and 107 together.

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

The Garda strength by Station for the Laois / Offaly Division and the Kildare Division, as provided by the Garda Commissioner from 2009 is available on my Department’s website through the following link.

The Garda Reserve strength by Station for the Laois / Offaly Division and the Kildare Division, as on 30 September the latest date for which figures are currently available, as provided by the Garda Commissioner from 2009 is as set out in the following table.

Garda Reserve Strength 30 September 2018		
Division	Station	Total
Kildare	Naas	4
	Leixlip	4
	Athy	3
	Newbridge	4
	Kildare	2
	Total	17
Laois / Offaly	Tullamore	10
	Birr	1
	Portlaoise	5
	Total	16

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the following link.

International Time Zones

108. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps he is taking to carry out consultations with the public and the preparations he is making for retaining summer time all year round from October 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46051/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Following an EU-wide public consultation to gather citizens' views on the seasonal clock changes, the EU Commission has concluded that the majority of people who responded are in favour of abolishing the twice-yearly clock change and have put forward a proposal to give effect to this. In October, the Commission published a revised proposal changing the implementation date from 2019 to 2021. The proposal is outlined as follows:

- the practice of a twice-yearly clock change will cease from 2021.
- Member States must decide whether they want to switch to permanent "summer" or "winter" time.
- if opting for Summer time, the last mandatory change to clocks would take place on 28 March 2021
- Member States who wish to remain on Winter time would make one last seasonal clock change on 31 October 2021.

My Department launched a public consultation on 26th October which will remain open until Friday 30th November 2018. I have invited businesses, organisations and individuals to have their say by participating in a survey available on my Department's website

<http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/WP15000529>

My Department has also invited over 400 stakeholder groups to ask them to provide their views on the proposal.

It is important to acknowledge that if the UK were to adopt a different position, this would present particular challenges for the island of Ireland. Any position adopted by Ireland will be

informed by this important consideration. My Department is in contact with the relevant UK Ministry in this regard and there is also ongoing contact with other Member States in the context of the continuing discussion of this proposal at EU level.

An Interdepartmental Steering Group has been established to consider the Commission's proposal and to guide the public consultation exercise. The Steering Group will consider the responses received and report back to me as soon as possible with their recommendations.

Direct Provision Payments

109. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to fund the cost of feminine hygiene products for persons living in direct provision centres; the funding that will be provided for this initiative; if it is a long-term initiative; when this initiative will commence; the way in which it is proposed to roll out this initiative; his further plans to engage with persons living in direct provision on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46106/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As a result of the recommendations in the McMahon Report, accommodation centres for persons in the protection process are all moving to an independent living model (which includes either self-catering or communal catering). In this model, each resident is assigned a number of points depending on their family composition and residents can procure food and other products such as personal toiletries and hygiene products at a food-hall type facility provided by the contractor.

As the Deputy will be aware, I am making arrangements that for those centres that do not yet have the independent living model in operation and in which women and girls are resident, that supplies of feminine hygiene products will be made available as required.

The costs of providing these feminine hygiene products will be borne by the Department. The initiative will see the contractors who run the centres providing the products to residents with the costs being reimbursed to the contractors. The total level of funding required for the initiative is difficult to forecast as there are a number of factors that will impact on the overall cost. These factors include the changing demographic nature of residents, whether residents wish to avail of the initiative rather than provide the products themselves, and the open procurement process which will see more and more centres move to the Independent Living Model.

Under the Independent Living Model, each resident is assigned a weekly points allocation depending on their family composition. Residents then procure the items that they need on-site from their points allocation. Any points not used in a given week can be utilised in any week within a four week period. The points allocated allow for each resident to choose the foods they eat and the toiletries and personal hygiene products that they want. My Department continue to monitor the application of the Independent Living Model to ensure it is meeting the needs of residents.

The Department has recently commenced a public procurement exercise to seek tenders from contractors to provide accommodation and ancillary services by way of the Independent Living Model to persons in the protection process. This process is scheduled for completion in 2020 and will be delivered via a series of regional competitions to cover the entire State.

Staff from the Department will continue to consult with residents through on-site clinics on all aspects of the accommodation and ancillary services that they receive including this initiative.

Direct Provision Payments

110. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the rationale used to determine which persons living in direct provision centres will be able to access feminine hygiene products under the plans to fund the cost of same; and the number of persons that will be able to access and not access these products respectively, under this plan. [46107/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As a result of the recommendations in the McMahon Report, accommodation centres for persons in the protection process are all moving to an independent living model (which includes either self-catering or communal catering). In this model, each resident is assigned a number of points depending on their family composition and residents can procure food and other items such as personal toiletries and hygiene products at a food-hall type facility provided by the contractor.

As the Deputy will be aware, I am making arrangements that for those centres that do not yet have the independent living model in operation and in which women and girls are resident, that supplies of female hygiene products will be made available as required.

Currently, within the Department's accommodation portfolio, five centres which have a combined capacity of 1,537 persons out of a total current population of 5,848 currently deliver services through the Independent Living Model.

It is important to note that following my recent commitment to provide hygiene products to those residents who are not in a centre which operates the Independent Living Model, this now means that all residents, regardless of which style of centre that they reside in, can procure these items without the resident incurring the cost.

The Department has recently commenced a public procurement exercise under which public tenders for the provision of accommodation and ancillary services by way of the independent living model to persons in the protection process will be advertised. This process is scheduled for completion in 2020 and will be delivered via a series of regional competitions to cover the entire State. As this process reaches completion, the numbers of residents living in the Independent Living Model will increase towards 100%.

The rationale behind the move to delivering accommodation services through the independent living model was to address concerns regarding the dependency of residents and to increase their independence and prepare those residents who obtain a permission to remain for the realities of living in the community.

Direct Provision System

111. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if plans to fund the cost of feminine hygiene products for persons living in direct provision centres will not extend to persons living in independent living centres; and if so, the reason therefore. [46108/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As a result of the recommendations in the McMahon Report, accommodation centres for persons in the protection process are all moving to an independent living model (which includes either self-catering or communal catering).

As the Deputy will be aware, I am making arrangements that for those centres that do not yet have the independent living model in operation and in which women and girls are resident,

that supplies of hygiene products will be made available as required.

The rationale behind the move to delivering accommodation services through the independent living model was to address concerns regarding the dependency of residents and to increase their independence and prepare those residents who obtain a permission to remain for the realities of living in the community.

Under the Independent Living Model, each resident is assigned a weekly points allocation depending on their family composition. Residents then procure the items that they need on-site from their points allocation. Any points not used in a given week can be utilised in any week within a four week period. The points allocated allow for each resident to choose the foods they eat and the toiletries and personal hygiene products that they want. In all cases, the costs of feminine hygiene products will be covered by the Reception and Integration Agency either directly or indirectly. My Department continue to monitor the application of the Independent Living Model to ensure it is meeting the needs of residents.

My Department has also recently commenced a public procurement exercise to seek public tenders from contractors for the provision of accommodation and ancillary services by way of the independent living model to persons in the protection process. This process is scheduled for completion in 2020 and will be delivered via a series of regional competitions to cover the entire State.

Direct Provision System

112. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the direct provision centres identified as independent living centres; and the number of women and female children living in each of these centres. [46109/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): Following on from the recommendations of the McMahon Report and, in particular, to increase the autonomy and independence of residents, the Department has been working with service providers to introduce an 'independent living' model in accommodation centres. In this model, residents are allocated a number of points depending on their family composition and these points are used to procure the ordinary day to day household needs of residents. Items that can be procured under this system are ingredients for cooking, toiletries and other household items.

Currently five centres have moved to the independent living model. These centres and their current contracted capacities are:

Centre	Contracted Capacity
Athlone, Co Westmeath	300
Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo	245
Clonakilty, Co. Cork	108
Millstreet, Co. Cork	284
Mosney, Co. Meath	600

The Department has recently commenced a public procurement exercise under which public tenders for the provision of accommodation and ancillary services under the independent living model will be advertised. This process is scheduled for completion in 2020 and will be delivered via a series of regional competitions to cover the entire state.

In parallel with the delivery of the full independent living model, a number of other accom-

modation centres have provided self catering facilities with fresh food provided by either the contractor or the resident themselves. These centres include St Patrick's in Monaghan, Kinsale Road in Cork and Ocean View and Atlantic House in Tramore.

The statistical breakdown sought by the Deputy is not readily available. An analysis of the relevant centres will be carried out and will be forwarded on to the Deputy as soon as is practicable.

Employment Rights

113. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if a protocol is in place in order to ensure the Sectoral Employment Order (Construction Sector) 2017 is being adhered to; the sanctions for companies that are not adhering to the order; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46025/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The Industrial Relations Act 2015 provides a new framework under which proposals for wage setting in particular economic sectors can be considered. The 2015 Act allows for applications for Sectoral Employment Orders (SEOs) to be made to the Labour Court by a trade union or an employer body either individually or jointly. The Court must then examine and assess the application against the criteria set down in the 2015 legislation.

The Sectoral Employment Order (Construction Sector) 2017 came into law on the 19th October 2017. The rates of pay and other terms and conditions, including sick pay and pension schemes, set out in the SEO apply to every worker of the class, type or group in the economic sector to which the order applies, including agency workers.

In the event of a dispute as to the rates that should apply and to whom, the SEO sets out the dispute resolution procedure that applies. Essentially, this provides that in the first instance efforts should be made at local level to reach a resolution by giving notice in writing to the employer. Failing a resolution at this point, a complaint may be made to an adjudication officer of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). In the case of an individual dispute, the outcome of the adjudication hearing can be appealed by either party to the Labour Court. In the case of a collective dispute, if the issue remains unresolved locally, it will be referred to the conciliation service of the WRC. If the issue remains unresolved after conciliation, it will be referred to the Labour Court for investigation and recommendation.

Legislative Reviews

114. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of work to draft new legislation which would replace the Dentists Act 1985; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45965/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department is developing new legislation to replace the Dentists Act 1985, and work on the preparation of the Dental Bill is progressing steadily in parallel with other competing legislative priorities. Drafting of the Scheme of the Bill has commenced, but is at an early stage.

Department officials are currently committed to drafting a Regulated Professions (Health & Social Care) (Amendment) Bill, the primary purpose of which is to amend all health profession regulatory Acts, including the Dentists Act, as a consequence of the transposition of the

modernised Professional Qualifications Directive (2013/55/EU), and to address a number of other issues. This is a large and complex Bill, and is currently at an advanced stage of drafting by the Office of Parliamentary Council in liaison with my officials. Publication is expected by year-end.

Work on the Dental Bill will gain momentum once the Regulated Professions (Health & Social Care) (Amendment) Bill has been published and commences its passage through both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Services for People with Disabilities

115. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the concerns of a school (details supplied) about the lack of regular professional supports such as psychological, psychiatric, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy for pupils with special educational needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45974/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath) (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 Capital Programme

116. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the progress and timeframe for completion of the extension to St. Patricks Hospital, Cashel, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45977/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of capital projects in the health services, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you.

General Practitioner Services Provision

117. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health the status of the establishment of a general practitioner out-of-hours service for north County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45979/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for it to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

118. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE has a plan in place to

replace the position of a medical officer at a hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45981/18]

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Staff

119. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff assigned to the child and adolescent mental health service at University Hospital Waterford in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018 inclusive; and the number of consultant posts by post in tabular form. [45982/18]

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Staff

120. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant posts in place at the child and adolescent mental health service at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45983/18]

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Administration

121. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the catchment area for child and adolescent mental health services at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45984/18]

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.

Industrial Disputes

122. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his views on industrial action by psychiatric staff at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45985/18]

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

Hospital Staff Data

123. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of radiographers in UHW in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45986/18]

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.

HSE Funding

124. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the need for the HSE to provide additional funds for a section 39 organisation (details supplied) to meet its service requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45995/18]

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

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

Pharmacy Regulations

125. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that an organisation (details supplied) has recently decided to limit the working hours and duties of pharmaceutical assistants; if his attention has been further drawn to the concerns of pharmaceutical assistants; if permission will be refused for these changes having regard to the Pharmacy Act 2007; if he will consider changes to this legislation and other short-term solutions to the problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46010/18]

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 Pharmacy Act 2007 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 2018, the Council of the PSI 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 the Council approved the draft rules without amendment.

I understand that since that date the PSI has undertaken to redraft the Rules in relation to what may or not be done by a registered pharmaceutical assistant when acting on behalf of a registered pharmacist. The redrafted Rules will require approval of the Council of the PSI before a public consultation phase. Subsequent to any public consultation phase the draft Rules must again be approved by the Council before submission for my consent. This Council approval is not anticipated until early in the New Year.

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

I await the receipt of the Rules for my consideration from the PSI and until that time, I am unfortunately not in a position to comment any further on the matter raised.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

126. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients at University Hospital Waterford on hospital trolleys in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, by month in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46013/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As Minister for Health, I am committed to maintaining the focus on addressing overcrowding in our hospital emergency departments.

My Department is working with the HSE to ensure the most effective response to the winter challenges to unscheduled care provision and I expect to be in a position to outline the detail of the winter plans very shortly.

As part of Budget 2019, an additional €10m in funding is being provided in 2018 to enable the hospital system to get patients home or to an appropriate care setting, before the end of the year, with a focus on patients in the over 75 age group.

I have asked the HSE to ensure that specific attention is given in the National Service Plan 2019 to ensure that activity is planned so as to anticipate and manage critical demand pressures, most particularly, in respect of emergency pressures in the initial and latter parts of the year.

€10 million in funding is being made available in 2019 to increase acute bed capacity in line with the recommendations in the Health Service Capacity Review. My Department is currently in discussions with the HSE, in the context of the National Service Plan 2019, to identify the sites for investment and the associated number of beds, as part of an agreed capacity programme for 2019.

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

respond to the Deputy directly.

Patient Data

127. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients on inpatient and out patient waiting lists in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018, by speciality; the length of time they have been waiting in bands (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46014/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): With regard to the matter raised, officials of my Department are collating the data requested and will provide it directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

128. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reconfigure orthopaedic services at UHW; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46015/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

129. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding budgets for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46023/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I wish to draw the Deputy's attention to the report of the Task Force on Personalised Budgets, which I published on 17 July 2018. The report is available on the Department of Health website. The report sets out how personalised budgets could work as a funding mechanism for people with a disability, providing them with greater choice and control over the services and supports they receive.

Having reviewed the national and international research evidence and consulted with service users and their families, the report of the Task Force advocates three different models of how personalised budgets might be accessed by people with disabilities:

1. Person-managed fund, often referred to as Direct payments;
2. Co managed with the service provider;
3. Broker managed fund.

The rationale for several models is a recognition of the fact that no two people are the same and therefore, 'one size does not fit all'. The Task Force recommended that the Department of Health and the HSE should establish demonstration projects to test the delivery of personalised budgets. These demonstration projects will test the three models with a view to identifying the best approach to the wider roll-out of these payment models following the initial demonstration phase.

The Department of Health, NDA and the HSE are in the process of designing the demonstra-

tion projects, and the Department's website will be kept updated with information on the roll out of the demonstration projects as it becomes available.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

130. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health if secondary legislation to underpin the access programme for medical cannabis products is being prepared; and if this will be finalised once cannabis based products to be included in the legislation can be sourced. [46038/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Considerable progress is being made in relation to the Cannabis for Medical Use Access Programme.

An Expert Group has drawn up clinical guidance for healthcare professionals treating patients through the Access Programme. These guidelines are available on the Department's website. The guidelines contain detailed information on medical cannabis, including clinical guidance on the use of medical cannabis and guidance on which cannabis products are appropriate for medical use.

Officials in my Department are working on secondary legislation in the form of three Statutory Instruments. This work will be finalised once cannabis-based products, to be included in the legislation, can be sourced.

Whilst medical cannabis products are not medicines, ensuring that such products meet appropriate quality standards when they are made available to the Irish market is a critical aspect of facilitating safe access to medical cannabis for Irish-based patients. Department of Health officials are working intensively on this issue to ensure a supply of appropriate medical cannabis products from other EU Member States and further afield to meet the needs of Irish patients. However, the Department of Health has no control in relation to business decisions taken by commercial product manufacturers and has no powers to compel such companies to supply their products to Irish market.

Until these products are available in Ireland, it will be a matter for the prescriber and their patient to source the prescribed medical cannabis-based product. It is understood that patients who have been prescribed such products under Ministerial Licence have sourced them from the following Pharmacy in the Netherlands: Transvaal Pharmacy, Kempstraat 113, 2572 GC The Hague. Tel: 070-3469314.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

131. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding liability implications for consultants in both public and private practice who prescribe medicinal cannabis; and his plans to change same. [46039/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under existing arrangements consultants in public hospitals are covered by the Clinical Indemnity Scheme (CIS) in respect of the prescription of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) based products for a patient under their care provided that the consultant is permitted to do so under a licence granted by the Minister for Health under the Misuse of Drugs Acts and where he/she has exhausted all other treatment options for that patient.

In relation to private consultants the CIS covers the excess over the indemnity ceilings (or

Caps) set by the State for private indemnifiers of consultants working in private practice settings. Effectively, the private indemnifier's liability in respect of any claim is capped at the relevant indemnity ceiling and the State assumes responsibility for any amount in excess of the cap. Consultants in private hospitals should check with their Medical Defence Organisations to establish that such organisations will cover them up to the Caps limit in cases where they are considering prescribing THC-based medicines for a patient, under licence from the Minister and where he/she has exhausted all other treatment options for that patient.

There are no plans to change these arrangements.

HSE Properties

132. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health his plans for a property (details supplied) owned by the State and which is no longer in use. [46044/18]

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

Home Care Packages Administration

133. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the HSE national service plan 2018 which provided for 18.25 million home support hours to be delivered to over 50,000 persons; the reason persons may still be waiting six to eight months or more for home care packages for vulnerable relatives that wish to live independently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46053/18]

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.

Blind Welfare Allowance

134. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if the blind person's allowance will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied); the reason this payment was ceased in this case; the financial and other supports available to persons diagnosed with Wolfram syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46056/18]

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

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

Health Insurance Data

135. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons availing of private health insurance by age group (details supplied). [46058/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Membership of the private health insurance market as of 1 July 2018 by age group:

Age Group	Number of insured persons
Aged 17 and under	488,387
Aged 18 to age 29	227,672
Aged 30 to age 39	286,593
Aged 40 to age 49	332,670
Aged 50 to age 54	148,849
Aged 55 to age 59	138,809
Aged 60 to age 64	126,855
Aged 65 to age 69	110,696
Aged 70 to age 74	91,782
Aged 75 to age 79	60,947
Aged 80 to age 84	38,760
Aged 85 and over	25,964
Total	2,077,984

Hospital Appointments Status

136. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46070/18]

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

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

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

Patient Safety

137. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 180 to 182, inclusive, of 3 October 2018, if clarification of will be provided and the specific questions asked answered (details supplied). [46099/18]

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.

Professional Ethics

138. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if each hospital in the HSE keeps a disclosure register for doctors of all connections to interest groups and contract organisations, particularly in the pharmaceutical and medical device industries; if so, the details on the type and amount of remuneration received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46105/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): When the HSE was asked this question in 2017 it replied that it did not centrally hold such information. However, it cited the requirements under its Code of Standards and Behaviour, the Consultant Contract and the Ethics Acts as the bases under which individuals must refrain from any activity which causes a conflict of interest.

The requirements in the Code of Practice for Governance of State Bodies also apply to doctors and other senior officials working in the HSE and other public bodies.

The regulator of the medical profession in Ireland is the Medical Council. The Medical Council's Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics also sets standards for the conduct for doctors regarding gifts or payments they receive from pharmaceutical or other commercial companies.

The Guide states that if doctors are paid, directly or indirectly, by pharmaceutical, medical device or other commercial companies or organisations to conduct medical research, they must make sure that the payment does not influence their study design or interpretation of research data. They must also address any potential conflict of interest and disclose the payment in any publication of research results. It also states that doctors should not accept gifts (including hospitality) from pharmaceutical, medical devices or other commercial enterprises. This does not prevent those doctors attending educational meetings or receiving payment of reasonable fees for professional services to commercial enterprises.

If they are involved in any way in promoting or endorsing specific healthcare products or services, they must declare any financial or commercial interest they have in the organisation or company providing the products or services.

Since the Deputy's question relates to the HSE, I have referred it also to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Respite Care Services Provision

139. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health when a place will be made available in Kilkenny city in one of the community homes for a long-term client of an organisation (details supplied); if they will be accommodated at a facility; the reason the family has not received respite services for over 12 months; his plans to provide respite services in counties Kilkenny and Carlow for the future and in the short-term; his further plans to provide one-to-one services for clients such as the person that have medical, psychological and mobility problems and that have been in care for most of their lives; his views on whether persons fitting

this profile should be given priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46110/18]

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

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

Ambulance Service

140. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of additional staff, emergency ambulances, intermediate care ambulances and rapid response vehicles that are required for the National Ambulance Service to meet targets set by HIQA in its 2016 capacity review in tabular form. [46119/18]

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

Sea Lice Controls

141. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the regulations being put in place to help with the problem of sea lice (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46143/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The control protocols for the management of sea lice are operated by the Marine Institute on behalf of the State. All stocks of fish are inspected by Marine Institute Inspectors on 14 occasions throughout the year. As part of this control strategy farm operators are required to undertake treatments to control lice infestation levels once certain trigger levels are reached. In certain circumstances treatments alone may not be the most appropriate strategy and in a number of limited circumstances an accelerated harvest may be required.

These protocols are more advanced than those operated in other jurisdictions for the following reasons:

- The inspection regime is totally independent of the industry.
- Data obtained as a result of inspection is published and made widely available.
- Treatment trigger levels are set at a low level.

The sea lice monitoring and control programme in Ireland has been acknowledged by the Environment Directorate (DG Environment) of the EU Commission as representing international best practice.

Bord na Móna

142. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the location of all the Bord na Móna bogs that are due to close under its current plans. [45972/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Information regarding activity on specific bogs is an operational matter for Bord na Móna.

Energy Schemes

143. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to expand the SEAI grants for solar PV available to householders to SMEs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46008/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): In July 2018, details of a new pilot scheme to support micro generation were introduced, initially targeting domestic self-consumption through a grant scheme for solar PV installation and battery storage. The data gathered during the pilot scheme will inform potential future phases of support for micro-generation in Ireland that may be appropriate, as we align with the ambition and requirements of the recast Renewable Energy Directive (RED) that recognises the rights, entitlements and obligations of renewable self-consumers. The scheme will be subject to a six month review which will examine the uptake and the level of the grant, assess the costs associated with relevant technologies and explore opportunities for broadening the scheme to other groups, as appropriate. The objective of the pilot scheme is to help build a sustainable, enduring micro generation sector in Ireland including setting appropriate safety and qualification standards for the industry.

Micro generation, was also appraised as part of the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) economic assessment. The analysis identified a number of challenges that may need to be addressed before a financial support scheme (payment) for micro generation can be developed. These include a reform of network charges, an assessment of the distributional impact of such a policy decision on the PSO (cost burden sharing), and development of a fair tariff for exported electricity taking the benefits of self-consumption into account. This approach is in line with experience from other EU member states who have attempted to introduce supports for micro generation.

My Department currently offers opportunities for SMEs to avail of supports for Solar PV and other energy efficiency measures through the SEAI-led Better Energy Communities scheme, details of which can be found www.seai.ie/grants/community-grants.

Broadband Service Provision

144. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the provision of rural broadband for County Kildare. [46024/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): In April 2017 my Department 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. The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- 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 BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to roll-out high speed broadband to 300,000 premises as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017.

There are approximately 92,000 premises in Kildare. Nearly 14,000 (15%) fall within the AMBER area and will be served under the State led Intervention. Some 76,000 (83%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be served by commercial providers, while nearly 2,000 (2%) are LIGHT BLUE and fall to be served by eir's planned rural deployment.

The above is based on data for Q3 2018. This data is to be published on my Department's website shortly.

Information on categories of specific premises can be accessed on the Department's website, www.broadband.gov.ie, by entering the relevant eircode into the High Speed Broadband Map. For those premises who fall within eir's commercial deployment to 300,000 premises further detail is provided on its website www.fibrerollout.ie.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage, with evaluation ongoing of the final tender submission received on 18 September. The Taoiseach has asked Mr Peter Smyth, the independent process auditor to the NBP procurement to review the process. Mr. Smyth will submit a report to the Taoiseach and to me as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. This review is taking place in parallel with the evaluation being carried out by the Department's procurement team on the final tender.

Under a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017, eir is in the process of passing 300,000 predominantly rural homes with high speed broadband. According to data for Q3 2018 submitted by eir to my Department the company has passed almost 210,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment. This data is to be published on my Department's website shortly.

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.

145. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the revised target deployment schedule for the national broadband plan will be published; and when black spots in County Louth can expect to have access to adequate broadband services. [46032/18]

146. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to undertake public information campaigns or to provide updates to persons living in black spot areas in County Louth and other counties affected regarding the future of the National Broadband Plan. [46033/18]

147. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the audit commissioned from a person (details supplied) on the integrity of the procurement process regarding the national broadband plan will conclude; and if the findings of the audit will be published. [46034/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 145 to 147, inclusive, together.

In April 2017 my Department 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.

The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- 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 BLUE areas represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to roll-out high speed broadband to 300,000 premises as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017.

There are nearly 61,000 premises in Louth. Some 8,500 (14%) fall within the AMBER area and will be served under the State led Intervention. Nearly 52,000 (85%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be served by commercial providers, while approximately 500 (1%) are LIGHT BLUE and fall to be served by eir's planned rural deployment.

The above is based on data for Q3 2018. This data is to be published on my Department's website shortly.

Information on categories of specific premises can be accessed on my Department's website, www.broadband.gov.ie, by entering the relevant eircode into the High Speed Broadband Map. For those premises who fall within eir's commercial deployment to 300,000 premises further detail is provided on its website www.fibrerollout.ie.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage, with evaluation ongoing of the final tender submission received on 18 September. The Taoiseach has asked Mr Peter Smyth, the independent process auditor to the NBP procurement to review the process. Mr. Smyth will submit a report to the Taoiseach and to me as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. This review is taking place in parallel with the evaluation being carried out by the Department's procurement team on the final tender.

Under a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017, eir is in the process of passing 300,000 predominantly rural homes with high speed broadband. According to data for Q3 2018 submitted by eir to my Department the company has passed almost 210,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment. This data is to be published on my Department's website shortly.

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. Under the 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.

To address mobile phone blackspots, officials in my Department and in the Department of Rural and Community Development are actively engaged with local authorities and mobile phone operators to identify priority blackspots and take action to resolve this issue.

To identify the areas across the country lacking adequate mobile phone coverage, both Departments have worked with a pilot group of local authorities to identify the issues associated with mapping local blackspots. This pilot exercise has been completed, with all local authorities now having been asked to map local blackspots and identify infrastructure that could potentially be used to provide additional coverage on an economic basis. This exercise is ongoing. The blackspot information received so far is providing useful and usable data regarding poor coverage in many rural areas and along national and regional roads.

Various other initiatives are under way to address mobile coverage blackspots:

- Both Departments have worked to achieve a greater consensus around site selection for telecoms infrastructure and therefore improve mobile phone coverage.

- A focus group was established to provide guidance with respect to categories of location where high quality reliable mobile coverage should be made available as a priority. The report of the focus group was published on my Department's website on 31 August 2018. It is anticipated that the output of the focus group should influence the actions of the mobile network operators in their work to reduce mobile phone blackspots. It will also inform future policy in my Department with regards to priorities for mobile phone services.

- A working group has been established with the remit of investigating the feasibility of developing standardised policy for accessing and utilising State and publicly owned assets for the deployment of telecommunications infrastructure.

- ComReg is delivering a composite national coverage map, which will, in tandem with its work on handset testing and activities to raise consumer awareness, allow people across Ireland to optimise the services available to them.

- Following a consultation process ComReg has developed a licensing scheme which will enable households and businesses to use mobile phone repeaters to boost signals into their premises and bring immediate improvements in mobile coverage

- All of these initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services, particularly in rural areas.

Further information on the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce is available on my Department's website, www.broadband.gov.ie.

Questions - Written Answers
National Broadband Plan

148. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the roll-out of the national broadband plan; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that businesses in counties Cavan and Monaghan are suffering due to a lack of same (details supplied). [46035/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I refer to the reply to Question no. 860 of 6 November 2018. The position is unchanged.

Vehicle Testing

149. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on recent reports regarding emission levels from diesel vehicle imports from the UK and Northern Ireland; if these imports meet Ireland's standards on particulate and other noxious emissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46047/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am aware of recent reports that have indicated that emissions testing was not being carried out in Northern Ireland as part of the annual Ministry of Transport (MOT) test on diesel cars, and of concerns that imports of such cars may result in higher emissions from the Irish passenger fleet. Emissions from road vehicles in general, and from diesel vehicles in particular, are a key source of negative health impacts from a range of air pollutants, including nitrogen oxides (NO_x), particulate matter (PM), black carbon and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), especially in urban areas. Any factor which may increase these emissions, or circumvent legally mandated controls on them, is a matter for concern. However I understand that, with a few rare exceptions such as vintage vehicles, any second-hand car imported into Ireland from Northern Ireland will be required to undergo the National Car Test (NCT) if it is more than four years old and the period of validity of its MOT has expired, at which point its emissions will be tested.

For further information on this question, or on matters relating to the NCT, I would refer the Deputy to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Broadband Service Provision

150. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if Emper, Ballynacargy, County Westmeath, will avail of fibre broadband (details supplied). [46078/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): In April 2017 my Department 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. The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- 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 BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to roll-out high speed broadband to 300,000 premises as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017.

According to the Map all 42 premises in the townland of Emper are in the AMBER area. The townland of Ballynacargy (Ballynacarrigy on the Map) has 98 premises, all of which are also in the AMBER area. Information on the categories of premises in other townlands in the wider Ballynacargy area can be accessed on my Department's website *www.broadband.gov.ie* by entering the relevant eircode into the High Speed Broadband Map.

Under a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017, eir is in the process of passing 300,000 predominantly rural homes with high speed broadband. According to data for Q3 2018 submitted by eir to my Department the company has passed almost 210,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment. This data is to be published on my Department's website shortly. For those premises who fall within eir's commercial deployment to 300,000 premises further detail is provided on its website *www.fibrerollout.ie*.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage, with evaluation ongoing of the final tender submission received on 18 September.

The Taoiseach has asked Mr Peter Smyth, the independent process auditor to the NBP procurement to review the process. Mr. Smyth will submit a report to the Taoiseach and to me as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. This review is taking place in parallel to the evaluation being carried out by the Department's procurement team on the final tender.

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.

Road Safety

151. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the safety measures that will be put in place at a junction (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45978/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of local authorities, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

It is a matter for each Council to determine its priorities and decide its work programme

taking available grant funding and its own resources into account. I always stress to Councils the importance of prioritising roads when allocating their own resources.

My Department's regional and local road grant programmes include a Safety Improvement Works scheme. Under this programme local authorities submit a list of projects each year in order of priority for consideration for funding. Within the constraints of the overall roads budget, allocations are then made to local authorities as part of the annual grant allocation process. The Cavan County Council proposals for Safety Works in 2019 will be considered under this process. It is expected that the 2019 Grant Allocations for regional and local roads will be announced in January 2019.

Road Improvement Schemes

152. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he and TII can assist in having urgent works carried out to alleviate flooding problems in respect of two properties (details supplied); and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that despite several commitments that the work was to be carried out in 2018 nothing has been carried out to date; if he will make a statement on the matter. [45992/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. 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 (such as the N73).

While I note that you have already been in contact with the National Roads Design Office (NRDO) on this matter, given the concerns raised, I have referred your question to TII for their attention and direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Departmental Correspondence

153. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will examine the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46012/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The case provided by the Deputy was subject to review by my Departmental officials as there was an issue with the initial application payment. This matter has now been rectified and the case is being progressed.

Rail Services Provision

154. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Irish Rail has a shortage of carriages and rolling stock to run its schedules; if the company is having to rent carriages and rolling stock for its national, commuter rail and DART lines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46045/18]

155. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the deficit in DART and commuter rail rolling stock is a major factor in ongoing overcrowding

on rail and DART services in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46046/18]

156. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to increase capacity on the train line serving the M3 park-and-ride facility. [46098/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 154 to 156, inclusive, together.

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 ensuring the development and delivery of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area including, in consultation with Iarnród Éireann, the provision of rail fleet.

In light of the NTA's responsibility on this matter, I have referred the Deputies' questions to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Child Abuse

157. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 484 of 3 July 2018, if she has received the data from Tusla as committed to in the reply; if she will direct Tusla to reply to this Deputy in view of the fact the agency has not responded; if there is a process within Tusla to fully investigate the way in which a complaint was handled dating back to 1998 and having significant repercussions to date; if Tusla will investigate the complaints of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46093/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy will be aware that it is not appropriate for me to comment on individual cases. I have written to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and asked them to ensure that the individual matter to which the Deputy refers receives the appropriate attention.

I have also asked Tusla to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to his queries on the management of complaints that predate the establishment of Tusla.

I can inform the Deputy that, prior to the establishment of Tusla in 2014, the functions of the Agency fell under the Health Services Executive. Tusla do not have a role in the management of complaints that predate the establishment of the Agency, and such complaints should be made to the HSE.

Parental Leave

158. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to seek policy responsibility for parental leave. [46117/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Parental leave, and the range of different types of family leave which are available, are of considerable significance for children's experiences and their outcomes. For these reasons, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has a clear interest in policy developments in these areas. To this end, officials from my Department have actively engaged in an Inter-Departmental Group this year on how to operationalise commitments in the Programme for Government to expand

paid parental leave during the first year of a child's life. My Department has also led the drafting of a Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families which outlines significant actions to continue to making progress in this area in the coming decade. The Strategy will be published on 19th November. The Department of Justice and Equality, in the context of its mandate to progress equality measures, has policy responsibility for Family Leave and will lead on the implementation of actions in this respect in the Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, in partnership with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in the case of paid leave entitlements. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs will continue to work closely with colleagues across Government to progress actions on family leave and family friendly flexible working. This collaborative approach across the relevant Government Departments is effective and I am not seeking to change it.

CLÁR Programme

159. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to review the CLÁR areas based on the 2016 census returns; the timeline for the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45960/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): CLÁR was originally launched in October 2001 to provide for targeted investment in disadvantaged rural areas. The areas originally selected for inclusion in the programme were those which suffered the greatest population decline from 1926 to 1996. The Cooley Peninsula was also included on the basis of the serious difficulties caused in that area by Foot and Mouth disease. The average population loss in the original CLÁR regions over the period 1926 to 1996 was 50%.

In 2006, an analysis of the 2002 Census data was carried out by the NIRSA Institute at Maynooth University and the programme was extended to include areas with an average population loss of 35% between 1926 and 2002.

The CLÁR programme was closed for new applications in 2010. However, I re-launched the programme in the second half of 2016, using as a base-line the areas identified in the work carried out by NIRSA. Over 1,200 projects have been approved for funding of €25 million under CLÁR since I re-launched the programme in 2016.

I have now initiated a review of the CLÁR programme which will, in particular, examine CLÁR areas by reference to the 2016 Census of Population data. The review process will begin with a targeted consultation meeting with a number of people who are recognised for their background and expertise in relation to rural development issues. This meeting is scheduled to take place in the coming weeks.

The review will also involve more detailed stakeholder consultation and will inform future launches of the CLÁR programme in 2019 and beyond. I anticipate that the review will be completed early in 2019.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

160. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of an application by Longford County Council for funding for Granard Motte. [39839/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund overseen by my Department will invest €1 billion over 10

years in rural renewal. This will enable towns and villages and outlying rural areas throughout Ireland to grow and support stronger rural economies and communities into the future.

The first call for applications for the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund closed at the end of September. There was a great response with over 290 applications received. Of these 125 were for category 1 “shovel ready” projects and the other 165 were for category 2 projects - those which need development funding to become potential category 1 applications in future calls for applications.

Assessment criteria are published and the applications are now being assessed by a project advisory board. The board includes representatives from key Government Departments and external experts.

As the assessment process has not concluded it would not be appropriate for me or my Department to comment on any applications received.

By the end of this month I am expecting to receive recommendations from the project advisory board on the first group of category 1 projects for funding with further announcements to follow.

Illness Benefit Applications

161. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a payment will issue for an application by a person (details supplied) for illness benefit. [45989/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned has now been processed and any arrears owing to her have been issued.

If she remains ill and unfit for work, she should forward further medical certificates to the Department as soon as possible to enable payments to continue to issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

162. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason for delays in applications for illness benefit; and the steps she is taking to rectify the situation. [45990/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Overall payment levels of Illness Benefit (IB) are now at their normal level. For information, in any one week, circa 50,000 customers are entitled to an IB payment. Last week, circa 54,000 customer payments were made, approximately 4,000 payments in excess of the normal level, and this includes some customers due arrears. For any customers with arrears outstanding, the Department would like to assure them that they will receive their back payments as soon as possible.

The Department can confirm that a normal level of payments will issue to IB customers this week. It is, however, important to note that there will always be some people who do not get paid in any given week. This is due to issues such as delays in receipt of claims and certifi-

dates, incorrectly completed certificates, human error, inconsistencies between the information submitted and the information already on file, the existence of another welfare payment for the main claimant or their dependants on the claim, all of which can lead to payments being suspended or delayed. This was always the case.

However, the Department acknowledges that the majority of the delays over the past few weeks were due to system and processing issues rather than normal levels of exceptions and would like to again apologise to the customers affected.

In August, the IB scheme migrated from an old legacy IT system approaching its end-of-life to a more up-to-date system already successfully used for many of the Department's other payments. As part of this process, IB payments transitioned from a payment in arrears to a real-time payment model. This model was designed to provide quicker access to payments for customers and also to greatly reduce the manual processing work involved in administering IB claims. Unfortunately, although the majority of customers continued to receive payments, there were a number of unanticipated difficulties and some IB customers' payments were adversely affected with delays and missed payments.

The Department would like to sincerely apologise for the difficulties and frustration experienced by customers who did not receive the correct IB payment or who experienced delays in their payments. The Department has been working hard over the past few weeks, and is continuing to work, to resolve any outstanding issues - allocating additional staff to IB claim work and developing a number of IT modifications to identify and rectify payment issues.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

163. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will receive an illness benefit payment and all arrears due. [45991/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned is certified to 2nd February 2019 and is paid to date.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Waiting Times

164. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she and the Secretary General of her Department will appear before the Oireachtas Joint Committee of Public Accounts about the delays in payments of illness benefit to circa 50,000 persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45993/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Secretary General will appear before the Joint Committee on Employment Affairs and Social Protection on 8th November 2018 in order to update the committee on the issues pertaining to recent Illness Benefit payment matters and the steps taken to address these issues. The Secretary General will respond to any questions raised by the committee at that meeting.

In addition to his role as Accounting Officer for the Department of Employment Affairs

and Social Protection, the Secretary General is scheduled to appear before the Houses of the Oireachtas Committee on Public Accounts on a regular basis. Any matters raised at his next appearance before the PAC pertaining to recent Illness Benefit payment issues will be addressed by the Secretary General on that occasion.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance

165. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the equality and poverty proofing measurements in place to protect jobseekers under 26 years of age, particularly those who are experiencing homelessness, those with international protection who are moving out of direct provision and those who have support needs such as mental health and confidence building that cannot access or participate in activation schemes (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45994/18]

166. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which the policy on age-related jobseeker's allowance can continue to be justified as a preventative measure for welfare dependency in view of the fact that there is no basis in evidence (details supplied) [45999/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 165 and 166 together.

In line with other EU and OECD jurisdictions where such measures feature in their social welfare systems age related reduced jobseeker's allowance (JA) payments for young unemployed people were introduced on a phased basis to tackle high youth unemployment. Receiving the maximum rate of JA without a strong financial incentive to engage in education or training can lead to long-term welfare dependency from a young age.

A key feature of the introduction of the rate adjustments was that subsequent participation in full-time education and training would lead to an increased rate in payment. As a result, if a young jobseeker on a reduced JA payment participates on an education or training programme they receive the maximum weekly personal payment of €198.

Recipients of JA under 26 years of age who have dependent children, those transferring directly to JA from disability allowance, or individuals aged 18-24 years who were in the care of the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) during the period of 12 months before they reached the age of 18 are not subject to the reduced rate. Similarly, unaccompanied minors who entered the State and were in the care of TUSLA prior to entering the direct provision system are exempt from the reduced rates of JA. My Department actively engages with Tusla and non-Government organisations in providing the necessary support to vulnerable young people leaving care who are experiencing homelessness or are in insecure situations.

Supports are also available to vulnerable young people under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme, notably through the exceptional needs payment (ENP) which helps meet essential expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. For example, to end September 2018, the Department made some 360 rent deposit support payments to young people under 26, with expenditure of some €250,000. This form of assistance is very important to those on low incomes and who are at risk of, or who are homeless, or who rely on the private rented market to meet their housing needs.

The Deputy will be aware that in 2013 the EU adopted a Council Recommendation to

member states on a Youth Guarantee. The aim of the EU-wide Youth Guarantee, supported by central EU funding of €6 billion, was to provide young people under the age of 25 with a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a short time of becoming unemployed. Many of the elements of a Youth Guarantee were already in place in Ireland prior to the EU Recommendation, so the implementation of the Irish Youth Guarantee focuses on enhancing processes and policies for assisting young unemployed people to secure sustainable jobs. Under the Youth Guarantee process case officers engage with unemployed young people, on a monthly basis, to prepare and implement personal progression plans for employment. Where young people do not find work quickly, additional supports are offered through places on employment and training schemes, which are closely aligned to the needs of the labour market.

To date, these policies have been effective in reducing both youth and long-term unemployment. For example, the most recent data shows that Irish youth unemployment has fallen from a peak of 31.2% in 2012 to 12.0% in October 2018. Irish youth unemployment has thus fallen from well above the EU average in 2012 (23%) to well below the current EU figure of 14.9%.

The National University of Ireland, Maynooth was given access to the data from the Jobseeker's Longitudinal Database to examine the effectiveness of the reduced rates in encouraging young jobseekers to avail of education, training, employment programmes and opportunities. They examined the data for 18 and 19 year olds as the reduced rates were first introduced for this cohort. Their findings found positive results noting an overall reduction in unemployment durations.

The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) which I launched on 24 September 2018 is a new work experience scheme targeted exclusively at young jobseekers, aged 18 to 24, who are either long-term unemployed or face significant barriers to employment. All participants will receive a payment of €229.20 per week from my Department. Participants whose underlying entitlement is in excess of that amount will continue to receive their weekly payment with an additional top-up allowance of €22.50 per week.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Youth Unemployment Measures

167. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the roll-out of the youth employment support scheme will come into effect; if the scheme can guarantee the inclusion of persons experiencing homelessness or that have international protection and are moving out of direct provision with no recourse to family or financial supports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46020/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) has been open to applications since Monday 1st October 2018.

YESS is targeted at young jobseekers aged 18-24 years of age who are long-term unemployed or who face barriers to employment. The scheme aims to provide jobseekers with the opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement. The scheme will provide a supportive structure for participants, including case worker support for both Placement Hosts and jobseekers.

While participation on the YESS is wholly voluntary for both parties involved, there are certain qualifying and eligibility conditions that both Placement Hosts and jobseekers have to

satisfy.

For a jobseeker to participate on the YESS, they need to meet the following eligibility criteria:

- they must be aged between 18 and 24
- and
- have been out of work and in receipt of a qualifying payment for at least 12 months ,
- or
- if unemployed for less than 12 months, be considered by a case officer to face a significant barrier to work .

The list of qualifying payments for participation on the scheme include; Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseeker's Benefit, One Parent Family Payment, Jobseeker's Transition Payment, Disability Allowance, Blind Person's Pension or Supplementary Welfare Allowance. The scheme does not guarantee inclusion for any jobseekers, other than those who satisfy the necessary criteria and who meet the scheme qualifying conditions. Persons who are experiencing homelessness or that have international protection and are moving out of direct provision will need to be in receipt of a relevant payment and satisfy all other scheme related conditions to be eligible to participate.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Waiting Times

168. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she is satisfied with the length of time it takes to process an application for a carer's allowance; if measures will be introduced to speed up this process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46043/18]

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 Allowance (CA) is a means-tested payment, made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that they require that level of care. An increased payment can be made where full-time care is being provided to two people.

At the end of September 2018 the average waiting time for a decision on a new CA application was 17 weeks. Additional staff have also recently been reassigned to the CA area to work on claims processing and this should lead to a reduction in processing times.

Before a decision can be made on entitlement to CA, evidence must be provided in respect of the carer's habitual residence in the State, the level of care they provide, their means and also 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 carer's allowance applications.

The Department recently launched a re-designed CA application form. The new form includes a Care Report section which has been arrived at through consultation between officials and medical assessors of my Department and representatives and members of Family Carers Ireland. It is expected that the new form 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.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Expenditure

169. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount spent on rent supplement in 2017; and the projected amount for 2018 and 2019 respectively. [46060/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting approximately 25,700 recipients for which the Government has provided €179.50 million for in 2018.

The outturn figure for 2017, with projected costs for 2018 and 2019, are provided in the following table. The 2018 forecast outturn figure remains in line with actual outturn trends to date for the year. The 2019 figure, similar to 2018's forecast, is predicated on current trends associated with Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP) and the underpinning macroeconomic conditions prevailing throughout next year.

The strategic goal of returning rent supplement to its original purpose; that of a short-term income support, has been primarily facilitated by the introduction of the HAP. The "Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness (July 2016), reiterated in the "Housing First National Implementation Plan 2018-2021" (September 2018), is to provide 87,000 flexible housing supports through the HAP and Rental Accommodation Scheme between 2016 and 2021. As part of this commitment will be the transfer of those out of rent supplement with long term housing needs to HAP with a targeted completion date of these transfers by the end of 2020. For 2019, HAP's transfer activity is expected to yield a closing rent supplement base of approximately 15,000 rent supplement customers at year end.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Tabular Statement:

Rent Supplement Outturn: 2017 Actual Costs with 2018 & 2019 Forecasts

Year	Total Expenditure €000
2017	231,221
2018	179,500
2019	132,300

Paternity Benefit Applications

170. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision has been made on a paternity allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46076/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to disallow the paternity benefit appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

171. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason all parental income is taken into account on the means assessment for social welfare applicants under 25 years of age; the reason a parent in receipt of a carer's allowance parental income is normally disregarded under all other schemes yet it is taken into account when a person under 25 years of age is still living with their parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46092/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Social welfare legislation provides that where a person under 25 years of age claiming a social welfare payment and is living with a parent or step-parent in the family home, an assessment is made of the yearly value of any benefit and privilege enjoyed by that person by virtue of residing there. The value of the benefit and privilege assessed is based on the level of the parents' assessable income.

Assessable parental income is calculated as gross income less tax, PRSI, Universal Social Charge, superannuation and union dues. Rent or mortgage repayments are then disregarded, where appropriate, and, finally, a parental allowance of €600 per week per couple plus €30 per week in respect of each additional dependent child is also disregarded. The balance is assessed at 34% and this constitutes the weekly value of benefit and privilege to the claimant. This weekly value is deducted from the maximum personal rate applicable to determine the level of weekly entitlement. Where the level of entitlement as calculated is at least €1 per week and less than €40 per week, a minimum rate of €40 per week is payable.

All social welfare payments are included as assessable income with the exception of the following: Fuel Allowance, Child Benefit, Carer's Support Grant, Guardian's payments, and Domiciliary Care Allowance.

However where a social welfare payment such as Carer's Allowance is the only source of parental assessable income, there would be no means assessed from benefit and privilege against the claimant, as the level of disregards would be higher than the level of weekly payment. If the Deputy has a particular case in mind he should bring it to the attention of the Department.

It should be noted that there are some exceptions to assessing benefit and privilege. No as-

assessment is made where a son or daughter and his or her spouse / civil partner / partner is living with his / her parents. No assessment is made where a son or daughter has a child dependant and is living with his/her parents. In addition, where a person returns to the parental home having had an independent life elsewhere in Ireland or abroad for an appreciable length of time, e.g. at least three years, the assessment in this case is €7 per week.

Furthermore, once a person reaches 25 years of age, the value of any benefit and privilege is no longer regarded as means.

Departmental Correspondence

172. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if correspondence on the 2012 pension changes have been issued to 67,000 Irish residents and 9,000 non-Irish residents who were set to receive them over the course of October 2018 as stated by her in Dáil Éireann on 25 September 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46097/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 23 January last, the Government agreed to allow pensioners, born on or after the 1st September 1946, affected by the 2012 changes in rate bands, to have their state pension (contributory) entitlement calculated under an interim “Total Contributions Approach” (TCA). The changes also provide for up to 20 years of home caring periods in the calculation of that entitlement, for those who took time out of the workplace for parenting children under age 12, or individuals who needed increased levels of care.

The changes apply to those who reached pension age on or after 1st September 2012 who were awarded less than maximum rate, on post Budget 2012 rate bands. The changes do not apply to anyone already entitled to maximum rate state pension (contributory).

Currently there are approximately 79,000 pensioners in this category and my Department is now in the process of issuing Information Letters to them

Work on examination of the social insurance records of the pensioners concerned commenced in September. As social insurance records are unique to individual pensioners, this manual examination phase is expected to continue to the end of the year. To date, over sixty temporary staff members have been recruited to work on this phase. Further recruitment will take place in January 2019 when the first pension reviews are expected to get under way and it is anticipated that the first review outcomes will be notified to pensioners during Quarter 1 2019.

Payment of increases, where awarded, will be made immediately after an individual’s review is completed. If a pensioner does not qualify for an increased rate, they will continue to receive their existing rate of entitlement.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

173. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a claim for illness benefit by a person (details supplied) will be processed to completion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46116/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned has been processed and any arrears owing to him have been issued.

If the person remains ill and unfit for work, he should submit further medical certificates to the Department as soon as possible to enable further payments to issue to him.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Occupational Injuries Benefit Applications

174. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for an occupational injury benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46126/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Occupational Injury Benefit (OIB) claim for the person concerned was disallowed.

The reason for this decision is because, as stated by the person concerned, he first noticed his incapacity before Christmas last. However, his incident at work did not occur until 8th February 2018.

OIB is only allowed in cases where the incapacity is solely due to a work place accident or develops due to the nature of the work.

The person concerned does not have sufficient contributions for the award of an Illness Benefit payment.

If the person has an urgent financial need, he should contact the Community Welfare Service through the local Intreo Centre.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Waiting Times

175. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the delays in processing of new and existing illness benefit claims; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46127/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Overall payment levels of Illness Benefit (IB) are now at their normal level. For information, in any one week, circa 50,000 customers are entitled to an IB payment. Last week, circa 54,000 customer payments were made, approximately 4,000 payments in excess of the normal level, and this includes some customers due arrears. For any customers with arrears outstanding, the Department would like to assure them that they will receive their back payments as soon as possible.

The Department can confirm that a normal level of payments will issue to IB customers this week. It is, however, important to note that there will always be some people who do not get paid in any given week. This is due to issues such as delays in receipt of claims and certificates, incorrectly completed certificates, human error, inconsistencies between the information submitted and the information already on file, the existence of another welfare payment for the

main claimant or their dependants on the claim, all of which can lead to payments being suspended or delayed. This was always the case.

However, the Department acknowledges that the majority of the delays over the past few weeks were due to system and processing issues rather than normal levels of exceptions and would like to again apologise to the customers affected.

In August, the IB scheme migrated from an old legacy IT system approaching its end-of-life to a more up-to-date system already successfully used for many of the Department's other payments. As part of this process, IB payments transitioned from a payment in arrears to a real-time payment model. This model was designed to provide quicker access to payments for customers and also to greatly reduce the manual processing work involved in administering IB claims. Unfortunately, although the majority of customers continued to receive payments, there were a number of unanticipated difficulties and some IB customers' payments were adversely affected with delays and missed payments.

The Department would like to sincerely apologise for the difficulties and frustration experienced by customers who did not receive the correct IB payment or who experienced delays in their payments. The Department has been working hard over the past few weeks, and is continuing to work, to resolve any outstanding issues - allocating additional staff to IB claim work and developing a number of IT modifications to identify and rectify payment issues.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Reviews

176. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a review of an invalidity pension in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46145/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP from this gentleman on 03 August 2018. His claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. He was notified on 04 October 2018 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal.

He requested a review of the decision and submitted further medical evidence in support of his request.

This review will be processed as quickly as possible and when a decision is made he will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Election Management System

177. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to cease sending voting cards to each registered voter in view of the fact that

they are not required to vote; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46027/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Electoral law provides that where a poll is to be taken at a referendum or a Dáil, European, Presidential or local election, the returning officer shall send to every elector whose name is on the relevant register of electors for the constituency and who is not on the postal or special voters lists, a card (referred to as a polling information card). The purpose of the card is to inform the elector of his or her number (including polling district letter) on the relevant register of electors and of the place at which he or she is entitled to vote. The card also contains a statement in relation to the documents required for the purposes of establishing a person's right to vote. At a referendum, the polling information card also contains a statement for the information of voters in relation to the proposal which is the subject of the referendum. I have no plans at present to change arrangements in regard to polling information cards.

Local Authority Housing Data

178. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of buy and renew units delivered to date in 2018; and the average cost for each unit. [46002/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Capital funding is provided to local authorities to acquire a range of properties for social housing use. The properties involved can range from those in good condition to those that need remediation and may have been vacant.

To ensure a local-led response to such work, responsibility for property acquisitions is delegated to local authorities. To further assist local authorities pursuing vacant properties, funding is available through the Buy & Renew Scheme to facilitate local authorities in acquiring and remediating vacant properties that may be suitable for social housing.

As with standard acquisitions, local authorities have delegated responsibility to utilise the Buy & Renew Scheme, as part of the blend of property acquisitions, as appropriate to their area, given housing need and the availability of properties of different types.

To date in 2018, circa 65 housing units have been delivered through the Buy & Renew Scheme and taking the purchase price and upgrade costs into account, the average cost per unit is approximately €173,000.

Repair and Leasing Scheme

179. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homes brought into use to date in 2018 via the repair and lease scheme; and the average cost of each unit. [46003/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) was initially piloted in Carlow and Waterford and the pilot has been rolled out nationally since 23 February 2017. The scheme is one of a suite of measures available to local authorities to bring vacant properties back into use. Since the national roll out, my Department has been working intensively with local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to develop and implement the scheme. There have been a number of national and local press advertising initiatives, as well as targeted online promotion, in an effort to en-

sure that property owners who can avail from the scheme are aware of it.

A breakdown of the RLS data for 2017 and up to end Q2 2018 is set out in the following table:

Year	Applications	Agreements to lease	Operational
2017	820	31	9
2018 (to end Q2)	217	60	22

Based on claims received to end Q2 2018, the average cost of works per dwelling is €28,145.

Housing Agency Data

180. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of units delivered to date in 2018 via the Housing Agency's €70 million rolling Housing Agency fund; and the average cost for each unit. [46004/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Actions 1.1, 2.5 and 5.6 of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Housing Agency is actively engaged with banks and investment companies in relation to its acquisitions programme. An Acquisitions Fund of €70m, which is a revolving fund, has been established with the objective of acquiring some 1,600 units over the period to 2021 for social housing use.

As of 30 September 2018, the Agency had bids accepted on 818 units. Contracts have been signed for 509 units and 487 of these purchases have closed. The process of selling properties on to Approved Housing Bodies is underway. As of 30 September 2018, the Agency had signed purchase option agreements for 217 properties with Approved Housing Bodies and these units are now under Caretaker Leases. In addition, the onward sales of 215 properties (212 to AHBs and 3 to Local Authorities) have been completed in full and the Agency has received €45.3m for these units.

As of 30 September 2018, the average cost per property purchased by the Agency is €182,079. When properties are sold to AHBs, the price paid is made up of the original cost of the unit as well as the cost of the upgrade work. The average sales price for the 215 properties sold as of 30 September 2018 is €211,008.

Home Loan Scheme

181. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loan applications by local authority area to date in 2018; the number of approvals and drawdowns, respectively, by local authority area; the average loan amount awarded in each local authority area in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46005/18]

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 Q2 2018 is available on the Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>, and this information will be updated on a quarterly basis as additional data is compiled.

In addition, the Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses loan applications that are made to the local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities as to whether loans should be offered to applicants. I have asked the Agency to centrally compile figures on the numbers of applications that it has assessed and recommended for approval, the most recent figures, as at the end of October, indicate that the Agency had recommended a total of 1,317 applications for approval since the scheme launched.

Local Authority	Recommended to Approve
Carlow County Council	15
Cavan County Council	2
Clare County Council	18
Cork City Council	43
Cork County Council	104
Donegal County Council	17
Dublin City Council	189
Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council	38
Fingal County Council	185
Galway City Council	26
Galway County Council	36
Kerry County Council	35
Kildare County Council	85
Kilkenny County Council	13
Laois County Council	32
Leitrim County Council	2
Limerick City & County Council	38
Longford County Council	14
Louth County Council	22
Mayo County Council	15
Meath County Council	109
Monaghan County Council	3
Offaly County Council	12
Roscommon County Council	12
Sligo County Council	17
South Dublin County Council	92
Tipperary County Council	25
Waterford City & County Council	11
Westmeath County Council	12
Wexford County Council	39
Wicklow County Council	56
Total	1,317

The average loan amount requested to date is €158,433. The average loan amount recommended for approval where the maximum borrowing is €288,000 is €207,927. The average loan amount recommended for approval where the maximum borrowing is €225,000 is €131,493.

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.

Traveller Accommodation

182. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the Traveller accommodation allocations for each local authority for 2018; and the drawdown to date for each local authority in tabular form. [46006/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

The allocations and recoupment profiles for capital Traveller accommodation projects can vary across local authorities given local priorities, circumstances and project timelines as set out in the TAPs. Local authorities adopted the fourth and current round of TAPs in 2014, with five-year rolling programmes running from 2014 to 2018. These programmes provide a road map for local authority investment priorities over the period. They also form the basis for the allocation of funding from my Department for Traveller accommodation. Preparations are underway for the fifth TAP programme in respect of the period 2019-2024.

The following table sets out the allocation versus drawdown to date in 2018 by local authority.

Local authority	Allocation	Drawdown to date
	2018	2018
	€	€
Carlow	€ 167,740.00	€ -
Cavan	€ 30,000.00	€ -
Clare	€ 853,250.00	€ 13,250.00
Cork	€ 251,197.00	€ -
Cork City	€ 310,000.00	€ -
Donegal	€ 121,800.00	€ -
Dublin City	€ 1,321,558.39	€ 329,147.54
South Dublin	€ 869,642.50	€ 927,454.92
Fingal	€ 851,189.00	€ -
Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown	€ 673,685.78	€ 40,860.00
Galway County	€ 1,080,100.00	€ 36,158.41
Galway City	€ 176,996.00	€ -
Kerry	€ 15,350.00	€ -

Local authority	Allocation	Drawdown to date
	2018	2018
	€	€
Kildare	€ 80,000.00	€ -
Kilkenny	€ 201,682.00	€ 32,126.04
Laois	€ 30,000.00	€ -
Leitrim	€ 159,614.00	€ -
Limerick City and County	€ 858,739.00	€ 26,875.00
Longford	€ 2,922.00	€ -
Louth	€ 17,039.00	€ 3,810.00
Mayo	€ 30,000.00	€ -
Meath	€ 65,000.00	€ -
Monaghan	€ 400,000.00	€ 29,714.30
Offaly	€ 49,379.00	€ 10,998.97
Roscommon	€ 230,000.00	€ 102,273.72
Sligo	€ 1,046,095.00	€ 75,974.44
Tipperary	€ 25,655.00	€ 42,002.50
Waterford City and County	€ 317,280.00	€ -
Westmeath	€ 150,000.00	€ -
Wexford	€ 498,801.00	€ -
Wicklow	€ 209,620.00	€ 19,393.14
Reserve	€ 905,665.33	€ -
TOTAL	€ 12,000,000.00	€ 1,690,038.98

Housing Policy

183. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46042/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Action 18 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector, a Working Group was established, involving representatives of all major public stakeholders with a policy interest in short-term lettings, to develop guidance in relation to planning applications, changes of use relating to short-term lettings and to examine the need for new regulatory arrangements, including having regard to regulations in place in other jurisdictions.

Proposals considered by the Working Group have been aimed at facilitating short-term letting of accommodation within permanent residences, known as homesharing, while protecting the existing stock of residential property in areas of high demand.

Having considered the Group's report as well as the recommendations in the Oireachtas Committee's report on short-term lettings, I recently announced plans to introduce a "one host, one home" model in areas where there is high housing demand.

Homesharing will continue to be permissible for a person's primary residence, and such home-sharers will have to now register with their local authority. An annual cap of 90 days will apply for the renting out, on a short-term basis, i.e. for 14 days or less at a time, of a person's entire home where it is their primary residence.

Where a person owns a second property and intends to let it as a Short Term Letting (STL), they will require planning permission to do so unless the property is already permitted to be used for tourism / short-term letting purposes. Planning permission for a change of use to STL can be sought and it will be up to each local Planning Authority to consider applications, based on guidance that will issue from my Department, taking account of housing demand pressures and other relevant factors such as cumulative impacts.

These proposed changes will not affect the operation of holiday homes as typically understood, or longer-term flexible lettings which are provided for those coming to Ireland under employment contracts.

It is intended that the new planning changes will come into effect on 1 June 2019, to allow property owners to prepare for and adapt to the new laws. In addition to revised draft exempted development planning regulations, which have been prepared, amendments to primary legislation will also be introduced which will underpin and strengthen the new proposals; drafting of these amendments is currently underway.

Any unauthorised development, including breaches of the proposed exemptions, may be the subject of planning enforcement by the relevant planning authority.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

184. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking to ensure that 2018 social housing construction targets will be achieved by his Department, the local authorities and housing agencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46049/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is supporting local authorities in the provision of new build social housing through a range of different initiatives and schemes, including the construction of social homes on their own lands, construction delivery in conjunction with approved housing bodies and also, local authorities are working in partnership with private developers to deliver social housing construction through turnkey arrangements.

Through this range of supports, local authorities now have substantial pipelines of new build social housing projects approved, details of which can be seen in the Quarter 2 2018 Construction Status Report, which is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-latest-social-housing-construction-report/>.

The report shows a strong build pipeline is in place with 1,067 projects and 16,351 homes already completed or in the pipeline.

While the management of the social housing delivery programmes is a matter for individual local authorities, my Department has set targets across the period 2016-2021 and is working closely with all stakeholders to accelerate delivery and further expand pipelines. In parallel with developing pipelines for delivery, ensuring that progress and delivery on ongoing projects remains on track is critical.

Data in relation to social housing construction delivery in 2018, to end Quarter 2, is available on my Department's website at the following link:

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/social_housing_output_overview_q2_2018.xlsx.

Some 1,438 homes have been delivered through build programmes in the first half of the year, which includes delivery by local authorities, approved housing bodies, Part V homes and a small number of voids. Construction delivery in the second half of the year is expected to be considerably higher than delivery to end Quarter 2, in keeping with the normal annual pattern of delivery.

My Department engages with all local authorities on a regular basis regarding the delivery of social housing. This includes structured quarterly meetings to review progress and in the case of the four Dublin local authorities, monthly meetings are held. I am confident that the actions, targets and resources available to all local authorities under Rebuilding Ireland provide a strong platform for meeting our challenges in the housing sector and I am satisfied that all stakeholders are mobilised to keep delivery on track.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

185. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the social housing construction targets for all local authorities in 2018; the number of these homes that have been completed by the end of quarter 3 in 2018; and the number to be completed by the end of 2018, in tabular form. [46050/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details of the 2018 social housing delivery targets, including build targets, can be accessed on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>.

The published build targets include both local authority and approved housing body construction projects, turnkey schemes, regeneration schemes and a small number of void homes being brought back into active use through remedial build activity.

Data in relation to social housing construction delivery in 2018, to end quarter 2, is available on my Department's website at the following link:

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/social_housing_output_overview_q2_2018.xlsx.

Some 1,438 homes have been delivered through build programmes in the first half of the year, which includes delivery by local authorities, approved housing bodies, Part V homes and a small number of voids. Construction delivery in the second half of the year is expected to be considerably higher than delivery to end quarter 2, in keeping with the normal annual pattern of delivery.

Data in relation to quarter 3 social housing delivery is currently being finalised by my Department and will be published when complete.

My Department engages with all local authorities on a regular basis regarding the delivery of social housing. This includes structured quarterly meetings to review progress and in the case of the four Dublin local authorities, monthly meetings are held. I am confident that the actions, targets and resources available to all local authorities under Rebuilding Ireland provide a strong

platform for meeting our challenges in the housing sector.

Proposed Legislation

186. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the housing (regulation of approved housing bodies) Bill will come before the Houses of the Oireachtas in view of the fact that over 500 voluntary housing bodies are not subject to statutory regulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46052/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is working with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to finalise the text of the Housing (Regulation of Approved Housing Bodies) Bill for publication, subject to Government approval, shortly. While it was hoped that the Bill would be published before now, the complex nature of some of the issues involved in drafting the legislation has required additional time to work through. The Bill is expected to be published during the current Dáil term.

The Bill provides for the regulation of the social housing provider sector for the purposes of ensuring proper governance and the financial viability of the sector. This is to ensure that the State's contribution towards Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) and tenants' interests in relation to those housing assets are safeguarded. Similarly, the Bill will provide assurance to tenants, the public and investors that the sector is well regulated.

Currently, AHBs have to be approved under the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992. In anticipation of the introduction of the new statutory regulatory framework under the Bill referenced to above, an interim Regulation Committee for the AHB sector was established in 2014 under the auspices of the Housing Agency, which, supported by a Regulation Office based within the Agency, oversees implementation of a voluntary regulation code (VRC) for AHBs.

Since the Code was put in place, any AHB applying for housing funding from my Department and local authorities must furnish proof of compliance with the voluntary code. Only those AHBs that have undergone a satisfactory assessment as part of the annual assessment process by the Regulation Office are considered eligible for funding for the provision of social housing. At present 256 AHBs, including all the larger Tier 3 AHBs, encompassing some 95% of the AHB social housing stock, have signed up to the code.

Rental Accommodation Scheme Expenditure

187. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount spent on the rental accommodation scheme in 2017; and the projected amount for 2018 and 2019, respectively. [46061/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) introduced in 2005 places responsibility on local authorities to meet the accommodation needs of people in receipt of Rent Supplement for 18 months or longer, and who are assessed as having a long-term housing need.

Expenditure on the scheme in 2017 was just under €143m. €134.34m has been allocated to RAS for each of the years 2018 and 2019. From 1 January to the end of August 2018, expenditure of €111.7m had been incurred. This provision will fund the cost to local authorities of existing RAS agreements and new transfers targeted over the period.

RAS continues to be an effective and secure form of social housing support, and remains a significant part of the suite of social housing options currently available to those who are assessed as being in need of housing support.

Housing Assistance Payment Expenditure

188. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount spent on the housing assistance payment in 2017; and the projected amount for 2018 and 2019, respectively. [46062/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is funded through a combination of Exchequer monies and tenant differential rents collected in respect of HAP tenancies. Budget 2019 has increased the Exchequer funding for the HAP scheme to €422 million. This will allow 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 Homeless HAP Place Finder Support Service across the country.

The exchequer funding spent in 2017 and the exchequer funding allocated for 2018 and 2019, are set out in the following table.

Year	Funding
2017	€152.69m
2018	€301m
2019	€422m

At the end of Quarter 2, 2018, there were over 37,750 households in receipt of HAP and over 21,000 separate landlords and agents providing accommodation to households supported by the scheme.

I am satisfied with how the HAP scheme is currently operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under Rebuilding Ireland. My Department will continue to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review.

Deer Culls

189. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to introduce a deer management plan for Killarney National Park; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45980/18]

192. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the culling carried out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service since the deer on Innisfallen Island, Killarney, were found starving in March 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46057/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 189 and 192 together.

I can assure the Deputy that the deer population in Killarney National Park is carefully monitored and managed by qualified staff in my Department. As the Deputy will be aware, as part of its regular on-going management operations, the Department carries out localised annual deer counts on State lands, when appropriate. Every year, as part of this on-going management of

deer populations within the Park, deer numbers may need to be reduced. Deer have the potential to impact significantly on woodlands, including the iconic yew, oak and also wet woodlands, within the Park (e.g. by bark stripping of mature trees and preventing regeneration).

The Department commissioned a comprehensive survey and report in the winter of 2016 on the distribution, population density and population structure of red deer and sika deer in Killarney National Park. The study found that the total estimated red deer density over the entire study area of 13.64km² was some 708 deer. A further census of areas of the Park was commissioned by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and conducted in Spring 2017. Following consideration of these reports, population surveys, on-going monitoring by staff and scientific advice, my Department commenced a cull in January 2018.

The cull in Killarney is carried out by trained, experienced and dedicated NPWS staff in a professional manner and is based upon scientific research. As part of this managed process, more than 120 deer have culled since January 2018. It is not possible to estimate how many more deer will be culled in 2018 due to weather and other factors. The following points should be noted:

- The 2018 cull was decided upon following consultation with NPWS professional staff, including scientific input as required.

- Shooting of deer in the Park is carried out only by NPWS professional staff members, who are fully trained, competent, expert and licensed in the use of firearms.

- The selection of deer shot is in accordance with normal deer management protocols. The deer are shot humanely by qualified NPWS marksmen.

- The remains are processed and disposed of in full compliance with the applicable Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine guidelines, and with the involvement, as appropriate, of officials from that Department.

There is a significant challenge in attempting to balance the demands of agriculture, forestry and conservation with the need to ensure that deer populations occupying the same land resources are managed at sustainable levels, and in a responsible and ethical manner. Ultimately, however, where deer species are increasing in range and numbers, depending on the annual count and instances of damage caused by deer to habitats (especially woodland), culls need to be carried out to ensure that deer populations do not reach levels that would have negative ecological consequences.

Land Acquisition

190. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the progress regarding the purchase of land for the new entrance for a walkway to a location (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45988/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I refer the Deputy to my previous reply to Parliamentary Question No. 718 of 23 October 2018. The legal process of acquiring lands from the local landowners to facilitate works to provide enhanced public access to the area has taken longer than had been anticipated and is now close to conclusion.

National Parks and Wildlife Service Staff

191. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when the regional manager and district conservation officer posts will be filled for Killarney National Park (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46037/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that the District Conservation Officer post in Killarney National Park has been filled since the 22nd October 2018, while the Regional Manager post in Killarney National Park has been filled since the 5th November 2018.

Question No. 192 answered with Question No. 189.

Arts in Education Charter

193. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of meetings she and her predecessor have had with the implementation group of arts in education charter since the report was published; the dates of those meetings; the person or body that attended those meetings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46080/18]

194. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of reports received from the implementation group of arts in education since the report was published; if these reports are publicly available; if not, the reason therefore; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46081/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 193 and 194 together.

The Arts in Education Charter was launched in 2013 as a joint initiative of the then Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, The Department of Education and Skills, working with the Arts Council. The Charter recognised the value of arts in education and committed to cross-departmental co-operation in this area. A number of commitments were made as part of this process and much progress has been made across all areas of the Charter since its publication.

An High Level Implementation Group, chaired by the late Professor John Coolahan, was appointed by the Ministers of both Departments in 2013 to provide a strategic, high-level and ongoing point of contact with them to ensure the delivery of the Charter objectives. The Group was made up of senior officials from the then Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Department of Education and Skills, the Director of the Arts Council, Orlaith McBride, Mary Nunan, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick (and Chair of the Points of Alignment Committee) and Dr Katie Sweeney, National Director for the integration of the Arts in Education. Michael Finneran, Head of Drama and Theatre Studies, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick replaced Mary Nunan on this group in 2016.

The Group has been active since 2013 and met my predecessor Minister Humphreys (on 14 October, 2014) as well as Minister Deenihan and previous Ministers for Education and Skills. Six formal reports were submitted to the Minister for Education and Skills and to the then Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. These reports will be uploaded to the Arts in Education Portal and will be available to view.

As the Deputy will be aware, Creative Youth, a plan to enable the creativity of every child and young person was published in December 2017. This Plan aims to ensure that every child in Ireland has practical access to tuition, experience and participation in music, drama, arts and coding by 2022. The actions in the Creative Youth Plan extend to both the formal and non-

formal education sectors and are being delivered by my Department, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Arts Council. This Plan is building on the Arts in Education Charter and aims to resource, fast-track and implement the objectives of the Arts in Education Charter as well as rolling out a range of other initiatives.

In addition, a new Expert Advisory group chaired by Dr. Ciaran Benson has been established by myself, Minister Bruton, in his previous role as Minister for Education and Skills and Minister Zappone. Their role is to drive the implementation of Creative Youth and the continued roll out of the Arts in Education Charter. They will also advise on the broader, long-term objective for the Creative Ireland Programme: to enhance cultural and creative education for all our children and young people.