

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 12, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 13 to 37, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 38 to 49, inclusive, answered orally.

Northern Ireland

50. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the outcome of recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and with the political parties in Northern Ireland about the urgent need to have the institutions established under the Good Friday Agreement fully functioning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4129/19]

53. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of efforts to restart the Executive in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3973/19]

54. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to have talks 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 in Northern Ireland restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4128/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 50, 53 and 54 together.

The continuing absence of vital institutions of the Good Friday Agreement is a source of deep concern for the Government, as it is for the British Government. 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 its institutions.

I visited Belfast on 9 and 10 January last and held discussions with the leaders of all the Northern Ireland political parties. These were constructive engagements with each of the party leaders and I emphasised that the two-year absence of the devolved institutions cannot be allowed to continue. There are pressing decisions and issues across a range of areas, which require a functioning Executive and Assembly. Each of the party leaders confirmed to me their wish to participate in the institutions again and provided views on key concerns and issues for their parties.

Both Governments are determined to find a way beyond the current impasse to get the insti-

tutions operating again and I remain in regular contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how this can be pursued.

Following these latest consultations, I do not underestimate the way to go in achieving a resolution, but I continue to believe that this can be achieved and that there is an increasingly urgent need for talks to begin. Secretary of State Bradley and I will meet again this week to discuss the way forward.

The devolved institutions of the Agreement are urgently needed so that the Assembly and power-sharing Executive can represent the interests of all of the people of Northern Ireland and address issues of concern, including the challenges for Northern Ireland resulting from the UK decision to exit the European Union. The North South Ministerial Council is also essential to oversee and develop North South cooperation on matters of mutual interest, as provided for under the Good Friday Agreement.

The legislation that was brought forward by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, which temporarily suspends the requirement to call an Assembly election, underlines the urgent requirement for all with responsibilities to do everything in their power to get them operating again.

I will continue to work with the Secretary of State and remain in regular contact with the leaders of each of the political parties, to get the necessary political process underway to secure an agreement for a functioning Executive and Assembly and NSMC.

Passport Applications Data

51. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the waiting times for passport express applications. [3858/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service offers a range of convenient channels for the submission of passport applications by Irish citizens at home or abroad. These include a postal application system, an online passport application service, and a counter service for applicants who have immediate travel plans.

The current waiting times for postal applications through the postal application system, Passport Express, will depend on the category of application.

Renewal applications are currently being processed in 13 working days. First time applications, or those applicants who are applying to replace a lost or stolen passport are being processed in 15 working days.

I would like to remind Deputies that the Passport Service recently expanded its online renewal service to include renewal of children's passports, as well as of adults. The online service brings significant benefits for citizens with faster turnaround times of 10 working days for all online applications, excluding postage. In addition, the cost of renewing a passport online is cheaper than alternative methods, with fees for all online applications being reduced by €5 across all application types.

As the online service is the most convenient and most efficient method of renewing a passport, I would urge all applicants who are eligible to do so, to consider using this application channel.

Question No. 52 answered with Question No. 43.

Questions Nos. 53 and 54 answered with Question No. 50.

Brexit Negotiations

55. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the details of his engagement with the EU Brexit negotiating team and the UK Government with a view to ensuring regulatory alignment on agriculture matters post the UK leaving the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3770/19]

78. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if regulatory alignment on agriculture matters post the UK leaving the European Union has been discussed and agreed as part of the negotiations between the EU Brexit negotiating team and the UK Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3769/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 55 and 78 together.

Throughout the negotiations on the Withdrawal Agreement, I, as well as officials from my Department, engaged in extensive contact with representatives from EU Member States, the Commission and Task Force, and the UK, to advance Ireland's priorities.

The Withdrawal Agreement, as agreed in November, and adopted by the European Council, provides for a period of transition, up to December 2020, during which EU rules and regulations will continue to apply to the UK, including regulatory alignment on agriculture matters.

Under the measures included for a backstop, should it need to be invoked, a UK-wide customs territory would apply, ensuring no tariffs or quotas. This includes well established rules with regard to ensuring a level playing field. Northern Ireland would remain aligned to those rules of the Single Market that are indispensable to avoiding a hard border. As regards the movement of animals and agricultural products between North and South, this provides for complete regulatory alignment, including with respect to SPS controls, and rules on agricultural production and marketing.

I should be clear that the backstop acts simply as an insurance policy, which we hope will never have to be used. It remains our priority to achieve a future relationship agreement that can resolve all these issues, and obviate the need for the backstop.

Regarding the future relationship, both the EU and the UK have identified cooperation in the area of agriculture and trade in agri-food products as important aspects of the future trading relationship. Ireland wants the closest possible relationship between the EU and the UK, including in the area of trade, and in particular as regards agriculture and trade in agri-foods. This will be a priority for us in negotiations on the future relationship.

Question No. 56 answered with Question No. 47.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

57. Deputy Niall Collins asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts being made to find a solution to the issue of the undocumented Irish in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3975/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Taoiseach and I have prioritised the immigration issue in the US since taking office. We will continue our efforts in this regard until we secure progress – both in terms of future legal immigration opportunities for Irish citizens; and in securing a pathway for those Irish who are undocumented in order to regularise their status.

Special Envoy to the US Congress on the Undocumented, John Deasy T.D., has worked closely on these issues with my Department, and with Ireland's Ambassador to the US, Dan Mulhall, and his team at the Embassy in Washington DC in particular, since his appointment.

Building on this work, I look forward to visiting the US in early February, for a series of engagements with the US Administration and Congressional leaders on a full range of issues of mutual interest. I will raise immigration issues in these meetings, as I have done in all my interactions with the US Administration and US political leaders since taking office.

Additionally, I expect that the Taoiseach will have a range of engagements at the highest levels of the US Administration and with Congressional leaders over the St Patrick's Day period.

My Department, including through our Embassy and Consulates in the US, work alongside the Irish Immigration Centres across the US to provide support to those Irish who are undocumented on an ongoing basis. Each Irish Centre receives significant Government funding through the Emigrant Support Programme each year for its work, including support for vulnerable Irish and the undocumented. In 2018, over €3 million was allocated to 76 organisations across the US, including the Irish Centers.

Foreign Conflicts

58. Deputy Niall Collins asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the situation in Venezuela; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3972/19]

79. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent re-election of Mr. Nicolas Maduro as the President of Venezuela. [3859/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 58 and 79 together.

I continue to be deeply concerned by the political, economic, social and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, which has had a grave impact on the Venezuelan people, and has resulted in mass migration, affecting countries in the region and overall regional stability.

On 10 January, President Maduro started a new mandate on the basis of non-democratic elections held in May 2018. Ireland was not represented at the inauguration, and fully supports the declaration by EU High Representative Federica Mogherini of 10 January. This statement reiterates that the May 2018 Presidential election was neither free nor fair, and that its outcome lacked credibility. The statement also urges President Maduro to release all political prisoners, to uphold the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to urgently address the needs of the population.

I, alongside my EU partners, have repeatedly called on the Venezuelan Government to engage in dialogue with the opposition, to respect the electoral calendar and to fully restore the country's democratic institutions. It is regrettable that the Venezuelan Government has not

heeded these calls for fresh presidential elections in accordance with internationally recognised democratic standards and the Venezuelan constitutional order.

Ireland is committed to finding ways to foster shared democratic solutions that can bring political stability and address the pressing needs of the Venezuelan people. It is my continued belief that a credible, meaningful dialogue is the most effective way of achieving a peaceful solution to the current crisis in Venezuela. In that regard, Ireland regrets the negative impact the assumption of this new mandate may have on the possibility of achieving this negotiated solution. It will be vital that the EU remains engaged with all stakeholders in Venezuela.

The recent protests in Caracas are a demonstration of the Venezuelan people's will and their demand for democracy. It is imperative that the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are respected, and I wholly condemn the use of violence against these protesters by the Venezuelan authorities. I would like to offer my condolences to the families of those affected.

Ireland fully supports the statement made by High Representative Mogherini on 26 January, which reaffirms that a peaceful and inclusive democratic solution is the only sustainable way out of the current political and social crisis. The statement also reaffirms the full support of the EU to the democratically elected National Assembly, emphasising that its powers need to be restored and respected. The EU calls again for the urgent holding of free and fair Presidential elections in accordance with internationally democratic standards and the Venezuelan constitutional order. If no announcement regarding fresh elections is made over the coming days, the EU will take further actions regarding the issue of recognition of the country's leadership. Ireland stands firmly with our EU partners in support of this declaration.

I welcome the high priority given to the issue by the EU, and I expect there will be further discussions on developments in Venezuela at the upcoming Foreign Affairs Council meeting in February. I believe that it is important for us to work in step with our like-minded regional partners.

Our Embassy in Mexico is responsible for our diplomatic relations with Venezuela and is monitoring the situation closely, engaging with partner organisations on the ground and with EU Missions in Caracas. Ireland will continue to engage regularly with our EU partners on this issue, as well as with affected countries in the region.

EU Migration Crisis

59. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on discussions he has had with his European counterparts with regard to the recent reports of 170 migrants missing in the Mediterranean Sea; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3967/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am deeply troubled by the recent reports of 170 migrants missing in the Mediterranean Sea. Any death at sea is tragic.

Saving lives at sea is a priority for Ireland and for this reason we have been active in operations to tackle people-trafficking in the Mediterranean since 2015, first through Operation Pontus, a bilateral agreement between Ireland and Italy running in parallel to Operation Sophia. Ireland has been a full member of Operation Sophia since 2017. Since 2015, Irish naval vessels have rescued thousands of migrants in the Mediterranean.

In June, the European Council reconfirmed that a precondition for a functioning EU policy

on migration relies on a comprehensive approach to migration which combines effective controls of the EU's external borders, external action to strengthen co-operation with countries of transit and origin and dealing with the management of migrants within the European Union, where a balance of solidarity and responsibility is needed.

In addition, Ireland has provided humanitarian assistance in solidarity with other Member States on four separate occasions by making pledges to take migrants who were rescued in the Mediterranean Sea and to process their applications for international protection. On 9 January, the Minister for Justice and Equality, Charlie Flanagan TD, announced that Ireland will accept five unaccompanied minors from Malta as a gesture of solidarity and humanitarian assistance.

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

Solving the migration crisis will ultimately require deeper political, economic and development relationships between the EU and neighbouring countries, including many in Africa, that will form a basis for dealing with a variety of challenges on the basis of shared responsibility.

Brexit Negotiations

60. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of negotiations particularly those relating to the Border region of counties Cavan and Monaghan in view of Brexit and the possible reintroduction of a hard border. [3771/19]

69. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Ireland's position on a potential hard border will be reaffirmed in the event of a no-deal UK withdrawal from the EU in view of the statement made by a spokesperson for Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker reaffirming the EU external border position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3896/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 and 69 together.

The Government has been consistent that we will not accept a hard border on this island. The EU and UK both accept that avoiding a hard border is essential.

Throughout the negotiations it has been a priority to protect the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts, and to ensure that there will be no hard border on the island of Ireland under any circumstances. Naturally the counties of Cavan and Monaghan are included in this commitment, which is of very particular relevance to people and businesses there. Only the Withdrawal Agreement, with its backstop provisions, provides the essential legal guarantee to avoid a hard border in any circumstances and protect the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts.

However, if the Withdrawal Agreement does not enter into force, Ireland and the EU will have responsibilities in terms of ensuring protection of the Single Market and Customs Union. The UK will have its own responsibilities, including meeting WTO requirements. As co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, Ireland and the UK have solemn and binding obligations to ensure peace and stability in Northern Ireland. As such, whether the UK leaves with or without an agreement in place, we will all have to work together to ensure that we deliver on the shared goal of avoiding the return of a hard border.

The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, understands the importance of these commitments, and he provided further reassurances on this in a phone call with the Taoiseach on 24 January. This position is fully shared by the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, and our fellow EU 27 Member States. As the Commission spokesperson also stated on 23 January, the “EU is determined to do all it can, deal or no deal, to avoid the need for a border and to protect peace in Northern Ireland. The EU is fully behind Ireland and has expressed, on numerous occasions, full solidarity with Ireland. That has not changed.”

We are committed to doing all in our power to ensure that goal is met. But it is preferable for us all to resolve this now, as set out in the Withdrawal Agreement.

Middle East Issues

61. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the actions he plans to take with regard to the ongoing and worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4138/19]

67. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has discussed with his European counterparts the worsening humanitarian situation in Palestine since the United States of America implemented cuts to infrastructure projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3968/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 61 and 67 together.

Ireland is a longstanding and steadfast supporter of the Palestinian people and of a two-State solution. In 2018, we provided €15.38 million in development and humanitarian assistance to meet the needs of the most vulnerable Palestinian men, women and children, our highest level ever.

In the Tánaiste’s recent visits to the region, he has witnessed first-hand the increasingly fragile humanitarian situation on the ground and the daily challenges for the Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza. The ongoing Gaza blockade and recurrent outbreaks of hostilities have eroded basic infrastructure, service delivery, livelihoods and coping mechanisms. It is clear that humanitarian needs in Gaza are critical and that all key services, particularly the health service, are under severe strain.

Ireland has responded to the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, including in Gaza, for many years. Our funding is channelled primarily through UN and multi-lateral partners. In 2018, we significantly increased our funding to the UN Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), providing an overall contribution of €9 million, so that they could continue to provide basic services such as food aid, education and health to some 5.3 million registered Palestine refugees, 1.4 million of whom are in Gaza. This was an increase of €3.5 million on their 2017 allocation.

We also provided €500,000 in 2018 to support the work of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the occupied Palestinian territory. This included €300,000 for the OCHA-managed Humanitarian Fund. The fund played a particularly important role in the international response to the injuries suffered by thousands of Gaza residents during the “Great March of Return” protests last year.

In 2019, Ireland is committed to increasing our support to the Palestinian people. This will involve an expanded programme of scholarships for Palestinian students. I believe that Ireland

can greatly increase its engagement with Palestine in this area. We are also working with the Palestinian Water Authority on the delivery of solar energy in Gaza to help alleviate the critical shortage of power there. This power shortage is crippling the Gazan economy and makes daily life and any form of economic activity very difficult and is one of the factors contributing to political instability.

Issues related to the situation in Palestine, including the humanitarian situation in Gaza, are regularly discussed with our EU partners. The EU and its Member States are the largest contributors of assistance to the Palestinian people.

Brexit Negotiations

62. Deputy Joan Burton asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his ongoing discussions with Mr. Michel Barnier in respect of the proposed agreement between the EU and UK in terms of Brexit. [49100/18]

84. Deputy Michael Moynihan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the comments by Mr. Michel Barnier on the vote on the withdrawal treaty on 15 January 2019 in the House of Commons that the UK is not ready to agree the treaty; and his views on whether attempts will be made to change, further clarify or weaken the backstop. [2655/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 62 and 84 together.

I met with Michel Barnier on 21 January, in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels. We discussed the disappointing but not unexpected outcome of the 15 January vote in the House of Commons on the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement. Both Mr Barnier and I are in agreement that what we need from the UK is clarity on how it proposes to move forward, and ultimately what it wants to achieve. The EU could then consider any next steps it might take. The EU continues to take a united approach to the negotiations and I thanked Mr Barnier for his unwavering support for Ireland.

Mr Barnier and I remain firmly of the view that the only way to ensure an orderly withdrawal is to ratify the Withdrawal Agreement as endorsed by the European Council and agreed with the British Government. The European Council in December and the joint letter from Presidents Tusk and Juncker have provided reassurances with regard to the backstop. The European Council has made clear that it stands by the Withdrawal Agreement and that it is not open for renegotiation. The EU stands ready to work further on the Political Declaration as we look to the future relationship.

I welcomed Mr Barnier's statement to the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 16 January, in which he publicly reaffirmed his commitment to the backstop and to the Withdrawal Agreement as a whole, which represents the best possible compromise between the European Union and the United Kingdom. In our discussion, Mr Barnier and I agreed that it is the only agreement on the table that provides the essential legal guarantee to avoid a hard border in any circumstances and protect the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts.

As Mr Barnier stated in Strasbourg, an orderly Brexit remains our top priority, but we must be prepared for all scenarios. In light of the ongoing uncertainty in Britain, the European Council has asked that preparedness work at the national and EU level intensify, taking account of all possible outcomes. I have outlined Ireland's approach in this regard to Mr Barnier, including planned legislation and other contingency measures. I also thanked Mr Barnier for the Com-

mission's continued helpful and constructive engagement in this area, and their understanding of the particular challenges faced by Ireland.

Human Rights Cases

63. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has raised the issue of the reports of ill-treatment of eight female activists detained in a prison in Saudi Arabia with his counterparts across Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4137/19]

86. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will establish a cross-party group to visit the detainees in a prison in Saudi Arabia in view of reports of ill-treatment and torture of eight female activists detained at the location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4136/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 63 and 86 together.

Promoting respect for human rights is a cornerstone of Ireland's foreign policy. Ireland has consistently supported the human rights of prisoners and detainees, and continually advocates for the freedom of civil society actors to operate in a safe and enabling environment.

Overall, through our engagement at the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, Ireland works tirelessly to promote gender equality, to combat all forms of discrimination against women and prevent gender-based violence.

Ireland has also co-sponsored resolutions at the Human Rights Council calling upon states to investigate alleged human rights violations and abuses suffered by persons deprived of their liberty, in particular cases involving death, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Ireland has also co-sponsored resolutions concerning human rights in the administration of justice, and resolutions concerning torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishments.

It is completely unacceptable that women should be imprisoned, let alone mistreated in any way, for peacefully seeking their basic rights. In December, the UN Committee against Torture cited serious allegations that a number of activists have been detained without charge in Dhahban prison since May 2018 and that they had suffered torture, sexual harassment and other forms of ill-treatment during interrogation. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have alleged shocking abuses subjected on these activists, which the Saudi government has vehemently denied.

The Irish Embassy in Riyadh regularly works with other EU Member States to ensure that human rights issues in Saudi Arabia are addressed, and the EU Delegation has raised the cases in question directly with the Saudi authorities on multiple occasions and at various levels. The EU Head of Delegation in Riyadh raised these reports last week.

On a national basis, Ireland consistently raises issues of human rights in Saudi Arabia with the Saudi Embassy in Dublin, and at international level. I understand that many members of the Oireachtas share my deep concerns, and that their status as parliamentarians will give them their own contacts and channels for highlighting these.

During the last Universal Periodic Review of Saudi Arabia's human rights record at the Human Rights Council, in November 2018, Ireland registered its concern about the imprisonment

of Human Rights Defenders and recommended that Saudi Arabia bring its laws into line with international standards for the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

My Department will continue to monitor the cases in question, and continue to relay our concerns to the Saudi government, at bilateral, EU and international levels.

Brexit Negotiations

64. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he continues to emphasise the fundamental importance of the Good Friday Agreement in the context of discussions between the EU and UK on Brexit with particular reference to the need to retain the status quo in respect of the island of Ireland with unimpeded access to traditional markets and recognition of the need to ensure that Ireland remains at the centre of Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4122/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Throughout the negotiations and Brexit process, it has been a priority of this Government to protect the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts and the gains of the peace process, which includes ensuring that there will be no hard border on the island of Ireland under any circumstances. The Withdrawal Agreement, which was agreed by the UK and EU in November and endorsed by the European Council on 25 November, fully reflects this through the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, including its provision for a “backstop” on avoiding a hard border. This reflects the commitment provided by the UK in the joint progress report of December 2017 that it would maintain the full alignment with those rules of the EU’s Customs Union and internal market necessary to protect North South cooperation, the all-island economy and the Good Friday Agreement.

The UK is leaving the EU and that means that some changes are unavoidable. However, in addition to the guarantee on avoiding a hard border in all circumstances, the Protocol contains provisions on a number of important areas for Ireland, including provision for the maintenance of the Common Travel Area, that North South cooperation can continue and develop, and that the Single Electricity Market will be maintained on the island of Ireland. It also includes commitments to ensure no diminution of rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity as set out in the Good Friday Agreement and confirms that people in Northern Ireland will continue to enjoy their rights as EU citizens. The Protocol also makes clear that these arrangements fully respect the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and the principle of consent under the Good Friday Agreement. All of this is aimed at ensuring that impact of Brexit on the everyday lives of people, both North and South, is minimised and that the status-quo on the island is protected.

I have continued to engage directly with my EU counterparts, and with the Commission with regard to the ratification and implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement agreed between the EU and the British Government. On 21 January, I met with Michel Barnier, who expressed his ongoing support for our position on the backstop and agreed that the Withdrawal Agreement remained the best way to ensure an orderly UK withdrawal that fully protected the Good Friday Agreement. He echoed his statements of 16 January; that the backstop must remain a backstop, and it must be credible.

In all my meetings, I am struck by the continued solidarity and unity of our EU partners with Ireland on the issue of the backstop, and I am grateful for their continued public and private expressions of support.

Following the vote in Westminster on 15 January, and as the President of the Commission, Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, has stated, what we need from the UK is clarity on how it proposes to move forward. We will then consider what next steps to take with our EU partners.

Middle East Peace Process

65. Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the work he has undertaken on the Palestine-Israel situation; the expected outcome of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3897/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):

The Middle East Peace Process is a matter of deep concern to me, and the Deputy will be aware of the attention I have given to this issue since assuming this office. It is a priority for the Government, and for the Irish people, to do what we can to bring the Israel-Palestine situation to a resolution which is just and equitable for both peoples.

With the political process having been at a standstill for some time, I have made my views clear that the international community needs to increase their engagement in order to move forward. Ireland has worked consistently, particularly at EU level, to maintain an international focus on the issue and support for the two state solution. The violent events in recent months have highlighted that the situation is only likely to deteriorate if solutions continue to be put off.

I have visited Israel and Palestine three times over the last eighteen months, holding meetings with the key interlocutors in both places, including both President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu. These visits have allowed me to raise Ireland’s priorities forthrightly and directly with the key decision makers, as well as listening to their concerns for the security and dignity of their peoples. I was also delighted to welcome President Abbas to Ireland in September, his first visit in ten years, during which he had good meetings with the President and the Taoiseach.

In December, Ireland proposed a Resolution at the UN General Assembly on a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. This Resolution, which reaffirmed the long-standing and broadly agreed parameters for a two-state solution to the Israeli- Palestinian conflict, was adopted by an overwhelming majority of 156 UN states. Ireland has, and will continue, to take a firm stance on matters relating to the Palestinian people and the Middle East Peace Process.

At Israel’s Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council last year, Ireland raised the continued expansion of settlements, and urged that Israel abide by its international legal obligations, including under the Fourth Geneva Convention, on the treatment of a civilian population under military occupation. I reiterated our concerns about these policies in my speech to the UN General Assembly in September.

On the ground, Ireland works closely with like-minded countries to protect Palestinians in the West Bank from individual and mass forcible transfer, through the provision of humanitarian assistance. Ireland takes a leading role in coordinating advocacy on these issues. Ireland also provides significant humanitarian and development assistance to the Palestinian people, and I increased Ireland’s contribution to UNRWA by €3 million in 2018, in view of the strain it is under following the withdrawal of US support. I have also initiated new solar energy and scholarship programmes as a contribution to the development of the Palestinian people.

However, I am all too aware that the pressure on Palestinian communities continues to grow. I have considered ways considered how the EU and the wider international community can productively engage and better use all the levers at our disposal to influence the parties

to the conflict. I am convening a small gathering of European and Arab Foreign Ministers in Dublin in February, to discuss the Middle East Peace Process. Ireland will work with the Palestinians, as well as supportive Arab and European participants on discussing the current situation, longer term prospects and developments, and where best to go from here.

Foreign Policy

66. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on a company (details supplied) that continues to import coal for use by the ESB from a mine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3893/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the specific mine to which the Deputy refers, although I should say at the outset that queries regarding where the ESB sources its coal would be more properly directed to my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

I understand that there have been complaints from some non-governmental organisations regarding private sector activities in the Cerrejón Mine and I am aware of negative publicity that has surrounded the mine. I remain concerned at reports of mining activities having a negative impact on local populations or on the environment, as well as of reported abuse of workers.

The EU Delegation in Bogotá has been monitoring the situation closely and the EU Head of Delegation has visited the Cerrejón Mine in order to hear stakeholders' views on the allegations and to assess the situation on the ground. Several follow-up meetings have taken place and the EU has maintained contact with representatives of sectoral trade unions and other civil society and environmental organisations.

Ireland is currently in the process of opening its first resident Embassy in Colombia, with Ambassador-designate Alison Milton having arrived in Bogotá earlier this month. This significant step demonstrates this Government's commitment to developing Ireland's relationship with Colombia and in particular our commitment to supporting Colombia's transition to a peaceful post-conflict society, including the vindication and protection of human and social rights.

This, combined with the opening of the Colombian Embassy in Ireland last year, marks a period of exceptional relations between our two countries and will greatly enhance our ability to engage on issues on the ground.

While our Embassy's focus will be on developing the political and economic relationship and on continuing to support Colombia's transition to a post-conflict society, having a permanent presence in Bogotá means that we will be much better positioned to monitor issues such as the impact of the Cerrejón mine on the local community and the environment.

Historic strides have been made in Colombia in recent years in the transition to a post-conflict society and addressing social and environmental issues is part of that process. Significant challenges remain, but Ireland remains committed to supporting the full implementation of the peace agreement, which will ensure a more peaceful, stable and prosperous future for all Colombians.

We will continue to monitor developments in the country and the particular issue raised by the Deputy as closely as possible. Officials at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Dublin, and at our new Embassy in Bogotá, will continue to engage with human rights defenders and civil society organisations active on the ground, and with our EU colleagues in Bogotá.

Question No. 67 answered with Question No. 61.

Departmental Expenditure

68. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the budget and spending of his Department in order to secure UN Security Council membership over the past period. [3772/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland is seeking election to a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the 2021-2022 term. The election will take place in the General Assembly of the United Nations in June 2020.

Ireland's candidature was announced in 2005 and the campaign is intensifying as the election date draws closer. There are two seats available on the Security Council for elected members of the Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG). Canada and Norway are the two other candidates for the 2021-2022 term.

Our campaign to be elected to the UN Security Council was launched by the Taoiseach and I at the United Nations in New York in July 2018, with an event that highlighted Ireland's commitment to multilateral engagement, including our strong record of 60 years of unbroken peacekeeping service with the United Nations, our longstanding development programme and our consistent commitment in the areas of human rights, humanitarian relief and disarmament.

I believe that Ireland's track record at the UN is widely recognised, along with our spirit of Empathy, Partnership and Independence which are keynotes of our Security Council campaign and which reflect our policy interests, our values and our history of positive engagement with the wider world.

Campaign costs to date have been approximately €500,000, including the launch event at the United Nations in New York, travel and promotional materials.

Alongside the Taoiseach and cabinet colleagues, I have utilised bilateral and multilateral meetings, and other international fora and engagements, to promote Ireland's candidature and make the case for the strong and independent role we would play on the Council.

In addition, my Department's staff in Ireland, our Permanent Representation to the UN in New York, and our entire Embassy network have been actively presenting and highlighting our case and seeking support. UN Member States will be very aware of Ireland's candidature, our commitment to the United Nations and multilateralism and the values we seek to bring to the work of the Security Council.

Question No. 69 answered with Question No. 60.

Human Rights Cases

70. Deputy Seán Crowe asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the mass hunger strike of over 200 Kurdish political prisoners in Turkey; if he is concerned for the health and well-being of a person (details supplied); and if he has raised the hunger strike and the continued jailing of political activists by Turkey with his Turkish counterpart. [3965/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am

Questions - Written Answers

very concerned with the hunger strike of the Kurdish prisoners, and in particular the case of Ms. Leyla Guven, the deputy of the People's Democratic Party (HDP).

As the Deputy is aware, we had called for the Turkish authorities to address our concerns about Ms. Guven and we are pleased to see that she has been released, although we remain concerned that her hunger strike is continuing.

Officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have conveyed our concerns to the Turkish Embassy in Dublin in regard to the arrest of HDP MPs, along with other elected politicians, journalists and academics over the past two years. We are well aware of the challenge faced by Turkey in July 2016, with the attempted coup d'état – but the state of emergency is over and the rule of law and freedom of expression must prevail. This is a point I have made in the past and will continue to make.

On the wider Kurdish issue, it is clear that this can only be addressed through dialogue aiming at establishing a peaceful, comprehensive and sustainable solution.

Ireland has called for the resumption of such a dialogue to allow the political process to resume and we continue to support efforts to maintain contacts between the Kurdish and Turkish sides through our funding of the Democratic Progress Institute's Turkey Programme.

On the wider issue of rights within Turkey, we have been consistent in expressing our grave concern at the disproportionate scale and scope of measures taken by the Turkish authorities in the wake of the failed coup attempt in July 2016. Together with our European partners we have conveyed our concerns on the backsliding on the rule of law and fundamental rights; the deterioration of the independence and functioning of the judiciary; and the restrictions, detentions, imprisonments and other measures targeting parliamentarians, journalists, human rights defenders and others exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms.

I want to assure the Deputy that the Irish Government will continue to monitor developments in Turkey on the specific issue of the hunger strike, and also on the wider issues of human rights, freedom of expression, rule of law, and democracy.

Human Rights Cases

71. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he and his EU counterparts have investigated the situation and welfare of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3775/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of reports regarding the individual referred to by the Deputy. As with most individual cases, this has not been discussed at Foreign Minister level.

The Irish Embassy in Abu Dhabi regularly coordinates locally with other EU Member States on Human Rights issues in UAE. This can include sharing information in relation to individual cases. In relation to the individual in question, developments are being monitored regularly.

I understand the Office of Special Procedures at the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has also received reports on the situation.

Syrian Conflict

72. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will reiterate the call to all regional participants to show restraint and avoid an escalation in the Syrian conflict in view of recent Israeli airstrikes on Syria; and if the intervention of Israel in the Syrian conflict will be condemned. [3969/19]

73. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions that have taken place regarding the withdrawal of foreign military powers from the conflict in Syria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4135/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 and 73 together.

I have frequently called on all regional actors, and all those involved in the Syria conflict to show restraint and avoid any escalation, which could further undermine regional stability, as well as adding to the suffering of civilians. I take this opportunity to reiterate that call. I also repeat my call on all parties with influence on the Syrian regime to exert that influence to ensure that civilians are protected, and to encourage the Syrian Government to engage fully with the UN-led peace process.

Ireland and the EU firmly believe that there can be no military solution to the Syria crisis. The misery caused by the long-running conflict in Syria has been further prolonged by military support which has been provided to the Assad regime. The EU's consistent position since the crisis began has been that the conflict can only be resolved by the Syrian people themselves.

Ireland and the EU strongly support the UN-led efforts to bring about a political resolution to the conflict. The EU provides direct assistance to the Geneva peace talks and has launched, in coordination with the UN, an initiative to develop political dialogue with key actors from the region to identify common ground. EU Foreign Ministers met with former UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, in the margins of the 2018 UN General Assembly, and reaffirmed our strong support for his work and that of his team. The EU will continue engagement with the new UN Special Envoy Geir Pedersen. The UN Special Envoy's work to bring about an end to the conflict is undertaken in accordance with the 2012 Geneva Communiqué and UN Security Council resolution 2254, which are clear on the need for this to be a Syrian-led political process.

We support the UN Special Envoy's ongoing efforts to establish a constitutional committee, made up of Syrians of different political views, to chart the way forward for the country. As part of his work to establish a constitutional committee, the UN Special Envoy has also been engaging directly with Russia, Turkey and Iran, and we believe that they have a responsibility to support and assist his efforts.

I do not condone or support the recent Israeli attacks into Syria. Nor do I support or condone the presence in Syria of other external forces who have been assisting the regime in the violent suppression of its own people, and who have used Syrian territory to launch attacks into Israel. There are significant Iranian forces in Syria, which have been assisting the regime in the violent suppression of its own people. This is unhelpful and unwelcome. It is also quite clear that Russia's support for the Assad regime has prolonged the suffering of the Syrian people. Russia has also repeatedly vetoed UN Security Council resolutions on Syria, which has seriously undermined the protection of Syrian civilians.

Turkey has borne a heavy burden in terms of knock-on effects of the Syria conflict, including hosting millions of refugees, as well as a risk of spill-over of violence and its concern about the conflict raging on its southern border is understandable. However, our messages to Turkey, in relation to its operations in Syria, have emphasised our overarching concern for the protection of civilians, and urged caution to avoid escalating the conflict any further. Our primary

concern is for the safety and well-being of civilians on both sides of the border, especially displaced and vulnerable communities, irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds, all of whom are entitled to protection and safety.

I take this opportunity to reiterate my unreserved condemnation of the violence perpetrated against civilians that has characterized the Syrian conflict to date, most notably by the Government and its allies, and the appalling acts committed by Da'esh.

I expect that the upcoming EU-League of Arab States Ministerial meeting in February will provide an occasion to discuss the ongoing conflict in Syria with my EU counterparts, as well as with those neighbouring countries most directly affected by the crisis in Syria.

Brexit Negotiations

74. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which he continues to find support for the Irish position on Brexit (details supplied) in view of recent developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4121/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): We maintain frequent contact with our EU partners. The Taoiseach, my cabinet colleagues and I take every opportunity to engage with EU partners to advance Ireland's priorities in the Article 50 process. I, as well as officials from my Department, remain in ongoing contact with representatives from EU Member States, the Commission and Task Force, and the UK.

I discuss Brexit collectively with my EU27 counterparts on a regular basis at the General Affairs Council (Article 50), where I take every opportunity to speak informally with them. I also regularly meet with my counterparts from other EU Member States, most recently the German Foreign Minister. In December I met with my Polish counterpart and I made clear to him the Irish and the European Council's position that the backstop cannot be a time-limited solution but that it, if triggered, it would be temporary unless and until it is superseded by a better solution.

In all of these contacts, I am struck by the continued solidarity and unity of our EU partners with Ireland on the issue of the backstop, and I am grateful for their continued public and private expressions of support.

I met separately with Michel Barnier during the GAC (Article 50) meetings of 15 October and 12 November, and most recently on 21 January in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council. Mr Barnier reaffirmed his commitment to the backstop provisions contained in the Withdrawal Agreement, which is the only agreement on the table that provides the essential legal guarantee to avoid a hard border in any circumstances and protect the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts. The EU continues to take a united approach and I thanked Mr Barnier for his unwavering support for Ireland. The EU stands ready to work further on the Political Declaration as we look to the future relationship.

The negotiations have been long and difficult, with flexibility and compromise shown on both sides. The European Council in December and the joint letter from Presidents Tusk and Juncker have provided important reassurances with regard to the backstop. They have also made clear that the Withdrawal Agreement cannot be renegotiated and that the European Union will not agree to anything that changes or is inconsistent with it.

Question No. 75 answered with Question No. 43.

Foreign Conflicts

76. Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his efforts through the EU to ensure the South Sudan peace deal holds in view of the volatile nature of the region and in further view of the fact that previous peace deals have proven ineffective. [3894/19]

94. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to continue to support humanitarian efforts in South Sudan; if Ireland will continue to support and fund conflict resolution and peacekeeping efforts in Sudan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3774/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 76 and 94 together.

I am deeply concerned by the humanitarian situation in South Sudan, primarily the consequence of a conflict which began in 2013, but compounded by many years of instability and strife. Violations of human rights and international humanitarian law serve to perpetuate the crisis, with a negative impact on its scale and with devastating consequences for the people of South Sudan. It is estimated that almost 400,000 people have died, and over 7 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance and protection.

Drought has exacerbated the effects of conflict, leading to severe food insecurity. There has been massive population displacement throughout the country. Conflict, food insecurity and drought have affected women and girls particularly.

On 12 September 2018, the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, signed a peace agreement with a number of the opposition forces. While this peace agreement has the potential to mark a new departure, it is critical that South Sudan’s leaders maintain their commitment to its effective implementation. Achieving lasting peace will require sustained effort and commitment as well as a genuinely inclusive approach to building the future South Sudan.

Ireland strongly supports efforts to build peace in South Sudan. Since the Tánaiste’s visit to Addis Ababa in 2017, when he met representatives of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union, Ireland has provided funding to IGAD to support negotiation of the peace agreement. Ireland will continue to support IGAD’s work on monitoring the implementation of the agreement in 2019.

Our Embassy in Addis Ababa, which is accredited to South Sudan, monitors the situation and engages with local, regional and international parties on an ongoing basis. The Irish Ambassador in Addis Ababa visits Juba frequently where she meets with key Government, UN, NGO, Red Cross and diplomatic partners, including the EU Delegation. Her most recent visit took place in November last year.

We are committed to supporting efforts towards peace in South Sudan and have contributed to projects aimed at peacebuilding. In 2018, this has included supporting partners’ mediation efforts and empowering civil society, in particular women’s groups, to facilitate their engagement in peace processes.

As well as our direct bilateral support, we are actively involved in the efforts of the EU to support peace in South Sudan. Two officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

have been seconded to the EU Delegation in South Sudan, including one as Head of Mission. The EU Delegation is strongly supportive of the peace process, in particular by providing support to the implementing and monitoring bodies of the peace agreement. The Tánaiste discussed these efforts with the EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, Alexander Rondos, when he visited Dublin on 7 November 2018.

While a sustained resolution to the conflict is the ultimate goal, we have a duty now to deal with immediate humanitarian needs. Since 2012, Ireland has provided €61 million in direct humanitarian assistance to South Sudan. Over €10 million in Irish funding was provided in 2018, including to Irish NGOs to assist them in reaching the most vulnerable. Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Oxfam, Trócaire and World Vision, with support from Irish Aid, are working in partnership with local organisations and NGO networks to provide lifesaving supplies to meet the basic needs of those suffering from the conflict.

As well as this direct bilateral aid, Ireland has also contributed to humanitarian support in South Sudan through the multilateral system. Ireland is a significant contributor to the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund, which has allocated \$178 million to alleviate the crisis in South Sudan since 2011, as well as to the EU, which provided more than €90 million in 2018.

With humanitarian needs likely to remain acute throughout 2019, Irish funding will continue to support both those in need inside South Sudan as well as South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries.

European Council Meetings

77. Deputy Eamon Ryan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his recent meetings at the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels; and if he will report on the discussions that took place on disinformation. [4130/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): At the Foreign Affairs Council on 21 January EU Ministers discussed various matters. Under the Current Affairs agenda item there was discussion on developments in DRC, Venezuela, Syria, Yemen and Nicaragua.

Ministers discussed the EU-ASEAN relationship ahead of the EU-ASEAN Ministerial meeting later that day. Member States focused on the importance of elevating EU-ASEAN relations to a Strategic Partnership and promoting the EU's approach to connectivity in ASEAN countries.

Ministers also had an exchange of views on the EU's relations with the League of Arab States in preparation for the EU – League of Arab States Ministerial meeting planned for 4 February.

The main focus of discussion at the Council was disinformation. Ministers welcomed the EU Action Plan against disinformation and many emphasised the importance of focussing on its implementation, especially given the proximity of next May's European Parliament elections. Several Ministers highlighted the threat from Russia, but other actors were noted also. Some Ministers called for greater EU cooperation with other bodies e.g. the G7, and the importance of civil society was emphasised. There was also strong support for the work of the three EEAS Strategic Communications Task Forces which are working to identify, expose and counter disinformation. The EU will continue to work closely with online platforms, as well as to check the transparency of funding of political advertising, while at all times respecting freedom of expression.

On the margins of the Council I had separate bilateral meetings with Michel Barnier and UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt in relation to Brexit.

Question No. 78 answered with Question No. 55.

Question No. 79 answered with Question No. 58.

EU Migration Crisis

80. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the EU migration policy particularly in respect of Libya; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3974/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): In June, the European Council reconfirmed that a functioning EU policy on migration requires a comprehensive approach which combines effective controls of the EU's external borders, action to strengthen co-operation with countries of transit and origin and dealing with the management of migrants within the European Union, where a balance of solidarity and responsibility is needed.

Solving the migration crisis will ultimately require deeper political, economic and development relationships between the EU and neighbouring countries, including many in Africa, that will form a basis for dealing with a variety of challenges on the basis of shared responsibility.

The EU is very conscious that Libya is a major transit country for migrants and refugees. We are also aware, and deeply troubled, by the grave human rights abuses that these migrants and refugees frequently suffer there. The Taoiseach highlighted these concerns when Libya was last discussed at the European Council.

At the Foreign Affairs Council in December, my EU counterparts and I adopted Council Conclusions on Libya, committing to continue our work with the Libyan authorities to improve conditions for migrants and refugees, by ensuring aid reaches those in need of protection, and with a view to overcoming the current system of detention.

The EU has mobilised €286 million for migration-related projects in Libya since 2014. The majority of this funding comes from the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, and is dedicated to providing protection, assistance and alternatives to migrants in Libya. This funding also provides support for migrants at disembarkation points, inside and outside detention centres, or in host communities. These projects are implemented on the ground by international partners, including the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), or by EU Member States.

Ireland is committed to tackling the root causes of migration and will provide a total of €15 million over the period 2016-2020 to the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. The Trust Fund helps to address the root causes of migration generally, as well as providing protection and assistance to migrants and refugees in Libya. The EU also provides training (including on human rights and gender issues) and other support to Libyan authorities, to enhance Libya's border management capacities.

Libyan detention centres are a focus of credible allegations of abuse and, at the very least, lack appropriate oversight. Alternatives to detention centres need to be established, in particular for vulnerable migrants, and Ireland calls on the Libyan authorities to continue to work with the relevant international organisations to make this possible.

Regrettably, political fragmentation and the fragile security situation in Libya limit the capacity of the international community to end abuses, since the internationally-recognised Libyan authorities, with whom the EU can work, may not have the capacity to effect this. There is a governance vacuum in many areas of the country, and access for international organisations seeking to monitor and alleviate conditions for migrants is restricted in many areas. Bringing real improvements to the lives of Libyans and migrants, and ensuring an end to human rights abuses, will require restoration of political stability, and a fully functioning and unified government. The EU will continue to work with the UN and others to support and reinforce Libya's sovereign institutions.

Passport Applications Data

81. Deputy Martin Heydon asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the take-up level of online passport applications for children since it was introduced; if it can be used by all children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3971/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since the expansion of the passport online renewal service for children in November 2018, almost 8,000 of the approximately 18,600 applications to renew children's passports have been made online. As awareness of the service increases, we expect to see an even greater move towards the online channel.

The online service brings significant benefits for citizens with faster turnaround times of 10 working days for all online applications, excluding postage. In addition, the cost of renewing a passport online is significantly cheaper than alternative methods, with fees for all online applications being reduced by €5 across all application types. The expanded service is now available to all adults and children who wish to renew their passport.

As the online service is the most convenient and most efficient method of renewing a passport, I would urge all applicants who are eligible to do so to consider using this application channel.

Human Rights Cases

82. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his concerns have been highlighted to his Guatemalan counterpart regarding the continued attacks on human rights defenders in the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3895/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the difficult situation which currently pertains for human rights defenders in Guatemala, and condemn unreservedly any act of intimidation or violence perpetrated against those seeking to defend their rights.

Guatemala has made some strides in its political and social development over the past two decades since the gradual cessation of armed conflict from 1996 onwards. While overcoming the legacy of human rights crimes committed during the country's civil war remains a challenge, it is essential to Guatemala's future development. I urge the Government of Guatemala to address historical impunity at all levels and to fully investigate all incidents of violence, intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders, and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

To this end, the recent announcement of the Government of Guatemala that it would unilaterally terminate the 2006 Agreement with the UN establishing the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) is deeply regrettable. Ireland fully supports the declaration made by the EU High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini earlier this month which states that this announcement runs against Guatemala's legal obligations to the UN and against several rulings of the Constitutional Court, and calls on the Government to respect the country's constitutional order, in particular the independence of the Constitutional Court.

Since its establishment, the CICIG has been working effectively to combat corruption and impunity and to strengthen the rule of law in Guatemala. I urge the Government to allow CICIG to continue its important work until the end of the current mandate in September 2019, respecting the integrity of CICIG national and international personnel and affording them all necessary protection.

The situation in Guatemala is discussed regularly at EU level, and officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade also meet regularly with human rights defenders and civil society organisations active in Guatemala.

Ireland took the opportunity of the 28th Session of the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council on 8 November 2017 to express its concern in relation to attacks against human rights defenders in Guatemala. Ireland also noted that there have been worrying instances of harassment, intimidation and criminalisation of human rights defenders in the country.

Ireland's statement recommended that Guatemala take all necessary steps to protect human rights defenders through the removal of legal and policy measures which inhibit the ability of human rights defenders to carry out their vital work in safety, without fear of interference, obstruction or harassment of any kind, including by finalising the Public Policy for the Protection of HRDs with strong participation by civil society and an adequate budgetary allocation.

While Ireland does not have a resident Embassy in Guatemala City, we will continue to follow the situation in Guatemala closely, and to raise our concerns regarding threats against human rights defenders in discussions on Guatemala at EU and international level, in keeping with our commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and working with partners on the ground.

Dublin-Monaghan Bombings

83. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the ongoing outstanding requests with the UK Government regarding inquiries into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3977/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The implementation of the All-Party Dáil motions relating to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings is a priority for the Government, as highlighted in the Programme for a Partnership Government. The All-Party motion on the 1974 Dublin Monaghan bombings adopted by the Dáil on 25 May 2016 has, like those adopted in 2008 and 2011, been conveyed to the British Government.

These motions call on the British Government to allow access by an independent, international judicial figure to all original documents relating to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, as well as the Dublin bombings of 1972 and 1973, the bombing of Kay's Tavern in Dundalk and the murder of Seamus Ludlow.

The Government is committed to actively pursuing the implementation of these motions, and has consistently raised the issue with the British Government. I am actively engaged with the British Government on an ongoing basis on this issue, as are officials from my Department.

I met with Justice for the Forgotten in April last year to hear their views and update them on the Government's continuing engagement on legacy issues, including with the British Government on the Dáil motions. In addition, officials from my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality met with Justice for the Forgotten in July to hear their views on the implementation of the legacy framework provided for under the Stormont House Agreement.

My Department also facilitated an engagement in Dublin on 29 August last for the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, Judith Thompson, to hear the views of victims and survivors in this jurisdiction, including the families affected by the Dublin and Monaghan bombings and other attacks.

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

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

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 62.

Ministerial Meetings

85. Deputy Eamon Ryan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his recent meetings with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the African Union. [4131/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I attended the 22nd EU-ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (FMM) in Brussels on 21 January which was an opportunity to build relations with 10 countries from South East Asia and to offer support to our shared priority of elevating the relationship between our two regional blocs. While at the FMM, I participated in both the retreat and plenary sessions, where countries emphasised their shared support for the rules-based international order and the defence of multilateralism. Ireland's national statement called for our two regional groups to work collectively to ensure a sustainable, equitable and peaceful future for our global community of neighbours.

The key outcome of the FMM, as noted in the Joint Statement which issued afterwards, was an agreement in principle to elevate EU-ASEAN relations to that of a strategic partnership, subject to details and timing being worked out.

Subsequent to the FMM, I attended the opening dinner of the EU-AU Ministerial and my Government colleague, Ciarán Cannon T.D., attended the plenary session the following day. The Ministerial addressed the progress made since the EU-AU Summit in Abidjan in 2017, in cooperation on peace and security, trade relations and support for the multilateral system. Participants discussed the implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding on Peace, Security and Governance and the EU proposal for an Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and Investment. They

renewed their commitment to hold regular Ministerial meetings in the lead up to the next EU-AU Summit in 2020, and issued a Joint Communiqué reaffirming their commitment to work together to strengthen the relationship between our two continents.

Ireland's intervention highlighted the need for cooperation through all phases of the conflict cycle and, in particular, the need to concentrate on mediation and conflict prevention. It drew on our experience of peacebuilding and offered our support to those who wished to learn from our experience.

Question No. 86 answered with Question No. 63.

EU Issues

87. Deputy Niall Collins asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of developments in Hungary and Poland and the efforts of the EU to ensure that democracy and the rule of law are upheld; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3976/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The European Parliament voted on 12 September 2018 on the Sargentini report which proposed the launching of Article 7 proceedings against Hungary. The General Affairs Council considered the issue at its meeting on 12 November, and again on the 11 December.

Our concerns about issues relating to the rule of law in Hungary are well known. The Taoiseach raised these when he met with Prime Minister Orban on 4 January 2018 in Budapest.

I also spoke with Hungarian Foreign Minister Szijjártó on 14 December last and our discussion included rule of law issues.

We have concerns over the civic space available for NGOs to continue to operate in Hungary. These concerns have been exacerbated by the passage of legislation aimed at individuals and organisations providing lawful assistance to migrants and asylum seekers.

We also regret that the necessary steps were not taken to ensure the operation of Central European University in Budapest in the long term. As the Taoiseach said in this House recently, the loss of the CEU will be a loss to Budapest and Hungary.

In relation to Poland, the European Commission activated its rule of law mechanism in January 2016 and formally triggered the Article 7 procedure on 20 December 2017. There have been a number of Hearings at General Affairs Councils since then involving the Commission, Poland and other Member States, in which Ireland has actively participated highlighting the importance of respect for the rule of law..

We welcome the legislative steps taken by the Polish Government to address the concerns on rule of law issues raised by the European Commission and also by Member States at the General Affairs Council. We would encourage Poland to continue to engage and address the concerns that have been raised.

I met with Foreign Minister Czaputowicz on 21 December last and reiterated Ireland's support for the process, and urged continuing engagement with the Commission to make further progress.

Rule of law matters are of serious concern to Ireland. We have always said that fundamental values and the rule of law are a shared EU interest and call for a common approach.

Questions - Written Answers
Departmental Staff Recruitment

88. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the timeline for the hiring of the planned extra staff at the passport office in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4132/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The staffing levels of many units in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and its missions overseas have been augmented in response to Brexit. My Department has strengthened the capacity of the Passport Service by recruiting additional permanent staff to respond to the general increase in passport applications. Those staff are located in the Passport Service offices in Balbriggan, Cork and in Dublin city centre. In addition, the normal seasonal intake of Temporary Clerical Officers has already commenced.

In Cork specifically, half of the intake of additional Clerical Officers have already commenced employment and the remaining cohort of new officers will join the office in February. All of the Temporary Clerical Officers assigned to the Passport Service office in Cork for 2019 have already started their contracts.

Brexit Issues

89. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extra preparations he plans to make to facilitate persons and materials travelling through Cork Airport and the Port of Cork in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4133/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): With regard to the facilitation of the travel of persons, under the Common Travel Area, Irish and British citizens may move freely and reside in either jurisdiction. Both the Government of Ireland and the UK Government have committed to maintaining the CTA in all scenarios.

With regard to the movement of goods, increased connectivity and capacity options direct to the EU are a key part of our preparations and contingency planning for Brexit. In this context the establishment of a new direct route from Cork to Santander in Spain, creating capacity for 35,000 additional freight units annually, is a very positive development.

Based on an assessment of the scale of trade in goods that are moving between Ireland and ports/airports in the UK, infrastructural measures are being progressed in Rosslare Port, in Dublin Port and in Dublin Airport to facilitate the carrying out of the necessary checks and controls that may be required.

Some €21 billion of Ireland's exports and imports, including many time-sensitive or perishable goods, are transported by truck on Roll-on/Roll-Off ("RoRo") shipping services to and through the UK. Dublin and Rosslare ports handle almost all of this traffic.

There are no sanitary and Phytosanitary checks carried out in the Port of Cork. Cork Port is however approved to handle bulk shipments of wood and plant based derivatives at the current container terminal in Tivoli and has been engaging with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in respect of its existing third country trade (bulk wood products).

We continue to review our infrastructural needs on an ongoing basis and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport's assessment is that there is capacity in other ports, including Cork, should there be a shift from RoRo to alternative services.

Continued investment in Ireland's connectivity through our ports and airports, including Cork Airport and Cork Port, is central to Project Ireland 2040. To this end the €90m Port of Cork redevelopment project, will bring about improvements to the port infrastructure and connectivity, and will enable the port to accommodate larger vessels, further developing it as an international gateway for trade.

Question No. 90 answered with Question No. 48.

Human Rights Cases

91. Deputy Seán Crowe asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to reports of violent state backed attacks on LGBT persons in Chechnya (details supplied); and if he has raised this matter with his Russian counterpart. [3962/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government closely follows developments in relation to the treatment of members of the LG-BTI community in Russia and, in particular, is well aware of the widespread reports of the persecution of gay men in Chechnya. When the reports came to notice, senior officials of my Department met the Russian Ambassador to convey the grave concerns of the Government, and of the Irish public, at these reports. During the meeting, officials urged the Russian authorities to fully investigate these allegations, to ensure that any such persecution is ended immediately, to provide all affected persons with the assistance they require, and to ensure the safety of activists and journalists investigating the reports of abuse in Chechnya. Ireland continues to raises its concerns over the treatment of the LGBTi+ community in Russia, and especially in Chechnya, through international fora such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE.

In November Ireland, along with 15 other participating States of the OSCE, invoked the Moscow Mechanism to establish a mission of experts to address the concerns surrounding allegations of impunity for reported human rights violations and abuses in Chechnya. The report, published in December, concluded that the evidence confirms the allegations of very serious human rights violations and abuses in the Chechen Republic. The invoking participating States, including Ireland, welcomed the report and its comprehensive list of specific recommendations that could be used by both Russia, including the Chechen Republic, and other participating States moving forward. We further urged Russia to heed the recommendations and work with relevant international institutions – including with the OSCE - to constructively address the issues raised.

Additionally, Ireland regularly makes recommendations on issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council. In May 2018, as part of the UPR of the Russian Federation, Ireland recommended that Russia adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation on the grounds of sexual orientation, including measures to allow LGBTi+ persons to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, without fear of harassment.

The promotion and protection of human rights is a key priority of Ireland's foreign policy, as outlined in "The Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World." Ireland is committed to promoting the rights of LGBTI+ individuals, who continue to suffer disproportionate levels of violence and face systematic discrimination in many countries across the world.

Human Rights Committees

92. Deputy Seán Crowe asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the inaugural meeting of the business and human rights implementation group which took place on 16 January 2019; the plan of work for the group in 2019; and if the group will be working with semi-State companies here to ensure effective human rights due diligence is taking place. [3964/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The establishment of the Business and Human Rights Implementation Group is a key commitment of the National Plan on Business and Human Rights. I am very grateful to have secured the agreement of Ms Breege O'Donoghue, formerly Primark's Group Director of New Markets and Business Development, to chair the Group, which brings together representatives of 23 organisations, from Government Departments and state agencies, the business sector and civil society, to monitor the delivery of the actions identified in the Plan, including those related to due diligence.

I was pleased to be able to participate in the first meeting of the Group on 16 January. In my opening remarks, I reiterated my conviction that the implementation of the National Plan must be a collective endeavour and the role of the Group will therefore be critical to its success. I was particularly keen to hear the views from the business and civil society representatives and overall I was impressed by the positive and constructive ideas put forward.

To guide the work of the Group, my Department commissioned a baseline assessment on the current legislative and regulatory framework for business and human rights in Ireland from independent consultants, in line with another key commitment in the National Plan. The Group received a short presentation on the draft study and it is expected that a more detailed consideration of its contents, including recommendations for action, will take place at the next meeting of the Group in early April. The document is currently being finalised and will shortly be uploaded to the website of my Department.

Northern Ireland

93. Deputy Joan Burton asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the interactions his officials have had with representatives in Stormont regarding the Irish language Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1580/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Respect for linguistic diversity and the Irish language are important elements of the Good Friday Agreement. A number of elements of the Good Friday and St Andrews Agreements have not yet been fully implemented, including an Irish Language Act for Northern Ireland. The Government's firm position is that the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent Agreements must be implemented in full.

An Irish Language Act in Northern Ireland to be enacted by the British Government was provided for in the St Andrews Agreement in 2006. Regrettably to date, there has been no agreement within the Executive to take forward what is now a devolved matter.

Successive Irish Governments have advocated in favour of an Irish Language Act and continue to do so.

In the Stormont House negotiations in late 2014, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and other Irish Government representatives sought that the commitment to an Irish Language Act would be honoured and implemented. Regrettably, it was not possible at the time to reach agreement for such an explicit undertaking.

Nevertheless, in the final text of the 2014 Stormont House Agreement, the two Governments, recalling commitments from previous Agreements, endorsed the need for respect for and recognition of the Irish language in Northern Ireland.

More recently, in the successive discussions at Stormont that took place between March 2017 and February 2018 to support the formation of a new Executive and the implementation of outstanding commitments from previous Agreements, the Government made consistently clear to the British Government and to all of the political parties our strong support for an Irish Language Act for Northern Ireland, as envisaged under the St Andrews Agreement.

The Tánaiste continues to engage with the British Government and the leaders of the political parties in Northern Ireland to seek a way forward from the current impasse with a new political process that can secure the effective operation of the devolved institutions and the implementation of outstanding commitments from the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent Agreements.

The Government will also continue to support the Irish language on an all-island basis, including through financial support for the work of Foras na Gaeilge.

Question No. 94 answered with Question No. 76.

Brexit Negotiations

95. Deputy Michael Moynihan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the comments made by Commissioner Schinas on borders at the EU Commission press conference on 22 January 2019; and if he has spoken to the Commissioner since. [4073/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Following his speculative remarks at the press briefing on 22 January, Commission spokesperson Margaritis Schinas clarified the Commission's position at a press briefing on 23 January, stating that the EU is determined to do all it can, deal or no deal, to avoid the need for a border and to protect peace in Northern Ireland. He added that the EU is fully behind Ireland and has expressed, on numerous occasions, full solidarity with Ireland and that this has not changed. He made clear that the EU will continue to remind the UK of its responsibilities under the Good Friday Agreement, deal or no deal. At the same time, he acknowledged that Ireland and the EU have responsibilities as regards the protection of the Single Market and Customs Union.

I welcome this important clarification from the Commission, which demonstrates that Ireland and the EU continue to be at one. It remains the case that ratifying the Withdrawal Agreement agreed between the EU and the UK Government is the best, and realistically the only, way to ensure an orderly Brexit that provides certainty with regard to the full protection of the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the peace process, including the avoidance of a hard border.

The Government has consistently stated unequivocally that we will not accept a hard border on this island. The UK also accepts that avoiding a hard border is essential.

If the UK Government cannot secure the ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement, while our objectives and commitments would not change, achieving and honouring them would become more difficult. So the EU and Ireland on one side, and the UK on the other, will have to work intensively together to ensure that we deliver on our shared goal of avoiding the return of a hard border, deal or no deal. We are committed to doing all in our power to ensure that goal is met.

Brexit Issues

96. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of preparedness for a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4181/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Work across Government has identified key issues arising in each Brexit scenario, including in a no deal scenario.

At its meeting of 11 December the Government agreed, that while work on Brexit preparedness for the central case scenario should continue, in light of ongoing political uncertainties and the Brexit deadline of 29 March, greater immediate priority must now be given to preparations for a no deal Brexit.

Following this, the Government published its Brexit Contingency Action Plan on 19 December which sets out detailed sectoral analyses and approaches to mitigating the impacts of a no deal Brexit. Ireland's Action Plan is consistent with and complementary to the approach being taken at EU27 level to prepare for the UK's withdrawal.

On 15 January, further discussion at Cabinet took this work forward in the important areas of transport connectivity and medicines, with Memos brought to Government by Minister Ross and Minister Harris respectively.

While ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement is still the Government's preferred outcome, last week the Government published the general scheme of proposed primary legislative measures required in the event of a no deal Brexit.

The draft Omnibus Bill focuses on measures protecting our citizens and supporting the economy, enterprise and jobs, particularly in key economic sectors.

Legislative Process

97. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Taoiseach the legislation, including heads of Bills, that has been sent from his Department to EU institutions before its publication during the period of the 32nd Dáil. [4256/19]

The Taoiseach: My Department has not sent any legislation, including heads of bills, to EU institutions before their publication for the period outlined by the Deputy.

Military Medals

98. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to fulfil the commitment given by his predecessor in 2017 to award medals (details supplied) for bravery to the veterans of Jadotville and the families of deceased members. [3763/19]

99. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will report on his correspondence with veterans and relatives of those who served at Jadotville; and if he will report on the awarding of distinguished service medals and military medals for gallantry. [4065/19]

100. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will

address a matter (details supplied) regarding veterans of the siege of Jadotville; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4263/19]

102. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason soldiers who fought at Jadotville and were recommended for medals (details supplied) have never received same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3835/19]

103. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the medals recommended by a person (details supplied) will be issued to the 32 members of A Company 35th Infantry Battalion, including deceased servicemen, for their service at the siege of Jadotville in 1961; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3951/19]

104. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when he plans to award medals recommended for 29 men for bravery in action by a person (details supplied) to the veterans still living and posthumously to those deceased who served during the siege of Jadotville in 1961; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3988/19]

105. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when he plans to award medals recommended for 29 men for bravery in action by a person (details supplied) to the veterans still living and posthumously to those deceased who served during the siege of Jadotville in 1961; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3992/19]

107. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if medals for bravery will be awarded to persons (details supplied) in respect of the siege of Jadotville. [4059/19]

108. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if medals will be awarded to the seven veterans and posthumously awarded to the 40 deceased veterans of the siege of Jadotville (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4097/19]

109. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when the soldiers involved in the siege of Jadotville will receive medals; his plans to award medals posthumously; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4150/19]

110. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4194/19]

111. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to award medals to persons who fought in the siege of Jadotville, as recommended by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4235/19]

112. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will consider awarding medals to soldiers who participated in the siege of Jadotville; the reason they have not been awarded to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4237/19]

115. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason the military medals for gallantry and distinguished service for 29 soldiers at the siege of Jadotville as committed to previously have not been presented; when the medals will be presented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4366/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 to 100, inclusive, 102 to 105, inclusive, 107 to 112, inclusive, and 115 together.

The siege of Jadotville was a prominent event that occurred during Ireland's peacekeeping mission in the Congo in September 1961. "A" Company, 35th Infantry Battalion took responsi-

bility for the UN post at Jadotville on 3rd September 1961. On the 9th September, a large force of Katangese Gendarmerie surrounded them and early on the morning of the 13th September “A” Company came under attack. From the 13th to the 17th September they endured almost continuous attack. They were taken into captivity on the 17th September and remained in captivity until finally released on the 25th October 1961.

The issue of the award of medals to the men of “A” Company, 35th Infantry Battalion was comprehensively addressed in 1965. A properly constituted Medals Board considered the various cases presented and made a decision that no medals would be awarded. The Chief of Staff of the day considered the decision of the Board and was satisfied with the findings. Subsequently, the question was raised again in a letter to a newly appointed Chief of Staff. He forwarded the letter to the original Medals Board and asked that they reconvene and review their decision. The Board indicated that the issues raised had received due consideration and that they were not prepared to alter their findings.

In accordance with Defence Forces regulations the award of medals for bravery is time bound. These may not be awarded in any case unless a recommendation is made through the usual channels to the Chief of Staff, not later than two years in the case of the Military Medal for Gallantry, and not later than four years in the case of the Distinguished Service Medal, after the performance of the act in respect of which the recommendation is made. Such awards are made on the recommendation of a Military Board appointed by the Chief of Staff for the purpose of examining and reporting on every recommendation for an award.

Over the past number of years various representations have been received in my Department outlining the courage and bravery of “A” Company. All representations have been considered and responded to acknowledging their valiant actions while under siege in Jadotville.

A review was conducted in 2004 by military officers for the purpose of a broader examination of the Jadotville case. This Board recommended that the events of Jadotville and the contribution of the 35th Battalion be given recognition. In this context, a number of measures have taken place to honour and to commemorate the events at Jadotville and the very significant contribution of “A” Company and of the 35th Battalion, as a whole, to the UN Peace Support Mission in the Congo.

Recognition of their contribution over the years include:

- A. A presentation of scrolls to “A” Company in 2006.
- B. Portraits of Lt Col McNamee (35th Battalion Commander) and Comdt Quinlan (Company Commander “A” Company) were commissioned in 2006.
- C. In July of 2010 the 50th anniversary of the first deployment to the Congo was commemorated in a highly publicised and well attended event in Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnel.
- D. A nominal roll of “A” Company, printed in copper, was affixed to the monument in Costume Barracks and was unveiled as part of the 50th Anniversary of the Jadotville affair in September 2011.
- E. On the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the Siege of Jadotville, I decided to issue a Unit Citation to honour the collective actions and bravery of the men of “A” Company. This was the first time a Unit Citation was awarded within the Defence Forces and I was delighted to be able to formally recognise the brave actions of these men.

Furthermore, on 13th June 2017, the Government decided, as an exceptional step, to award a medal known as “An Bonn Jadotville” or “The Jadotville Medal” to each member of “A”

Company, 35th Infantry Battalion and to the family representatives of deceased members to give full and due recognition in honour of their courageous actions at the Siege of Jadotville. This medal presentation ceremony took place on 2nd December 2017 in Custume Barracks, Athlone. This location is considered the spiritual home of “A” Company and it is from here that “A” company assembled in advance of their fateful deployment to the Congo.

I am satisfied that the events and happenings to date properly honour the collective bravery of the men of “A” Company and full and due recognition has been afforded to them in their honour.

Defence Forces Reserve

101. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason reservists in the Defence Forces are not issued with gloves in line with the single force concept; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3705/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am advised by the military authorities that all Reserve Defence Force (RDF) personnel are issued, when appropriate, with gloves for State ceremonial events. I am also advised that the military authorities are in the process of amending the appropriate Administration Instruction (L3) to ensure that gloves are made available to RDF personnel who are engaged in appropriate levels of training. The requisite criteria in relation to eligibility to be issued gloves will be promulgated with the amended instruction.

Questions Nos. 102 to 105, inclusive, answered with Question No. 98.

Overseas Missions

106. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence whether a formal decision has been taken, either by the Defence Forces or him, to initiate a process that would see Army Rangers deployed to the MINUSMA mission in Mali; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4032/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): MINUSMA, the UN mission in Mali is authorised under Chapter VII of the UN Charter by the UN Security Council. It is a significant UN peace enforcement mission comprising both regular and special operations forces and high end capabilities.

Ireland currently has no Defence Forces personnel deployed to the MINUSMA mission. However, potential overseas missions are considered on an on-going basis. The option to deploy a small contingent of Army Ranger Wing personnel to UN mandated MINUSMA mission as part of a larger Special Operations Forces within the mission later this year has arisen. The Department and the Defence Forces are in the very early information gathering stage in considering this particular mission. This involves getting detailed information on the mission and its operations, consideration of the possible role which the Defence Forces may be able to undertake in the mission, how such a deployment fits with Defence Forces capabilities having regard to existing and potential commitments at home and overseas and a detailed threat analysis and assessment. This process has only just commenced and will take a period of time to reach a conclusion. On foot of the respective military and policy advice arising from this process, I will then consider the matter.

I should emphasise again, that no decision has been taken yet and there is some way to go in the process before we reach that point.

Questions Nos. 107 to 112, inclusive, answered with Question No. 98.

Legislative Process

113. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the legislation, including heads of Bills, that has been sent from his Department to EU institutions before its publication during the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4246/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There are no pieces of legislation including heads of bills which have been sent from my Department to EU institutions before their publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil.

Defence Forces Pensions

114. Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason an Army pension will reduce in the case of a person (details supplied). [4266/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Under the Defence Forces occupational pension scheme applicable to Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and Privates enlisting in the Defence Forces before April 2004, 21 years is the minimum service required for an immediate retirement pension and gratuity, regardless of age. Under this 'fast accrual' pension scheme, maximum retirement benefits accrue after 31 years. The 21-year pension, the rate of which varies according to retiring rank and other factors, is payable for the person's lifetime.

Where qualifying service is more than 21 years, an 'additional increment' is payable at a flat rate (generally €8.94 a week) for each year of service in excess of 21 years up to a maximum of 31 years' service. This gives a maximum additional increment of €89.40 weekly. However, under the 'pre-April 2004' pension scheme rules, this additional increment ceases to be payable if and when the pensioner reaches the prescribed age for the State Pension (Contributory), that is, at age 66 to 68 depending on a person's date of birth. The question of a person's entitlement to a State Pension is, of course, a matter for the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

These arrangements are in accordance with the long established principle of integrating occupational pensions with Social Insurance benefits of employees who are in full PRSI class. This includes NCOs and Privates who are fully insured for the range of social insurance benefits under the Social Welfare Acts, such as the State Pension (Contributory).

Integration means that a person's entitlement to social insurance benefits is taken into account when calculating the rate of their occupational pension payable. The State Pension is regarded as part of the overall pension package payable to the individual. The integration principle applies right across the public service and, indeed, in many areas of the private sector as well as in other countries.

It might be noted that the method of integration for 'pre-April 2004' military pensioners is more favourable than in other areas of the public service. In the public service generally, integration begins from the time the occupational pension commences payment, for example from

age 60 where ‘standard accrual’ pensions apply. However, these NCOs or Privates who serve 31 years having joined the Defence Forces at age 18/20, can qualify for maximum retirement benefits payable immediately from age 49/51. The integration process only begins for them when the State Pension becomes payable, for example, at age 66. Furthermore, the maximum personal rate of State Pension payable (€243.30 a week currently if under age 80) is considerably more than any reduction that could happen under the Defence Forces pension schemes by virtue of the loss of the additional increment on qualification for the State Pension.

Question No. 115 answered with Question No. 98.

Passport Applications

116. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if a matter regarding the criteria on issuing a passport to a person (details supplied) who changed the person’s name by deed poll will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4143/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): All passport applications are subject to the terms of the Passports Act, 2008, as amended (“the Act”). The Act provides a legal basis for the various policies and procedures that are applied by the Passport Service in the issue of passports.

Section 10 of the Act provides that a passport will issue in the name of a citizen as it appears on his/her birth certificate or naturalisation certificate. However, a name change for a passport from that which appears on a person’s birth certificate is permitted under the Act in situations such as marriage, civil partnership etc. where civil, or legal documents are available to verify this change

In cases where name change arises, other than by marriage or civil partnership etc, the Act requires evidence of the use of this new name over a two year period. In very sensitive cases there is discretion under the Act for accepting evidence of usage for less than two years.

Evidence of two years’ proof of usage such as bills/bank statements/official correspondence is required as a deed poll is not adequate evidence of the constant use of a new name. The question of what a person’s name is at any given moment in time depends upon its usage and the evidence to support the constant and sustained use of this new identity.

Where an applicant holds a Public Services card (irrespective of when it was issued), the Passport Service requires only one, instead of two, additional official document that demonstrates that the person is using the new name for two years.

Ministerial Meetings

117. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the annual meeting with the President of the United States of America has been confirmed. [4350/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): In line with past years, Government Ministers will undertake a comprehensive ‘Promote Ireland’ programme of engagements in the US over the St. Patrick’s Day period. Fourteen US cities are

to be visited by seven Government Ministers, the Attorney General and Taoiseach. This is an increase of nearly 50% on the previous year's engagements and represents one of our most ambitious programmes to the US ever.

The Taoiseach will travel to Washington, D.C., over the St. Patrick's Day period and is expected to have a range of engagements at the highest levels of the US Administration and Congress, which will provide opportunities to discuss a range of issues of mutual concern to our two Governments. The Taoiseach will also celebrate the Irish-American contribution to the US during this visit.

The programme for the St. Patrick's Day period, led by our Embassy in Washington, D.C., is currently being finalised and I expect more details to be confirmed and made public in the coming weeks.

European Council Meetings

118. Deputy Lisa Chambers asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his recent meeting at the Foreign Affairs Council in particular regarding discussions on Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3812/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There was no discussion of Brexit at the Foreign Affairs Council as it was not on the agenda; Brexit is discussed at the General Affairs Council (Article 50).

I did meet with Michel Barnier in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council. We discussed the disappointing but not unexpected outcome of the 15 January vote in the House of Commons on the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement.

Both Mr Barnier and I are in agreement that what we need from the UK is clarity on how it proposes to move forward, and ultimately what it wants to achieve. The EU could then consider any next steps it might take. The EU continues to take a united approach and I thanked Mr Barnier for his unwavering support for Ireland.

Mr Barnier and I remain firmly of the view that the only way to ensure an orderly withdrawal is to ratify the Withdrawal Agreement as endorsed by the European Council and agreed with the British Government. The European Council in December and the joint letter from Presidents Tusk and Juncker have provided reassurances with regard to the backstop. The European Council has also made clear that the Withdrawal Agreement cannot be renegotiated and that the EU will not agree to anything that changes or is inconsistent with it. The EU stands ready to work further on the Political Declaration as we look to the future relationship.

In light of the ongoing uncertainty in Britain, the European Council has asked that preparedness work at the national and EU level intensify, taking account of all possible outcomes. I have outlined Ireland's approach in this regard to Mr Barnier, including planned legislation and other contingency measures. I also thanked Mr Barnier for the Commission's continued helpful and constructive engagement in this area, and their understanding of the particular challenges faced by Ireland.

I also met with the British Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt. He updated me on the British political situation and the UK Government's perspective on possible ways forward. While expressing openness to looking carefully at any constructive proposals, I reiterated our and the EU's clear and firm position on the backstop.

Passport Applications

119. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the options available to a person (details supplied) to obtain an Irish passport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3814/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): All passport applications are subject to the provisions of the Passports Act, 2008 as amended (“the Act”). The Act provides that a person must, among other things, be an Irish citizen before a passport can be issued to him or her.

Entitlement to Irish citizenship is in turn determined by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1965, as amended, under which and in general, Irish citizenship may be obtained by birth on the island of Ireland if born prior to 01 January 2005 and after that date to parents meeting specified requirements by descent or by naturalisation.

A person born outside of Ireland to a parent who was born in Ireland and who was an Irish citizen at the time of their birth, automatically becomes an Irish citizen.

A person can become an Irish citizen if:

1. One of their grandparents was born in Ireland, or;
2. One of their parents was an Irish citizen at the time of their birth, even though they were not born in Ireland.

In these cases, a person may become an Irish citizen through Foreign Birth Registration. Once a person is entered onto the Foreign Births Register they are an Irish citizen and entitled to apply for an Irish passport.

A person may apply for Irish citizenship by way of naturalisation if they meet certain requirements as set down by the Department of Justice and Equality.

Election Monitoring Missions

120. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if applicants for the 2018 Irish election observer roster are obliged to be resident on the island of Ireland; the number of non-residents who applied for the position; the number of non-residents short-listed to join the roster; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3815/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Ireland’s election observer roster does not require volunteers to be habitually resided in Ireland. It does require all volunteers on the election observation roster to be citizens of Ireland, in order that Ireland complies with a European Union requirement that EU election observers are citizens of an EU Member State, or a citizen of Switzerland or Norway. Accordingly no questions regarding habitual residency were asked of potential volunteers and no data on habitual residency was generated for statistical or other purposes.

Northern Ireland

121. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has met or spoken with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland since the car bomb in

Derry was found on 19 January 2019 and the following threats of violence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4041/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Officials of my Department in Dublin and in the British-Irish Secretariat in Belfast, as well as colleagues in the Department of Justice and Equality, were in ongoing contact with their counterparts in the NIO following the car-bomb attack and subsequent security incidents in Derry, and both Minister Flanagan and I were kept fully briefed on developments on an ongoing basis throughout that period.

I spoke with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley, on 22 January last about the car-bomb attack and the overall security situation in Derry. We both expressed our strong condemnation of the incidents, as well as our concern for the community whose lives have been disrupted over the past number of days.

The people who carried out these attacks do not speak for the people of Derry. Since last week, we have seen a strong cross-community response in the city, from political, business and community leaders, and it is these people who are the true representatives of their community. The people of this island, North and South, have repeatedly expressed their support for the peace process and their utter rejection of violence. The Secretary of State and I are determined that the two Governments will continue to work closely together to ensure a stable and lasting peace in Northern Ireland. We will not allow those responsible for these reckless acts of terror to drag us back to the violence and conflict of the past.

Security Cooperation is a key issue of concern for the Irish and British Governments and it is discussed regularly at both bilateral Ministerial meetings and at formal meetings of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, which last met in Dublin in November. In addition, there is a close and cooperative relationship between An Garda Síochána and the PSNI on matters relating to cross border security. Dissident republican activity continues to pose a threat to public safety on both sides of the border and both the Secretary of State and I are deeply thankful for the work that the Gardaí and PSNI undertake in order to keep the community safe on an ongoing basis.

Brexit Negotiations

122. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he spoke directly with the Polish Foreign Minister regarding the suggestion of putting a time limit on the EU backstop; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4042/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have not yet had the opportunity to speak to Foreign Minister Czaputowicz since he made his comments on the backstop in a press interview. However, I addressed this issue with Minister Czaputowicz when he made this suggestion to me when we met during his visit to Dublin last December. On that occasion I made clear that a time-limit would be completely contrary to the purpose of the backstop. The backstop acts as an insurance policy for avoiding a hard border in all scenarios, and would not provide the necessary certainty if it is time-limited.

Since Minister Czaputowicz made his comments, our Ambassador in Warsaw has clarified with the Polish authorities that Poland maintains the EU's unified position. This was confirmed by the Polish Prime Minister in his recent comments in Davos. This unified EU position was set out clearly by the European Council, including the Polish Prime Minister, on 13 December and reiterated in the joint letter from President Tusk and Juncker to Prime Minister May on 14

January.

Ministerial Meetings

123. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has met the Palestinian ambassador recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4043/19]

124. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has met or spoken with the Israeli ambassador recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4044/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 123 and 124 together.

I met the Ambassador of Israel at the National Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration on Sunday, 27 January. I have also spoken to the Ambassador of Israel on the phone on a number of occasions, to receive his Government's views in relation to the Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill, and to convey my own.

I have met and spoken with the Palestinian Ambassador on a number of occasions, but have not had an opportunity to do so again since the beginning of the year.

Both the Israeli and Palestinian missions in Ireland are of course normally and routinely in contact with officials of my Department.

Ministerial Meetings

125. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has met the EU ambassadors as a group with regard to Brexit recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4045/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I last met with the EU Ambassadors as a group at a lunch in the Bulgarian Embassy in June 2018. I frequently meet individual ambassadors.

Officials from my department are in regular contact with the EU Ambassadors, both individually and as a group, including at monthly briefings organised by the Embassy of the Member State holding the EU Presidency. In addition, a senior official briefs Embassies prior to every meeting of the General Affairs Council and General Affairs Council (Article 50). Official-level briefings are also organised from time to time for non-EU Ambassadors.

The Taoiseach, my cabinet colleagues and I take every opportunity to engage with EU partners to advance Ireland's interests in the Article 50 process. I discuss Brexit collectively with my EU27 counterparts on a regular basis at the General Affairs Council (Article 50). Officials at the Permanent Representation in Brussels as well as in our Embassies are in regular contact with their EU counterparts.

In all of these contacts, I am struck by the continued solidarity and unity of our EU partners with Ireland on the issue of the backstop, and I am grateful for their continued public and private expressions of support.

Ministerial Meetings

126. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has met with or spoken to the British Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, Mr. Stephen Barclay recently; if they discussed the most recent comments by Mr. Barclay on the extension of Article 50; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4046/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Brexit is a priority issue for this Government and the Taoiseach, my cabinet colleagues and I have taken every opportunity to engage with EU partners and the UK to advance Ireland's priorities.

I have not yet had the opportunity to meet with UK Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, Stephen Barclay, though I have spoken with him by phone following his appointment late last year.

I maintain frequent contact with UK Ministers. Over the course of the last several months, I have met with Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, Dominic Raab during his time as UK Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley and David Lidington, the UK Minister of the Cabinet Office, with whom I remain in regular contact.

With regards to the extension of Article 50, the EU can only consider this following a formal request from the UK. The EU would need to carefully consider a request, and the basis on which it was made. However, Ireland would be open to such a request, as, I believe would EU partners, if it would contribute to reaching a resolution.

Ultimately, what we need from the UK is clarity on how it proposes to move forward.

Northern Ireland

127. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the meetings he has had with the DUP and Sinn Féin recently; if the Northern Ireland Assembly was discussed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4047/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The continuing absence of vital institutions of the Good Friday Agreement is a source of deep concern for the Government, as it is for the British Government. The Government will continue to do everything in its power, in accordance with its responsibilities as co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to secure the effective operation of all of its institutions.

I visited Belfast on 9 and 10 January last and held discussions with the leaders of all of the Northern Ireland political parties. These were constructive engagements with each of the party leaders and I emphasised that the two-year absence of the devolved institutions cannot be allowed to continue. There are pressing decisions and issues across a range of areas which require a functioning Executive and Assembly. Each of the party leaders confirmed to me their wish to participate in the institutions again and provided views on key concerns and issues for their parties.

Following these latest consultations, I do not underestimate the way to go in achieving a resolution, but I continue to believe that this can be achieved and that there is an increasingly urgent need for talks to begin.

Both Governments are determined to find a way beyond the current impasse to get the institutions operating again and I remain in regular contact with the Secretary of State for Northern

Ireland on how this can be pursued. Secretary of State Bradley and I will meet again this week to discuss the way forward.

The devolved institutions of the Agreement are urgently needed so that the mandated Assembly and power-sharing Executive can represent the interests of all of the people of Northern Ireland and address issues of concern, including the challenges for Northern Ireland of the UK decision to exit the European Union. The North South Ministerial Council is also essential to oversee and develop North South cooperation on matters of mutual interest, as provided for under the Good Friday Agreement.

The legislation that was brought forward by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, which temporarily suspends the requirement to call an Assembly election, underlines the requirement for all with responsibilities to do everything in their power to get them operating again.

I will continue to work with the Secretary of State and remain in regular contact with the leaders of each of the political parties, to get the necessary political process commenced to secure an agreement for a functioning Executive and Assembly, and NSMC.

Good Friday Agreement

128. Deputy Billy Kelleher asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the legal mechanisms that exist to appeal or arbitrate breaches of the Good Friday Agreement by either co-guarantor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4127/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Good Friday Agreement was concluded on 10 April 1998 following talks between the political parties in Northern Ireland and the Irish and British Governments. The Agreement consists of two elements, the Multi-Party Agreement reached between the Northern Ireland political parties and the two Governments, and an agreement between the Irish and British Governments to which the Multi-Party Agreement is annexed. The latter is referred to as the British-Irish Agreement and it is an international agreement which has been registered with the United Nations.

Under the British-Irish Agreement, the two Governments affirmed their solemn commitment to support and, where appropriate, implement the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement. Reflecting that solemn obligation, successive Irish and British Governments have worked together in partnership over the last 20 years - and continue to do so today - to secure the progressive implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and the consolidation of peace, increasing prosperity and furthering of reconciliation across these neighbouring islands, which the Agreement has enabled.

The Multi-Party Agreement provides that the two Governments can convene the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference to “promote bilateral co-operation at all levels on all matters of mutual interest within the competence of both Governments”. The Conference will keep under review the workings of the British-Irish Agreement and the machinery and institutions established thereunder. It further provides that all decisions of the Conference will be by agreement between the two Governments and that they will make determined efforts to resolve disagreements between them. Similarly, under Strand Three, the Multi-Party Agreement provides a mechanism for review where difficulties arise in relation to the institutions. Where difficulties arise which cut across the range of institutions, this review falls to the two Governments in consultation with the parties in the Assembly.

The Government looks forward to the continuation of the partnership approach with the

British Government as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, so as to secure the effective operation of all of the institutions and the full implementation of the Agreement.

Miscarriages of Justice

129. Deputy Mick Wallace asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he highlighted the case of persons (details supplied) at his attendance at the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference; if his attention has been drawn to the details of the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49795/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers.

The persons concerned were convicted of murder by joint enterprise at their trial in 2012. Their appeal against these convictions failed at the High Court in Belfast in 2012 and, in 2015, the UK Supreme Court refused to allow them to mount a further appeal.

As the Deputy is aware, the case is now being looked at by the Criminal Cases Review Commission, which is an independent public body responsible for reviewing possible miscarriages of justice in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. As the case is being reviewed, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further. It is important that the legal process is respected and is allowed time to conclude.

At the most recent meeting of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference in Dublin last November, my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, Charles Flanagan T.D., and I engaged with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley, and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, David Lidington, on matters related to security co-operation. Additionally, officials from my Department in both Dublin and Belfast monitor this case as part of their broader engagement with their Northern Irish counterparts on justice and security matters. They regularly engage with the NI Department of Justice, the Northern Ireland Office, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Criminal Justice Inspectorate, the NI Police Ombudsman, and the NI Prisoner Ombudsman.

My officials will continue to monitor developments in this case and the Government will take action as appropriate. It is regrettable that, due to the continuing absence of the Assembly and Executive, there is not a Northern Irish Justice Minister in place that we could engage with on these matters, but we will continue our efforts in this regard to the extent possible.

Military Neutrality

130. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which he can ensure and guarantee neutrality in view of recent signals from the EU that security and military union is the preferred next stage of European integration. [48436/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality is characterised by our non-participation in any military alliance. Our position as a member of the European Union in no way undermines or threatens this policy, a policy to which this Government remains fully committed. This commitment is recognised by our European partners in the legally-binding Protocols attaching to the Lisbon Treaty, which state that "The Treaty of Lisbon does not affect or prejudice Ireland's

traditional policy of military neutrality.” The Constitution provides a further safeguard on this issue where Article 29(4)(9) states “The State shall not adopt a decision taken by the European Council to establish a common defence pursuant to Article 42 of the Treaty on European Union where that common defence would include the State.” This Constitutional safeguard was inserted in 2002 at the time of the Nice Referendum and was reconfirmed in 2009 following the Lisbon Treaty Referendum.

Ireland’s military neutrality is a core element of Ireland’s foreign policy, as stated in our 2015 Foreign Policy Review “The Global Island” and reconfirmed in the White Paper on Defence. It brings with it a deep commitment to international peace and security which we work to achieve through our efforts in peacekeeping, conflict-prevention and support for human rights - in many cases alongside our European partners. While others may express different aspirations, this will continue to be our position when it comes to future enhanced cooperation through the EU’s Global Strategy and its Common Security and Defence Policy.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

131. Deputy Michael Moynihan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on recent discussions he has had within his Department on the undocumented Irish in the United States of America and the recent visa deal. [50820/18]

132. Deputy Michael Moynihan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has met with the United States of America envoy to discuss the developments on the E3 visa schemes. [50821/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 131 and 132 together.

I and my Government colleagues regret that it did not prove possible to secure passage of the Irish E3 Visa Bill in December, during the last term of the outgoing US Congress.

While this was disappointing news for all who care about the Ireland-US relationship, it is important to acknowledge the strong support received from many quarters for Ireland’s position on securing a legal pathway for Irish citizens wishing to live and work in the US, an issue of very real importance for the continued development of the Ireland-US relationship.

I believe that the backing received from the US Administration; former Speaker Paul Ryan; the Congressional Friends of Ireland; and many others, Republican and Democrat, on this Bill, is testament to the depth and strength of our transatlantic relationship.

The Taoiseach and I have prioritised the immigration issue in the US since taking office. We will therefore continue our efforts in this regard until we secure progress – both in terms of future legal immigration opportunities for Irish citizens; and in securing a pathway for those Irish who are undocumented in order to regularise their status.

Special Envoy to the US Congress on the Undocumented, John Deasy T.D., has worked closely on these issues with my Department, and in particular with our Embassy in Washington DC. This work will continue.

Providing on-going support for those Irish who are undocumented in the US is a priority. My Department, including through our Embassies and Consulates in the US, will continue to work with Irish Immigration Centres across the US, including supporting their outreach to vulnerable Irish and the undocumented. In 2018, over €3 million was allocated to 76 organisations

across the US, including the Irish Centres.

My Department maintains close ties with the US Embassy here in Dublin, and has frequent engagements and constructive discussions on a range of issues. While I have not recently met the US Chargé d’Affaires on this issue, the Secretary General of my Department and our Ambassador to the US have met separately with Mr. Smyth in the last two weeks.

I look forward to visiting the US in February, for a series of engagements with the US Administration and Congressional leaders on the full range of issues of mutual interest. I will raise immigration issues in these meetings, as I have done in all my interactions with the US Administration and US political leaders since taking office.

In addition, the Taoiseach will have a range of engagements at the highest levels of the US Administration and Congress over the St. Patrick’s Day period, and will highlight our priorities in terms of immigration in that context.

Brexit Issues

133. Deputy Joan Burton asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the opinion expressed by the Advocate General of the European Court of Justice regarding the ability of the United Kingdom to unilaterally revoke Article 50. [51850/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): On 10 December, and following the earlier opinion by its Advocate General, the European Court of Justice decided that a Member State can revoke a notification under TEU Article 50 of its intention to withdraw from the Union, unilaterally, at any point up to its withdrawal from the Union. The Court stipulated that it would have to be an unequivocal and unconditional decision, taken in accordance with the Member State’s constitutional requirements.

Were the UK to revoke its notification, the withdrawal procedure would be ended and the UK would remain an EU Member State. Any decision to do so would be a matter for the UK, and it would not be appropriate to comment on what would be an internal matter for it.

The EU and UK have agreed a Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration on the framework for the future relationship. Our focus remains on seeing this deal ratified and implemented.

Brexit Negotiations

134. Deputy Joan Burton asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on increased preparations for a hard Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53143/18]

135. Deputy Joan Burton asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the preparations that have been made to address difficulties arising from Brexit for the Government and citizens. [1703/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 134 and 135 together.

Since July 2018 the Government has made a number of key decisions on Brexit preparedness including on staffing, ICT and infrastructure at the ports and airports.

At its meeting of 11 December the Government agreed, that in light of ongoing political uncertainties and the Brexit deadline of 29 March, greater immediate priority must now be given to preparations for a no deal Brexit.

Following this, the Government published its Brexit Contingency Action Plan on 19 December which sets out detailed sectoral analyses and approaches to mitigating the impacts of a no deal Brexit. Ireland's Action Plan is consistent with and complementary to the approach being taken at EU27 level to prepare for the UK's withdrawal.

On 15 January, further discussion at Cabinet took this work forward in the important areas of transport connectivity and medicines, with Memos brought to Government by Minister Ross and Minister Harris respectively.

A number of the actions identified in a no deal scenario will still be required even in a central case scenario, including the Withdrawal Agreement with a transition period and the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland and the political declaration on the future relationship, but with a longer timeframe for implementation.

While ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement is still the Government's preferred outcome, last week the Government published the general scheme of proposed primary legislative measures required in the event of a no deal Brexit.

The draft Omnibus Bill focuses on measures protecting our citizens and supporting the economy, enterprise and jobs, particularly in key economic sectors.

Brexit Issues

136. Deputy Joan Burton asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had with the European Commission in respect of the current developments on Brexit. [3008/19]

139. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken with President Donald Tusk or Mr. Michel Barnier since 21 January 2019 regarding the statement by Prime Minister May in the House of Commons. [3856/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 and 139 together.

I most recently met with Michel Barnier on 21 January, in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels. We discussed the disappointing but not unexpected outcome of the 15 January vote in the House of Commons on the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement. Both Mr Barnier and I are in agreement that what we need from the UK is clarity on how it proposes to move forward, and ultimately what it wants to achieve. The EU could then consider any next steps it might take. The EU continues to take a united approach and I thanked Mr Barnier for his unwavering support for Ireland.

Mr Barnier and I remain firmly of the view that the only way to ensure an orderly withdrawal is to ratify the Withdrawal Agreement as endorsed by the European Council and agreed with the British Government. The European Council in December and the joint letter from Presidents Tusk and Juncker have provided reassurances with regard to the backstop. The European Council has also made clear that the Withdrawal Agreement cannot be renegotiated and that the EU will not agree to anything that changes or is inconsistent with it. The EU stands ready to work further on the Political Declaration as we look to the future relationship.

I welcomed Mr Barnier's statement to the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 16 January, in which he publicly reaffirmed his commitment to the backstop and to the Withdrawal Agreement as a whole, which represents the best possible compromise between the European Union and the United Kingdom. In our discussion, Mr Barnier and I agreed that it is the only agreement on the table that provides the essential legal guarantee to avoid a hard border in any circumstances and protect the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts.

As Mr Barnier stated in Strasbourg, an orderly Brexit remains our top priority, but we must be prepared for all scenarios. In light of the ongoing uncertainty in Britain, the European Council has asked that preparedness work at the national and EU level intensify, taking account of all possible outcomes. I have outlined Ireland's approach in this regard to Mr Barnier, including planned legislation and other contingency measures. I also thanked Mr Barnier for the Commission's continued helpful and constructive engagement in this area, and their understanding of the particular challenges faced by Ireland.

Dublin-Monaghan Bombings

137. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the outcome of recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom and with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the need for the UK Government to respond positively to the unanimous requests of Dáil Éireann regarding the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of 1974; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4184/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The implementation of the All-Party Dáil motions relating to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings is a priority for the Government, as highlighted in the Programme for a Partnership Government. The All-Party motion on the 1974 Dublin Monaghan bombings adopted by the Dáil on 25 May 2016 has, like those adopted in 2008 and 2011, been conveyed to the British Government.

These motions call on the British Government to allow access by an independent, international judicial figure to all original documents relating to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, as well as the Dublin bombings of 1972 and 1973, the bombing of Kay's Tavern in Dundalk and the murder of Seamus Ludlow.

The Government is committed to actively pursuing the implementation of these motions, and has consistently raised the issue with the British Government. I am engaged with the British Government on an ongoing basis on this issue, as are officials from my Department.

I met with Justice for the Forgotten in April last year to hear their views and update them on the Government's continuing engagement on legacy issues, including with the British Government on the Dáil motions. In addition, officials from my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality met with Justice for the Forgotten in July to hear their views on the implementation of the legacy framework provided for under the Stormont House Agreement.

My Department also facilitated an engagement in Dublin on 29 August last for the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, Judith Thompson, to hear the views of victims and survivors in this jurisdiction, including the families affected by the Dublin and Monaghan bombings and other attacks.

In relation to the Dáil motions, I have consistently underlined to the British Government that the Dáil motions represent the consensus political view in Ireland that an independent, international judicial review of all the relevant documents is required to establish the full facts of the

Dublin and Monaghan atrocities. I have also underlined that the absence of a response from the British Government is of deep concern to the Government and indeed this House, and I have emphasised the urgent need for such a response.

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

Brexit Negotiations

138. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if European Union leaders or officials on their behalf requested a change to the EU backstop; and if there have been requests from his Polish counterpart on having a five-year time limit on same. [3852/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There has been no suggestion from any of our EU partners that the Withdrawal Agreement, or the backstop which forms part of it, can or should be reopened. Rather there has been clear and unwavering solidarity on it from EU partners and institutions.

Throughout the Article 50 process they have demonstrated strong understanding, and support, for the need to address the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, to maintain the necessary conditions for North-South cooperation, to avoid a hard border, and to protect the peace process. This has not changed.

The European Council, in its conclusions of 13 December 2018, made clear that the Union stands by the Withdrawal Agreement and that it is not open for renegotiation. This position was reiterated in the exchange of letters between Prime Minister May and Presidents Tusk and Juncker on 14 January, which provided important clarifications and reassurances, but made clear that the EU is not in a position to agree to anything that is inconsistent to what has been agreed with the British Government in the Withdrawal Agreement, including on the backstop.

The Polish Foreign Minister made a suggestion on a time limit for the backstop to me during his visit to Dublin in December. On that occasion I made clear that a time-limit would not work. The backstop acts as an insurance policy to avoid a hard border in all scenarios, and a time-limit would be contrary to its purpose.

Since Foreign Minister Czaputowicz made his comments in a press interview, our Ambassador has clarified with the Polish authorities that Poland maintains the EU's unified position. This was confirmed in comments by the Polish Prime Minister in Davos.

Question No. 139 answered with Question No. 136.

Legislative Process

140. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the legislation, including heads of Bills, from his Department which has been sent to European Union institutions before its publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4250/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As provided for in the Government's Contingency Action Plan on the withdrawal of the UK from

the EU, published on 19 December 2018, at a national level, Ireland has screened all legislation currently in force to identify areas where legislative amendments will or may be required in the case of a no deal Brexit.

The General Scheme of these proposed amendments was published on 24 January 2019, as the Miscellaneous Provisions (Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 29 March 2019) Bill 2019. In relation to this proposed legislation, and Brexit Preparedness and Contingency planning more generally, the Government continues to engage with the EU institutions and other Member States to ensure a coordinated approach, where appropriate.

The Miscellaneous Provisions (Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 29 March 2019) Bill 2019 is intended to be consistent with and complementary to the steps currently underway at EU level to prepare for the UK's withdrawal, notably as regards the implementation of the European Commission's Contingency Action Plan published on 19 December 2018 and associated legislative measures. The Bill and the Parts contained within it may be updated or adjusted further in light of ongoing developments, including in respect of EU legislative measures currently under consideration and any additional measures taken collectively by the EU27 Member States, including Ireland.

Brexit Negotiations

141. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which Brexit negotiations continue to safeguard the interests of all persons on the island of Ireland, including the continued observance of the Good Friday Agreement in all aspects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4400/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Article 50 negotiations concluded in November 2018 with the publication of the Withdrawal Agreement which has been endorsed by the European Council and agreed with the British Government. An integral part of the Withdrawal Agreement is the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland which also contains the backstop provisions. The Agreement, with its backstop provisions, is the only agreement on the table that provides the essential legal guarantee to avoid a hard border in any circumstances and protect the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts.

In addition to the guarantee on avoiding a hard border in all circumstances, the Protocol contains provisions on a number of important areas for Ireland, including provision for the maintenance of the Common Travel Area, that North South cooperation can continue and develop, and that the Single Electricity Market will be maintained on the island of Ireland. It also includes commitments to ensure no diminution of rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity as set out in the Good Friday Agreement and confirms that people in Northern Ireland will continue to enjoy their rights as EU citizens. The Protocol also makes clear that these arrangements fully respect the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and the principle of consent under the Good Friday Agreement. All of this is aimed at ensuring that the impact of Brexit on the everyday lives of people, both North and South, is minimised and that the status quo on the island is protected.

The negotiations have been difficult and long, with flexibility and compromise shown on both sides. The European Council in December and the joint letter from Presidents Tusk and Juncker have provided important reassurances with regard to the backstop. They have also made clear that the Withdrawal Agreement cannot be renegotiated and that the EU will not agree to anything that changes or is inconsistent with it. We remain fully of the view that the only way to ensure an orderly withdrawal that fully protects the interests of everyone on the

island of Ireland is to ratify the Withdrawal Agreement as endorsed by the European Council and agreed with the British Government.

Brexit Issues

142. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he expects to be in a position to ensure that trade between Northern Ireland and the European Union can be facilitated notwithstanding Brexit in view of the need to ensure economic prosperity on the island of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4401/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): North-South economic and social cooperation has benefited people across the island, and supported the development of an all-island economy that has enhanced the prosperity of all. Protecting these gains is not just about ensuring frictionless trade; it is also about facilitating peoples' lives and livelihoods. Fundamentally, this is about peace, reconciliation and prosperity.

Protecting the all-island economy has been a major priority for the Government throughout the Brexit negotiations. The issue was addressed in paragraph 49 of the December 2017 EU-UK Joint Report, in the context of North-South Cooperation and protection of the Good Friday Agreement. The Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland within the Withdrawal Agreement protects the Good Friday Agreement and gains of the peace process in all its parts. This includes underpinning continuing North South Cooperation and protecting the all island economy, including by maintaining the Single Electricity Market.

North South cooperation and cross-border trade has grown significantly in the years since the Good Friday Agreement, strengthening a growing prosperity which both supports and is supported by the peace process. Underpinned by the current shared EU regulatory framework, cross-border trade at present represents the first export market for 73% of Northern Ireland's small and medium-sized companies. More than 7,000 businesses trade from Northern Ireland across the island of Ireland, supporting over 165,000 jobs.

Recent research has also shown a high degree of integration of the economies North and South, including in supply chains and trade in intermediary products. This underlines the importance of securing an outcome in the Brexit negotiations that facilitates the continuation of the all-island economy as it functions today. This objective goes beyond trade and is to protect the Good Friday agreement in all its parts and the gains of the peace process. Peace and prosperity are mutually reinforcing and cross-border trade is an important element in supporting jobs and building prosperity.

Outreach to Northern Ireland's economic and business sector continues, and my Department is facilitating North South relationship-building between business groups.

InterTradeIreland, one of the North South Implementation Bodies, helps small businesses explore new cross-border markets, develop new products, processes and services and become investor-ready. It also offers practical cross-border business funding, information, advice and support to SMEs across the island. In addition, InterTradeIreland has also developed programmes aimed at helping SMEs to plan for Brexit.

The Withdrawal Agreement remains the best option and the only agreement on the table that avoids a hard border on the island of Ireland and protects the Good Friday Agreement. Our ambition throughout these negotiations has been to ensure that the Good Friday Agreement can continue to operate in all its parts after the UK leaves the Union, and the Government is com-

mitted that the gains and benefits of peace for people North and South, and East and West, can be protected.

Brexit Issues

143. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he can continue to support the interests of the business community North and South in the context of the Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4402/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Throughout the negotiations on the Withdrawal Agreement, I, as well as officials from my Department, engaged in extensive contact with representatives from EU Member States, the Commission and Task Force, and the UK, to advance Ireland's priorities.

The Withdrawal Agreement, as agreed in November, and adopted by the European Council, is the only way to ensure an orderly withdrawal of the UK from the EU. It can provide certainty to citizens and business, North and South, as we continue our preparations for the new relationship with UK outside the EU. It puts in place a period of transition, up to December 2020, and extendable for up to one or two years, if needed, during which EU rules and regulations will continue to apply to the UK. This will allow for the negotiation of an agreement on the future relationship between the EU and the UK, which we hope will be deep and comprehensive.

At the same time, the Withdrawal Agreement, through the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, protects continuing North-South cooperation and the all-island economy while also recognising the continuation of the Common Travel Area.

It includes the backstop which provides a guarantee that there will be no hard border no matter what the outcome is to the negotiations on the future relationship, and that the existing frictionless travel and trade North South will be maintained.

Under the measures included for a backstop, should it need to be invoked, a UK-wide customs territory would apply, ensuring no tariffs or quotas, and including well established rules with regard to ensuring a level playing field. Northern Ireland would remain aligned to those rules of the Single Market that are indispensable to avoiding a hard border and protecting the all-island economy. It would provide businesses in Northern Ireland with the best of both worlds, access to the EU Single Market and the ability to trade freely with the rest of the UK.

I should be clear that the backstop acts simply as an insurance policy, which we hope will never have to be used. It remains our priority to achieve a future relationship agreement that can resolve all these issues, and obviate the need for the backstop. We are determined to quickly work towards that best possible outcome. The Political Declaration makes clear the EU and UK's shared ambition to reach an ambitious, broad, deep and flexible partnership across trade and economic cooperation, among other areas.

At the same time, as part of the Government's longstanding and intensive Brexit planning and contingency work, we are providing an array of supports and information measures to assist businesses in Ireland to respond and prepare themselves. Across three Budgets, since 2016, the Government has put in place dedicated measures and schemes for the business and agri-food sector. This includes the Future Growth Loan Scheme, a €300m fund to support strategic capital investment for a post Brexit environment by business, and €71 million to further strengthen the agriculture sector's ability to become more resilient in addressing the challenges of Brexit. Capital expenditure of €116bn over the coming decade under Project Ireland 2040 will also al-

low the State and its Agencies to properly plan major infrastructure projects, while ensuring that communities and businesses can plan ahead.

Government enterprise agencies continue to work with companies, helping them to deal with Brexit – making them more competitive, diversifying market exposure, and up-skilling teams. Both Enterprise Ireland and Inter-Trade Ireland are provided grants to businesses to help them get Brexit ready.

To better inform business and the public at large, the Government has also overseen a co-ordinated communication and outreach campaign, *Getting Ireland Brexit Ready*, through the Brexit website, social media and public events.

Overseas Development Aid

144. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the bilateral aid programme continues to assist those in most need globally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4403/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's international development cooperation programme, and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. In line with our commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, our bilateral aid programme is focused on reducing poverty and hunger, promoting inclusive and sustainable growth, and building more equitable and better systems of governance.

In additional to assistance delivered through multilateral channels, during 2017 Ireland provided over €430 million in bilateral aid which was targeted at the least developed countries of the world with Sub-Saharan Africa a priority focus. This aid is given in support of countries' development needs and through the provision of humanitarian assistance in response to emergencies and protracted crises. Final figures for bilateral aid in 2018 are being collated and will be published in the Irish Aid annual report later this year.

Our bilateral aid is delivering real and sustainable improvements in the lives of the poorest in the areas of basic health, education, agriculture, and food production. In 2018, the Overseas Development Institute, found that Ireland had the most effective support on ending extreme poverty compared to other international donors.

Ireland will continue to maintain a priority focus on those countries and people that are furthest behind and support them in making progress to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The Government committed in the Global Ireland strategy to delivering the 0.7% target for ODA by 2030. This will facilitate an increase in Ireland's future bilateral aid contribution. In order to prepare for this, a new strategy on international development is currently being finalised.

Humanitarian Aid

145. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which commitments entered into by Ireland and other countries in response to various hurricanes, volcano eruptions and other natural disasters globally are being honoured with particular reference to alleviation of starvation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4404/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): In 2017, over 95 million people were affected by disasters linked to natural hazards worldwide; over 9,000 people directly lost their lives; and economic losses from major disaster events were estimated at almost US\$335 billion. Comprehensive figures for 2018 are not yet available, but the year saw another significant number of people around the world impacted by natural disasters, notably the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia.

Climate change, together with poverty and poor environmental management, means that an increasing number of countries, in particular developing countries, are becoming increasingly vulnerable to natural disasters.

The international community is providing record levels of funding, with a coordinated response that is reaching tens of millions of people affected by natural disasters. A rapid, effective response is vital, in order to address the immediate needs of affected populations, as well as ensure a return to sustainable livelihoods, including alleviating the risk of starvation. Ireland's development programme also helps put in place sustainable food systems, so that the conditions which contribute to crises and starvation can be avoided.

Ireland's humanitarian programme leads our response to global natural disasters, working with partners in the UN, EU, the International Red Cross Movement (ICRC) and Irish and international NGOs.

Ireland has developed a deep partnership with the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA. OCHA coordinates and leads coherent and effective international responses to humanitarian crises. Amongst other funds, OCHA manages the Central Emergency Response Fund, which responds to sudden onset disasters and to under-funded crises. Ireland is a strong supporter of both mechanisms and the current chair of the OCHA donor support group, which works with the Office of the UN Humanitarian Coordinator. In 2018 OCHA has assisted millions of people affected by natural disasters around the world, including the response to Hurricane Irma in the Caribbean, drought in Afghanistan, and floods in Nigeria. During 2018, my Department hosted a Casement Lecture by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, on the theme of innovation in humanitarian financing, a contribution to the raising of awareness on new approaches to crisis response.

Ireland also works closely with the ICRC and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The IFRC is the world's largest humanitarian organisation, comprising 191 Red Cross and Red Crescent member societies, and reaches 160 million people annually through 17 million volunteers, members and staff. Ireland provided €1.85 million to the Federation in 2018 to support its co-ordination of relief operations to assist victims of natural disasters, including those affected by the earthquake and tsunami that struck Indonesia.

Ireland's NGO partners provide rapid assistance following natural disasters. For example, in response to the eruption of the Fuego Volcano in Guatemala on 3 June 2018, Ireland provided €75,000 to Plan International to assist with shelter for those affected.

As well as responding quickly and effectively in the event of a disaster, it is also important to work with countries to build up their resilience to disasters. Ireland provides core support to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction worth €0.5m to help them build capacity in Ireland's key partner countries to prepare for and manage the impact of disasters.

EU Issues

146. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and

Trade the extent to which all European countries continue to remain committed in full to the European project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4406/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government remains fully committed to Ireland's membership of the European Union. Opinion polls consistently show that this is a view shared by the vast majority of the Irish people.

While I cannot speak for other Member States, I have every confidence in the commitment of our European partners to the European project. This has been re-affirmed on many occasions.

In September 2016, the leaders of the EU27 declared that "although one country has decided to leave, the EU remains indispensable for the rest of us". They repeated their commitment to the European project in the Rome Declaration in March 2017 when they pledged that "Europe is our common future."

In building this future, leaders have said that they need to focus on the expectations of citizens and give them a vision of Europe that they can trust and support.

Each Member State has been consulting with its citizens to learn about the Europe they want. Last year, the Government hosted a series of Citizens' Dialogues on the future of Europe to engage the Irish public directly in the debate.

These consultations are expected to inform the deliberations of the Heads of State or Government at their informal meeting in Sibiu on 9 May 2019 when they will discuss priorities for the next institutional cycle, with a view to agreeing the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024.

EU Membership

147. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which countries applying for European Union membership continue to observe the *acquis communautaire*; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4407/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The EU has opened formal negotiations with two countries in the Western Balkans: Montenegro and Serbia. Both of these countries opened new negotiating chapters at their respective Accession Conferences in Brussels in December 2018. Montenegro now has 32 of 35 opened chapters, while, for Serbia, that number is 16. Further Accession Conferences will be planned, as appropriate, in order to take the process forward in the first half of 2019.

Progress has also been made in both the Republic of North Macedonia and Albania. The June 2018 Council conclusions on Enlargement set out the path towards opening accession negotiations with both countries in June 2019 subject to progress.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the commitment to advance on the European path needs to be translated urgently into comprehensive reform results on the ground.

Kosovo is at an early stage of its EU path – it is essential that greater efforts are made to build consensus across the political spectrum to advance Kosovo's European agenda and to accelerate the implementation of the required comprehensive reforms.

With regard to Turkey, Ireland has, together with our EU partners, expressed its serious concerns regarding the situation with respect to human rights, freedom of expression, rule of law, and democracy in the country. The EU still considers Turkey as a 'key partner', and it formally remains a candidate for EU membership, but given the current circumstances, the June 2018

Council conclusions on Enlargement noted that Turkey has been moving further away from the European Union, stating that accession negotiations have effectively come to a standstill and that no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing at this point in time. Neither is any further work towards the modernisation of the EU-Turkey Customs Union foreseen.

Humanitarian Aid Provision

148. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he, at European Union and United Nations levels, continues to positively influence the international community response to war and starvation in various trouble spots throughout the globe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4408/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The number and complexity of humanitarian crises globally has increased in recent years, with the UN estimating that over 130 million people are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance and protection. Conflict is the most significant driver of this increased need.

Critical to maximising Ireland's response is our central and enduring commitment to effective multilateralism, particularly through our membership of the European Union and the United Nations. Ireland is a strong contributor not just to decisions regarding the international humanitarian response to crises but also, importantly, to efforts to prevent and resolve conflict.

At the EU level, Ireland is engaging actively along with other EU Member States on issues relating to peace and security, and also in the oversight of EU development and humanitarian instruments. Last week's meeting of EU and African Union Foreign Ministers, attended by both the Tánaiste and Minister of Foreign Affairs and myself, discussed peace and security cooperation - a central pillar of the EU-AU partnership. Through the European Development Fund we are contributing to the African Peace Facility, an important source of funding for the African Union's efforts in peace and security.

Likewise, at the level of the UN Ireland is playing a central role in promoting multilateral engagement on peace and security and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. We are also promoting the UN's ability to respond effectively where crises occur. For example, Ireland is currently chairing the donor group of the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA. This agency manages the Central Emergency Response Fund, responding to sudden onset disasters and to under-funded crises. A key priority for Ireland as Chair is the protection of civilians and the upholding of international humanitarian law.

In international forums, Ireland consistently advocates for adherence to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, and calls on all parties – for example, those engaged in the Syria conflict - to fulfil their responsibility to protect civilians and to allow the safe passage of humanitarian assistance.

Ireland also continues to support efforts by the UN in keeping peace, improving human well-being and advancing human rights and the rule of law. The UN has helped to end numerous conflicts, often through actions of the Security Council - the organ with primary responsibility, under the United Nations Charter, for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Ireland has a long tradition of contributing to UN and EU peace-support missions, including in some of the world's most complex and intractable conflicts. Ireland has maintained a continuous presence in UN peace support operations since 1958, and the Government is committed to participation in peacekeeping operations as a tangible contribution to the development of global peace and security. This was illustrated by the Taoiseach's recent visit to Mali, where he met

members of the Irish Defence Forces serving with the EU Training Mission to Mali (EUTM).

Ireland's commitment to peace and security has informed our decision to seek election to a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the period 2021-22. If elected, membership of the Security Council will allow Ireland to play an even more important influential role in the international response to the needs of the most vulnerable.

International Terrorism

149. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community continues to monitor and contain the activities of organisations (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4409/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The recent attack in Nairobi reminds us of the immediate impact of radicalisation and violent extremism on civilians in many countries in the world today. I remain deeply concerned by the threat to peace and security represented by armed groups such as Boko Haram and Al Shabaab. The Government consistently condemns their brutal attacks on civilian populations, and particularly the impact of such violence on women and girls.

Ireland is working with partners to implement a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of radicalisation in both regions. The EU is engaged through political dialogue, EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions (including EUCAP Somalia, EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta and EUTM Somalia), and development and humanitarian cooperation. The Irish Defence Forces and other Irish experts have participated in many different CSDP Missions, often at a senior level - the former Director of the Irish Coast Guard will deploy to Mogadishu to take up the position of Deputy Head of Mission at EUCAP Somalia at the end of this month. Ireland's participation in these CSDP Missions allows us to contribute to international peace and security, to protect human rights, and to support conditions for sustainable development.

The EU is also actively supporting capacity building operations in the areas of maritime law enforcement and training, while in territories affected by Boko Haram, the EU has pledged €50 million in support of the Multinational Joint Taskforce which promotes regional security. The EU provides considerable support to the UN-mandated AMISOM, the African Union-led peacekeeping mission in Somalia, to combat the serious threat posed by Al-Shabaab. Through a wide variety of programmes and partnerships, the EU also supports the strengthening of Somalia's Government institutions.

Ireland works bilaterally, as an EU Member State, and with UN partners to promote peace and security in areas affected by armed groups. The Embassies of Ireland in Nairobi and Abuja actively monitor the situation on the ground, advise on humanitarian response and guide Ireland's engagement in EU and UN forums.

In addition, Ireland works with partners on our collective humanitarian response. In 2018, Ireland provided €5.5 million in humanitarian support to the Somalia and €4.8 million to the Lake Chad region. As well as this direct bilateral aid, Ireland has also contributed significantly to humanitarian support through the multilateral system and via the EU. The European Union last year provided almost €89 million to Somalia and €90 million to the Lake Chad region. Ireland is the 7th largest donor to the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund, which last year allocated €15 million to Somalia and €43 million to the Lake Chad region. With humanitarian

needs likely to remain acute throughout 2019, Irish funding will continue to target those most in need.

EU Membership

150. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the European Union continues to positively influence matters in the western Balkans with particular reference to preparations for European Union membership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4410/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The EU remains dedicated to supporting the European future of the Western Balkans. In the Council Conclusions on Enlargement which were agreed on Tuesday 26 June 2018, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to enlargement and stated that it continues to represent a strategic investment in peace, democracy, prosperity, security and stability in Europe. The Conclusions also stated that the EU is determined to strengthen and intensify its engagement at all levels to support the region's political, economic and social transformation, including through increased assistance, based on tangible progress on the rule of law, as well as on socio-economic reforms, by the countries in the region.

There is a recognition that this is not only a strategic investment in Europe's security and prosperity, but that it can also contribute greatly to the long term stability of formerly war-torn areas in that it helps create a political environment conducive to bilateral issues being resolved, as we have witnessed recently in the agreement between Athens and Skopje on the name issue.

As a demonstration of the EU's commitment, the European Commission adopted in 2018 a strategy for 'A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans'. In this Strategy, the Commission sets out clearly the actions that it will implement in the short to medium term to boost transformation efforts in the region in areas of mutual interest. These actions are set out across six flagship initiatives: strengthening the rule of law, reinforcing cooperation on security and migration and expanding the EU Energy Union into the Western Balkans, lowering roaming charges and rolling out broadband in the region. In addition, the Strategy underlines the need for the EU to be prepared to welcome new members on the condition they have met the rigorous criteria for doing so.

It should also be noted that the Commission proposal for the new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance fund (IPA III) for the 2021-2027 period, envisages a 13% increase (to €14.5 billion) compared to current funding, and also seeks to make this fund more strategic by clearly anchoring it in the context of the Western Balkans Strategy.

Over the longer-term, there is a recognition in the EU that enlargement is a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong and united Europe based on common values. A credible accession perspective is the key driver of transformation in the region as it enhances our collective integration, security, prosperity and social well-being.

Humanitarian Aid Provision

151. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which international efforts to address issues in the Horn of Africa continue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4411/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Horn of Africa is currently experiencing a period of tremendous political change and transition.

Since his appointment in April last year, the Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has pursued an ambitious programme of political, economic and social reform, on which he briefed the Taoiseach when they met in Addis Ababa in January. However, the Ethiopian reform process is complicated by a backdrop of ethnic conflict and high levels of internal displacement. More positively, Prime Minister Abiy led the process leading to an historic rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea in July 2018, after decades of conflict.

In South Sudan, President Salva Kiir signed a new peace agreement with a number of opposition groups in September 2018.

Widespread protests erupted in Sudan in December, initially against the worsening economic situation but which have since developed into calls for President Omar al-Bashir's resignation.

Al Shabaab have claimed responsibility for a recent terrorist attack in Nairobi in which 21 people were killed.

There have been a number of worrying developments in Somalia, including attacks on the UN Compound in Mogadishu and expulsion of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Somalia in January.

The region is also affected by the challenges of irregular migration, forced displacement, trafficking in human beings, and smuggling of people. Taken together, the political trajectory of the region when combined with climatic shocks, severe drought, and conflict, has escalated the scale of the humanitarian crisis in the region, with more than 24 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.

Ireland, together with its UN and EU partners, is strongly committed to and actively engaged in the Horn of Africa, through our political, development and humanitarian efforts. The EU engages in the region through political dialogue, its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions (EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta, EUCAP Somalia, and EUTM Somalia), and development and humanitarian cooperation. The former Director of the Irish Coast Guard will deploy to Mogadishu to take up the position of Deputy Head of Mission at EUCAP Somalia at the end of this month. Ireland, through the EU, also supports the efforts of the UN peace-keeping mission AMISOM to stabilise Somalia. Through regional and bilateral programmes and the Trust Fund for Africa, the EU is providing over €3 billion to the Horn of Africa (2014-2020). Ireland has pledged €15 million to the Trust Fund for Africa.

Ireland supports regional efforts in the Horn of Africa to achieve stability, normalise relations and increase regional cooperation, including through regional organisations such as the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). During his visit to Ethiopia in January 2019, the Taoiseach met with the acting Chairperson of the African Union, to discuss regional issues. During his visit to Ethiopia and Kenya in November 2017, the Tánaiste met representatives of IGAD and the African Union, and Ireland has since provided funding to IGAD to support negotiation, monitoring and evaluation of the South Sudan peace agreement and is planning to further increase engagement with the African Union in 2019. In addition, two Departmental officials are seconded to the EU mission in South Sudan.

The EU has a Special Representative to the Horn of Africa, Alex Rondos, whose mandate is to contribute to regional and international efforts to achieve lasting peace, security and develop-

ment in the region. The Tánaiste discussed EU efforts in the region with EUSR Rondos when he visited Dublin in November 2018.

In response to the multiple humanitarian crises in the region, Ireland has provided €164 million in direct humanitarian assistance to the Horn of Africa since 2012. Over €30 million in Irish funding was provided in 2018, including to UN agencies and Irish NGOs to assist them in reaching the most vulnerable. With humanitarian needs likely to remain acute throughout 2019, Ireland remains committed to providing humanitarian assistance where it is needed most in the Horn of Africa, working with partners who can ensure that such assistance is delivered in a coordinated and effective manner.

Foreign Conflicts

152. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community continues to intervene to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers at various global locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4412/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The recruitment and use of child soldiers during conflict remains a serious problem globally. Tens of thousands of children are recruited and used as soldiers in conflicts around the world. Since 2002, the Secretary-General of the United Nations has issued an annual report on children and armed conflict which lists all armed groups – both state and non-state – that recruit and use children. The most recent report, published in May 2018, indicated that children continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict in many country situations. The report also noted that in 2017, there was a large increase in the number of violations compared with the number reported for 2016.

The recruitment and use of children as soldiers is explicitly prohibited under international humanitarian law and human rights law. In 1999, the UN Security Council passed its first Resolution, UNSCR 1261, on the impact of armed conflict on children and condemned violations in that context. In the same year, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child entered into force. Article 22 of the Charter sets out a prohibition on the recruitment and direct participation in hostilities of any person under the age of 18 years.

Ever since, the Security Council has established important tools to strengthen child protection and to strengthen implementation of international standards, including the position of UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict who investigates and develops best practices to address the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Ireland remains committed to the eradication of the recruitment and use of child soldiers. In addition to the focus in our development programmes on addressing the socio-economic causes which can lead to conflict, and the recruitment of child soldiers, Ireland also supports more targeted interventions by working with organizations such as UNICEF, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and institutions such as the International Criminal Court.

Middle East Peace Process

153. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he and the international community can continue to exert pressure to bring about an amicable peace process in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [4413/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have given a high priority to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since I took up office, and have worked consistently to maintain an international focus on the issue, and support for the two state solution.

I have visited Israel and Palestine three times over the last eighteen months, holding meetings with the key interlocutors in both places, including both President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu. I was also delighted to welcome President Abbas to Ireland in September, his first visit in ten years, during which he also had good meetings with the President and the Taoiseach. These visits and meetings have allowed me to raise Ireland's priorities with pivotal decision makers, and have helped to inform my thinking on how best to support efforts to advance the broader peace process.

At present, prospects for the resumption of negotiations centre on the peace plan being developed by the United States. I have engaged with the US Middle East team to encourage this initiative, and to highlight some of the key issues which it will have to address, if it is to be successful. I have encouraged my EU colleagues to take a similar approach.

Regrettably however, the US administration has made a series of unilateral actions over the past year that have made bringing all interlocutors together for negotiations more difficult. Efforts towards peace are more likely to succeed, when attention is paid to creating the right political context for fruitful cooperation. I have conveyed this view to both US and Israeli interlocutors.

I have spent much time considering how the EU and the wider international community can productively engage and better use the resources at our disposal to influence the parties to the conflict. In December, Ireland proposed a Resolution at the UN General Assembly on a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. This resolution, which reaffirmed the long-standing and broadly agreed parameters for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, was adopted by an overwhelming majority of 156 UN states, including common EU support.

I am also convening a small gathering of Foreign Ministers in Dublin in February, to discuss the Middle East Peace Process. Ireland will work with the Palestinians, as well as supportive Arab and European participants on discussing how best to encourage a move towards a just and durable peace.

Trade Promotion

154. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which embassies abroad continue to be actively involved in the promotion of increased volumes of trade with Ireland with particular reference to the aftermath of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4414/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Embassy network plays a central role in advancing Ireland's international trade as part of Team Ireland overseas. Embassies and Consulates around the world provide vital support for Ireland's state enterprise agencies, including by supporting their strategic objectives and activities in overseas markets. The role of the Embassy in supporting Ireland's trade objectives is particularly pertinent in markets with limited or no state agency presence.

Officers of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade across the Embassy network continuously engage in economic and public diplomacy, to advance Ireland's prosperity and raise awareness of Ireland as a great place to live, study, work, visit and do business.

The Department's officers overseas engage with host country Governments and multilateral institutions on a range of trade-related issues, including market access, regulatory compliance, visas, phyto-sanitary issues, and Double Taxation Agreements.

The Embassy network also supports Irish businesses in market, by providing contacts and information, organising Ministerial visits overseas and supporting trade missions, in partnership with the state agencies.

In June 2018, the Government launched the Global Ireland initiative, which aims to double the impact and scope of Ireland's global footprint by 2025. Global Ireland's targets include enhanced global engagement, the expansion of Ireland's Embassy network and strengthening of Ireland's state agency presence overseas. Each of these measures will increase Ireland's international visibility, facilitate market diversification and intensification, and deepen bilateral relations in support of the Government's economic and political objectives, including in the context of Brexit.

To date, the Government has approved funding for 13 new Embassies and Consulates, which are either already open, or set to open during 2019 or 2020. As part of Global Ireland, in 2018 a new Embassy was opened in Wellington and a new Consulate General was opened in Vancouver. New Embassies will open in Bogotá, Santiago de Chile and Amman in 2019, and new Consulates General will open in Mumbai, Cardiff, Frankfurt and LA. In 2020, new Embassies will open in Kyiv, Manila and Rabat. The Irish Aid office in Monrovia is also being upgraded to an Embassy.

These locations have been chosen based on a range of factors, including their potential to diversify our markets, to grow trade and investment with Ireland, and to enable Irish companies to better take advantage of new opportunities.

VAT Rebates

155. Deputy Declan Breathnach asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the new online procedure for dealing with farmers who are not registered for VAT to reclaim VAT paid by them under the VAT58 system is putting undue stress on them; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that many farmers do not have access to computer systems and/or do not have broadband to conduct their business online; if he will consider continuing to accept VAT58 claims by post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3709/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that many taxpayers prefer to do their business online and at a time of their convenience. To meet that need, Revenue has in place modern, high-quality, accessible and user-friendly online services for taxpayers to manage their tax affairs at a time that best suits them. The Revenue Commissioners continues to enhance those services and, in line with their strategy to establish the use of electronic channels as the normal way of conducting tax business, a new VAT repayments facility was launched for unregistered farmers on 1 January 2019.

This new facility, which is available through both the Revenue Online Service (ROS) and My Account, is simple to use and will facilitate faster and more efficient processing of repayment claims. This new facility may also be accessed through any smartphone.

Revenue fully appreciates that not every taxpayer will be able to avail of digital services. In such circumstances, I am assured by the Revenue Commissioners that as regards the VAT repayments facility for farmers not registered for VAT, repayment claims submitted by post will continue to be accepted for the minority of farmers who have been granted an exclusion by Revenue from electronic filing. If a person considers that they qualify for an exclusion, they should set out the reasons in writing to the Revenue Commissioners and the matter will be fully considered.

Tax Collection

156. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners will examine the file of a person (details supplied) who is of the view that he or she is paying the higher rate of tax. [3716/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it has already reviewed the person's tax situation across their various income sources and is satisfied that the applied credits and rate band are correct. The person was issued with an updated tax credit certificate (TCC) on 15 January 2019 which set out the tax credits that are available to her for this year.

Revenue has confirmed that it will make direct contact with the person to explain their tax credit and rate band entitlements and answer any other queries that they might have.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

157. Deputy Marc MacSharry asked the Minister for Finance if a company (details supplied) has received to date €156 million in three tranches via the National Treasury Management Agency; if so, the reason the company received these payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3744/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): For the purposes of clarity, I believe the €156 million referred to in the Deputy's question relates to agreements to which both the National Treasury Management Agency (the "NTMA") and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (the "SBCI") are separately party. Details on these agreements are set out, as follows; however, I am advised by the NTMA that the value of these agreements is €171 million.

The NTMA, as controller and manager of the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), has made direct strategic equity investments in Finance Ireland Limited. These investments amount to €45 million in total. Finance Ireland Limited received a €30 million equity investment from the ISIF in 2016, and a further €15 million in 2018, in order to support the expansion of the company's SME and agri lending franchise.

The SBCI has entered into on-lender facility agreements with FICS Holdings (One) DAC, a subsidiary of Finance Ireland Limited. FICS Holdings (One) DAC initially received a €51 million facility from the SBCI in April 2016, to support the continued expansion of its hire purchase, leasing, working capital and agri asset finance offerings to SMEs and bring increased choice to Irish businesses. In December 2018, the SBCI announced an additional €75 million facility agreement with Finance Ireland.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

158. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the off balance sheet lending to a company (details supplied) of €420 million as per December 2017 accounts from a company; the exposure taxpayers here have to the funds in view of the fact that the bad debt provision of the company is less than 1%; his views on whether a slight downturn renders the company an unprofitable company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3745/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my response to PQ 3744/19, which sets out the agreements with Finance Ireland Limited and its subsidiary FICS Holdings (One) DAC.

I am advised that neither the National Treasury Management Agency, as controller and manager of the ISIF, nor the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland has any agreements with 'Close Bros'.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

159. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that according to the accounts of a company (details supplied) the return for taxpayers here on the high risk investment in 2019 will be less than €1 million which is less than 1% of the €156 million that went to the company; his views on whether this is value for money; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3746/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to the response to PQ 3744/19, which sets out the agreements with Finance Ireland Limited and its subsidiary FICS Holdings (One) DAC. These agreements are commercially negotiated and it would not be appropriate to disclose this commercially sensitive information.

However, I would draw the Deputy's attention to the facts, as set out in PQ 3744/19, that the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund funds are direct equity investments, whereas, the funds from the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland are lending facilities. These funds have different statutory objectives, as set out in the statutes establishing both bodies, which means a single level of return should not be expected.

Insurance Costs

160. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if alternative avenues will be examined to help reduce the cost of insurance here (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3800/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): With regard to the examination of alternative motor insurance systems, such as that in use in New Zealand as referenced in the details supplied, I would refer the Deputy to the Cost of Insurance Working Group's 2017 Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance and in particular Chapter 7.5 and Appendix 7 of that Report which deal with international comparisons.

The Report notes the use in some countries - including New Zealand and parts of Australia and Canada – of what is known as a 'no fault' system, where the State pays compensation and/or the cost of rehabilitation and the public pays for this system through taxes. The Report states that some of these models are quite complex and should to be considered in a wider context. As well as impacting upon insurance premiums, they may impact on taxation and social security

and must be considered in terms of existing constitutional, national and European requirements, e.g. the requirements of EU Motor Insurance Directives in terms of an individual's right to monetary compensation.

The Motor Report recommended that a Personal Injuries Commission (PIC) be established with a view to proposing further measures that can help reduce the cost of claims. Amongst other issues, the PIC was charged with analysing and reporting on alternative compensation and resolution models internationally, focusing on common law systems while taking account of social welfare, healthcare and related factors associated with each jurisdictions.

The second report of the PIC, under the chairmanship of former President of the High Court Justice Nicholas Kearns, was published in September 2018 and Chapter 3 includes the results of its examination of the various compensation and resolution models used in around a dozen different countries, including, in section 3.5, New Zealand. The report is available at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Second-and-Final-Report-of-the-Personal-Injuries-Commission.pdf>

The PIC concluded that it would be difficult to envisage a no-fault system such as exists in New Zealand being applied in Ireland in view of our current legal and constitutional framework. The PIC considers that there may be a European level legislative dimension to this matter with such models only operating in jurisdictions outside the continent. The PIC also notes that introducing a no-fault system model would have fundamental cost implications in terms of raising revenue in the form of direct and indirect taxation.

At a broader level, I would be cautious about the introduction of a State-backed insurance scheme in this jurisdiction generally for a number of other reasons. Such an approach could actually decrease competition in the Irish insurance market, with insurers potentially deciding to cease insuring certain types of risks if there is a view that the State will insure these risks instead, particularly lines of business which are considered to be unprofitable. This would lead to a lack of choice for those seeking cover which could ultimately mean that the cost of insurance becomes even more expensive than it is now. Also, there is no reason to believe that the State would be any better at managing risks than private insurance companies, and as a result there potentially would be a large financial exposure to the State if significant losses were incurred. Finally, any State insurance scheme would be required to comply with the same prudential rules as private companies, thereby meaning that the cost of any insurance would still have to reflect the risk involved.

In view of these factors, I am not convinced that a State-backed motor insurance scheme would be a panacea with regard to the cost or availability of insurance, either for younger drivers or other categories of consumers.

Illicit Trade

161. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Finance his plans to implement measures to assist compliant household fuel merchants facing difficulties due to the illegal importation of products resulting in a price differential caused by smuggling and the imposition of a carbon tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3827/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Solid fuel carbon tax commenced in May 2013 and the current rates per tonne of carbon dioxide emitted are €52.67, €36.67, €17.99 and €27.99 respectively for coal, peat briquettes, milled peat and other peat. Annual net receipts for solid fuel carbon tax amounted to €25.3 million in 2018. Approximately 75% of solid

fuel carbon tax yield relates to coal.

Revenue has responsibility for administering this tax and, as it does with all taxes and duties, takes a risk-focused approach in its deployment of resources on compliance activities. Solid fuel carbon tax is collected by Revenue on a self-assessment basis and compliance with the law is enforced using the full range of compliance interventions and enforcement provisions for self-assessed taxes.

Liable fuel suppliers must file a return and pay for each bi-monthly period by the last day of the following month. Where suppliers do not submit returns by the due date Revenue will issue an estimate of the tax due. The estimate is the amount of tax that Revenue will pursue if a supplier does not complete and file their return. If a taxpayer fails to pay the amount due, including any debt for which an estimate has issued, Revenue may refer the debt for enforcement action. This can include sheriff enforcement, civil proceedings through the courts or attachment of third parties. I am advised that, as of November 2018, Revenue has undertaken actions, including sheriff enforcement, civil proceedings through the courts or attachment of third parties, to enforce approximately €640,000 of solid fuel carbon tax.

Currently, there is no carbon tax on domestic solid fuel in Northern Ireland. This factor, combined with that jurisdiction's lower VAT rate on solid fuel and currency fluctuations, can give rise to significant price differentials for solid fuel between this State and Northern Ireland.

European Union Single Market constraints preclude the use of any cross-border movement controls in the administration of solid fuel carbon tax. Therefore, Revenue has no authority to stop vehicles and physically inspect loads of solid fuel. Similarly, the transport or possession of solid fuel that originated in Northern Ireland are not, in themselves, Revenue offences and Revenue's officers have no authority to challenge such transportation or possession.

As I, and my predecessor, have pointed out before, the collection of solid fuel carbon tax is heavily reliant on the regulatory regime covering the marketing, sale, distribution and burning of solid fuels in the State. This regulatory regime imposes higher environmental standards on coal in the State than applies in Northern Ireland.

The regime is operated by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and is enforced by local authorities who have powers to inspect premises and vehicles being used for the sale and distribution of solid fuel, collect samples of coal to check for adherence to environmental standards and to prosecute traders involved in selling illicit coal. The Regulations also provide for the establishment of a register of coal suppliers by the Environmental Protection Agency.

I am advised that Revenue is in contact at present with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to discuss the effectiveness of the regulatory regime for solid fuel and to explore how Revenue could support the Department to improve matters in light of continuing concerns that solid fuel sourced from Northern Ireland is getting onto the market here. I understand that contacts are ongoing with a view to undertaking a number of joint operations and to explore the scope for follow up action by Revenue in relation to persons found to be in breach of environmental regulations.

Illicit Trade in Fuel and Tobacco Products

162. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Finance his plans to implement additional measures to counteract the illicit trade in fuel, tobacco and drink products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3828/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The threat that fuel fraud and the illicit alcohol and tobacco trades pose to legitimate business, to consumers and the Exchequer is clear. I am satisfied that combatting such activity and criminality has been and continues to be a priority for Revenue.

Steps taken by Revenue to combat the illegal fuel trade include the introduction of stringent supply chain controls and reporting requirements, and a rigorous programme of enforcement action. In addition, Revenue and the UK Revenue and Customs undertook a joint initiative to introduce a new marker for use in marked fuels, from April 2015.

The industry view is that the action taken has been successful in curtailing fuel fraud. I am advised also that Revenue conducted random National Sampling Programmes in 2016 and 2017 to assess the extent of fuel laundering. The programmes each involved nearly one in ten of some 2,500 holders of auto fuel trader licences, and tests of diesel samples taken from the randomly selected traders found no evidence of the new marker in any of them. The results of this sampling are a clear indication that Revenue's actions have resulted in the near elimination of the selling of laundered products at retail level. The 2018 sampling programme was expanded to include hauliers and other businesses in the transport sector. A very small number of samples from this programme tested positive, and another sampling programme will take place this year.

Illicit trade in alcohol can occur through the diversion of untaxed alcohol on to the market, through the production of counterfeit alcohol and through smuggling from countries with lower taxes. While there has been little evidence of large-scale illegal activity, as indicated by the low value of seizures in 2017 (€0.91million) when set against the overall value of the alcohol market (€6.1billion), I am assured that Revenue remains vigilant and takes appropriate action where illicit activity is detected. This action is informed by, *inter alia*, intelligence on criminal activity and risk-based examination of commercial traffic and stock in retail premises. Key results of this activity include the seizure of almost 200,000 litres of beer, believed to be associated with diversion fraud, since September 2017; the uncovering in November 2017 of a large-scale counterfeit vodka production plant processing highly dangerous denatured industrial alcohol and the detention in June 2018 at Dublin Port of a container carrying a quantity of raw alcohol with the capacity to produce over 50,000 litres of illicit alcohol. On 16 January 2019, officers at Dublin Port seized over 11,000 litres of alcohol with a retail value of over €403,000. The smuggled alcohol, which included over 10,200 litres of blended Scotch whiskey and 800 litres of alcopops, represents a potential loss to the exchequer of over €255,000.

Revenue acts against all aspects of the illegal tobacco trade, so that the illicit products involved can be seized and those responsible for smuggling or supplying them can be prosecuted. A combination of risk analysis, profiling and intelligence, and the risk-based screening of cargo, vehicles, baggage and postal packages is used to intercept illicit products. Action after importation includes checks at retail outlets, markets and private and commercial premises. This action has delivered considerable success, with the seizure in 2018 of almost 68 million cigarettes and approximately 1,900 kilograms of tobacco. In March 2018, a joint operation between Revenue and An Garda Síochána led to the closing down of a major illicit cigarette factory in Jenkins town, County Louth. Over 20 million cigarettes and 70 tonnes of tobacco were seized at this facility, which could produce 250,000 illicit cigarettes an hour. At the end of October last, Revenue seized 7.2 million cigarettes that arrived into Dublin Port from Rotterdam. At the end of last November, Revenue seized over 8 million smuggled cigarettes that arrived into Dublin Port from Rotterdam.

I know that Revenue and An Garda Síochána collaborate closely in acting against fuel, alcohol and tobacco crime, and also cooperate closely with their counterparts in Northern Ireland, in the framework of the North-South Joint Agency Task Force. I am advised that this cooperation

plays a key role in targeting the organised crime groups responsible for much of this criminality, who operate across jurisdictions.

I am satisfied that Revenue's work against fuel fraud and the illicit alcohol and tobacco trades has delivered significant results. Revenue is, however, conscious of the resourcefulness of those involved in these forms of criminal activity and is vigilant for, and ready to respond to, any new developments in these areas. For my part, I will fully consider any additional proposals for legislative change or additional resources that may be brought forward by Revenue which would enhance its capacity to deal effectively with fraud and criminality in these areas.

VAT Rate Application

163. Deputy Mick Wallace asked the Minister for Finance if he will direct the Revenue Commissioners to defer the withdrawal of the concessionary application of the zero rate of VAT to certain food supplements until an impact study has been completed. [3848/19]

171. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Finance the rationale for applying the 23% VAT rate to food supplements; if health supplements fall under this rate; his plans to task the tax strategy group with reviewing the decision in 2019 in the context of the budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4142/19]

176. Deputy Peter Burke asked the Minister for Finance if the impact in the change of policy for tax treatment of health food products which now incur a 23% VAT will be reviewed; if he will consider requesting the Revenue Commissioners to review the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4265/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 163, 171 and 176 together.

The standard rate of VAT applies to food supplements. However, a Revenue Commissioners concession allowed the zero rate to be applied to certain types of vitamins, minerals and fish oils. Revenue has since decided to remove this concession with effect from 1 March 2019 so that all food supplements will be charged at the standard VAT rate.

It should be noted, however, that human oral medicines, including certain folic acid and other vitamin and mineral products, licensed by the Health Products Regulatory Association will continue to apply at the zero rate of VAT. Infant foods will also continue to be zero rated.

The operation of the concession became extremely problematic as a result of efforts by certain businesses in the industry to extend the concession beyond the scope permitted. Consistent challenges to Revenue guidance and decisions on the VAT rating of products gave rise to serious concerns about compliance within the industry and unfair competition between compliant and non-compliant businesses.

However, independent of Revenue's decisions on interpretation, I agreed during the recent Finance Bill to put in place a process that will conclude in the 2019 Tax Strategy Group Paper to examine some of the policy choices around the VAT treatment of food supplements.

Home Building Finance Ireland Establishment

164. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance when Home Building Finance Ireland will be fully established; when funding will be issued; when applications will be

submitted; if applications have been submitted; if so, the number and value of each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3915/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI) was incorporated on 7 December 2018, pursuant to the Home Building Finance Ireland Act 2018. The official launch of HBFI took place on 28 January 2019, with both myself and Minister Eoghan Murphy in attendance.

HBFI began accepting applications on 28 January 2019. The primary method of contact with HBFI is through its website (<https://www.hbfi.ie>) where an expression of interest can be submitted. HBFI can also be contacted through the HBFI contact email (info@hbfi.ie) or by means of telephone enquiry. As of 2:30pm on Monday 28 January, five expressions of interest had been received.

HBFI has also provided a dedicated email address for general queries and representations from Oireachtas members - oireachtas@hbfi.ie. This email is monitored regularly, and queries are responded to promptly, while observing the statutory principle of client confidentiality that is set out in the HBFI Act.

HBFI will be participating in six information events around the country, in conjunction with the Construction Industry Federation of Ireland (CIF), to ensure that their members are fully briefed in terms of HBFI and how HBFI may support their development activities.

Tax Reliefs Data

165. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance if entrepreneurial relief will be increased from a maximum of €1 million to €10 million in line with UK rules in view of the fact that Irish businesses have domiciled in the UK to take advantage of this higher rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3961/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is assumed that the Deputy is referring to the revised Entrepreneur Relief provided for in Section 597AA of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

I should say that no evidence is available to me which suggests that a significant number of Irish businesses have domiciled to the UK to take advantage of the higher lifetime CGT limit in that jurisdiction.

In general, consideration of any changes to the tax system in advance of Budget 2020 are undertaken within the annual Budgetary and Finance Bill process. The Deputy will therefore appreciate that I cannot comment on any possible changes at this time.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that based on 2016 data which is the latest available information, the provisional cost of the relief in 2016 was in the region of €20 million. Increasing the lifetime limit to €10 million is estimated to cost €47 million.

VAT Exemptions

166. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if Ireland enjoys exemptions pursuant to Article 395(1) of Directive 2006/112/EC of 28 November 2006 or derogations more generally from EU VAT rules; if so, the exemptions in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4001/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Ireland avails of the following exemptions provided for under Articles 394 and 395 of the EU VAT Directive (originally under Article 27(1) to (5) of the 1977 Sixth VAT Directive):

1. The exemption of fish supplied by fishermen to taxable persons, including buyers from outside Ireland, regardless of turnover threshold.
2. The treatment of supplies of zero-rated food products as supplies of a service when catered, resulting in the application of the 13.5% VAT rate.
3. In the case of goods made by a contractor from materials supplied by the customer, if the materials are taxable at a lower rate than the service rate applicable, this derogation allows for the value of the materials to be taxed at a rate equal to the difference between the higher and lower rates.
4. Relief from VAT to foreign taxable persons in receipt of taxable Irish services, subject to the foreign trader being registered for VAT or proving economic status.
5. Simplification arrangement for retailers, who can calculate their tax liability with reference to cash receipts rather than invoices issued.
6. A refund to non-registered farmers of the VAT charged on certain buildings and the drainage or clearing of land.
7. The application of zero-rating to fertilizers, animal feeding stuffs and seeds.
8. The two-thirds rule, which provides that a service which is normally taxable at the reduced rate, will be taxable at the rate applying to any goods provided in the course of providing that service, in certain circumstances.

Ireland also enjoys other derogations from the general VAT rules, as provided for under the VAT Directive. Articles 109 to 122 provide for the entitlement to apply the zero rate or a reduced rate of VAT to certain supplies of goods or services, where such rate was applied in a Member State prior to 1 January 1991. Ireland uses this derogation to continue to apply the zero rate to such supplies as printed books, human or oral medicines, food and children's clothes and to apply a reduced rate to such supplies as construction services, domestic fuels, general repair and maintenance services and residential housing. The full list of goods and services operating under derogated VAT rate treatment in Ireland is contained in Part 2 of Schedule 2, and Part 2B, Part 3 and Part 4 of Schedule 3 to the VAT Consolidation Act 2010.

Historical VAT rate derogation is also operated by Ireland to certain services in accordance with Article 371 of the VAT Directive, which allows the continuation of VAT exemption where those services were exempt in a Member State as at 1 January 1978. The supply of passenger transport, public water services and admissions to sporting events are exempt from VAT under this derogation.

Finally, Ireland also avails of a derogation, as provided for under Article 17 of the VAT Directive, to restrict the right to deduct VAT in respect of expenditure on passenger cars, petrol, entertainment, accommodation and food or drink.

Tax Yield

167. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Finance the performance to date of the sugar tax in terms of revenue raised versus predicted revenue and in terms of reduction in sug-

ary drinks being sold; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4005/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the provisional receipts from Sugar Sweetened Drinks Tax (SSDT) in 2018 are €16.5m. As this was a new tax, forecasting the level of receipts in advance was challenging, but based on the best available information was estimated at €30m. This assumed a commencement date of 1 April 2018. The subsequent 1 May commencement date impacted on the returns filed and payments made. The estimated yield from SSDT in 2019 is provisionally set at €35m.

Finally, the Deputy will be aware that the primary purpose of this tax is to change behaviour rather than to raise revenue. As such, the early indications are that the tax is working effectively in reducing the volume of sugar sweetened drinks being consumed in Ireland.

VAT Rate Reductions

168. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of reducing VAT to a rate of 0% on household utility bills; if this is feasible under EU rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4006/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The VAT rating of goods and services is subject to the requirements of EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply. The VAT Directive provides that Member States may apply either one or two reduced rates of VAT to certain goods and services listed in Annex III of the Directive. In addition, the Directive allows for historic VAT treatment to be maintained under certain conditions on certain goods and services not provided for in Annex III. Ireland has retained the application of the reduced rate of VAT, 13.5%, to the supply of fuel, gas, oil and electricity services for domestic use, and, under the Directive, the rate applicable to such services cannot be reduced below 12%. It is not possible, therefore, to apply a 0% rate to household utilities.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that VAT returns do not identify specific transactions or activities and therefore it is not possible to estimate the cost of reducing the VAT rate on these specific services.

Employment Investment Incentive Scheme

169. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 69 of 22 November 2018, the penalties that will be imposed on a company that issues an incorrect statement of qualification under the EII scheme; the penalties if the incorrect statement was intentional or unintentional, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4033/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In my responses to Parliamentary Questions No. 69 of 22 November 2018 and No. 77 of 23 January 2019, I set out how tax underpaid by investors as a consequence of an incorrectly issued Statement of Qualification for relief under the Employment and Investment incentive may be recovered from an investee company in certain circumstances.

I also advised that, in such circumstances, the company may be liable to penalties as provided for in Section 1077E of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. The penalty regime provided for in this section applies to all tax defaults. In summary, the regime applies a penalty commencing at 100% of the additional tax due, but reduced by a number of factors including:

Questions - Written Answers

- The behaviour of the taxpayer that gave rise to the default, i.e. whether it was Deliberate Behaviour, Careless Behaviour with Significant Consequences or Careless Behaviour without Significant Consequences.

- Whether a Qualifying Disclosure, prompted or unprompted, was made.
- Whether the taxpayer co-operated with Revenue.

Full details on penalties are set out in Chapter 5 of the Code of Practice for Revenue Audit and other Compliance Interventions. This can be found on the Revenue website at the following link:

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/self-assessment-and-self-employment/code-of-practice-and-compliance/index.aspx>.

It should be noted that where a penalty cannot be agreed with the taxpayer, Revenue advise me that they will ask the relevant Court to determine the penalty.

Revenue also advise me that without the full facts of any case, it is not possible to give a definitive answer as to the level of penalty due. I am advised, however, that it is very much in the taxpayer's interest to advise Revenue of a default, whether intentional or unintentional, in advance of the start of any form of intervention, as the taxpayer can benefit from reduced penalties and avoid being investigated with a view to a prosecution. Full details of options for a taxpayer to regularise their tax affairs are set out in Chapter 3 of the Code of Practice. The relevant options for the EII scheme include:

1. Declaring an Innocent Error

An innocent error may be corrected without penalty where the tax default was not deliberate and the taxpayer took reasonable care to comply with their tax obligations. A number of factors will be considered when deciding if a tax default will be accepted as an innocent error and they are set out in paragraph 3.3 of the Code.

2. Self-Correction

To encourage taxpayers to self-review and regularise any errors or oversights, the Code allows taxpayers to self-correct without penalty for a defined period. For the EII scheme, this period ends with the filing of the Corporation Tax return for the period in which the Statement of Qualification was issued or until the taxpayer is notified of a compliance intervention, whichever occurs earlier.

3. Qualifying Unprompted Disclosure

Taxpayers can make an unprompted qualifying disclosure before Revenue initiates an investigation or inquiry or before the issue of a letter notifying the taxpayer of the commencement of an audit. The benefits of making a qualifying unprompted disclosure include significantly reduced tax-geared penalties and that the taxpayer will not be investigated with a view to prosecution, nor will they be published for the defaults disclosed.

4. Qualifying Prompted Disclosure

Taxpayers also have the benefit of making a prompted qualifying disclosure in the period between the date of issue of the audit notification letter and the actual start of the audit. The benefits of making a qualifying prompted disclosure include reduced tax-geared penalties and that the taxpayer will not be investigated with a view to prosecution, nor will they be published for the defaults disclosed.

Motor Industry

170. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the measures he plans to implement to assist the motor trade due to the substantial drop in car sales and the increased volume of imports, in some instances with environmental impacts, particularly from Northern Ireland and Britain, and the impact on employment in the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4124/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The large scale importation of used cars from the UK during 2016 to 2018 may be due to a number of factors such as the relative weaknesses of sterling and the disparity in policies between the UK and Ireland in relation to the taxation of diesel and diesel vehicles.

My Department recognises that the large scale importation of used cars from the UK over the past number of years is undesirable from a public health perspective and also an Exchequer perspective. In this regard, my officials will bring forward options to the Tax Strategy Group later in the year to address the matter and more broadly to help Ireland meet its 2030 Climate Change targets.

Question No. 171 answered with Question No. 163.

Mortgage Interest Rates

172. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the contingencies in the event vulture funds increase the interest rate on mortgage loans significantly in excess of market rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4205/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): All mortgage or other loans which are sold or assigned to a new creditor will continue to be subject to the terms of the contract as entered into by the borrower, including the terms which provide for an adjustment to the borrowing rate.

Also, the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 provides that all the consumer protections a borrower had prior to a loan sale continue to apply after the loan sale irrespective of the regulatory status of the new creditor. Additionally, the new Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2018, which came into effect on 21 January 2019, provides that the holder of the legal title to credit, if not already subject to authorisation by the Central Bank, must now be authorised by the Central Bank as a credit servicing firm.

This Central Bank regulatory framework makes clear that the relevant Central Bank statutory codes, such as the Consumer Protection Code and where applicable the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears, will apply to residential mortgages provided to consumers irrespective of the current creditor party to that mortgage agreement. In this context there are a number of regulatory obligations which are due to the consumer. Firstly, there is an obligation to ensure that the “owner” of the mortgage acts honestly, fairly and professionally in the best interest of its customers.

Furthermore, an addendum to the Consumer Protection Code which came into effect from 1 February 2017, now requires that a regulated entity (including where applicable a credit servicing firm) must produce a summary statement of its policy for setting each variable mortgage interest rate (excluding a tracker interest rate) which, inter alia,

- (I) clearly identifies the factors which may result in changes to the variable interest rate;
- (II) clearly outlines the criteria and procedures applicable to the setting of the variable interest rate and
- (III) clearly outlines where the regulated entity applies a different approach to setting the variable interest rate for different cohorts of borrowers and the reasons for the different approach.

There is also a requirement to update this statement when the policy changes.

Furthermore, a regulated entity is also obliged, at least annually, to provide to a variable mortgage interest rate borrower (excluding a tracker interest rate mortgage), *inter alia*, a summary of other mortgage products offered by the entity which could provide savings for the personal consumer at that point in time and details of how the personal consumer can obtain information on these mortgage products. (There is also a requirement to provide a link to the relevant section of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission's website relating to switching lenders or changing mortgage type. The most recent addendum to the Consumer Protection Codes, which came into effect on 1 January 2019, further supports the mortgage switching process and, where applicable, also requires lenders to notify borrowers if savings can be made on the mortgage by moving between loan to value interest rate bands. In this context, it should also be noted that the Central Bank macro prudential loan to value and loan to income residential mortgage lending restrictions do not apply to switcher mortgages).

If a consumer is not satisfied with the way his/her lender is dealing with him/her under the terms of the contract, the consumer protection regulatory framework, the relevant legal framework or more generally, he/she can make a complaint directly to the lender pursuant to Chapter 10 of the Consumer Protection Code and if the matter cannot be satisfactorily resolved at that point the borrower can then refer the matter to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman.

Insurance Costs

173. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Finance his plans to tackle increasing insurance premiums (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4215/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland has the power to direct insurance companies on the pricing or provision of insurance products. Indeed, the EU framework for insurance expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. The provision of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered is a commercial matter for insurance companies and is based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept and adequate provisioning to meet those risks. These are considered by insurance companies on a case-by-case basis.

Motor insurers use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply. Factors include those such as the age and type of vehicle, the age of the driver, the relevant driving experience, the claims record, how the vehicle is used, and the number of drivers. Insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, prices vary across the market and consumers are free to choose. Insurance companies also price in accordance with their own past claims experience.

Notwithstanding the above, my predecessor as Minister for Finance, Mr. Michael Noonan T.D., established the Cost of Insurance Working Group in July 2016. This Working Group, now chaired by the Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Mr. Michael D'Arcy T.D., undertook an examination of the factors contributing to the increasing cost of insurance in order to identify what short, medium and long-term measures could be introduced to help reduce the cost of insurance for consumers and businesses.

The initial focus of the Working Group was the issue of rising motor insurance premiums and the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017. The Report makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, which are set out in an Action Plan.

Work is ongoing on the implementation of the recommendations by the relevant Government Departments and Agencies and there is a commitment within the Report that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on its progress. The seventh such update was published last November and shows that of the 59 separate applicable deadlines within the Action Plan set to the end of Q3 2018, 45 relate to actions which have now been completed. Substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of the nine action points categorised as “ongoing”.

Both the Report and the quarterly updates are available on the Department's website, within “The Cost of Insurance Working Group” sub-section of the main “Insurance” section.

It is envisaged that the implementation of all the recommendations cumulatively, with the appropriate levels of commitment and cooperation from all relevant stakeholders, should achieve the objectives of delivering fairer premiums for consumers and a more stable and competitive insurance market. In this regard, it should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for December 2018) indicates that private motor insurance premiums have decreased by 22.16% since peaking in July 2016. While it is accepted that premiums are still at a very high level for many people, such statistics indicate at least a greater degree of stability in the market on an overall basis.

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

Knowledge Development Box

174. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies that availed of the knowledge development box in 2018; the cost of same in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4239/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, no data in respect of 2018 will be available to Revenue until the corporation tax returns for accounting years ended in 2018 are filed, processed and analysed. I am advised by Revenue that the latest available information is from Corporation Tax returns for 2016, which indicate 11 companies claimed the Knowledge Development Box with a tax cost of €9 million. Information in respect of 2017 will be published during 2019 when returns for the year have been processed and analysed. Information in respect of 2018 will likewise be published during 2020.

Legislative Process

175. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Finance the legislation including heads of Bills from his Department which have been sent to EU institutions before their publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4249/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I set out in the following table legislation which has been sent to EU institutions for consultation purposes since 10 March 2016. The Deputy should note that some items have been consulted on after the approval by Government of the Heads, while some items will not have been consulted on until after publication of the Bill itself, as is apparent from the dates in the table.

Title of legislation	EU Institution to which the legislation was referred	Date of referral	Date of publication of the legislation
Finance Bill 2017 – Amendments to Sections 579, 579A and 590 TCA, 1997	European Commission	28 June 2017	19 October 2017
Home Building Finance Ireland Bill	European Commission	14 February 2018	14 June 2018
Insurance (Amendment) Act 2018	ECB	4 July 2018	19 June 2018
Central Bank (National Claims Information Database) Act 2018	ECB	16 July 2018	10 July 2018
Heads of Bill regarding Settlement Finality for the Miscellaneous Provisions(Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 29 March 2019) Bill 2019	European Commission	24 January 2019	24 January 2019

Question No. 176 answered with Question No. 163.

NAMA Operations

177. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance his views on the development that NAMA is involved in regarding the orders to quit for tenants living in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4305/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that NAMA does not own or control property, rather NAMA owns loans for which the properties act as security.

I am advised that the properties concerned are under the control of the court-appointed administrator of a deceased person's estate and that NAMA is a secured creditor. The Deputy will be aware that one of the primary duties of an administrator is to maximise the value of the assets

and discharge the debts of the estate. Neither I, as Minister, nor NAMA, as charge holder, can force a court-appointed administrator to take action which could impede this process, such as prohibiting the sale of estate assets or selling the assets at less than market value.

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

Carbon Tax Implementation

178. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Finance the work being carried out by his Department to address unfair and unequal probable impacts of future national policy on carbon taxation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4322/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Decisions on tax policy take place every year as part of the annual budgetary process. The Environmental Taxes paper prepared annually for the Tax Strategy Group contains analysis on the carbon tax and this helps inform subsequent budget decisions. The Tax Strategy Group papers are available to read on the Department of Finance website.

The ESRI was commissioned and has published research on the environmental, social and economic impacts of increasing the carbon tax rate and is now in the next phase of this research, which will help inform future carbon tax policy decisions.

Under a commitment contained in the National Mitigation Plan, there are also cross departmental structures to examine carbon tax policy. In addition, the Deputy will be aware that the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action is currently considering measures to tackle climate change, including in relation to the carbon tax. The final report of the Committee is expected to be published soon and this will also be taken into consideration as part of the budgetary process.

In regard to mitigation factors, there are schemes already in place to help qualifying households to keep their homes warm through the winter. These include the National Fuel Allowance under the Department of Social Protection and a variety of home energy grants for energy efficiency improvements under the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland.

Primary Medical Certificates Eligibility

179. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance the clinical guidelines and methodology used to determine whether an applicant qualifies for a primary medical certificate; the policy in place to ensure applications are dealt with on a consistent basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4342/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware of the medical criteria used to determine whether an applicant qualifies for a primary medical certificate (PMC). The PMC is issued by the relevant Senior Medical Officer in the HSE, or failing that an appeal may be made to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal. I have no role in relation to the granting or refusal of PMCs and the HSE and the Medical Board of Appeal must be independent in their clinical determinations.

I understand that my colleague, Finian McGrath T.D., Minister of State for Disability Issues, in responding to the same question asked by the Deputy, advised that the HSE will respond

directly to the Deputy in relation to how HSE personnel apply the criteria set out in the regulations and ensure a consistent approach to its application.

EU Regulations

180. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4355/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Commission Regulation (EU) No. 702/2014 of 25 June 2014, commonly known as the Agricultural Block Exemption Regulation (ABER), is the Regulation under which certain categories of State aid can be granted to the agricultural and forestry sectors.

ABER became operational on 1 July 2014 and has had direct effect in all Member States since then. This means that the ABER rules apply directly to beneficiaries in Ireland regardless of our domestic Irish law and without having to be enacted in our tax legislation. Sections 21 (income tax and corporation tax measures) and 48 (stamp duty measures) of Finance Act 2018 (No. 30 of 2018) amend the relevant domestic tax legislation to provide greater clarity for the farming sector in relation to the ABER rules.

One of the conditions imposed by the regulation is that the aid be granted to a “young farmer” which means a person who is no more than 40 years of age on the date of submitting the aid application, possesses adequate occupational skills and competences and is setting up for the first time in an agricultural holding as a head of that holding.

I am aware that concerns as to the possible detrimental effect of this measure on the inter-generational transfer of farmland have been expressed by farm representative bodies.

Officials from my Department, Revenue and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine have met with both members of the Irish Farmers Association and Macra na Feirme to discuss these concerns and work is ongoing on this matter.

Insurance Industry

181. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who were underpaid insurance compensation after Storm Ophelia and Storm Emma; the amount by which they were underpaid; if he will publish the report by his Department on the practices of insurance companies in the aftermath of extreme weather events; if legislation is ready to prohibit such actions by insurance companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4415/19]

182. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank and the Personal Injuries Assessment Board have been formally requested to report on the practice of insurance companies offering cash offers for less than the amount for which property was insured in the aftermath of extreme weather events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4416/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 181 and 182 together.

I understand that the Deputy’s queries arise from comments made in the media recently by the Minister of State at the Department of Finance, Michael D’Arcy TD. At the outset, it

is important to note that my Department does not collect the type of information being sought by the Deputy and therefore I am not in a position to answer any specific questions regarding insurance compensation after Storm Ophelia and Storm Emma.

Notwithstanding this, I understand that the Minister of State requested Department officials to carry out an analysis with regard to how insurance claims were managed in the wake of Storms Ophelia and Emma last year. This arose on foot of negative feedback the Minister of State had received personally from policyholders of delays in claims processing in relation to the storms.

As part of this review, the Minister of State and Department officials met directly with a number of the largest insurance companies operating in the State to discuss their individual responses as well as to seek information with regard to how the claims process was handled since the storms, highlighting the issues that the Minister of State had received feedback on. Meetings also took place with representatives of loss assessors and a number of insurance brokers from an area which was heavily impacted by Storm Emma. A summary was prepared following these meetings outlining an analysis of some of the points raised during the meetings. This was presented to the Minister of State for his consideration and in response he has asked that his concerns be further examined by members of the CIWG over the coming weeks.

Finally you should note that there are no proposals at present to introduce legislation on the points raised in the question.

EU Funding

183. Deputy Declan Breathnach asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the breakdown of PEACE and INTERREG funding since inception by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4264/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the PEACE and INTERREG programmes are important drivers of regional development in a cross-border context, and reflect the unique and specific circumstances on the island of Ireland. Through this EU-funded cooperation, a wide range of organisations have engaged in and benefitted from a variety of cross-border and cross-community projects throughout Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland. The programmes are managed by the Special EU Programmes Body, a North South Implementation Body established under the Good Friday Agreement.

The majority of projects supported under the PEACE and INTERREG programmes involve activities and beneficiaries on a regional basis rather than on a county basis; accordingly a detailed county breakdown is not available.

The following table shows funding awarded under PEACE since 1995 and under INTERREG since 2000, based on data available to the Special EU Programmes Body.

* Note re funding amounts:

Where both currencies are provided, they represent equivalent amounts and not separate amounts of funding. PEACE I funding amounts are only available in sterling and PEACE IV and INTERREG VA funding amounts are only available in euro.

Programme	Amount Awarded STG	Amount Awarded EUR
PEACE I (1995-1999)	£446 million	-

Programme	Amount Awarded STG	Amount Awarded EUR
PEACE II (2000-2006)	£646 million*	€989 million*
PEACE III (2007-2013)	£264 million*	€316 million*
PEACE IV (2014-2020)	-	€197 million
INTERREG IIIA (2000-2006)	£115 million*	€177 million*
INTERREG IVA (2007-2013)	£205 million*	€246 million*
INTERREG VA (2014-2020)	-	€ 253 million

Deer Culls

184. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the NPWS has investigated solutions other than culling to address the overpopulation of the Phoenix Park deer herd; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4268/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Public Works has a Deer Policy for the Phoenix Park which has been endorsed by both the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the School of Biology & Environmental Science at University College Dublin. This policy addresses all aspects of deer welfare and management of the deer herd in line with international best practice. The Phoenix Park team has long-standing experience in managing the herd of wild fallow deer at the Park.

Together with the School of Biology & Environmental Science at U.C.D., OPW has explored various approaches to population management appropriate to a wild herd including use of contraceptives and relocation of deer to other locations. These options are impractical for a number of reasons primarily because the deer are wild and there are very significant physical challenges in dealing with wild adult deer. For example, capture and transport would be extremely stressful for the animal and so, for animal welfare reasons, relocation is not considered appropriate.

Having considered the various options in detail and with reference to international best practice for management of wild herds, OPW has concluded that a cull, as undertaken on 9 January, is considered the most appropriate and humane approach to population management.

Drainage Schemes

185. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if funding will be allocated to carry out works (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3761/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is responsible for the maintenance of Arterial Drainage Schemes and catchment drainage schemes designated under the Arterial Drainage Acts of 1945 and 1995. The river channel section referred to by the Deputy forms part of the River Maine Catchment Drainage Scheme for which the OPW has maintenance responsibility.

Following the Deputy's representation, staff from OPW inspected the section of the channel referred to and found it to be in reasonable repair and condition with no major impediments to

the conveyance of the watercourse.

Scheduled maintenance to this reach of the river extending from Currans Bridge downstream as far as Maine Bridge is expected to commence in September 2019.

Construction Costs

186. Deputy Barry Cowen asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his assessment of the impact of construction inflation on the costs outlined when announcing the allocation to Departments under the National Development Plan 2018-2027; if no such assessment has been completed, when such an assessment will be completed and published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3946/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Inflation is a common occurrence across most sectors of an economy, including the construction sector. However, given the scale of the necessary increase in public capital investment, against the backdrop of continuing strong private sector investment, the mid-term review of the 2016-2021 Capital Plan published by DPER in September 2017 noted the potential for capacity pressures in the construction sector and the need for a strategic focus on addressing these.

As announced in the NDP in February 2018, a Construction Sector Group has been established to ensure regular and open dialogue between Government and the construction sector. The CSG is made up of each of the key segments of the industry along with officials from relevant Departments and Agencies. The CSG's remit includes the consideration of opportunities to introduce reforms within the sector that will help in controlling price inflation, improving efficiency and delivering value for money investment.

In particular there will be strong focus on developing initiatives to drive productivity growth in the construction sector. This will help ensure a higher level of output for a given level of resources and can assist in tempering the impact of inflation caused by capacity constraints.

My Department is preparing a report on the performance and prospects of the Irish construction sector based on the available data. That report, which I anticipate will be published in the coming weeks, will further aid in the monitoring of trends across the sector, ranging from output and investment to employment and cost inflation, so that risks and performance issues can be identified and addressed where necessary.

Garda Stations

187. Deputy Aindrias Moynihan asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when a car park will be constructed at a Garda station (details supplied); if funding has been approved for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3982/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can confirm that the Office of Public Works (OPW) received an enquiry from local Gardaí about developing the parking facilities at the Garda Station in question. A quotation for the work has been provided to Garda Estate Management (GEM) which must approve funding before the work can be scheduled by OPW for delivery. GEM has confirmed that the proposed car park remains under consideration.

Questions - Written Answers
Flood Risk Management

188. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a river in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3995/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that local maintenance and flooding issues, such as the issue identified here at Milltown Bridge, are a matter in the first instance for each Local Authority to investigate and address, and County Councils may carry out maintenance and flood mitigation works using their own resources.

The OPW operates the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme to provide funding to Local Authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation works or studies to address localised flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas. This Scheme's eligibility criteria, including a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial, are published on the OPW website. The OPW has received no application under this scheme for works in the area identified.

Dingle was assessed as one of the 300 areas believed to be at significant flood risk under the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. The CFRAM programme culminated with the launch on 3 May, 2018 of 29 flood risk management plans which proposed 118 new outline flood relief projects, in addition to 42 major projects already completed, and 33 major schemes within the existing capital works programme of the Office of Public Works (OPW).

The CFRAM Programme identified potentially viable flood relief works for Dingle that may be implemented after project-level assessment. These proposals include the provision of a storage area on the Dingle Stream upstream of the town, some defences at the downstream end of the Milltown Stream and tidal flood defences comprising of sea walls and embankment.

While the proposed scheme for Dingle is not in this first tranche of projects to be progressed, the OPW and the local authority will work closely to ensure that it will be commenced in the coming years and within the 10-year timeframe for the programme of investment.

Employment Rights

189. Deputy Jan O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if consideration is being given to extending the right to work up to 70 years of age, which now applies to public servants and employees of semi-State companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4008/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I take it that the Deputy is asking whether the provisions of the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018, which applies to public servants, can be extended to employees of commercial State bodies.

The Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 came into effect on 26 December 2018. The Act provides for an increase in the compulsory retirement age to 70, for public servants recruited prior to 1 April 2004. Under the Act, any relevant public servant who had not already reached his/her compulsory retirement age before 26 December 2018 now has a new compulsory retirement age of 70.

Most pre-2004 public servants are covered by the new Act, other than a member of the uni-

formed pension fast accrual group, such as Gardaí, Prison Officers, Fire Fighters and members of the Permanent Defence Force who, for operational reasons are required to retire early.

In my role as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I have responsibility for the terms and conditions of public servants only. As the Deputy will be aware, employees of non-commercial State bodies are public servants and they are, therefore, covered by the new Act. Employees of commercial State bodies are not public servants. The terms and conditions, including compulsory retirement age, of employees of commercial State bodies (other than the Chief Executive Officer), are generally a matter for the body concerned and I have no direct input in relation to those terms and conditions.

Capital Expenditure Programme

190. Deputy Jonathan O'Brien asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the capital projects that will be delayed or deferred across all Departments due to the cost overruns of the national children's hospital by the date on which they were due to commence; and the date to which they have been deferred in tabular form. [4152/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In my role as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform I am responsible for setting the overall capital allocations across Departments and for monitoring monthly expenditure at a Departmental level. Decisions on how and where those allocations are invested by Departments are a matter, in the first instance, for my Ministerial colleagues.

My Department is engaging with the Department of Health on the topic of the National Children's Hospital, and how the increased costs of the project will be managed within the overall agreed NDP capital allocations. To that end, the Government has decided that in relation to the 2019 increased costs, €50 million will have to be found within the existing 2019 capital allocation for the Department of Health, with the remaining €49 million to be met by reallocation from within the overall €7.3 billion capital allocation for 2019.

To put this amount into context, the 2019 capital allocation has increased by €1,325 million or just over 22% above the 2018 provisional outturn figures. The Deputy will appreciate that, even with this adjustment, all sectors will still receive substantial additional resources in 2019 to pursue their priority projects. Public investment this year will reach 3.5% of national income (GNI*) compared to an EU average in recent years of 2.7% (GDP).

My officials are currently engaging with the Department of Health on the funding requirements for the National Children's Hospital over the period to 2022. When that engagement is complete, I expect to revert to Government with proposals in relation to how the increased costs of the project will be met, within the existing agreed annual NDP ceilings.

Finally, a major capital projects tracker is available on my Department's website. The tracker sets out details of the key projects being implemented under the National Development Plan, including expected commencement dates. My Department is currently in the process of updating this projects tracker, informed by the latest information available from Departments, which information will then assist me in developing my proposals for meeting the increased costs of the National Children's Hospital within existing agreed annual NDP ceilings.

Legislative Process

191. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the legislation, including heads of Bills, from his Department that has been sent to EU institutions before its publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4254/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to confirm that no pieces of legislation, including heads of Bills, from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform have been sent to EU institutions before their publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil.

Public Service Stability Agreement

192. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the benefits to existing public service pensioners under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4306/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government have approved public service pension increases under the pension increase policy adopted for the period to end-2020 as part of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 (PSSA). The principle of pay parity underlies this pension increase policy. This means that the pay increases agreed as part of the PSSA, and legislated for in the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, are passed on to pension recipients to bring the salary on which their pension is based up to the current salary rate of those still serving, after the pay increases have been applied to serving staff. Pension recipients qualify to receive an increase if the salary on which their pension is based is lower than the current salary rate of those still serving in the same grade and on the same scale point.

Because current salary rates for serving staff are being progressively restored to the pre-FEMPI cut levels, it means that for increasing numbers of pension recipients, the salary on which their pension is based will be overtaken by the current salary rates for serving staff, with the result that these pension recipients will qualify for pension increases.

In addition to the grant of pension increases as I have described, pension recipients will also benefit from the reduction/elimination of the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) in accordance with the FEMPI Act 2015 and the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017. The changes with regards to PSPR do not form part of the PSSA, but will take place during the time period covered by the Agreement.

Public Procurement Regulations

193. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department was informed by the Department of Health that the normal procurement process for State projects was changed to a two-stage process in the case of the national children's hospital; if his attention has been drawn to the possible escalation of costs arising from the two-stage development process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4317/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Health is responsible for the management of the New Children's Hospital project including budget management, project governance, ensuring compliance with procurement rules and project appraisal in accordance with the Public Spending Code.

Government policy (through Circular 33/06) requires the use of the Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF) on all projects delivered under the Exchequer-funded element of the public capital programme. It is possible for public bodies to seek a derogation from the use of the standard forms of contract from the Government Contracts Committee for Construction (GCCC). In May 2014 the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board recommended this approach and secured a derogation. It is important to note that a derogation, where agreed, does not approve the approach or strategy of the contracting authority, but simply acknowledges that the circumstances are such as to warrant a different approach than the standard.

The budget oversight unit in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform was never informed that a two-stage procurement process could increase costs beyond the Government approved allocation for the project. In November 2018, the capital cost increase of €450m was brought to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform's attention.

Brexit Expenditure

194. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the additional State expenditures in 2019 which will be incurred by necessity to fully implement the proposed omnibus miscellaneous provisions (withdrawal of the UK from the EU on 29th March 2019) Bill in the coming weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4318/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The General Scheme of the Miscellaneous Provisions (Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 29 March 2019) Bill 2019 was published last week by my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The Bill is made up of seventeen parts relating to nine Departments. It prioritises those areas that need to be addressed urgently through primary legislation, focusing on the broad themes of protecting the citizen and supporting the economy, enterprise and jobs. The Bill is intended to be consistent with, and complementary to, the steps currently underway at EU level to prepare for the UK's withdrawal.

It is intended to publish the full text of the Omnibus Bill on 22 February 2019. The Government will work closely with all the opposition parties and Oireachtas members to seek their co-operation in ensuring that the necessary Brexit-related legislation will be concluded in a timely manner and in advance of 29 March 2019.

Land Ownership

195. Deputy Anne Rabbitte asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason landowners who farm or live along the bank of the River Shannon are being offered the opportunity to purchase land that they already live or farm on such as in a case (details supplied); the appeals mechanism for disputing maps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4338/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In line with Standing Order No. 42a, I will respond to the Deputy directly within ten working days.

Departmental Funding

196. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of emergency funding for remedial works at a centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3792/19]

198. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of emergency funding for remedial works at a centre (details supplied) in County Dublin. [3733/19]

200. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of emergency funding for remedial works at an educational centre (details supplied) in County Dublin. [3760/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 196, 198 and 200 together.

I am aware of the request for funding referred to by the Deputies. Dublin Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB) has agreed to assist the Centre with addressing these issues. Officials from my Department have been in contact with DDLETB in recent days in that respect and with a view to progressing the resolution of these issues as quickly as possible.

School Accommodation Provision

197. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a unit (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3732/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school to which the Deputy refers was granted funding under the Additional Accommodation Scheme 2017 to build 1 mainstream classroom with en-suite toilets, an Assisted User WC and 3 SET Rooms.

In July 2018, further grant approval was given to the school to build a 2-classroom SEN Base. My Department received correspondence from the school seeking clarification about the approved scope of works on 16 January 2019. This clarification has recently been provided and the school has been given approval to proceed to the planning stage.

Question No. 198 answered with Question No. 196.

Schools Building Projects Status

199. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of a school building project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3742/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's Capital Programme.

My Department is currently finalising the project brief with a view to progressing the project into the architectural planning process. The brief is expected to be completed shortly and my Department will be in further contact with the patron when this process has been completed.

Question No. 200 answered with Question No. 196.

Schools Building Projects Status

201. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for a new school building. [3767/19]

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

Under this arrangement, the ETB has appointed a Design Team for the project to design the buildings, obtain the necessary statutory planning permissions and move the project forward to construction in due course.

Teacher Secondment

202. **Deputy Charlie McConologue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason secondary school teachers who are seconded for training on the new junior cycle are required to use the nearest education centre as a starting point for travel expenses; if the situation can be reviewed in order to allow rural based teachers avail of an increased expense from their home address in view of the fact that this is the location they will be travelling from (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3778/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I understand the Deputy's question refers to Teachers seconded to education centres or associates of professional development services including the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT).

I wish to advise the Deputy that travel and subsistence payments apply to secondees to the Department's support services including secondees to the JCT, in accordance with the regulations and at rates approved from time to time by the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform.

The nature of work for secondees to the support services necessitates travel to venues/schools in the area defined in their programme of work.

The conditions governing travel & subsistence payments and the procedures to be applied are set out clearly for Education Centres who administer the payments.

The regulations provide that travel expenses are paid for officially authorised travel between either the secondees place of work and the approved destination or the employee's home and the approved destination, whichever is shorter.

In the case of Teachers seconded to Education centres, their place of work is the Education Centre.

Secondees to JCT should be aware of these provisions prior to taking up a secondment contract with the service as this information is clearly outlined in recruitment and contract documentation.

School Expulsions

203. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an expulsion can be expunged from a person's school record. [3747/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Under Section 23 of the Education Welfare Act, 2000 the board of management of a school is required to prepare a Code

of Behaviour in accordance with the Tusla (formerly the NEWB) ‘Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools’. The Code of Behaviour must specify the procedures to be followed before a student may be expelled from school. Any decisions in relation to expulsion are a matter for the board of management of a school at local level.

An appeal may be made against a decision of a board of management to expel a student from school under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998. Appeals are made to my Department and further information on the current Section 29 Appeals process is available on my Department’s website at the following link www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Appeal-against-Permanent-Exclusion-Suspension-or-Refusal-to-Enrol/

The recently enacted Education (Admission to Schools Act) 2018 provides for the amending of the current Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 by the substitution of a new Section 29. When commenced, the amended Section 29 provisions will provide that where an independent Section 29 Appeals Committee allows an appeal relating to expulsion, the appeals committee shall direct the board of management to readmit the student and remove the expulsion from the record of the student.

Schools Building Projects Status

204. Deputy Darragh O’Brien asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of a new school (details supplied) for Balbriggan, County Dublin; the stage the project is at; when construction will commence on the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3748/19]

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

Following the appointment of a replacement consultant architect, the Design Team has reviewed the previous Stage 2(b) documentation and is currently upgrading the design to ensure that the new school building is a Near Zero Energy Building (NZEB) in compliance with the 2017 amendment to Part L of the current Building Regulations.

Upon receipt and review of the Stage 2(b) submission, my Department will revert to the Board of Management regarding the progression of the project.

School Accommodation Provision

205. Deputy Ruth Coppinger asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the delivery of sufficient classrooms in a school (details supplied) for the new school year in September 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3808/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Officials at my Department are aware of the accommodation requirements of the school to which the Deputy refers and work is ongoing to ensure that there will be sufficient suitable additional accommodation available to the school for September 2019.

School Playgrounds

206. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for funding to repair its school yard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3821/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school to which the Deputy refers has submitted additional information in support of its application for funding under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme. This information is currently being assessed and a decision will issue directly to the school authority in due course.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

207. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position of a person (details supplied) on a waiting list for a specific school; and when the person will be accommodated. [3843/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The policy of my Department is to ensure that all children with special educational needs can be provided with an education appropriate to their needs.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is an independent statutory body whose functions include planning and co-ordinating the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs in conjunction with schools, families and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in making decisions in these matters. However, practical help and advice is available throughout the country from the local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist parents in identifying an appropriate educational placement and the necessary supports for the child. Contact details for SENOs is available at <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list>.

I understand that the local SENO is working with this family and that a suitable placement has been identified. If further issues arise, it is important that the parent continues to work closely with the SENO for the area.

School Staff

208. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter in respect of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3851/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

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

The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

Staffing arrangements for the 2019/20 school year are currently being finalised and will be published on my Department's website next month. At that stage, schools will be able to establish their staffing for the coming school year and submit a staffing appeal to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

209. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) in County Kildare will be funded in order to develop an autism spectrum disorder, ASD, unit; the procedure the school must undergo to be eligible for a funding stream of this nature; his plans to fund ASD units nationally in 2019, 2020 and beyond; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3904/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has a statutory function to plan and co-ordinate the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs including Autism, in consultation with the relevant education partners and the Health Service Executive (HSE). This includes the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where there is an identified need.

Since 2011, the NCSE has increased the number of special classes from 548 in 2011 to 1,459 across the country now, of which 1,196 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes. Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available by county on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie

In Co. Kildare, there are currently 4 special schools and 75 special classes in mainstream schools, including 6 ASD Early Intervention classes, 46 primary ASD classes and 15 ASD post primary ASD classes.

While it is not always possible or practical that a special class placement would be available in a child's local school, the NCSE has informed my Department that, in general, they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand in Kildare.

The NCSE identifies the need for special class and special school placements nationally on an ongoing basis, and where specialised provision is required to support children with Special Educational Needs, it is planned and established to meet that need.

My Department is aware that the establishment of special provision in some schools and communities can be challenging.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 will assist in addressing this issue in areas where the NCSE is of the opinion that there is insufficient education provision for children with special educational needs.

Section 8 of the Act, which commenced on the 3rd of December 2018, provides the Minister with a power, after a process of consultation with the 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.

As the question refers to a particular school, I have arranged for the Deputy's question to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

Broadband Service Provision

210. Deputy Anne Rabbitte asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the roll-out of broadband to a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3913/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Through the Schools Broadband Access Programme the Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for all recognised primary and post primary schools, and some 98% of schools are included in this scheme. All post-primary schools and some special schools are now included in the 100Mbps programme.

The policy of my Department is to offer the best quality connectivity to all schools in line with the technical solutions available in the market and financial constraints. Broadband capacity can vary due to geographical location and local infrastructure, and thus impact on the service that can be provided.

The school referred to by the Deputy is in the National Broadband Plan intervention area and is currently on a 12 Mbp/s wireless connection through the Schools Broadband Access Programme. The school is in year three of a three year service agreement. When this contract has expired towards the end of 2019 the school will be retendered to the Departments' framework of suppliers, and upgraded to a higher speed if possible.

Under the current primary schools programme the Department continually reviews the availability of services and upgrades schools where the opportunity arises, in line with contractual and budgetary requirements. A recent drawdown from the Framework of Providers of Broadband Services saw some 1,400 primary schools awarded download speeds of 30Mbps or greater (the baseline download speed required under the National Broadband Plan). Those schools have now been upgraded to that connectivity. This represents more than one third of all primary schools. This is a significant improvement over recent years, given that less than 100 primary schools were on those speeds in 2012. Further schools are likely to be upgraded to those speeds in 2019, through EIR's 300K Rural Deployment commitment.

The need to improve broadband connectivity to primary schools is recognised in the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, and as noted access to high speed broadband is one of the indicators identified in the Digital Strategy Action Plan. An interdepartmental working group has been established to determine how best to address broadband connectivity to primary schools in collaboration with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, in the context of the National Broadband Plan and the Intervention Strategy, and proposed industry provision.

Child Abuse

211. Deputy Willie O'Dea asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the Private Member's motion to ensure that all victims of child sex abuse whose perpetrators have been convicted can seek redress from the State, which was passed by Dáil Éireann in July 2018; the interaction that has taken place between him and the independent assessor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3925/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As part of the implementation of ECtHR Judgement in the Louise O'Keeffe case Mr Justice Iarfhlaith O'Neill, a retired High Court Judge, was appointed in November 2017 as an independent assessor to assess cases

where an individual has had an application to the ex-gratia scheme declined by the State Claims Agency - the administrators of the scheme.

Mr Justice O'Neill invited the Department to make a submission on: ‘whether the imposition of the condition which required that there had to be evidence of a prior complaint of child sexual abuse on the part of the employee in question to the school authority (or a school authority in which the employee has previously worked), to establish eligibility for a payment under the ex gratia scheme, is consistent with and a correct implementation of the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Louise O’Keefe v. Ireland’.

The submission forwarded to Mr Justice O'Neill on 27 April can be accessed on the Department’s website.

Mr Justice O'Neill subsequently provided copies of submissions received by him from solicitors representing applicants for assessment and from third parties and subsequently asked the Minister to address in particular: ‘the legal status and/or legal effect in domestic law, of decisions/determinations of the Committee of Ministers in relation to the implementation/enforcement of judgments of the ECtHR.’

The second submission on foot of this request was forwarded to Mr. Justice O'Neill on 14 September and can be accessed on the Department’s website.

Mr Justice O'Neill then received further submissions from third parties responding to the submission of 14th September and asked for further response. A further submission was sent to Mr Justice O'Neill on 21 January and that submission will be published on the Department’s website shortly.

Third Level Institutions

212. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to allow a college (details supplied) use the designation of university. [3926/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): An amendment has been proposed at the Committee Stage in the Seanad to the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Bill 2018 which would allow the college referred to in the details supplied to the Deputy’s question to use the title of university in the State.

The Department has sought legal advice from the Office of the Attorney General on the proposed amendment, including in the context of any potential wider application beyond the college in question. The Department will advise the Minister on the most appropriate response to the proposed amendment on the basis of the legal advice.

School Accommodation Provision

213. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3993/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question has recently submitted additional information in support of its application for additional school accommodation.

This information is currently being considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school

authority when this process has been completed.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

214. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) has not received a special needs assistant, SNA, in school; and if an application has been made to request a SNA. [3998/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at www.education.ie, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

In considering applications for SNA support for individual pupils, the NCSE take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

As this question relates to a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

School Accommodation Provision

215. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4020/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question has recently submitted additional information in support of its application for additional school accommodation. This information is currently being considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority when this process has been completed.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

216. Deputy Joe Carey asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application by a school (details supplied) in County Clare to provide an autism spectrum disorder, ASD, unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4039/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has a statutory function to plan and co-ordinate the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs including Autism, in consultation with the relevant education partners and the Health Service Executive (HSE). This includes the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where there is an identified need.

There are 37 special classes attached to mainstream schools in Co. Clare. Of these, 2 are ASD early intervention classes, 20 are primary ASD classes and 7 are post primary ASD classes. The number of ASD special classes in Co. Clare has increased from 5 in 2011/2012 to 29 in 2018/2019. Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available by county on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie

Schools may apply to the NCSE to open a special class where a need has been identified in their area i.e. a number of students have professional reports indicating they require the support of a special class.

The NCSE, in looking to open special classes, must take into account the present and future potential need for such classes, taking particular account of the educational needs of the children concerned. The NCSE will also take account of location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas.

In addition, the NCSE will consider:

- the school's accommodation and accessibility
- the number of special classes, if any, already in the school.

The NCSE has not currently identified the need to establish additional ASD special classes in the area referred to by the Deputy.

However, this process is ongoing, and should the NCSE identify the requirement for additional special class placements in the area it will contact schools in the area in relation to establishing an ASD special class.

Parents/Guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement, including special class placement, should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available at <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list>.

My Department continues to work with the NCSE to ensure that there is appropriate planning in place to ensure that all children who require special class placements can access such placements in schools within their communities.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

217. Deputy Ruth Coppinger asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received a report (details supplied) on the schooling needs of pupils with autism in the Dublin 7 and 15 areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4063/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am aware of the demand for additional special class and special school placements in the North Dublin area.

I have asked the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to provide my Department with a report on current and future identified need in the area so that evidence based decisions may be made on the development of the necessary placements in the area for the short, medium and longer term. The report is expected shortly.

The NCSE is continuing to work with schools, parents, NEPS, health professionals and other staff who are involved in the provision of services in the North Dublin area for children with special educational needs, to ensure that each child has a school placement appropriate to

their needs for the 2018/19 school year and beyond.

Funding for special education provision in 2018 will amount to some €1.75 billion, up 43% since 2011 and equivalent to 18.7% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training.

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 Autism attend mainstream classes, but some require the environment of a special class or special school. This decision is based on a recommendation contained within a professional assessment and in consultation with the NCSE.

Special schools funded by my Department are intended to cater for children and young persons with special educational needs from the age of 4 years until the end of the school year in which they reach their 18th year.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school.

Accordingly, the NCSE advises parents, to seek to enrol their child, by applying in writing, to the school/s of their choice as early as possible. Where parents have been unsuccessful in enrolling their child in a school, they should update their local SENo to inform the planning process.

The NCSE is responsible, through its network of Special Needs Organisers, for the development and delivery and co-ordination of education services to children with Special Educational Needs, including the establishment of special class and special school placements.

124 special schools provide specialist education for those students with the most complex special educational needs, including students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Since 2011, the NCSE has increased the number of special classes from 548 in 2011 to 1,459 across the country now, of which 1,196 are ASD special classes.

There are 37 special schools and 237 special classes attached to mainstream schools in Co. Dublin. Of these, 17 are ASD early intervention classes, 139 are primary ASD classes and 41 are post primary ASD classes. The number of ASD special classes in Co. Dublin have increased from 66 in 2011/2012 to 197 in 2018/2019. Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available on www.ncse.ie.

The NCSE is aware of emerging need from year to year, and where special provision, including special class provision, is required, it is planned and established to meet that need. This process is ongoing.

While it is not always possible or practical that a special class placement would be available in a child's local school, the NCSE has informed my Department that, in general, they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand nationally. From time to time, the Council identifies local areas where additional provision is required. In those circumstances, SENOs work with the schools and families concerned to resolve the issues involved.

My Department is aware that the establishment of special class provision in some schools

and communities can be challenging.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 when commenced will assist in addressing this issue in areas where the NCSE is of the opinion that there is insufficient education provision for children with special educational needs.

Section 8 of the Act, which commenced Monday 3rd December 2018, will provide me with a power, after a process of consultation with the 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.

School Accommodation Provision

218. Deputy Jack Chambers asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to concerns of parents of children and staff at a school (details supplied) regarding accommodation for children enrolling in the school in September 2019; the measures that will be put in place to address these concerns; if the forward planning section of his Department will engage with the school in order to address the concerns raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4069/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Officials at my Department are aware of the accommodation requirements of the school to which the Deputy refers and work is ongoing to ensure that there will be sufficient suitable additional accommodation available to the school for September 2019.

Teacher Training Provision

219. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the change to the deadline for applying to Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge resulted in some interested students missing the application deadline (details supplied); the steps taken to highlight and publicise the change well in advance; his views on whether the application deadline needs to be further extended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4070/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In November 2018, I announced a plan to have one oral Irish examination for students seeking to gain entry to the primary post graduate programmes run in the four state funded providers DCU, Maynooth University, Marino Institute of Education and Mary Immaculate College.

Until now, to apply under the post graduate entry route to primary teaching, applicants who had already satisfied the minimum entry requirements in English, Irish and Maths potentially had to do three separate Irish oral examinations. Each oral examination would have taken place on the same day as the interview at the HEIs concerned, adding considerably to the stress on candidates.

I believe the plan that the four institutions of Initial Teacher Education have put in place will streamline the process for primary teaching candidates, who will only have to do one Irish oral test as part of their application for the PME, instead of three. I believe that this will reduce anxiety and help candidates to give their best.

I also wish to draw your attention to my announcement of today in relation to the deferral of the introduction of the new minimum entry requirements for Primary Initial Teacher Educa-

tion (ITE) students starting a Professional Master of Education from September 2019 to 2020.

This deferral is for students who have commenced an undergraduate degree (as distinct from a Bachelor of Education degree) and are planning to apply for the Professional Masters of Education (PME) for entry in September 2019. This deferral means that those particular students will have to meet the new entry requirements from September 2020, instead of 2019.

I am assured that the necessary arrangements to accommodate students who didn't make the January deadline are now being put in place.

State Examinations Commission

220. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the legal controversy regarding the award of a contract for online marking by the State Examinations Commission; his plans to investigate the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4090/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The State Examinations Commission (SEC) is the statutory body with responsibility for the operation of the State Certificate Examinations. The SEC has been working on plans to move from a paper-based to an on-line marking system for the examinations. On-line marking involves examiners viewing scanned images of candidate scripts on screen, (instead of looking at the original paper version). The scripts are scanned following receipt from the examination centres and thereafter are an electronic document. On-line examination marking of scanned examination scripts is widely used by almost all examinations boards in the UK.

I am advised by the SEC that it went to the market on 22nd December 2017 in order to procure a service provider to assist in the transition to on-line marking over the five year period 2018-2022. This was a public procurement process, operated under EU and national procurement regulations, for a Script Scanning and On-line Marking Solution for the state certificate examinations with the publication of a Request for Tender (RFT) on the eTenders website and in the Official Journal of the European Union. The deadline for submission of bids was 13 February 2018. Following a period of evaluation, the SEC notified the bidders in the process of the outcome on 28 March 2018. Bidders were notified that under EU rules a formal contract could not be put in place until at least 14 days had elapsed following the date of the notification. During the standstill period the SEC was notified of a legal challenge to the procurement process brought by one of the bidders to the process.

By placing a contract at the end of the mandatory standstill period, the delivery by the SEC of on-line marking at the planned level for the 2018 examinations was achievable. However, the interruption to these plans, as a result of the legal proceedings, resulted in the SEC cancelling plans to proceed with on-line marking for the 2018 state examinations and to collapse the procurement process for pragmatic reasons. Without a clear view of the likely duration or impact of the legal proceedings the SEC made this decision in order to safeguard the delivery of the 2018 examinations, as urgent arrangements had to be made to mark all examinations in a paper format, rather than some in a digital format as had been planned.

The RFT was clear that no commitment of any kind, contractual or otherwise, existed until such time as a formal written contract had been executed by the SEC. The RFT was also clear that the SEC was within its rights to cancel the public procurement competition at any time prior to a formal written contract being put in place.

The SEC advises my Department that it rejects any assertion that there was any improper

action on the part of the Commission or its officials during the tender process and that there was full compliance with all national and EU procurement regulations in all aspects of the process, including the decision to collapse the tender on pragmatic grounds. The matter of costs in the legal case have yet to be determined by the Courts.

The SEC is satisfied that it has acted correctly and appropriately in relation to this procurement process.

In late December 2018 the SEC returned to the market for a script scanning and on-line marking solution for the 2019 examinations, and for future years.

School Catchment Areas

221. Deputy Martin Ferris asked the Minister for Education and Skills the person or body that decides the catchment area for secondary schools; and the catchment area in respect of primary schools for a school (details supplied). [4093/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The question of enrolment in individual schools, including the setting of catchment areas, is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of those schools and my Department does not seek to intervene in decisions made by schools in such matters. It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018.

My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking places. Parents have the right to choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

As the Deputy is aware the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018, which was signed into law by the President on 18 July 2018, is an important piece of legislation which will introduce a more parent-friendly, equitable and consistent approach to how school admissions policy operates for the almost 4,000 primary and post-primary schools in this country and a fair and balanced school admission process for all pupils.

School Management

222. Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice asked the Minister for Education and Skills the procedure for the removal of clergy who have not resigned or become ineligible to serve by patrons from school boards of management following diocesan changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4096/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The mechanisms under which a Board of Management member may be removed are as follows:

Section 16 of the Education Act, 1998, provides that a patron may, with the consent of the Minister, for good and valid reasons stated in writing to a member of a board of management remove that member from that office, or if satisfied that the functions of a board are not being effectively discharged, dissolve that board.

Section 7 of the Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015 - 2019 sets out the circumstances in which Board members may be removed or membership of a board of management shall cease.

As Minister I have no function within Section 16 until such time as the Patron seeks my consent under Section 16 (1). Furthermore, as Minister whilst I have a statutory role regarding the removal of a member of a Board, I have no statutory role in respect of members who cease to be members of Boards for varied reasons.

Education Grants

223. Deputy Michael Moynihan asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the non-mainstream music education bursary scheme will be available in 2019; if so, when the scheme will be open to applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4099/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department funds a number of music education organisations, both directly and through a number of initiatives including the Non-Mainstream Music Education Bursary scheme.

The Non-Mainstream Music Education Bursary is a DES funded initiative to provide additional funding to non-mainstream educational initiatives. The purpose of the scheme is to provide support by way of a cash grant, to established, smaller-scale, non-mainstream music education/community music initiatives with limited or no access to other forms of public funding. Grants are not intended for use on capital expenditure such as structural/building costs, but can be used for instruments. Award of the bursary is done based on published criteria. The scheme was first established in 2016 and continued in both 2017 and 2018.

€100,000 has been allocated for the Non-Mainstream Music Education Bursary in 2019. An announcement regarding the application process will be made soon.

Education Grants

224. Deputy Michael Moynihan asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the funding allocated to the non-mainstream music education bursary scheme in 2018 was fully allocated; if funds were not utilised, if an application for same will be considered in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4100/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department funds a number of music education organisations, both directly and through a number of initiatives including the Non-Mainstream Music Education Bursary scheme.

The Non-Mainstream Music Education Bursary is a DES funded initiative to provide additional funding to non-mainstream educational initiatives. The purpose of the scheme is to provide support by way of a cash grant, to established, smaller-scale, non-mainstream music education/community music initiatives with limited or no access to other forms of public funding. Grants are not intended for use on capital expenditure such as structural/building costs, but can be used for instruments. Award of the bursary is done based on published criteria. The scheme was first established in 2016 and continued in both 2017 and 2018.

The list of awardees of the 2018 Bursary was announced 7 June, and the full €100,000 was allocated. One awardee, who had been awarded €1,250, did not draw down the award in 2018.

Questions - Written Answers

€100,000 has been allocated for the Non-Mainstream Music Education Bursary in 2019. An announcement regarding the application process will be made soon.

The full list of successful applicants for 2018 is:

€15,000

St Agnes Community Centre, CCMA Crumlin, Dublin.

€10,000

Whitefriar Street String Project, Aungier Street, D2.

€5,000

Mayo Concert Orchestra, Castlebar Concert Band, Mayo Youth Orchestra

Kilkenny Uilleann Pipers, Co. Kilkenny

€4,500

DIT Ballymun Music Programme, Ballymun, Dublin

Inisboffin Island Development Company, County Galway

€3,350

Ballymore Eustace Concert Band, Kildare

Inishowen Childrens Autism iCARE, Buncranna, Donegal

Blanchardstown Brass Band, Swords, County Dublin

HFC Concert Band, Wexford

Naomh Brid Music, Portlaoise, Co. Laois

Barack Street Concert Band, Waterford

Carndonagh Brass Band, Co. Donegal

€3,300

Colour My Strings initiative, Moyderwell, Co. Kerry

€3,250

Kids Classicks, Dunboyne, Co. Meath

€1,250

Gleann Glass Initiative, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary

Partry Kids Choir, Claremorris, Co Mayo

Old School of Music, The Commons, Co. Tipperary CCE

Tourmakeady CCE, Co. Mayo CCE

Foilmore CCE, Cahersiveen, Co Kerry

Ballyboy CCE, Tullamore, Co Offaly

Caislean Nua CCE, Clonmel, Co Tipperary

Cavan Town CCE, Co Cavan

Tuisceart Loch Gorman CCE, Wexford

Gorey Ballyraggert CCE, Gorey, Co Wexford

Ratheneska CCE, Co Laois

Spink Comhaltas, Abbeyleix, Co Laois

Powerstown Liosronagh, Clonmel, Co Tipperary

Cahir CCE, CO Tipperary

Laois Folk Orchestra CCE, Co Laois

Mountmellick CCE, Co Laois

Ceolteoirí Cluain Tarbh, Clontark, Co Dublin

Craobh Leamchan, Lucan, Co Dublin

Craobh Osraí, Marble City Branch, Kells Co Kilkenny

Rahan CCE, Tullamore, Co Offaly.

School Accommodation

225. Deputy Eamon Scanlon asked the Minister for Education and Skills the grants available and the criteria to qualify for such grants to primary schools for the development of classrooms, multi-purpose rooms and indoor sports and recreation facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4101/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Department's Capital Programme continues to address the challenges posed by the significant bulge in pupil enrolments going through our schools. This has seen a significant expansion in the rate of provision of new school places. The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process.

The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed. In this regard, it is open to schools to submit an application to my Department for additional classroom accommodation should the school's existing accommodation not be capable of hosting additional classes. An application form is available on my Department's website.

The recent launch of Project Ireland 2040 included an announcement of a major package of investment in education for the next decade with the school building budget increasing by 70%. The National Development Plan 2018-2027 signals a gradual ramping up in capital expenditure in the schools sector over the coming years. It is intended that this will address the twin priorities of catering for demographic need while also allowing for a greater focus on refurbishment and upgrading of existing school stock to include the building and modernisation of PE facil-

ties in post-primary schools.

In addition, in terms of other Government bodies, it is open to any school to explore any funding options that may be available under the Sports Capital Programme administered by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Special Educational Needs Staff Contracts

226. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 85 of 17 January 2019 and circular 0058/2006 from his Department, if clarification will be provided regarding the area in which SNA employment contracts state that their employment is with a specific school and names the school; if redundancy payments will issue as a result of such contracts to SNAs when their employment at the school ceases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4112/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): There are supplementary panel arrangements in place to facilitate SNAs made redundant by one employer in filling SNA vacancies that may become available in another school / ETB. These arrangements were agreed between management and staff side representative bodies and are subject to annual reviews by these parties. The current SNA supplementary assignment panel arrangements for the 2018/19 school year are contained in Circular 34/2018 which can be accessed through the following link: http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0034_2018.pdf

Every eligible SNA remains on the panel for two years with a view to getting further employment. If they are not successful over that period of time in obtaining a further SNA position then they will be eligible for a redundancy payment in line with the terms set out in the SNA redundancy scheme (Circular 58/06). An SNA may choose to take the redundancy immediately or remain on the panel for up to two years. The SNA is entitled to trigger the redundancy payment anytime during the two years.

Circular 34/2018 notes that where an SNA is employed by a recognised Primary, Secondary or Community and Comprehensive School, then the SNA should be formally notified of the redundancy by the employer and relevant paperwork completed by the school management and the SNA, and forwarded onto the Department's Redundancy Unit. However, the circular also notes that in circumstances where an SNA is employed by an ETB, the provisions which currently exist to re-assign within the ETB should be completed prior to the issuing of any redundancy notification. Redundancy payments are managed directly by the ETBs.

School Staff

227. Deputy John Brassil asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a third teacher will be allocated to a school (details supplied) for the September 2019 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4149/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

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

The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

Staffing arrangements for the 2019/20 school year are currently being finalised and will be published on my Department's website next month. At that stage, schools will be able to establish their staffing for the coming school year and submit a staffing appeal to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board.

School Accommodation Provision

228. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of additional accommodation for a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4187/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department has been in contact with the school in question relating to the application for additional accommodation. The school has agreed to submit additional technical information in support of the application and this is awaited. The application can be considered further when this information has been received.

DEIS Eligibility

229. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the DEIS scheme will be expanded to additional schools in County Donegal on foot of a recent report which found a significant gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4188/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department has introduced an objective, statistics based model for assessing which schools merit inclusion in the DEIS Programme, so that all stakeholders can have confidence that we are targeting extra resources at those schools with the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage.

The key data sources used in the DEIS identification process are the DES Primary Online Database (POD) and Post-Primary Online (PPOD) Databases, and CSO data from the National Census of Population as represented in the Pobal Haase Pratschke Deprivation Index (HP Index). The HP Index combines three underlying dimensions of affluence/disadvantage, identified as Demographic Profile, Social Class Composition and Labour Market Situation, to achieve a balanced measure of relative affluence and deprivation, which evenly applies across the urban-rural continuum. Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, single parent rates, education levels, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates. This data is combined with pupil data, anonymised and aggregated to small area, to provide information on the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of individual schools. This data is applied uniformly to all schools in the country in a fair and objective way, to identify the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in each school.

The calculation of the level of disadvantage in each school is based on the socio-economic background of their pupil cohort using centrally held data as previously outlined and is not based on the location of the school but on the geographical CSO Small Areas where the pupil cohort resides.

A detailed document explaining the methodology used in the Identification process under DEIS plan 2017 is available on my Department's website at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>

DEIS Plan 2017 states that the improved data on the socio-demographic of schools resulting from the new identification model will have an impact not only on the assessment of schools for inclusion in the programme but also on the scaling of resources to allow for more graduated levels of support. This in turn allows for the ultimate objective of allocating resources to best meet the identified need of individual schools.

In order to achieve this, the current identification model needs to be as accurate as possible and this requires the use of Eircode to ensure correct inputting of addresses. Further analysis is also required to examine other variables known to be strong predictors of educational disadvantage in the context of resource allocation.

Therefore, in order to ensure the quality of the address data and conduct further analysis it is not intended to extend the DEIS programme to any further schools until this work is complete.

Third Level Funding

230. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Education and Skills his position on the future funding of third level education; if student loans will be ruled out as a means of raising funding for the sector; the details of the recent application to the European Commission to carry out a detailed economic analysis of third level education funding here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4189/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In order to build a political consensus regarding a future approach to funding the higher education sector, the then Minister for Education and Skills referred the expert group report on future funding of higher education to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills for their consideration. The Committee requested that my Department undertake an economic examination of the three policy options proposed by the expert group to assist the Committee in forming its view of the most appropriate option.

In Q4 2018, my Department applied to the European Commission Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) which provides tailor-made support to all EU countries for their institutional, administrative and growth-enhancing reforms to carry out the analysis of the three policy options identified by the Expert Group. Formal decision-making by the European Commission on projects that have been successful in obtaining support is expected by end-February 2019.

Having this evaluation undertaken through the Commission's Structural Reform Support Programme will provide the type of international expertise and analysis that would be very beneficial to a major evaluation of this nature.

If the proposal is approved by the European Commission the detailed programme of work for a comprehensive economic evaluation of the funding options identified by the Expert Group would be expected to be completed in the course of 2019. The expected timeframe for undertaking the economic evaluation and the Government's concerns regarding Irish students incurring on graduation high levels of debt for tuition fees corresponding to those currently experienced by students in the UK and the US, therefore, rule out the introduction of a student loan system during the lifetime of this Government.

My Department is working to continue re-investment in Higher Education, building on the progress made in Budgets 2017 & 2018. Overall higher education spending has increased by 17% compared to 2016 to a projected €1.76 billion in 2019. This represents an increase to the sector of €257m during the period.

Budget 2019 continued the Government's prioritisation of reinvestment in higher education. Through the budget, I secured €57million in additional current funding for the higher education sector. This is in addition to separate funding that has been provided for pay deals and pensions, amounting to an additional €41million in 2019.

Budget 2019 also announced a new Human Capital Initiative that will involve investment of €300 million in higher education over the 5 year period from 2020 to 2024, with €60m being made available in each of those years.

Teachers' Remuneration

231. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of negotiations with primary school teachers on pay equality issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4190/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. The starting salary for a new entrant teacher in 2012 was €30,702. As a result of the programme of pay restoration, the starting salary of a teacher is now €36,318 and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692. A teacher hired in September 2011 will see their salary increase from €45,200 in September 2018 to €53,062 in September 2020 under the PSSA agreement and the proposed 24 September agreement.

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

The report laid before the Oireachtas on foot of this provision by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform assesses the cost of a further change which would provide a two scale point adjustment to new entrants recruited since 2011. The total cost of such an adjustment across the public sector is of the order of €200 million, of which Education accounts for €83 million. The report also acknowledges that, during the financial crisis, there were policy changes which affected remuneration in different occupations across the public sector (including education).

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

On 24 September 2018, an agreement was reached between the Government and the public services committee of ICTU in respect of new entrant pay.

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

These restorations for new entrants have been achieved through continued engagement and

collective bargaining between the Government and the public service unions and shows the benefits that such engagement can bring.

School Services Staff

232. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the issue of pay inequality with regard to school secretaries will be addressed; if he has met with representatives in an effort to resolve pay inequality issues across the education sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4191/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I recognise the very important work done by school secretaries, and indeed by other support staff, in the running of our schools and I am grateful to them for the contribution they make to our education system. I have spoken to a number of school secretaries about their employment conditions.

Schemes were initiated in 1978 and 1979 for the employment of Clerical Officers and Care-takers in schools. The schemes were withdrawn completely in 2008.

These schemes have been superseded by the more extensive capitation grant schemes. The current grant scheme was agreed in the context of the Programme for Economic and Social Progress, published in 1991.

The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools now receive assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services under these grant schemes. It is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs. Where a school uses the grant funding for caretaking or secretarial purposes, any staff taken on to support those functions are employees of individual schools. Specific responsibility for the pay and conditions rests with the school.

On foot of a Chairman's Note to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, my Department engaged with the Unions representing school secretaries and caretakers, including through an independent arbitration process in 2015. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for staff and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 be phased in over that period. This arbitration agreement covers the period up to 31 December 2019.

The arbitration agreement was designed to be of greatest benefit to lower-paid secretaries and caretakers. For example, a Secretary or Caretaker who was paid the then minimum wage of €8.65 per hour in 2015 prior to the arbitration will, from 1 January 2019, be paid €13 per hour which is a 50% increase in that individual's hourly pay.

Following the arbitration process, grant funding used by schools to fund the salaries of ancillary staff was improved in order to enable schools to implement the arbitration outcome.

My Department has shown a willingness to engage with staff representatives as evidenced by the Chairman's Note discussions. Officials of my Department meet regularly with Forsa and other unions on a range of issues.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

233. Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe asked the Minister for Education and Skills if SNA cover will be arranged for a child (details supplied) from within the existing number of SNAs in the school. [4202/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at www.education.ie, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

In considering applications for SNA support for individual pupils, the NCSE take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

As this question relates to a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

Summer Works Scheme Eligibility

234. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding available to surface the car park at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4238/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school to which the Deputy refers may apply for the works in question under any future Summer Works Scheme. In the meantime, the school authority can use its Capitation Grant to address ongoing repairs and maintenance.

If health and safety works are identified that require immediate attention, an Emergency Works application for these works only can be submitted to my Department. The Emergency Works circular and application form are available on my Department's website.

Legislative Process

235. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the legislation, including heads of Bills, from his Department which has been sent to EU institutions before its publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4247/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department has not referred any Bills or Heads of Bills to European Institutions in the current Dail term.

Schools Building Projects Status

236. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to a submission by a group (details supplied) in County Kildare regarding the provision of an education campus; if a commitment will be reaffirmed to ensure that the

resourcing and accommodation needs will be met for September 2019; if he will engage with the group with a view to setting up a meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4293/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy will be aware, the building project referred to has been devolved for delivery to Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB).

A contractor is currently on site on the Maynooth Campus completing the external fabric of both school buildings. Separately, the process of appointing a replacement contractor to complete the works is well underway. A pre-qualification process in that respect has been completed.

Tender documents are expected to issue shortly, with a view to having a contractor on site in Quarter 2, 2019. It is fully expected that the buildings will be available for occupation prior to September 2020.

My Department received an application from the ETB, for interim accommodation, pending delivery of the new school buildings. Following a review of the application and a technical site visit to the area with the ETB, my Department considers that there is sufficient accommodation in existing KWETB buildings, in Maynooth, to cater for the schools interim needs pending the construction of the permanent accommodation. This position has been clarified to the ETB.

Summer Works Scheme

237. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when details of the summer works scheme will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4302/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The recent launch of Project Ireland 2040 included an announcement of a major package of investment in education for the next decade with the school building budget increasing by 70%. This investment will provide for the continued increase in demographics while also allowing for a greater focus on refurbishment and upgrading of existing school stock.

In this regard, I wish to advise the Deputy that I am committed to a new Summer Works Scheme which will open for applications in the coming months for projects to be delivered from Summer 2020.

Schools Building Projects Status

238. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an education campus development (details supplied) in County Cork; the position with planning permission for the project; the stage of the project; the timeline for its overall development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4304/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school building project for the schools referred to by the Deputy will be delivered under the Department's Design & Build programme. The project involves the delivery of a post primary school and two primary schools on a greenfield site.

The project is currently at advanced architectural planning which includes the preparation of the planning application. The Design & Build Project Management Team is now proceeding

to finalise the planning application for submission to Cork County Council which is due to be lodged in February.

The project will need to secure the necessary statutory approvals before proceeding to tender and construction stages. Based on the current project programme, the anticipated handover of the schools is scheduled for late Quarter 4 of 2020.

Schools Building Projects Status

239. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of school building works for an area (details supplied) in County Cork. [4309/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school building project for the school campus referred to by the Deputy will be delivered under the Department's Design & Build programme.

The project is currently at advanced architectural planning which includes the preparation of the planning application. The Design & Build Project Management Team is now proceeding to finalise the planning application for submission to Cork County Council which is due to be lodged in February.

The project will need to secure the necessary statutory approvals before proceeding to tender and construction stages. Based on the current project programme, the anticipated handover of the schools accommodation is scheduled for late Quarter 4 of 2020.

School Accommodation

240. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the works necessary for the phase I and phase II additional accommodation and improvement works at a school (details supplied) have now been approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4323/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm that my Department has been in contact with the school in question relating to its application for additional accommodation. The school has been advised that it is my Department's intention to undertake a site visit to the school and that my Department will be in further contact with the school in this regard.

Schools Building Projects Status

241. Deputy Paul Kehoe asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a new school building for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4343/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question submitted an application for major capital funding to my Department to construct a new school.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Government recently announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows

nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

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

While the announcement did not include a new post primary school for the Wexford town area (which is located in the Wexford school planning area), the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular will have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

Given the need to meet demographic growth, the delivery of new schools, together with extension projects identified by my Department's 6 year construction programme to meet future demand, will remain the focus of my Department's budget for the coming years.

State Examinations

242. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason registration for external candidates for the leaving certificate is not open on the website of the State Examinations Commission in view of the fact that the closing date is 7 February 2019; if his attention has been drawn to the concern this is causing students and parents; and if there will be an extension for students in view of the delay in opening registration. [4344/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

Minor Works Scheme

243. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 115 of 6 December 2018, the reason an application by a school (details supplied) was not approved; the further detailed analysis required in the case; if the matter will be expedited prior to the estimated timeframe of 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4357/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, the Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is designed to allow schools, on a devolved funding basis, to carry out necessary improvement and refurbishment works that will upgrade existing school facilities. Under the 2016-2017, almost €117 million has been approved to date under the Summer Works Scheme, in respect of over 940 school projects in categories 1 - 9. Details of the successful school applicants are published on my Department's website www.education.ie.

The remaining 347 applications under Category 10 (External Works e.g. upgrade and resurfacing of yards and car parking etc.) have an estimated costing of over €30m. Given the scale of costs involved, more detailed analysis of these applications is required to determine the pathway forward. It is intended to undertake this analysis in 2019 with a view to enabling

approved applications proceed in 2020.

Schools Facilities

244. Deputy Willie Penrose asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to expedite an application by a school (details supplied) for AFD facilities and a science room; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4396/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that funding has been approved for the provision of an SEN Base and a Science Laboratory, *inter alia*, at the school to which the Deputy refers. Longford Westmeath Education & Training Board (LWETB) has been notified accordingly.

As the project has been devolved for delivery to LWETB, it is a matter for that ETB to advance the project.

School Accommodation

245. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will be made on an application by a school (details supplied) in County Kerry for additional accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4419/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that a building project for this school is in the process of being devolved for delivery to Kerry Education and Training Board (KETB).

The first step in this process is the execution of a Service Level Agreement between my Department and KETB and this is being arranged. Thereafter, the ETB will procure a Design Team for the project to design the buildings, obtain the necessary statutory planning permissions and move the project onward to construction in due course.

Road Traffic Accidents Data

246. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of accidents at roundabouts (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3706/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): You will appreciate that I, as Minister for Justice and Equality, have no role in relation to the collation of road traffic collision data, which is the responsibility of An Garda Síochána. However, to be of assistance, I have asked An Garda Síochána for a report on the matter.

An Garda Síochána has provided the following table, which shows the number of road traffic collisions in the Kerry Division, where the collision ‘location type’ was a roundabout. The data covers the period from January 2016 to December 2018 and is broken down into annual statistics, as follows:

Accident type	2016	2017	2018	Total
Material Dam-age Collisions	35	43	47	125

Accident type	2016	2017	2018	Total
Non-Serious Collisions	0	2	4	6
Serious Injury Collisions	0	0	0	0
Fatal Collisions	0	0	0	0
Total	35	45	51	131

* An Garda Síochána advises that all figures provided are provisional, operational and subject to change and are correct as of 25 January 2019.

I am further advised by An Garda Síochána that the data is not recorded in such a way as to easily differentiate the geographic location of each roundabout comprehended by these statistics. To do so would involve significant research, which would not be justified due to the disproportionate amount of Garda time required.

Citizenship Applications

247. Deputy Anne Rabbitte asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the criteria for applying for citizenship; the associated cost of same; if there are concessions for old age pensioners such as a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4234/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The fees to be paid by an applicant for a certificate of naturalisation are governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 569 of 2011). The application fee, stipulated at €175, is payable on application for a certificate of naturalisation and a certification fee is payable on the issue of a certificate of naturalisation. The standard certification fee is set at €950, while a reduced fee of €200 applies in the case of an application made on behalf of a minor or in certain cases where the application is made by a widow, widower or surviving civil partner of an Irish citizen. In the case of recognised refugees and stateless persons the certification fee is nil.

There is no provision in the Regulations for the discretionary waiver or reduction of fees, or for differing fees to apply to different nationalities, or based on length of residency. While the operation of the Act is kept under review, there are no plans to amend the fees as they are comparable with other jurisdictions.

The standard fees payable by an applicant are designed to reflect the effort and cost involved in processing applications for a certificate of naturalisation. The Deputy will be aware that formal citizenship ceremonies have been introduced at no extra cost to applicants. These have been universally well received by participants as the ceremonies provide a sense of dignity and occasion that serves to underscore the importance to both the State and the applicant of the granting of Irish citizenship.

Visa Applications

248. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the type of visa a non-EEA citizen can apply for to visit Ireland in the case of an Irish citizen who is getting married to a non-EEA citizen in their country; if they should apply for the visa before they are married; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3715/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I understand that the Deputy wishes to refer to Filipino nationals. I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that Filipino nationals, including those married to Irish citizens living abroad, are required to obtain a visa in order to travel to Ireland. In circumstances where the applicant is visiting, the person concerned may apply for a ‘Visit Family/Friend’ visa if they intend to visit family or friends or for a ‘Visit Tourist’ visa if they wish to do so without visiting family or friends. Prospective applicants for these types of visas are advised to make their application three months before their intended travel to Ireland.

The INIS website (www.inis.gov.ie) contains comprehensive guidelines to assist the applicant with the application process. It should, however, be noted that the information contained on the website is intended to provide guidance only and does not limit the discretion of the Visa Officer in dealing with individual applications. The onus rests at all times with the applicant to satisfy the Visa Officer that any visa sought should be granted.

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

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

Prison Accommodation

249. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that on 4 July 2018 there were 314 prisoners detained in Cork prison which has a capacity for 296 and a peak capacity of 310; if he was informed of these emergency circumstances; his views on whether the prison is safe for both staff and prisoners in cases in which the peak capacity is breached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3718/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that Cork Prison is the main committal prison for male prisoners from the counties of Cork, Kerry and Waterford. My officials in the Irish Prison Service have informed me that the current operational capacity figure for the Prison is 296 and that in 2018 the average daily population figure was 288.

The prison system is, of course, subject to peaks and troughs. Numbers can be particularly high when Courts are at their busiest, giving rise to a high number of committals. While there were 314 prisoners in Cork Prison on 4 July 2018, through a combination of temporary and full release and transfers to other prisons, my officials in the Irish Prison Service reduced this number over the following week to 288 prisoners on 11 July 2018.

It has to be acknowledged that the Irish Prison Service does not have the option of refusing committals and is required by law to accept all prisoners into their custody who have been committed to prison by the Courts. The Irish Prison Service therefore has no control over the numbers committed to custody at any given time.

Where the number of prisoners exceeds the maximum capacity in any prison, my officials make every effort to deal with this through a combination of inter-prison transfers and structured Temporary Release, as happened in Cork Prison on this occasion. Decisions in relation

to temporary release are considered on a case by case basis and the safety of the public is paramount when those decisions are made.

However, where it is not possible to reduce the capacity of a given prison in this manner, prisons may be required to operate in excess of their official bed capacity. Every effort is made by the Irish Prison Service to ensure that this requirement is limited in duration.

Garda Deployment

250. Deputy Mary Lou McDonald asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí stationed in Santry Garda station in each of the past ten years in tabular form. [3782/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, the manner in which the resources of the Garda Síochána are deployed is solely a matter for the Garda Commissioner and his management team and I, as Minister, have no direct role in this regard.

Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I can assure the Deputy that local Garda management in the areas referred to remains resolute in its determination to act against all forms of criminal activity and will work with these communities to prevent and detect crime.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,400 Garda recruits have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, including 800 trainees who passed out from the college during 2018.

The Government has increased the budget for An Garda Síochána to €1.76 billion for 2019, which includes provision for the recruitment of up to 800 Gardaí this year. The Commissioner has now informed me that he plans to recruit a total of 600 trainee Gardaí in 2019 and 600 Garda Civilian Staff. This Garda Staff recruitment will allow the Commissioner to redeploy a further 500 fully trained Gardaí from administrative duties to frontline policing in 2019.

I believe that the injection of this large number of experienced officers into the field, along with the new recruits, will be really beneficial in terms of protecting communities. This and ongoing recruitment will clearly provide the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí to deliver a visible effective and responsive policing service to communities across all Garda Divisions including the D.M.R. North Division.

Santry Garda Station is in the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) North Division. The Garda strength of the DMR North Division from 2009 to 31 December 2018 as provided by the Garda Commissioner is available on my Department's website through the following link. http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and%20Station_2009_to_30_December_2018.xlsx/Files/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and%20Station_2009_to_30_December_2018.xlsx

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

Garda Stations

251. Deputy Willie O'Dea asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will consider the provision of a new Garda station for the Castletroy and Annacotty suburb of Limerick city (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3788/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation for 2019 of €1.76 billion. This represents an increase of over 6% over the initial allocation for 2018.

Very significant capital investment is also being made in An Garda Síochána, including investment of €342 million in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021 to enable; investment of €46 million in the Garda Fleet over the same period; as well as considerable capital investment in addressing the deficiencies in the Garda estate. This investment is in support of the Government's commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime.

The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána, to ensure that their best possible use. This includes responsibility for the formulation of proposals in relation to the opening and closing of Garda stations, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities.

In that regard, I would recall that the Programme for a Partnership Government included a commitment for a review of Garda districts and dispersement of resources. The resulting report of the Garda Síochána Inspectorate entitled "Policing with Local Communities", which was submitted to me as Minister by the Policing Authority and published in December 2018, also finds that the responsibility for decisions on boundaries and dispersement of Garda resources – including the number, type and location of Garda stations - should rest with the Garda Commissioner, as is currently the case.

I understand from the Garda authorities that Castletroy, the area referred to by the Deputy, is located on the N7 Limerick – Dublin road and that there are three existing Garda stations between 5 and 10 kilometres away (Henry Street Garda station, Roxboro Road Garda station and Castleconnell Garda station). I understand that in addition, a weekly Garda Clinic is run on campus at the University of Limerick by Community Policing members based in the Henry Street District, to cater for student requirements (currently held on Wednesdays, from 13:00 -14.30).

I am informed by the Garda authorities of a range of other ongoing engagements, for instance the Community Policing Coordinator for Limerick and members of Community Policing sit on the Community Liaison Committee which allows for representatives from the University, Student Services, local residents associations and the Local Authority to engage regularly in relation to campus and community related matters.

The Garda authorities further advise me that thefts from cars and burglaries in the area are specifically targeted by Operation Disruption. This operation also involves active patrolling of the area by plain clothes Gardaí in unmarked Garda vehicles. I understand that Gardaí allocated to Henry Street station are also tasked with performing Mandatory Intoxication checkpoints in Castletroy. Finally, the headquarters of the Divisional Specialised Units including Detective, Special Branch, Traffic Corps and Drug Unit are located only approximately 5 km from Castletroy.

In these circumstances, I am informed that the Garda do not propose a new station in Castletroy at the present time.

Garda Policing Plans

252. Deputy Frank O'Rourke asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the redundancy programme for An Garda Síochána as recommended by the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland will be implemented in 2019; if so, the details of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3799/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, on 18 December 2018 the Government endorsed the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland and accepted all 157 key recommendations contained within the report. On 18 December 2018 I also published a four year high level plan, ‘A Policing Service for the Future’, which sets out the approach to implementation which will be overseen by a dedicated Programme Office in the Department of the Taoiseach, as recommended in the Commission’s report.

One of the recommendations proposes the development of a highly targeted once-off severance option for management in An Garda Síochána to deploy. As set out in the implementation plan, this matter is being considered by the Garda Commissioner in conjunction with my Department and the Department of Expenditure and Reform. As per the Government Decision of the 18 December, I intend to return to Government with a proposal for a limited severance programme to support policing reform in An Garda Síochána before the end of March.

Naturalisation Applications

253. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an application for naturalisation will be reconsidered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3801/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory conditions for naturalisation prescribed in the Act. The statutory residence conditions are that the applicant must have a period of 1 year’s continuous residence in the State immediately before the date of application and, during the 8 years immediately preceding that period, have had a further total residence amounting to 4 years (in the case of an application based on being the spouse or civil partner of an Irish citizen the Act reduces this further period to 2 years during the preceding 4 years).

Where an applicant is found to be non-resident or whose permission to remain in the State is out of date for substantial periods of time such periods will not be reckonable for the purposes of satisfying the statutory residency conditions for naturalisation stipulated in the Act. This is of particular importance with regard to the requirement to have 1 year’s continuous residence in the State immediately prior to the date of application, and may also mean the requirement of total residence is not met.

I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the application for naturalisation in respect of the person referred to by the Deputy

will be reviewed if written confirmation from her Immigration Officer is supplied outlining the reason for the gap in her Permission to Remain stamp. All non-EEA nationals are required to keep their permission to remain in the State up to date at all times, and to have such permission registered. Failure to do so may adversely affect an application for a certificate of naturalisation

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

Departmental Data

254. Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of injury warrants issued historically by his Department and-or the Irish Prison Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3870/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department does not issue Injury Warrants. I understand that matters relating to Injury Warrants come within the responsibility of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

255. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will liaise with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to ensure that an official bus stop is put in place at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3919/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): In January of 2018, the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department published a call for expressions of interest in the national press for premises to meet the increasing demand for accommodation for persons in the protection process (asylum seekers).

This call sought expressions of interest from parties who may be interested in providing accommodation and related services on an urgent and emergency basis. This was issued in response to the urgent and unforeseen demand for accommodation and related services from those persons arriving in the state seeking international protection.

The criteria against which the Department assessed the offers of accommodation were availability, standard of property, ability to provide communal social spaces for residents, ability to cater at mealtimes and proximity to various other services.

Following the call for expressions of interest in January 2018, the Temple Spa Hotel was offered to the Department and the premises was opened as an accommodation centre on the 30th April 2018 with a contracted capacity of 80 persons.

It should be noted that these premises were offered voluntarily to the Department by individual contractors across the country; the locations involved reflect that fact, rather than any specific choice made by the Department.

To ensure the residents have access to transport, RIA ensured this formed the basis of the contractual agreement. Currently, a bus service is provided from the centre to Moate and back

on a daily basis and in addition a bus goes from the centre to Athlone and back twice a week.

I would like to note that the centre was opened on an emergency and time-limited basis.

In order to meet the accommodation needs of asylum seekers in the longer term, the Department has recently commenced a public procurement exercise under which public tenders for the provision of accommodation and ancillary services to persons in the protection process, by way of the independent living model, will be advertised. This process is scheduled to continue throughout 2019 and is due for completion in 2020. This will be delivered via a series of regional competitions to cover the entire State.

Garda Equipment

256. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of additional horse boxes purchased in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019 for the Garda mounted support unit; the number withdrawn from the fleet during the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3929/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána as well as for decisions in relation to the allocation and management of Garda equipment and resources. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda Mounted Unit is based at Áras an Uachtaráin, Phoenix Park, Dublin 8. The unit has a national remit under the direction and control of the Assistant Commissioner, Roads Policing and Major Event Management and the operational control of the Superintendent, Operational Support Services.

I understand from the Garda authorities that there are currently four double horse box trailers attached to the Garda Mounted Unit. I further understand that there were no horse box trailers purchased or withdrawn during 2016 – 2018 or to date in 2019.

Deportation Orders

257. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of a case pursuant to section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended, in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3981/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the persons concerned have submitted written representations.

These representations, together with all other information on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be

obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Ministerial Meetings

258. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of bilateral meetings he has had with his EU counterparts over the past six months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4029/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I meet my EU counterparts on a regular basis at meetings of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council. These meetings provide valuable opportunities for Ministers to informally exchange views in the margins of the formal meetings. In addition, I have had a number of formal meetings with international colleagues, the details of which are set out in the following table.

EU Minister	Date	Location
UK Home Secretary, Mr Sajid Javid MP	25 July 2018	London
Dutch Minister for Justice and Security, Mr. Ferdinand Grapperhaus	13 September 2018	Vienna
UK Secretary of State for Justice, Mr David Gauke MP	11 October 2018	Luxembourg
Greek Minister for Migration, Mr. Dimitrios Vitsas	12 October 2018	Luxembourg
UK Home Secretary, Mr Sajid Javid MP	12 October 2018	Luxembourg
UK Cabinet Office Minister, David Lidington MP and Secretary of State for NI Karen Bradley MP	2 November 2018	Dublin
Greek Minister for Migration, Mr. Dimitrios Vitsas	6 December 2018	Brussels
Mr Savvas Angelides, Minister of Defence of the Republic of Cyprus	13 December 2018	Dublin

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

259. Deputy Mary Lou McDonald asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has received the report by An Garda Síochána relating to youth diversion programme referrals from July 2010 to July 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4053/19]

260. Deputy Mary Lou McDonald asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the report by An Garda Síochána regarding the youth diversion programme referrals from July 2010 to July 2017 has been published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4054/19]

261. Deputy Mary Lou McDonald asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the report

by An Garda Síochána regarding the youth diversion programme referrals from July 2010 to July 2017 will include a breakdown of non-prosecutions by Garda division; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4055/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 259 to 261, inclusive, together.

As I have previously outlined, it is completely unacceptable that crimes were not properly pursued in many cases. This situation must be thoroughly addressed, not only for the victims and the proper administration of Justice, but also for the future welfare of children who are often themselves quite vulnerable and who may go on to commit other crimes.

In the first instance, it is important to understand that the issues in question relate to youth crime cases deemed unsuitable for the Garda Diversion Programme. There are therefore no negative implications for the effectiveness of the Diversion Programme itself, which has operated successfully for many years, helping generations of young offenders turn away from crime.

The Policing Authority's public meeting with the Commissioner last week arose from an Interim Report from An Garda Síochána. As the Commissioner informed the Authority, further work is required to complete the detailed examination of these matters, including external validation which I understand is ongoing. The Deputy will appreciate that due to the sensitivity of some aspects of the Garda review, consideration of the precise details which might be put into the public domain will remain a matter for the Commissioner.

The Garda authorities have taken a number of organisational steps to prevent recurrence of the failures identified. The Commissioner has also established a National Bureau for Child Diversion to improve future management of this whole area. While there have been significant improvements, there is more to be done to achieve a comprehensive solution.

The Commissioner has been very clear that alleged failings by individual Gardaí will be fully investigated at Divisional level. The Deputy will appreciate that this is a matter for the Commissioner and his management team and any process of that kind has to be allowed to take its course and cannot be pre-judged.

The Policing Authority, which was established to provide independent oversight of policing, has indicated that it will follow through with further detailed examination of this matter and the remedial actions which are being taken. I can assure the Deputy that I will keep in very close touch with the Commissioner, and the Policing Authority, to monitor progress on the steps being taken.

Inspector of Prisons

262. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 235 of 22 January 2019, if a list of previous members of the advisory group to the Office of the Inspector of Prisons will be provided. [4140/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In my reply to Parliamentary Question 235 of 22 January 2019 to the Deputy on this issue, I said that I understood that the Inspector of Prisons is currently considering the establishment of an advisory group, but that this has not been finalised.

The Deputy may have in mind a now expired panel of experts established in 2013 at the request of the then Inspector of Prisons which had no advisory function. It was put in place to

ensure the Inspector had available to him suitably qualified people to assist him if needed with certain aspects of his investigatory work under the Prisons Act 2007.

Citizenship Status

263. Deputy Sean Fleming asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the circumstances in which the citizenship of a minor can be cancelled in cases in which a passport is issued to a person born here to non-EEA parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4199/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The revocation of citizenship is a very serious matter for either an adult or a minor. Under Section 19 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act a certificate of naturalisation can be revoked, in certain circumstances. The Deputy may be aware that the Committee of Enquiry established to look into the grounds for revocation in particular cases has been convened and met for the first time before Christmas 2018. I understand there are no cases related to the revocation (cancellation) of certificates of naturalisation issued to minors, currently before the Committee.

The issue of passports and the cancellation of same is a matter for the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

If the Deputy has a specific case in mind my officials would be happy to provide further details. Such queries maybe directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Victim Support Services

264. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the size of the recent funding allocation for an organisation (details supplied); and the way in which it is to be used. [4201/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Victims of Crime Office in my Department is providing funding totalling €1.712m to 57 services, including the organisation specified in the Deputy's question, to support victims of crime in 2019.

As part of this overall allocation, funding of €18,000 is being made available this year, to the organisation specified in the Deputy's question, to provide a court accompaniment service to victims of domestic abuse. The group has been notified of this allocation.

Legislative Process

265. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the legislation, including heads of Bills, from his Department that has been sent to EU institutions before publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4253/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The table outlines the pieces of primary legislation including heads of bills from my Department which have been

Questions - Written Answers

sent to EU institutions before their publication during the term of the current government, as well as the reasons for doing so.

Pieces of legislation including heads of bills which were sent to EU institutions before final publication
Land and Conveyancing Law Reform (Amendment) Bill 2019 – sent to the European Central Bank for observations in January 2019, on the advice of the Attorney General.
General Scheme for the Criminal Records (Exchange of Information) Bill - sent to the EU Commission in 2017, in order to update the Commission as part of an informal dialogue process.
Amendment of Section 20 of the European Arrest Warrant Act 2003The amendment is included in the draft Criminal Justice (International Cooperation) Bill which has yet to be published and was sent to the Commission as part of an ongoing dialogue.

Asylum Applications Data

266. Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of protection applicants residing in emergency beds by location; the number of single males; the number of single females; the number of families; the number of children under 18 years of age; the contact person for each centre in each case; the person or body by which each emergency location was secured; the ongoing Reception and Integration Agency relationship with the party or parties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4295/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):
The statistics Deputy Ó Caoláin requested are compiled in the following table. Families represent the following: couples with no children, one parent families and two parent families.

Location	Current Occupancy	Number of children	Number of families	Number of single females	Number of single males
Cavan	37	5	7	1	24
Dublin	15	0	8	2	5
	35	6	14	5	10
Monaghan	120	9	11	23	77
	18	8	5	0	5
	30	0	6	6	18
	20	8	11	0	1
	11	1	4	5	1
Louth	6	0	2	2	2
Waterford	50	7	10	10	23
Total:	342	44	78	54	166

The Reception and Integration Agency of my Department has been encountering significant upward pressure on its accommodation portfolio. This pressure has increased further in recent months with an increase in the number of persons claiming international protection and a growth in the percentage of protection applicants who require assistance with accommodation. There are upwards of 700 persons residing in accommodation who have permission to remain in Ireland or who have received international protection status.

In order to ensure that the State can continue to provide material reception conditions for all protection applicants and continue to comply with the EU Reception Directive which was

transposed into Irish law in June of this year, RIA has, since last September, arranged for the provision of emergency beds where the mainstream accommodation centres were at capacity. This was done by contacting a large number of accommodation providers and also through a national print advertisement seeking expressions of interest for providing emergency accommodation on a short term basis. RIA is hoping to increase the capacity of the mainstream system by opening new centres.

The contact person given for each emergency short term accommodation provider is usually the hotel management. RIA does not have exclusive use of any of these emergency hotels and they continue to operate as commercial entities. Applicants are accommodated there for a short period before they are moved into mainstream accommodation system where they will have full access to all the services provided by the State to protection applicants. Staff in my Department and other Departments and agencies that provide assistance are in close contact with the management of each hotel to ensure that needs are met as necessary.

Crime Data

267. Deputy John Curran asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of bicycles stolen in each DMR in each of the years 2016 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4303/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities on the information sought by the Deputy and I will respond to him directly when the report is to hand.

Immigration Status

268. Deputy Michael Moynihan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a passport for a person (details supplied) in County Cork in direct provision will be returned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4307/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

Please be advised that all passport requests for applicants whose case is under consideration under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) should be made in writing to the Acknowledgements Unit, Repatriation Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS), Department of Justice and Equality, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2.

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

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Investigations

269. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has given further consideration to the establishment of a full public inquiry or commission of investigation into the death of a person (details supplied) and the subsequent Garda investigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4320/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, I have addressed the matters referred to in this question over the recent weeks and months in some detail. I have also indicated that I had sought the advice of the Attorney General on how I should proceed in the context of the resolution passed by this House last June calling for a public inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the tragic incident in which Shane O'Farrell lost his life.

I want to reiterate that the outcome of GSOC's criminal investigation into complaints made by members of the family of Shane O'Farrell and following a referral by my predecessor was set out in an interim report issued last year. That investigation concluded that no criminal misbehaviour by members of An Garda Síochána was disclosed. GSOC's investigation found that, while no conduct occurred which would require criminal sanction, certain aspects were identified as requiring further investigation which may lead to disciplinary proceedings against one or more members. The investigation of those matters by GSOC is still on-going. In the circumstances I do not propose to comment further while the investigation is proceeding. I know that it can be frustrating that investigations are not completed as quickly as people would like. However, our overriding concern must be that investigations are comprehensive and conducted to the highest standards.

As Minister for Justice and Equality, I am acutely conscious of my responsibility, and that of all Members of the House, to respect the independence of the Ombudsman Commission and guard against improper interference with its investigations.

With regard to the motion passed by this House last June, it referred to the need to examine the actions of the Gardaí, the Director of Public Prosecutions, GSOC and the Courts. I would remind the House of the constitutional independence of the Courts and the statutory independence of the Gardaí, the Director of Public Prosecutions and GSOC. These are important matters which must be taken into consideration if there is to be a further examination or investigation of issues related to this tragic case.

Having considered the options which appear to be available to me, I have, as I have already said, sought the advice of the Attorney General to determine how I may proceed in relation to the terms of the motion.

I have received that advice and I am currently considering the options open to me. Once I have completed that consideration, which I expect to have done shortly, I will inform all interested parties, including the O'Farrell family.

Refugee Status Applications

270. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for delays in issuing correspondence to those granted refugee or International Protection Office status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4422/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, if persons have applied to the International Protection Office for international protection and feel that there is a delay in receiving a recommendation letter from the IPO in relation to that application, they or their

designated legal advisor should contact the International Protection Office (IPO) directly, either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008, or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

I should point out that a recommendation letter from the IPO is not in itself a grant or status letter but, rather, a recommendation to the Minister that an international protection grant should be made or not made. Receipt of a recommendation letter from the IPO does not necessarily indicate that a Ministerial grant is imminent, as the Minister has to ensure that all due diligence is done before issuing an international protection declaration.

If, having received a negative recommendation from the IPO, applicants have appealed it to the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT), they should contact the IPAT if they feel there is a delay in relation to their appeal. The IPAT operates an email service that can be contacted by individuals with any queries regarding their application - info@protectionappeals.ie. As with the IPO recommendation letters, if an applicant receives a decision letter from the IPAT indicating that a negative recommendation from the IPO has been set aside, she or he should be aware that certain processing procedures are due from this point on and that they should allow a period of time for the Minister's decision to issue and not to anticipate an immediate grant.

Applicants can be assured that, having received a recommendation letter from the IPO or a decision from the IPAT in relation to an appeal, they will hear from the Minister as soon as possible in relation to their application.

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

Trade Relations

271. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which the international community can be influenced to avoid trade wars which can result in major inequality; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4405/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ireland is a small open, export driven economy and as such Free Trade and Free Trade Agreements are vitally important to our ability to develop and prosper. We can see from both our membership of the EU and successful economic strategy, that Ireland has benefitted hugely from an open and fair, trading environment. Free trade has increased our collective prosperity, facilitated job creation and has allowed the Irish Government to develop and continue to invest in and support its key strategic objectives, including my Department's Innovation 2020, Enterprise 2025, and the Future Jobs Initiative. These strategies are designed to secure Ireland's economy into the future and an underlying tenant of that overarching objective is our ability to trade globally in an unrestricted and fair way.

Restrictions on foreign trade often results in poorer economic prospects for all trading countries. Restrictions on trade can also have very negative impacts on countries that are less developed, as their access to markets in which to sell their goods and thus generate wealth is unfairly constrained. Consumers here can also feel the impacts on trade restrictions when goods coming

into the country are levied with tariffs, making them expensive and unaffordable.

The ability to trade freely is therefore important for our consumers and for driving global economic growth. Free Trade also drives enhanced efficiency, increases innovation, and creates greater fairness. Over time Free Trade results in higher wages, the ability to invest in infrastructure, and builds a dynamic economy that can create new jobs and opportunities.

Ireland, through its membership of the EU, exerts a great deal of influence in relation to trade and the development of a sustainable trade model through the agreed structures of the WTO.

Within the EU, Ireland works actively with other Member States to ensure that our concerns regarding the impacts of restrictions to free and open trade - which can have a disproportionate effect on small, open economies like ours - are heard at EU level. The EU itself is pro-active in trying to address issues at International Level regarding restrictions to free trade.

Of course, International Trade Policy is a competence of the EU Commission under the EU Treaties and defined as the Common Commercial Policy. Under this architecture the Commission makes legislative proposals and leads on international trade negotiations and the Member States approve negotiating directives (mandates) and engage with the Commission on the substance of all trade proposals through various Committees, including the Trade Policy Committee, and at Ministerial level through the Trade Council. Equally, Member States, at Council level, approve or reject the terms of Free Trade Agreements when negotiated. The European Union has in place free trade agreements with Korea and Canada as well as having successfully concluded trade negotiations with Japan Singapore, Vietnam and Mexico and has active negotiations with Mercosur, Chile, Australia and New Zealand. These agreements, on terms that are mutually beneficial to all parties assist with liberalising trade, removing barriers and de-escalating possible trade tensions.

The European Union proactively engages with 3rd countries to de-escalate trade disputes as can be witnessed in the EU's current engagement with the US over its recently applied tariffs on Steel imports.

The EU has robust measures in place to respond to trade disputes and officials from my Department are effectively engaged in both Brussels and elsewhere in resolving trade disputes in a fair and transparent manner.

In a broader context, Ireland fully supports the multilateral, rules-based, global trading system, embodied by the WTO, of which it is a member through the EU. An effective WTO system is an essential element of a fully functioning rules based, free trade system.

A key pillar of the WTO is its mechanisms for resolving trade disputes. Its dispute settlement system is central to ensuring that global trade is fair, and rules based. It is important that members of the WTO abide by the agreed procedures laid down in the legal texts and due respect is given to the judgements made on cases brought before the adjudicating body of the WTO.

Of course, over time, the functioning of any organisation must be reviewed and renewed to embed what is working well and to update what functions less well. In that regard, Ireland fully supports the European Union's position regarding the need for the WTO to urgently pursue an ambitious reform agenda to address structural problems which for some Member Countries inhibit the WTO from progressing further agreements and potentially limiting its ability to fairly arbitrate trade disputes.

To this end, Ireland has welcomed the ongoing trilateral engagement between the EU, the

United States and Japan as a way of seeking to develop constructive proposals to address essential aspects of WTO reform. We have also supported the EU's engagement with the recent Canadian initiative on WTO reform and the communique issued by the EU and several partner countries at the recent World Economic Forum in Davos which aims to further these endeavours. Of course, the EU remains in dialogue with many other WTO members as well.

We remain fully supportive of the EU efforts to lead on WTO Reform and believe the Commission's proposals are key in driving this process forward.

Ireland, through the EU, will continue to work in proposing solutions and responding constructively to proposals from others so that we can improve the WTO's functioning in the delivery of a fair, rules based, multilateral system in an effort to limit expensive and needless trade wars between important trading partners.

Brexit Supports

272. Deputy Billy Kelleher asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applicants and participants in all Brexit schemes and supports provided by her Department or agencies under her remit; and the amount allocated to and expended under each such scheme in each year since being established, in tabular form. [3802/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department and its agencies are working to provide extensive supports, schemes and advice to ensure that businesses are prepared for Brexit. These measures aim to assist businesses in identifying key risk areas and the practical preparatory actions to be taken over the coming weeks.

Additional resources have also been distributed across Science Foundation Ireland and the Health and Safety Authority and the NSAI for 2019 to support enterprises adjust to the new relationships with the UK and pursue new opportunities.

In addition to the direct supports outlined in the following table, my Department and I have been very active in the 'Getting Ireland Brexit Ready' public information campaign. This campaign includes workshop events throughout the country aimed primarily at business and people most impacted by Brexit. Officials from my Department and agencies also participated in the Getting Ireland Brexit Ready events, which included Enterprise Ireland, IDA, the LEOs, NSAI and the HSA.

Further to the table, increased funding has been allocated to Brexit-related support from my Department and its agencies as part of Budget 2019. An additional €5 million capital funding has been allocated to the Local Enterprise Offices, an increase of 22%, and a further €1 million allocated to InterTrade Ireland to help SMEs prepare for the particular North-South challenges associated with Brexit. Additional resources have also been distributed across Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland and the Health and Safety Authority.

The €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme provides relatively short term working capital, 1 and 3 years, to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees to help them innovate, change or adapt to mitigate their Brexit challenges.

The scheme was launched in March 2018 and, as at close of business on 18th January, there have been 376 eligibility applications received of which 337 eligibility applications have been approved and 65 loans progressed to sanction at Bank level to a value of €14.9m.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme was announced in Budget 2019. This scheme is jointly

Questions - Written Answers

funded by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Loans of €50,000 to €3m will be available, with loans of under €500,000 being provided on an unsecured basis. The scheme will be available to eligible Irish businesses, including those in the primary agriculture and seafood sectors, to support strategic, long-term investment in a post-Brexit environment. The SBCI has issued an “Open Call” for financial institutions to apply by 11 February 2019 for designation as a lending partner under the Scheme. It is expected that this Scheme will be operational in early 2019.

While many businesses have taken preparedness actions, a number have yet to do so. It is vital that businesses prepare themselves for Brexit impacts and take actions to mitigate. Firms that do business with the UK, whether buying goods or exporting products, should examine their supply chains to determine their vulnerabilities and take appropriate action.

Scheme	Uptake (28.01)
Brexit Loan Scheme	375 applications received, 336 approved by SBCI, 65 Loans progressed to sanction at bank level to a value of €14.94 million.
Enterprise Ireland Brexit Scorecard - online platform for Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit	3,902 Brexit Scorecards have been completed. 681 LEO clients have completed the scorecard.
Enterprise Ireland Be Prepared Grant	155 Be Prepared Grants have been approved
Enterprise Ireland Market Discovery Fund - A support to EI clients to research new markets	209 projects have been approved under this initiative
Enterprise Ireland Agile Innovation Fund - Gives rapid fast-track access to innovation funding	39 Agile Innovation projects have been approved
Enterprise Ireland Brexit Advisory Clinics	11 Brexit Advisory Clinics have been run with approx. 915 in attendance
Enterprise Ireland Brexit “Act On Programme” – A support funding the engagement of a consultant to devise report with recommendations to help clients address weaknesses and improve resilience	165 “Act on” Plans have been completed
Enterprise Ireland Strategic Consultancy Grant – A grant to assist EI clients to hire a strategic consultant for a set period	1,049 Strategic Consultancy Grants have been approved
Enterprise Ireland Brexit-exposed companies that have completed sustainable growth plans	706
Local Enterprise Office Technical Assistance Grant for Micro Export - an incentive for LEO clients to explore and develop new market opportunities	419 clients were approved assistance under the Technical Assistance Grant
Local Enterprise Office LEAN for Micro - The LEO Lean4Micro offer was developed in collaboration between the EI Lean department and the LEOs to tailor the EI Lean offer for LEO micro enterprise clients	221 LEO clients have participated in the programme

Scheme	Uptake (28.01)
Local Enterprise Office Mentoring	471 mentoring participants solely focused on Brexit
Local Enterprise Office Brexit Seminars/ Events	3,996 Participants at the Brexit Information events
InterTradeIreland Brexit Advisory Service	4,175 SMEs have directly engaged with the Brexit Advisory Service in 2018
InterTradeIreland Brexit Start to Plan Vouchers	There have been 811 applications, with 657 approved and 25 still pending assessment.
Pilot Online Retail Scheme administered by Enterprise Ireland	Applications are currently being assessed by Enterprise Ireland and the successful applicants will be announced in Q1 2019. There will also be a second call in 2019

Brexit Supports

273. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of firms that have applied for working capital under the Brexit loan scheme; the number that have been sanctioned financing to date by firm size (details supplied); and the value of same in tabular form. [3803/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department and its agencies are working to provide extensive supports, schemes and advice to ensure that businesses are prepared for Brexit. These measures aim to assist businesses in identifying key risk areas and to facilitate the practical actions to be taken in response to the UK's exit from the EU.

The Brexit Loan Scheme provides affordable working capital to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees that are or will be impacted by Brexit and meet the scheme criteria. The €23 million exchequer funding (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) has been leveraged to provide a fund of up to €300 million.

It has been designed to assist eligible Irish businesses in the short-term to deal with the challenges of Brexit, which include the pressures of increased market instability and currency volatility. The scheme is open to both State Agency clients and businesses that do not have any relationship with State Agencies. Sole traders may also apply.

The scheme was launched in March 2018 and, at close of business on 18th January, there have been 376 eligibility applications received of which 337 eligibility applications have been approved and 65 loans progressed to sanction at bank level to a value of €14.9m.

The number of eligibility applications received by SBCI at 18th January by company size is shown in the following table.

Company Size	Approved Eligibility Applications	Ineligible Eligibility Applications
Less than 10 employees	160	3
11 to 49 employees	132	1
50 to 249 employees	45	2
More than 250 employees	0	1

Company Size	Approved Eligibility Applications	Ineligible Eligibility Applications
Total	337	7

Brexit Supports

274. Deputy Billy Kelleher asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the €300 million Brexit loan scheme fund announced in budget 2019 for SME businesses will be open for applications; the length of time the fund will remain open for applications; the criteria for applying; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3804/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department and its agencies are providing extensive supports, schemes and advice to ensure that businesses are prepared for Brexit. These measures aim to assist businesses in identifying key risk areas and the practical preparatory actions to be taken over the coming weeks.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme was announced in Budget 2019. The scheme will provide a longer-term facility, 8 to 10 years, of up to €300m to support strategic capital investment for a post-Brexit environment by business at competitive rates. This is jointly funded by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Loans of €50,000 to €3m will be available, with loans of under €500,000 being provided on an unsecured basis. The scheme will be open to Irish SMEs, including those in the primary agriculture and seafood sectors, to support strategic, long-term investment in a post-Brexit environment. Eligible businesses must have an establishment or branch in Ireland.

The scheme will feature a two-stage application process. Applications for eligibility under the scheme will be made through the SBCI website. Successful applicants will be issued a reference number required to apply for a loan under the scheme with one of the participating finance providers.

The SBCI has issued an “Open Call” for financial institutions to apply by 11 February 2019 for designation as a lending partner under the Scheme. The scheme is expected to run for three years from its launch date. The SBCI have told me that they hope to be in a position to launch the Scheme before the end of the first quarter, and I encourage businesses to begin their preparations to support an application for the scheme now.

Jobs Protection

275. Deputy Billy Kelleher asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps she is taking to protect businesses and jobs here at EU level with respect to upcoming EU-USA trade discussions on a sectoral basis. [3805/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): On 25 July 2018, President Juncker and President Trump met in Washington to launch a new phase in the relationship between the US and the EU. They agreed to:

- work together toward zero tariffs, zero non-tariff barriers, and zero subsidies (on non-auto industrial goods) and to work to reduce barriers and increase trade in services, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, medical products, as well as soybeans (the EU will import soybeans from the US),

- strengthen strategic energy cooperation to potentially increase US imports of (LNG) to diversify the EU's energy supply,
- launch a close dialogue on standards to ease trade barriers, reduce bureaucratic obstacles, and slash costs, and
- work closely together with like-minded partners to reform the WTO and to address unfair trading practices, including intellectual property theft, forced technology transfer, industrial subsidies, distortions created by state owned enterprises, and overcapacity.

The meeting was in response to a shift in the direction of US trade policy which had seen the US impose tariffs on steel (25%) and aluminium (10%) imports from the EU to the US from 1 June 2018, following the expiry of a temporary exemption. The US measures were introduced following a “Section 232” investigation by the US Department of Commerce, into the effect of imports of steel and aluminium on US national security. The EU did not accept the basis for the US action and responded, after initial dialogue with the US Authorities failed to resolve the matter. Our collective response comprised:

- the launching of proceedings by the EU against the US at the WTO for breaching WTO rules, as the measures are designed to protect US domestic industry from import competition and not a national security measure,
- introducing rebalancing tariff measures through removing existing tariff concessions and applying 25% duties on a number of US imports to the EU in a proportionate manner, and
- introducing provisional safeguard measures, following an investigation, for a period of 200 days by imposing a tariff rate quota and an additional 25% tariff on imports of certain of steel products from third countries, with the exception of some developing countries with limited exports to the EU. These safeguards are likely to be made definitive in the coming weeks.

The EU is unanimously of the view that these US tariffs, which remain in place, are unjustified and in conflict with WTO rules. Ireland has fully endorsed the EU strategy and as part of this process I met with US Commerce Secretary Ross and other US actors on 7 May 2018 to discuss the issues.

On 10 September 2018, EU Trade Commissioner Malmström met U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Lighthizer to initiate the Executive Working Group (EWG), established to improve trade relations between the US and EU and address each of the topics in the Joint Statement issued by Presidents Juncker and Trump at their July meeting. The EWG has met a number of times since, to discuss the scope of future formal negotiations, most recently in Washington on 9 January 2019.

I and my other EU Trade Minister colleagues have discussed the issue of EU-US trade relations at our Council meetings in October and November 2018. Ireland has made clear to the EU Commission that agriculture must remain excluded from the scope of any future agreement with the US and I have spoken with Commissioner Malmström who confirmed to me that this is the EU Commission position. Indeed, the EU has made this clear on several occasions.

On 18 January 2019 the EU Commission adopted proposals for negotiating directives for its trade talks with the United States: one on conformity assessment, and one on the elimination of tariffs for industrial goods (excluding agricultural products). As part of its commitment to transparency, the EU Commission published the draft mandates at the same time as submitting them to the EU Member States. These mandates - or negotiating directives - will be discussed and agreed by Member States in Council to ensure that we are satisfied that EU - including Irish - interests are fully represented. Once approved, they should form the basis that will hopefully

see productive and substantive formal negotiations in these areas commence soon after, which would also see the removal of US steel and aluminium tariffs and the EU rebalancing measures. Additionally, it is important to note that while these negotiations are proceeding both sides are committed to not introducing new tariff measures and if the US were to do so, the proposed mandates make clear that the EU will suspend the negotiations and consider an appropriate and proportionate response.

The USTR also published its Negotiating Objectives this month and is in dialogue with Congress on them.

As with all trade negotiations, my Department will continue to prioritise Ireland's interests and play a full part, especially through the EU's Trade Policy Committee, in securing a mutually beneficial deal between the EU and US. As part of the effort to prioritise Ireland's interests in any future negotiations, my Department has commenced a consultation process with relevant stakeholders on the proposed mandates.

Ireland and the US have a significant bilateral relationship based on the same values and interests that has proved indispensable for the prosperity of both sides of the Atlantic. Ireland and the EU remain fully committed to a continued strong partnership with the US as equal partners. The de-escalation in trade tensions between the US and EU achieved by last July's accord has been of benefit to Irish trade interests and jobs. Equally, continuing to dialogue with the US to achieve a possible agreement on the elimination of tariffs for industrial goods, would be a positive development for Irish trade and jobs.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

276. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of complaints lodged with the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission regarding gift vouchers in each of the years 2014 to 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3952/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is the statutory body responsible for the enforcement of competition and consumer law in the State.

Section 9(5) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 provides that the CCPC is independent in the performance of its functions, including its day to day operational work regarding complaints made to it and I, as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, have no direct function in such matters.

Notwithstanding this, the CCPC have informed me of the aggregated figures for consumer and competition-related complaints in relation to gift vouchers in each of the years 2014 to 2018, that have been logged on their consumer contact line (see table).

Year	No. of complaints
2014	477*
2015	96
2016	182
2017	187
2018	206
Total	1148

*The CCPC have stated that the figure for 2014 was impacted by HMV's closure.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

277. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the ten most common consumer complaints lodged with the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission in 2018; the number of complaints by each category, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3953/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is the statutory body responsible for the enforcement of competition and consumer law in the State. The CCPC provides information to consumers on personal finance and consumer rights issues as part of its consumer protection and financial information functions. This information is provided to empower consumers to make more informed decisions and to take action for themselves, if required.

Section 9(5) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 provides that the CCPC is independent in the performance of its functions, including its day to day operational work regarding complaints made to it and I, as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, have no direct function in such matters.

Notwithstanding this, the CCPC has provided me with a list of the ten most common consumer complaints received by it in 2018. The following table lists the complaints by category, as well as the number of cases that have been received under each heading.

Issue	Volume (Cases)
Goods & Services - Faulty	8020
Contracts - Charges/Payments/Deposits	3082
Goods & Services - Sale of Goods/Service Issues	2529
Contracts - Cancellation	1925
Contracts - Performance Terms and Conditions	1518
Consumer Rights Directive/ecommerce	1370
Motor Insurance	1258
Mortgages	1226
Pricing	857
Advertising	697

Work Permits Applications

278. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason a work permit application was refused in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4025/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Employment Permits section of my Department inform me that an application for a Critical Skills Employment Permit for the person concerned was received on 6th December 2018.

My officials inform me that on 21 January 2019, this application was refused as the remuneration on offer was below the minimum annual remuneration of €60,000 per annum for a Critical Skills Employment Permit when the occupation is not listed on the Highly Skilled

Eligible Occupations List.

In addition to being informed of the decision to refuse this application, the applicant was also informed that they had the option to request a review of this decision within twenty-eight days. My officials inform me that, to-date, no such review has been requested.

The Deputy may wish to note that the occupation of the person concerned is eligible for a general employment permit which has a minimum remuneration threshold of €30,000 per annum. A refusal to grant an employment permit does not preclude an applicant for submitting another application. Such an application should comply with all of the legislative requirements for the particular employment permit type.

Brexit Issues

279. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which she remains satisfied with infrastructure under the remit of her Department in the case of a no-deal Brexit or hard-Brexit scenario; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4034/19]

281. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the funding allocated to her Department for Brexit-related matters for a hard Brexit or no-deal scenario; the way in which this funding will be spent; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4037/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 279 and 281 together.

Since the June 2016 decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, my Department and its agencies have worked to put a wide range of Brexit supports in place for businesses. The package of Brexit supports encompasses finance, advisory and awareness. My Department's focus is on helping firms to improve their competitiveness and innovation, and to diversify markets.

My Department and its agencies are working to provide extensive supports, schemes and advice to ensure that businesses are prepared for Brexit. The suite of enterprise and finance supports now in place covers the spectrum of potential Brexit impacts and aims to assist businesses in identifying key risk areas and the practical preparatory actions to be taken over the coming weeks.

I made Brexit one of my top priorities in the allocations of funding for 2019 in my Department and I have allocated further funding to Brexit-related support from agencies and offices of my Department as part of Budget 2019. I have allocated an additional €5 million capital funding to the Local Enterprise Offices, an increase of 22% for 2019, and a further €1 million allocated to InterTrade Ireland to help SMEs prepare for the particular North-South challenges associated with Brexit. I have allocated an additional €3m to Enterprise Ireland and €2m to IDA Ireland to expand their global footprints and drive the diversification of trade and investment. Additional resources have also been distributed across Science Foundation Ireland and the Health and Safety Authority and the NSAI for 2019 to support enterprises adjust to the new relationships with the UK and pursue new opportunities.

InterTradeIreland (ITI) works with SMEs on an all-Ireland basis and is particularly well-placed, given its remit to develop cross-border trade, to help SMEs prepare for the particular North-South challenges associated with Brexit.

The ITI Brexit Advisory Service provides a focal point for SMEs working to navigate any changes in cross-border trading relationships arising as a result of Brexit. As part of the service, ITI has organised a series of awareness events focused on improving knowledge of customs processes and procedures and identifying actions that can be taken in areas such as logistics and supply chain management. To date, more than 4,000 SMEs have directly engaged with the Brexit Advisory Service.

ITI also offers a Brexit Start to Plan voucher scheme, which enables businesses to get professional advice on how best to plan and prepare for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. This support helps businesses obtain advice on specific areas such as tariffs, currency management, regulatory and customs issues and movement of labour, goods and services. ITI vouchers are worth up to €2,250 (inclusive of VAT) each. Companies are finding the vouchers very useful and there has been strong demand which can be attributed to the media campaign conducted by ITI across a range of platforms. As of its most recent report and the end of November 2018, 811 businesses have applied for a Brexit Start to Plan voucher, of which 657 have been approved.

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in the Border Regions are the first-stop-shop for anyone seeking guidance and support on starting or growing their business. The LEOs have organised various events to enable companies to learn about the potential impacts and opportunities of Brexit. In addition, 402 LEO clients have received one-to-one mentoring solely focused on Brexit.

The LEOs engage in a number of other schemes to help companies prepare for Brexit. Technical Assistance Grants for Micro Export are offered as an incentive for LEO clients to explore and develop new market opportunities. Also, additional capital funding of €5 million was announced in Budget 2019 for local enterprise development.

In addition, the six LEOs in the Border region are working together with their Northern Ireland counterparts under the EU Co-Innovate Programme. The aim of Co-Innovate is to give SMEs from the manufacturing and tradable services sectors in the eligible regions the tools and tailored support to help them to innovate, differentiate and compete successfully.

The €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme provides relatively short term working capital, 1-3 years, to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees to help them innovate, change or adapt to mitigate their Brexit challenges. The scheme is open to eligible businesses from all regions of the country, including those in the Border counties. Businesses can confirm their eligibility with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and if deemed eligible, can apply to one of the participating finance providers for a loan under the scheme.

The scheme was launched in March 2018 and, as at close of business on 18th January, there have been 376 eligibility applications received of which 337 eligibility applications have been approved and 65 loans progressed to sanction at Bank level to a value of €14.9m. Brexit impacted exporters account for almost 50% of approvals while manufacturing accounts for 38% of approvals and 20% of approved applications relate to investments in new products or markets.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme was announced in Budget 2019. The scheme will provide a longer-term facility, 8 to 10 years, of up to €300m to support strategic capital investment for a post-Brexit environment by business at competitive rates. This is jointly funded by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Loans of €50,000 to €3m will be available, with loans of under €500,000 being provided on an unsecured basis. The scheme will be available to eligible Irish businesses, including those in the primary agriculture and seafood sectors, to support strategic, long-term investment in a post-Brexit environment. The SBCI has issued an "Open Call" for financial institutions to

apply by 11 February 2019 for designation as a lending partner under the Scheme. It is expected that this Scheme will be operational in early 2019.

Enterprise Ireland has established a Prepare for Brexit online portal and communications campaign, as well as an online “Brexit SME Scorecard” to help Irish businesses self-asses their exposure to Brexit and a “Be Prepared Grant” to support SME clients in planning to mitigate risks arising from Brexit. It has also launched a new Eurozone Strategy to help SMEs broaden their export footprint beyond the UK.

Over 3,700 business have used Enterprise Ireland’s Brexit Scorecard to date and 85% of EI client firms are now taking actions. EI is working closely with regionally-important larger companies in exposed sectors such as food to support strategic investments to build resilience – EI invested €74 million in these businesses in 2018. EI has also hosted 11 Brexit Advisory Clinics.

In addition, eligible EI client companies can respond to the threats and opportunities posed by Brexit by accessing the Agile Innovation Fund. This fund supports clients to quickly develop innovations and respond to opportunities and threats in new and existing markets. The new Fund allows companies to access up to 50% in support of innovation projects with a total cost of up to €300,000. A recent EI survey showed that EI clients that have availed of Innovation Capability, Funding and Collaboration support saw a 67% increase in global sales.

EI also recently launched a new Customs Insights Online course which is a new online training support to help all businesses understand how customs work including the documentation and process required to operate and succeed post Brexit. The Customs Insights course explains in clear and simple terms the main customs rules and included the key actions companies can take to prepare for customs after Brexit and the options from Revenue that are available to make the customs process more efficient. This will be available for any company to use whether they are importers or exporters and also whether they are agency clients or not.

The majority of the above schemes are open to all SMEs, not just agency clients. Enterprise Ireland will continue to engage with its clients to ensure they have the supports required to prepare for any kind of Brexit.

In my meeting with Commissioner Vestager on 24th January 2019, we discussed the severe challenges that Irish businesses, especially SMEs, will face when the UK leaves the European Union and the need for appropriate and timely State supports. We agreed that Irish officials will continue to work closely with the Commissioner’s team in addressing any State aid issues that may arise to ensure a rapid and appropriate response as the ultimate shape of Brexit and its firm-level implications become known. The Commissioner emphasised that the Commission stands ready to act urgently in mitigation against the impacts of Brexit on Irish firms.

In addition, in November 2017, the Commission approved a Rescue and Restructuring Scheme for Ireland for Undertakings in Difficulty. Under the scheme, an undertaking is considered to be in difficulty when, without intervention by the State, it will almost certainly be condemned to going out of business in the short or medium term.

This scheme was put in place as it was considered prudent to have contingency measures in place so that my Department can respond swiftly to changing circumstances as necessary. In May 2018 this scheme was extended to include Temporary Restructuring support for those enterprises with acute liquidity needs. To date, no enterprise has sought rescue and restructuring aid for temporary restructuring support.

With Brexit around the corner, I want businesses, particularly those around the Border counties to know my Department and agencies are here to help. My Department and its agencies are

providing extensive supports, schemes and advice to ensure that businesses are prepared for any Brexit scenario.

Brexit Supports

280. Deputy Eamon Scanlon asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the uptake of the various schemes by businesses to prepare for Brexit, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4035/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department and its agencies are working to provide extensive supports, schemes and advice to ensure that businesses are prepared for Brexit. These measures aim to assist businesses in identifying key risk areas and the practical preparatory actions to be taken over the coming weeks.

In addition to the direct supports outlined in the following table, my Department and I have been very active in the ‘Getting Ireland Brexit Ready’ public information campaign. This campaign includes workshop events throughout the country aimed primarily at business and people most impacted by Brexit. Officials from my Department and agencies also participated in the Getting Ireland Brexit Ready events, which included Enterprise Ireland, IDA, the LEOs, NSAI and the HSA.

Further to the table, increased funding has been allocated to Brexit-related support from my Department and its agencies as part of Budget 2019. An additional €5 million capital funding has been allocated to the Local Enterprise Offices, an increase of 22%, and a further €1 million allocated to Intertrade Ireland to help SMEs prepare for the particular North-South challenges associated with Brexit. Additional resources have also been distributed across Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland and the Health and Safety Authority.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme was announced in Budget 2019. This scheme is jointly funded by my Department and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Loans of €50,000 to €3m, with terms of 8 to 10 years, will be available, with loans of under €500,000 being provided on an unsecured basis. The scheme will be available to eligible Irish businesses, including those in the primary agriculture and seafood sectors, to support strategic, long-term investment in a post-Brexit environment. The SBCI has issued an “Open Call” for financial institutions to apply by 11 February 2019 for designation as a lending partner under the Scheme. It is expected that this Scheme will be operational in early 2019.

While many businesses have taken preparedness actions, a number have yet to do so. It is vital that businesses prepare themselves for Brexit impacts and take actions to mitigate. Firms that do business with the UK, whether buying goods or exporting products, should examine their supply chains to determine their vulnerabilities and take appropriate action.

Scheme	Uptake (18.01)
Brexit Loan Scheme	375 applications received, 336 approved by SBCI, 65 Loans progressed to sanction at bank level to a value of €14.94 million.
Enterprise Ireland Brexit Scorecard - online platform for Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit	3,902 Brexit Scorecards have been completed. 681 LEO clients have completed the scorecard.
Enterprise Ireland Be Prepared Grant	155 Be Prepared Grants have been approved

Questions - Written Answers

Scheme	Uptake (18.01)
Enterprise Ireland Market Discovery Fund - A support to EI clients to research new markets	209 projects have been approved under this initiative
Enterprise Ireland Agile Innovation Fund - Gives rapid fast-track access to innovation funding	39 Agile Innovation projects have been approved
Enterprise Ireland Brexit Advisory Clinics	11 Brexit Advisory Clinics have been run with approx. 915 in attendance
Enterprise Ireland Brexit “Act On Programme” – A support funding the engagement of a consultant to devise report with recommendations to help clients address weaknesses and improve resilience	165 “Act on” Plans have been completed
Enterprise Ireland Strategic Consultancy Grant – A grant to assist EI clients to hire a strategic consultant for a set period	1,049 Strategic Consultancy Grants have been approved
Enterprise Ireland Brexit-exposed companies that have completed sustainable growth plans	706
Local Enterprise Office Technical Assistance Grant for Micro Export - an incentive for LEO clients to explore and develop new market opportunities	419 clients were approved assistance under the Technical Assistance Grant
Local Enterprise Office LEAN for Micro - The LEO Lean4Micro offer was developed in collaboration between the EI Lean department and the LEOs to tailor the EI Lean offer for LEO micro enterprise clients	221 LEO clients have participated in the programme
Local Enterprise Office Mentoring	471 mentoring participants solely focused on Brexit
Local Enterprise Office Brexit Seminars/ Events	3,996 Participants at the Brexit Information events
InterTradeIreland Brexit Advisory Service	4,175 SMEs have directly engaged with the Brexit Advisory Service in 2018
InterTradeIreland Brexit Start to Plan Vouchers	There have been 811 applications, with 657 approved and 25 still pending assessment.
Pilot Online Retail Scheme administered by Enterprise Ireland	Applications are currently being assessed by Enterprise Ireland and the successful applicants will be announced in Q1 2019. There will also be a second call in 2019

Question No. 281 answered with Question No. 279.

Project Ireland 2040

282. Deputy Declan Breathnach asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if e-hubs will be provided for entrepreneurship and start-ups in each county in view of her

goal under Project Ireland 2040; the funding allocated to each local authority and local enterprise office, by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4064/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Over the next 20 years advances in digital technologies will transform the enterprise potential across the country, particularly in our smaller towns and rural areas. To maximise those opportunities, co-working spaces (or “eHubs”), are envisaged under Project Ireland 2040 as part of an ongoing suite of measures to encourage greater levels of collaboration between entrepreneurs in accessing available supports and assistance in helping to make their businesses grow.

These future eHubs will also play an important role in facilitating remote working which offers many benefits to businesses and to individuals and which contributes to balanced regional employment.

With regard to developing these eHubs, there are already cross-governmental efforts encouraging a bottom-up approach to strengthening the regions, notably through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, Urban Regeneration and Development Fund and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund. In that regard, I recently announced allocations under the second call of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund. A number of the projects that have been offered funding are already prototype digital Hubs and should develop throughout the duration of their project into sustainable ehubs in their own right.

My Department is committed to working with companies of all sizes and across all sectors to develop and achieve their potential including in developing strong digital resources and skills in order to remain competitive.

Enterprise Data

283. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the investment made in County Louth and in the old Drogheda borough region, respectively, by agencies (details supplied) in each of the years 2008 to 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3886/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): This Government is fully committed to the creation of high-quality and sustainable employment across Ireland, including in County Louth. There are now 3,903 people employed in IDA client companies in Louth with 139 net new jobs added in 2018. The new National Development Plan recognises the importance of Dundalk and Drogheda as key centres in the context of the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor. Both towns have a strong track record in attracting multinational companies due to the quality of the local infrastructure as well as their proximity to Dublin’s transport hubs. I am therefore confident that we will be able to sustain and grow investment levels in County Louth, including in Drogheda.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) supported companies employed 215,207 people throughout Ireland in 2018. EI is actively working with companies in Louth to drive competitiveness, innovation and market diversification. Payments to support these activities in each of the years detailed are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Enterprise Ireland Payments to Client Companies in Louth 2008-2018

County	Louth
2018	€3,079,928

County	Louth
2017	€4,063,517
2016	€5,569,603
2015	€4,396,281
2014	€1,603,265
2013	€2,153,930
2012	€2,561,842
2011	€2,235,346
2010	€3,901,224
2009	€5,266,959
2008	€1,915,865
Grand Total	€36,747,760

Note: (*Payments Report excludes infrastructural clients, recipients of Employment Subsidy Schemes I and II, Community Enterprise Centres and Shannon Free Zone transfer companies, and Innovation Partnerships & Innovation Vouchers*). EI does not have the data broken down by Old Drogheda Borough region.

LEO Louth is the ‘first-stop-shop’ for anyone wishing to start a business in the area. The LEOs were established on 15 April 2014 on foot of the County Enterprise Boards (Dissolution) Act 2014. Therefore data for LEO Louth is only available from 2014 onwards. In addition it should be noted that LEO investment figures for 2018 will not be available until a survey of LEO clients is completed in Q1 2019.

Table 2: LEO Louth Payments to Client Companies in Louth 2014-2017

County	Louth
2017	€209,493
2016	€227,426
2015	€195,023
2014	€225,203
Grand Total	€857,145

IDA Ireland is authorised by my Department to provide a range of financial supports to companies in the form of employment, capital, research and development, environmental and training grants. These grants remain an important means of encouraging firms to invest in Ireland, particularly in regional locations.

Information pertaining to these grants is collated on a county by county basis. Data on grants to specific locations and towns is therefore unavailable.

The following table provides a breakdown of grants paid by IDA Ireland to its client companies in County Louth between 2008 and 2017. I am informed by the IDA that information on the total of grants paid to client companies in 2018 will be made available once they have been audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. This audit should be completed by mid-2019.

It is important to note that grants paid in a particular year are not necessarily linked to either the investments won or the jobs created in that 12-month period. Grants are generally drawn down over the lifetime of a project which is normally over a period of three to five years. Some investments which result in job creation may not be grant aided and some well-established firms may no longer be receiving grant payments.

Table 3: IDA Ireland Payments to Client Companies in Louth 2008-2017

County	Louth
2017	€33,831
2016	€262,056
2015	€993,000
2014	€35,000
2013	€0
2012	€279,334
2011	€489,051
2010	€347,207
2009	€282,000
2008	€1,245,000
Grand Total	€3,966,479

Company Registration

284. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will clarify the appeals process on rejection of an application (details supplied) from the Companies Registration Office. [4091/19]

285. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason the word Irish was rejected as part of a domain word when seeking to register a company through the Companies Registration Office (details supplied); the reason for rejection; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4092/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 284 and 285 together.

Due to insufficient details supplied by the Deputy in relation to the company concerned, I am not in a position to provide the information sought. However, I can advise the Deputy that the registration of proposed company names is determined by the Companies Registration Office pursuant to the provisions of Sections 26 and 30 of the Companies Act 2014. Certain words prohibited by statute are not allowed to be used in company names. Some generic words are not sufficient to distinguish similar company names. In this regard applications are considered on the basis of the similarity of the proposed company name and names by which companies in existence are already registered. Details of general company names criteria can be found in CRO Information Leaflet No. 1 which is available at <https://www.cro.ie/Publications/Publications/Information-Leaflets>.

I am informed that it is the policy of the Registrar of Companies not to permit domain suffixes in company names. The word "Irish" is permitted in company names. However, the word "Irish" would not be considered to be sufficiently distinctive if the proposed company name was otherwise too similar to that of a company already on the register.

Should an applicant wish to appeal the refusal of a company name by the Companies Registration Office, she/he may appeal in writing to the Registrar of Companies. The Registrar is independent in the exercise of her statutory functions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in relation to the exercise of those functions.

Small and Medium Enterprises Data

286. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of patents successfully lodged by indigenous small and medium enterprises, SMEs, in each year since 2011; the number of copyrights taken out on software by indigenous SMEs in each year since 2011; the number of other intellectual property obtained by indigenous SMEs each year since 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4240/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Patents Office is the national intellectual property office, under the auspices of my Department, that is responsible for the administration of intellectual property (IP) rights in Ireland. Its statutory functions are concerned with the granting of patents, the registration of trademarks and designs and the administration and maintenance of these IP rights.

There is no registration procedure for copyright works under Irish copyright law. Copyright protection is automatic and arises upon the creation of an original work. As copyright is not a registrable right, the Office has no function or role in relation to individuals or companies seeking to obtain copyright protection for software.

While a total of 1,266 patents have been granted since 2011, it is not possible to distinguish indigenous SMEs from other applicants on any of the IP registers maintained by the Patents Office as this information is not kept or recorded by the Office.

You should also be aware that SMEs can apply for patent protection to the European Patent Office; for trademark and industrial design protection to the European Union Intellectual Property Office and patent, trademark and industrial design protection to World Intellectual Property Organisation but none of these organizations would record the level of detail you seek.

Legislative Process

287. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the legislation, including heads of Bills, from her Department that has been sent to EU institutions before publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4242/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): During the period of the 32nd Dáil, my Department did not send any pieces of legislation, including heads of bills, to EU institutions before their publication.

Consumer Protection

288. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the regulatory regime for the placement of children's toys on the market here; her plans to update the standards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4363/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Directive 2009/48/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the safety of toys, transposed into Irish law by S.I. No. 14 of 2011, places the onus on economic operators – manufacturers, distributors, importers – to ensure that only safe toys are placed on the market. If economic operators become aware that products on the market present a potential hazard they must take appropriate measures, up to and including recall of the items, to ensure that the risk is removed. Any action taken by an operator must be notified to the relevant Market Surveillance Authority: in Ireland this is the Competition and Consumer Protection Commis-

sion (CCPC).

Where the CCPC finds unsafe toys on the Irish market, it will act to ensure economic operators remove the particular toy from the market until it is in compliance with the legislation. The CCPC is part of an EU wide network (known as Safety Gate) that allows for the rapid exchange of information between national market surveillance authorities on dangerous products, including toys, found on the EU market.

Section 9 (5) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 provides that the CCPC is independent in the performance of its functions, including carrying out investigations of unsafe toys. As investigations and enforcement matters generally are part of the day-to-day operational work of the CCPC, I, as the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation have no direct function in the matter.

Should the Deputy have any information in relation to unsafe toys on the Irish market, he should make contact with the CCPC directly to provide any relevant information on these matters.

In relation to standards, economic operators can demonstrate conformity with the safety requirements of Directive 2009/48/EC when they comply with certain voluntary European Union (EU) harmonised standards. EU standards are based on a consensus, which reflects the economic and social interests of 34 European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) Member countries channelled through their National Standardization Organizations (in Ireland, this is the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI)). CEN, in Technical Committee 52, develops the standards concerned with toy safety. The evolution of the relevant standards has taken into account new types of toys and technologies, and thereby potential new hazards.

Work Permits Applications

289. Deputy Willie Penrose asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when a work permit application by a company (details supplied) will be processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4397/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Employment Permits section of my Department inform me that an application for a General Employment Permit for the person concerned was received on 12th December 2018.

It is currently taking 6 weeks to process applications for trusted partners and 15 weeks for standard applications. My Department is taking a number of steps to improve these processing times.

Ireland operates a managed vacancy led employment permit scheme in which an occupation list system for in-demand occupations and those occupations where the evidence suggests that there is a ready source of labour available domestically and/or across the EEA. These lists of highly skilled and ineligible occupations are reviewed twice yearly in order to ensure that the employment permits scheme remains responsive to changes in economic circumstances and labour market conditions.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

290. Deputy John Brassil asked the Minister for Health the provisions that exist for the cultivation of cannabis plants for use in medicinal products here; if no provisions are in place,

his plans for such legislation in view of the increase in prescribing and usage of medicinal cannabis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3758/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under current legislation - the Misuse of Drugs Acts 1977-2016, and the Regulations made thereunder- it is an offence to cultivate, import, export, produce, supply and possess cannabis except in accordance with a Ministerial licence. A related piece of Irish legislation, the Misuse of Drugs (Designation) Order 2017, limits the purposes for which such licences for cannabis can be issued, for example for forensic analysis or research - including research involving the cultivation of cannabis for use in approved clinical trials.

Furthermore, policy to date has not permitted the cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes and no licences have been issued for this activity.

The Department's priority at this time is the sourcing of suitable quality approved, affordable, finished cannabis products for medical purposes, i.e. those products that have been made in a GMP certified facility or equivalent internationally recognised quality standards.

Hospital Waiting Lists

291. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) waiting more than two years will be assessed for cataract surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3901/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

292. **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. [3711/19]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing sched-

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

293. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Health if a matter regarding staffing at a factory (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3714/19]

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

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

Hospitals Data

294. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the number of cataract surgeries cancelled nationally by hospital in each of the years 2016 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3720/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

295. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the number of ENT surgeries cancelled for children nationally by hospital in each of the years 2016 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3721/19]

296. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the number of children on ENT surgery waiting lists nationally by hospital in each of the years 2016 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3722/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 295 and 296 together.

Reducing waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures is a key commitment of Government. The last two years have seen ongoing improvements in the number of children

waiting for ENT surgeries, with a reduction of 52% in the number of children waiting for an inpatient or daycare procedure in the last two years.

The 2019 Scheduled Care Access Plan is currently being finalised by my Department and will set out HSE activity levels to reduce waiting lists across specialties and improve access. The Access Plan will also set out activity levels for the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) who, following an increase in funding in Budget 2019 to €75 million, will supply additionality to HSE activity by arranging both insourced and outsourced appointments and treatments to reduce waiting times experienced by patients.

The Access Plan is being developed to ensure an appropriate balance between high volume activities and offering treatment to complex long waiting patients. The NTPF will do this by inviting public hospitals to seek solutions for very long waiters either in the private sector or through insourcing. The NTPF will provide funding to the solutions proposed if appropriate.

A breakdown of the IPDC paediatric ENT waiting list for December 2016, December 2017, and December 2018 is provided for the Deputy. In relation to the number of procedures cancelled, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to provide the Deputy with a direct response.

[Tables].

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

297. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the length of time each person has been on the waiting list for cataract surgery nationally by hospital; the length of time they have been waiting and by month in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3723/19]

298. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the medically advised waiting time for cataract surgeries compared to the waiting times for cataract surgeries nationally by hospital in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3724/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 297 and 298 together.

Improving access to hospital treatment is a key priority for government. Budget 2019 announced a funding increase from €55 million to €75 million to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) to provide treatment for patients.

My Department is working closely with the NTPF and the HSE to finalise a Scheduled Care Access Plan for inpatients/day case and outpatients for 2019. In this regard, the NTPF and the HSE will continue to work closely with Hospital Groups, inviting proposals to improve access for patients waiting for either Inpatient/Daycase or Outpatient procedures.

In relation to the particular query raised, the HSE National Clinical Programme for Ophthalmology has advised that there is no specific medically advised waiting time for cataract surgery. A patient with cataract is advised to have it removed when it significantly impacts on their activities of daily living and this can obviously vary from patient to patient. Once the patient's vision drops to below 6/12 in the better eye, patients are advised to have their cataract removed if they wish to continue driving. They are not in a position to continue driving if their vision is below this level.

The following table of figures provided by the NTPF, shows the numbers waiting by hospital nationally by time band for cataract surgery at 20 December 2018.

Cataract waiting list as at Dec 20th 2018:

Sum of Count	Column Labels							
Row Labels	0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12-15 Months	15-18 Months	18+ Months	Grand Total
Galway Uni-versity Hospi-tals	388	453	65	3	3	6	4	922
Letter-kenny Uni-versity Hospital	16	17	8	1	4		2	48
Louth County Hospital	1							1
Mater Misericordiae Uni-versity Hospital	537	348	71	14	14	13	29	1026
Nenagh Hospital	18	23	28	2				71
Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital	655	457	142	26	9	4	3	1296
Sligo Uni-versity Hospital	181	132	112	146	11	14	10	606
South Infir-mary Victoria Uni-versity Hospital	256	144	113	8	4		1	526

Questions - Written Answers

Sum of Count	Column Labels							
Row Labels	0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12-15 Months	15-18 Months	18+ Months	Grand Total
St. Vincent's Uni-versity Hospital	131	82	33	4				250
Temple Street Chil-dren's Uni-versity Hospital	2	1	1					4
Uni-versity Hospital Limer-ick	244	155	16	13	15	4	13	460
Uni-versity Hospital Water-ford	404	369	283	61	40	28	45	1230
Grand Total	2833	2181	872	278	100	69	107	6440

Figures provided by the NTPF.

Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists

299. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the speech and language therapy assessment waiting list; and the number waiting fewer than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, by LHO in tabular form. [3725/19]

301. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the speech and language therapy initial assessment waiting list; and the number waiting fewer than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, by LHO in tabular form. [3727/19]

302. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the speech and language therapy further treatment waiting list; and the number waiting fewer than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, by LHO in tabular form. [3728/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 299, 301 and 302 together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for them to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

300. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy first time assessment waiting list in each local health office area; the number waiting fewer than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, and the number waiting aged zero to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and 65 or more years of age in each category in tabular form. [3726/19]

303. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy first time assessment waiting list; the number waiting fewer than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, and the number waiting aged under four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and more than 65 years of age, respectively, by category and by LHO in tabular form. [3729/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 300 and 303 together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for them to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Questions Nos. 301 and 302 answered with Question No. 299.

Question No. 303 answered with Question No. 300.

Hospital Appointments Status

304. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has not received an appointment in Monaghan Hospital. [3731/19]

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

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

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

Home Help Service Provision

305. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if emergency funding will be allocated to assist with the provision of home help hours (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3738/19]

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.

Cancer Screening Programmes

306. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Health the reason women, particularly in Counties Cavan and Monaghan, are waiting in excess of four months for the cervical screening results; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3739/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In May 2018, I asked CervicalCheck to make the necessary arrangements to provide that any woman who had a CervicalCheck smear test, and whose GP considered that they should have a further test, can access such a further test without charge. This decision was made in good faith to address the considerable fears of the many anxious women in Ireland as a result of significant media coverage of the issues that emerged in late April.

In the months since then, there has been a significant increase in the volume of women presenting for smear tests. This includes women who have availed of the out of cycle tests, but also a greater number of women presenting for scheduled screening.

This increased level of engagement with the programme is very welcome. However, the increased demand has undoubtedly put immense pressure on lab capacity and the HSE has advised that, currently, results of smear tests may take up to 22 weeks from the time of the test. Although many results are returned in less time, some may take longer.

The HSE has been working actively with the labs to manage this issue and to improve turnaround times for smear tests. The HSE reports that laboratories have agreed to undertake additional recruitment, provide for overtime and manage annual leave in an effort to minimise the backlog. In addition, the HSE is aiming to source additional screening capacity, which would improve the turnaround time of results. However, sourcing capacity and resources is a global challenge as countries start to move to primary HPV screening, which vastly reduces the requirement for cytology screening staff.

The HSE is currently developing a capacity plan to take account of available capacity and expected demand, with the aim of bringing the programme into stabilisation this year. This is a priority concern for my Department and the HSE.

Hospital Appointments Status

307. Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice asked the Minister for Health when a hospital appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied). [3741/19]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for sched-

uled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Services for People with Disabilities

308. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Health his plans to reopen a facility (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3757/19]

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.

National Children's Hospital

309. Deputy Jonathan O'Brien asked the Minister for Health the private companies and consultancies that have been paid for the tendering and procurement process of the national children's hospital; and the amount paid to these companies for the tendering and procurement process in each of the years since the process began for the hospital. [3764/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Operational responsibility for delivery of the construction project lies with the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPH-DB), charged with planning, designing, building and equipping the new children's hospital and outpatient and urgent care centres. As this query relates to NPHDB expenditure, I have asked the NPHDB to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Vaccination Programme

310. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Health the reason HIQA in its HTA report on extending the HPV vaccine to boys published in December 2018 used a Norwegian definition of a serious adverse reaction instead of the EU/EMA/HPRA definition of a serious adverse reaction as set out in guidelines (details supplied). [3765/19]

311. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Health the reason HIQA or his officials consider Norwegian data to be more accurate or relevant than HPRA data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3766/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 310 and 311 together.

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) has advised that, in relation to its

HTA report on extending the HPV vaccine to boys, a comprehensive, independent safety assessment was conducted by it. A systematic review of all relevant international literature was performed that encompassed 70,000 trial participants and surveillance of many millions of individuals in cohort studies, and had a follow up of up to ten years. Ireland-specific safety data from the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) were reported in the HTA.

A Norwegian definition of ‘serious adverse events’ was not used in HIQA’s safety assessment of HPV vaccines. The review noted that a single agreed definition of serious adverse event is not applied across safety studies. Consistent with all national adverse reaction reporting schemes, HPRA safety data must be interpreted with caution, as they relate to ‘suspected’ adverse events that are not always medically confirmed. In the absence of validated Irish data on hospitalisation rates for HPV-associated adverse events, Norwegian data was used to inform estimates of these costs in the economic model.

Audiology Services Provision

312. Deputy Martin Heydon asked the Minister for Health the consideration given to moving audiology services to a qualified provider system that would assist with the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3780/19]

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

Audiology Services Data

313. Deputy Martin Heydon asked the Minister for Health the status of the waiting list for audiology tests nationally and in County Kildare; the waiting times in the different areas; the progress being made on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3781/19]

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

Hospital Services

314. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Health when DEXA scanning will resume at Naas General Hospital; if a register of patients who have had their appointments postponed has been recorded; and if these patients will receive new appointments once the service resumes. [3783/19]

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.

Transport Support Scheme

315. Deputy Tom Neville asked the Minister for Health the status of progress in regard to introducing the new transport support scheme to replace the removal of the mobility allowance and motorised transport grant. [3786/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Deputy

will be familiar with the background to the closure of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes in February 2013.

My colleague, the Minister for Health and I brought a Memorandum to Government in May 2018 on proposals for a new Transport Support Payment Scheme in May 2018. Following consideration of the matter, it was decided to withdraw the Memorandum from the Cabinet Agenda at the time. I intend to revert to Government in due course with revised proposals to reflect the discussions at that Cabinet meeting and further discussions between myself and Minister Harris on the best way to progress the Transport Scheme.

It is important to note that the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme operated by the Revenue Commissioners, remains in place. This scheme provides VRT and VAT relief, an exemption from road tax and a fuel grant to drivers and passengers with a disability, who qualify under the relevant criteria set out in governing regulations made by the Minister for Finance. Specifically adapted vehicles driven by persons with a disability are also exempt from payment of tolls on national roads and toll bridges. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has responsibility for this particular scheme.

There are improvements in access to a range of transport support schemes available to persons with disabilities in the State and on-going work is being carried out by Government Departments, agencies and transport providers to further improve access to public transport services. Under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has responsibility for the continued development of accessibility and availability of public transport for people with a disability.

Hospital Appointments Status

316. Deputy Peter Burke asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [3793/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

317. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Health when an operation for a person (details supplied) will be carried out. [3794/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Ser-

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

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

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

Assisted Human Reproduction Services Expenditure

318. Deputy Charlie McConologue asked the Minister for Health if funding is available for IVF treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3809/19]

332. Deputy Declan Breathnach asked the Minister for Health when funding which was set aside for IVF will be available; the timeframe for enacting legislation necessary to bring the funding on stream; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3864/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 318 and 332 together.

In October 2017, the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research, based on the published General Scheme. The process of drafting this Bill will be completed in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General. In addition, the Joint Committee on Health is currently conducting a review of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, which began in January of last year. The review is on-going and the Committee intends to publish its report early this year. However, it is not possible at this time to give a definitive timeline for the completion of the draft Bill and its subsequent passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

In order to support the commencement of the legislation, officials in my Department are working with the HSE to develop a model of care for infertility to ensure the provision of safe, effective and accessible services through the public health system as part of the full range of services available in obstetrics and gynaecology.

The Government has approved a €1 million fund for use in relation to providing public AHR treatment during 2019. Officials in my Department are currently examining options in relation to the operation and administration of this fund, which includes determining the access criteria that will apply. Once I have had the opportunity to review and approve these proposals, there will be an announcement regarding the commencement of this fund for 2019.

It should also be noted that, currently, patients who access IVF treatment privately may claim tax relief on the costs involved under the tax relief for medical expenses scheme. In addition, a defined list of fertility medicines needed for fertility treatment is covered under the High Tech Scheme administered by the HSE. Medicines covered by the High Tech Scheme must be prescribed by a consultant/specialist and approved by the HSE ‘High Tech Liaison Officers’.

The cost of the medicines is then covered, as appropriate, under the Medical Card or Drugs Payment Scheme.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

319. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider reviewing the bring them home campaign initiated in 2015 in order to offer a more attractive and a wider suite of measures for recruiting nurses back to Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3810/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have referred the matter to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Departmental Meetings

320. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the open policy forum that took place on 15 November 2018 with the Departments of Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, his Department and an association (details supplied); if he will provide the records and minutes available from the forum; his views on whether civil society interest groups should be invited to further open policy forums and structured platforms of engagement to share their knowledge and perspective; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3816/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Securing access to new and innovative medicines in a timely manner is a key objective of Government and the health service. However, the challenge is to deliver on that objective in a manner that is affordable and sustainable.

In an effort to identify workable solutions to the challenges which we face, I proposed a dialogue with Industry to explore ways in which new medicines might be more easily introduced in Ireland. This invitation was built on the premise that any innovative approaches that may be tabled must be compatible with the statutory provisions which are in place and must also recognise the context of finite Exchequer resources.

It was in this context that an Open Policy Forum took place on the 15 November 2018 in relation to access to new medicines between the Department of Health, the Department of Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and the Irish Healthcare Pharmaceutical Association. This policy forum was held under the Chatham House Rule so as to encourage free discussion and there were no records or minutes taken at this event.

I look forward to more engagement over the course of the year with the aim of building a fairer partnership between industry and the State to help ensure that Irish patients get sustainable access to new medicines in as timely a manner as possible.

Medical Products

321. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if further information will be provided on Ireland's membership of the BeNeLuxA initiative; the number of meetings he and his officials attended as part of the initiative; the main outcomes to date; the main objectives of the initiative for 2019; his views on whether momentum should be renewed on strengthening the balance in the pharmaceutical systems across the entire EU system and member states as

concluded by the European Council in 2016; the steps being taken at European Council level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3817/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On the 22 June 2018, I signed the Beneluxa Initiative on Pharmaceutical Policy to work with Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. This Agreement is in line with my objective to work with other European countries to identify workable solutions, in an increasingly challenging environment, to secure timely access for patients to new medicines in an affordable and sustainable way.

The Beneluxa collaboration was established in 2015, with a view to taking a collective approach to pharmaceutical procurement and evaluation. The main objectives of this Initiative are to enhance patients' access to high quality and affordable treatments, improve the payers' position in the market through joint negotiations, increase transparency on pricing between the collaborating countries, share policy expertise and focus on knowledge building and enable national health challenges to be anticipated more effectively through the use of horizon scanning.

This Initiative is well established, with clear goals and a pragmatic approach to delivering on its objectives. Four areas of collaboration have been identified and there are four Domain Task Forces: horizon scanning, health technology assessment, information sharing and policy exchange and joint price negotiations.

The working methods of the initiative are face to face meetings, and via video conferencing, teleconference and web based meetings. A number of meetings have taken place since Ireland became a member in June 2018. Officials from My Department have attended 2 physical meetings and representatives from the HSE have attended 1 meeting abroad. Regular teleconferences take place within the Domain Task Forces and Ireland is represented by officials from the HSE during these meetings. A Beneluxa webinar was held in December 2018.

Beneluxa works together closely on horizon scanning, to explore which innovative medicines are expected to reach the market in the near future. In this context, a project is on-going on the development of an International Horizon Scanning Initiative (IHSI), which seeks to build a permanent horizon scanning system that can support countries and institutions in policy planning and their decision making regarding the reimbursement of new pharmaceuticals. In addition, the Beneluxa partners conduct joint health technology assessments and share data and policies.

The Deputy will be aware that a recurrent theme on the Agenda of previous Council Presidencies has been the topic of access to medication and I am pleased that the Romanian Presidency are continuing efforts to ensure that this topic remains at the forefront. The Romanian Presidency will continue the negotiations in the Council on the proposal for a Regulation on coordination in health technology assessment and it has indicated that it intends to organise debates on patient mobility and to encourage cooperation between Member States in the treatment of patients under the age of 18 who suffer from rare diseases. I look forward to working with colleagues over the duration of the Romanian Presidency to advancing the agenda of finding workable solutions to the challenges which exist in relation to medicines pricing, sustainability and supply.

Abortion Services Provision

322. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied that the management at the Coombe hospital followed the guidelines in the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 for a diagnosis and subsequent treatment of a fatal foetal abnormality

or life threatening condition in the case recently highlighted; and if matters (details supplied) will be clarified. [3818/19]

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

Hospital Charges

323. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 157 of 13 December 2017, 121 of 24 January 2018, 242 of 5 July 2018 and 576 of 18 September 2018, the position regarding proposals in respect of removing the venesection inpatient day case charge for patients with hereditary haemochromatosis; when considerations will be finalised on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3819/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The issue of the venesection in-patient day charge for patients with hereditary haemochromatosis is still under consideration. A decision on the matter is likely to be made in the coming months.

Mental Health Services

324. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Health his views on phone applications such as an application (details supplied); his further views on encouraging and supporting persons who wish to use these applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3824/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I believe that using telephone lines is a sensible approach for offering mental health supports to individuals seeking support and assistance. In mental health there are many types of services available in Ireland and it can be difficult to understand what service is most suitable to address an individual's needs. Therefore I have prioritised the establishment of a 24/7 signposting telephone contact line as a single point of contact to assist people locate and be referred to appropriate mental health services in their area. This important project is expected to be piloted in partnership with the National Ambulance Service and ready to proceed in 2019.

I am also supporting the HSE to provide a crisis digital texting service for those who feel that they are in need of urgent support. People will be able to text a specific number monitored by a trained counsellor responding from a secure online platform. A trained volunteer can then be assigned to the caller to assist the individual immediately. Following the call or texting conversation, appropriate referrals and follow-up work begins.

In addition to these very important initiatives I am very much committed to expanding the use of digital health technologies to support individuals access greater choice and avail of on-line therapeutic and educational interventions. I have been working with the HSE on delivering a number of digital services that support my position on the effectiveness of using evidence based online services.

I am a keen advocate of using online tele-counselling interventions and the HSE are undertaking two six month national pilot projects in South Wicklow and Galway/Mayo. I believe tele-counselling can provide a range of services including psychiatric evaluations, individual, group and family therapy, education and patient management. There is substantial evidence

regarding the effectiveness of tele-counselling and research indicates a high level of patient satisfaction, especially among adolescents and those with autism and severe anxiety disorders.

I have had the pleasure of attending a digital mental health seminar in Washington and visited health services that excel in delivering tele-psychiatry services in hospital A&D units. I hosted a successful digital health conference in Dublin in September 2018 called 'Changing Direction' which targeted psychiatrist and other mental health clinicians to propose the advantages of using tele-psychiatry services. Because of the success of this promotion, the HSE have established a project steering committee to run two pilot tele-psychiatry projects to conduct remote consultations to address CAMS waiting lists and a second pilot to address adolescent addiction and substance misuse.

As you will see, while I believe that providing phone services are essential, in this age of digital technology, there are many other options that will augment existing services to deliver appropriate care that will result in wider access, choice and the potential to create additional capacity for clinicians who may wish to work from home.

HSE Expenditure

325. Deputy Joan Collins asked the Minister for Health the amount the HSE has spent on correspondence issued through its legal team to organisations (details supplied) on union recognition. [3825/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

326. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3829/19]

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

Patient Data

327. Deputy Imelda Munster asked the Minister for Health the number of children and adults, respectively, who have no fixed abode or address and who are designated homeless, who attended Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital and Louth County Hospital in each of the years 2016 to 2018, in tabular form. [3844/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

HSE Reports

328. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Health when the implementation plan for the recommendations set out in the report of the chief medical officer in regard to the use of

vaginal mesh will be published; and the steps he is taking to ensure no further delay in the establishment of mechanisms for women who have suffered complications from mesh accessing aftercare. [3846/19]

329. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE has completed its examination of whether it needs to source services from abroad to address immediate shortfalls identified in the provision of aftercare services for women affected by vaginal mesh complications either through utilisation of the treatment abroad scheme or by commissioning services from abroad; if all women so affected can now expect prompt and appropriate treatment for complications which some have been enduring for years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3847/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 328 and 329 together.

In late 2017, concerns arose about the frequency and severity of complications associated with the use of mesh devices in the surgical treatment of Stress Urinary Incontinence (SUI) and Pelvic Organ Prolapse (POP) in women in Ireland. In responding to these questions and in recognition of the complexity of the matters arising, I requested the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) to prepare a report on the clinical and technical issues involved in ensuring both:

a) the safe and effective provision of mesh procedures in urogynaecology and b) an appropriate response to women who suffer complications as a result of undergoing such procedures

Preparation of the report has involved consultation and engagement with national and international bodies. The report has been informed by review of international reports and safety reviews of mesh surgery which have been published in recent years. The report has also been informed by the personal experiences of women who have suffered complications following mesh surgery.

The Report identifies that for many women, surgical procedures using synthetic mesh devices have provided a more effective and less invasive form of treatment than traditional SUI and POP procedures. However, mesh devices are associated with significant and severe complications in a minority of women. These are of concern given the difficulties of mesh implant removal.

The Report makes 19 recommendations including:

- the development of patient information and informed consent materials;
- surgical professional training and multidisciplinary expertise in units carrying out mesh procedures;
- the development of clinical guidance;
- the development of information systems to monitor the ongoing use of mesh devices;
- ensuring the reporting of mesh related complications; and
- ensuring timely, appropriate and accessible care pathways for the management of women with complications.

The report was completed and published on the Department of Health website on 21 November 2018.

The Secretary General of my Department wrote to the HSE on November 27 2018 to re-

quest that it prepare a detailed Implementation Plan for the complete set of recommendations set out in the CMO's Report, to be approved by the Leadership Team in the HSE and published on the HSE website within three months of receipt of the report, or sooner if completed. It was also requested that a copy of the Implementation Plan, together with an interim report on the implementation of those recommendations on which work has already commenced, should be submitted to the Department at the time of publication of the Implementation Plan.

Industrial Disputes

330. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of elective surgeries and procedures being postponed or cancelled in anticipation of the proposed strike by nurses at the end of January 2019. [3849/19]

331. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of elective surgeries and procedures being postponed or cancelled in anticipation of the proposed strike by nurses at the end of January 2019. [3850/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 330 and 331 together.

The final figures relating to the number of elective surgeries and procedures being postponed or cancelled in anticipation of the proposed strike by nurses at the end of January 2019 are currently unavailable, as I understand that individual hospital groups are still discussing possible exemptions with the nursing bodies. I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly to the particular issues raised.

Question No. 332 answered with Question No. 318.

Hospital Appointments Status

333. Deputy Barry Cowen asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); when the person can expect an appointment in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3869/19]

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.

Commencement of Legislation

334. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health when Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 will be commenced. [3871/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Parts 2 & 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 contain provisions relating to the regulation of donor-assisted human reproduction (DAHR) procedures carried out in the State, including dealing with the rights of children born as a result of those procedures. The enactment of the Children and Family Relationships (Amendment) Act 2018 was necessary to correct typographical and technical errors in the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, to enable the subsequent commencement of Parts 2 & 3 of the Act.

Officials in my Department are working towards putting in place a number of important administrative and operational arrangements that are essential for the implementation of Parts 2 & 3. This includes the establishment of the National Donor-Conceived Person Register (the “Register”), the purpose of which is to vindicate the rights of a donor-conceived child to access information on their genetic heritage. This is based on the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the right of a child to an identity and internationally regarded as best practice. However, as the Register will contain personal and potentially sensitive information about the various parties to a DAHR procedure, and particularly about the children born as a result of the procedures, robust data protection measures must be put in place prior to the establishment of the Register.

The commencement of Parts 2 & 3 of the Act also requires consent forms relating to the parties to a DAHR procedure (donors and intending parents) to be prescribed by regulations. The Department is liaising with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel in relation to the drafting of those regulations.

In addition, the appointment of authorised persons to ensure compliance of DAHR facilities with their obligations under this Act also needs to be finalised. It is my intention that Parts 2 & 3 of the Act will be commenced as soon as possible.

The provisions in Parts 2 & 3 are interconnected with provisions in other areas of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, particularly Part 9 which includes provisions for the registration and re-registration of the birth of a donor-conceived child. As such, officials from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health and the General Register Office are working together to ensure that the appropriate legislative, regulatory, and operational mechanisms are in place to allow for the earliest possible commencement of all of the relevant legislation that will allow for birth registrations of donor-conceived children.

Services for People with Disabilities

335. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by an organisation (details supplied) for capital funding to redevelop a training facility for adults with intellectual disabilities in County Donegal; when a decision in respect of the application will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3880/19]

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 ser-

vices they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Mental Health Services Provision

336. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Health the protocol for receiving patients transferred from general practitioner surgeries by ambulance to the psychiatric unit in Letterkenny University Hospital for assessment and-or admission; if such transfers are received in the psychiatric unit or the accident and emergency department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3881/19]

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

Mental Health Services Provision

337. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Health if home support services are available for persons under 65 years of age under CAMHS; if so, the process by which applications are made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3882/19]

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.

Suicide Bereavement Support

338. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Health the community-based suicide support services in place in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3883/19]

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

Hospitals Building Programme

339. Deputy Jan O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Health if the overrun in the projected cost of building the national children's hospital will not delay the timeframe for delivery of the modular 60-bed unit and the 96-bed ward promised to alleviate pressure on a hospital (details supplied). [3906/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive is currently developing its Capital Plan for 2019. The requirements of the new children's hospital and other health capital projects currently at various stages of development, including University Hospital Limerick, are being considered as part of this process.

Health Services Expenditure

340. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the budget allocation for the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics in each of the years 2016 to 2019, in tabular form; the number of staff in the centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3922/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE) was established in 1998 and its remit is to advise the HSE and the Department of Health in relation to the cost-effectiveness of medicines, through the carrying out of health technology assessments (HTAs).

The NCPE's workload has increased significantly, from less than five assessments per year in 2007 to eighty assessments per year in 2017. In addition, the complexity of individual assessments has increased greatly.

A 2017 Grant Thornton review of the NCPE indicated that it was understaffed, at 8.5 whole time equivalents, and that an additional 9 staff, including senior pharmacists, HTA assessors and statisticians, would be required to meet the additional workload.

I allocated an additional €750,000 to the NCPE in 2018 to support the recruitment of the additional staff, which has been underway since then. Staffing and expenditure levels are outlined in the following table. The 2019 expenditure estimate includes salary and superannuation, and non-pay costs such as ongoing training and development.

NCPE Staffing and expenditure 2016 - 2019

-	2016	2017	2018	2019
Core funded staff (WTE)	5.5	8.5	10.5	17.5
Budget by Year				
Core funded staff	€644,000	€844,000	€994,000	€1,578,000

General Practitioner Data

341. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners participating in the general practitioner visit card scheme for those under six years of age in the Dublin 5, 13 and 17 areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3923/19]

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.

Health Services Expenditure

342. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the details of the €667 million capital expenditure in health in 2019, by project, in tabular form. [3928/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The total capital funding for the public Health Services announced in Budget 2019 and published in the Estimates for Public Services 2019 is €667m, an increase of €174m (35%) over the capital funding provided in Budget 2018.

Description	€m
HSE Building, equipping and furnishing of health facilities	567.000
HSE Information Communication Technology and implementing the eHealth Strategy	85.000
Smaller directly funded agencies under the aegis of my Department, including €10m for HRB research	14.527
Information Communication Technology within my Department	0.473
Total Capital allocation for 2019:	667.000

Following the publication of the Health Service Executive's National Service Plan for 2019, the Executive is currently developing its Capital Plan for 2019. The HSE Capital Plan for 2019 will determine the projects that can progress in 2019 having regard to the available capital funding, the number of large national capital projects currently underway and the relevant priority of each project.

Health Services Data

343. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients with no fixed address discharged from all public hospitals at the end of December 2018 or on the latest date available; and the number of children discharged with no fixed address in tabular form. [3931/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Health Services Data

344. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the number of children discharged from hospital accident and emergency departments to no fixed abode (details supplied) in 2018, by hospital in tabular form [3932/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospitals Building Programme

345. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the construction inflation which he and the HSE are taking into account in terms of the acute hospital capital programme announced in 2018 in the context of the National Development Plan 2018-2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3950/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is respon-

sible for the delivery of the health capital programme, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

Disability Services Provision

346. Deputy Seán Haughey asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) will receive services from the multidisciplinary team at a service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3954/19]

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

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

Medicinal Products Supply

347. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the status of the Brexit medicines working group and the Brexit medicines plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3990/19]

348. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the medicines on the watch list of approximately 24 medicines about which the Brexit medicines working group is most concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3991/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 347 and 348 together.

As part of the overall Government response to Brexit, my Department is working on a comprehensive and coordinated set of actions to ensure, as far as is possible, continuity of supply of medicines in the event of a “no-deal” Brexit.

Significant work has been undertaken by my Department, the HSE, and the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), together with medicines manufacturers and suppliers, to ensure that risks to the continuity of supply are mitigated to the greatest possible extent.

No major supply issues have been identified through this preparedness and contingency planning work.

The Department of Health, HSE and HPRA do not anticipate an immediate impact on medicine supplies should there be a no-deal Brexit on 29 March. There are already additional stocks of medicines routinely built into the Irish medicine supply chain, and these additional stocks, together with planning by Revenue to allow the fast-tracking of essential drugs into Ireland, will help deal with any delays that may arise.

There is no need for hospitals, pharmacists or patients to order extra quantities of medicines, or for doctors to issue additional prescriptions. To do so could disrupt existing stock levels and

hamper the supply of medicines for other patients.

In 2018, the HPRA developed and launched a multi-stakeholder Medicine Shortages Framework to anticipate and manage medicine shortages when they occur. This framework is used to manage and address an average of 45 shortage notifications a month. The health system is therefore well placed to anticipate and respond to any additional shortages, should they arise because of Brexit. Recently, the list of resolved shortages for the past 6 months, available on the HPRA website, contained 24 medicines.

As an additional safeguard, consideration is being given to those categories of medicines which are considered most essential to public health. HSE and HPRA technical experts are undertaking a process to verify the contingency planning in place for the continuity of supply of medicines essential to public health, in order to determine those medicines that have the potential to be vulnerable to supply disruption and, where necessary, identify clinically appropriate alternatives. Work on this process is ongoing and will continue in the months before and after Brexit.

Both the HPRA and HSE have requested that medicines manufacturers and suppliers highlight any issues regarding the availability of specific products associated with Brexit and, to date, no major issues have been identified through this process.

Home Help Service Provision

349. Deputy Anne Rabbitte asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be approved home help hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3994/19]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

350. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding houses under HSE ownership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3996/19]

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.

Vaccination Programme

351. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Health if the vaccine for meningitis will

be provided to young children (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3997/19]

426. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Health the status of the talks and proposals regarding the catch-up programme on meningitis B vaccines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4294/19]

428. Deputy John Curran asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the high cost for persons from low income backgrounds in accessing the meningitis B vaccine for children born before 2016; his plans to address the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4300/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 351, 426 and 428 together.

The National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) is an independent committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland which is comprised of experts in a number of specialties, including infectious diseases, paediatrics, and public health, which makes recommendations to my Department on vaccination policy in Ireland. Its recommendations are based on the prevalence of the relevant disease in Ireland and international best practice in relation to immunisation. NIAC continues to revise recommendations so as to allow for the introduction of new vaccines in Ireland and to keep abreast of changes in the patterns of disease.

On foot of a recommendation by NIAC, the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule was amended in 2016 to include the introduction of the Meningitis B vaccine for all babies born on or after 1 October 2016. This change to the immunisation schedule took effect from 1 December 2016. The first dose of the vaccine is administered to children when they reach two months of age; a second dose is administered at four months and a third and final dose at twelve months. Meningitis B disease is most common in babies under 1 year of age and the scheduling of the administration of the vaccine under the immunisation programme as recommended by NIAC takes this into account.

All vaccines administered through the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule are provided free of charge. Ireland is the second country in Europe to make the Men B vaccine available free of charge as part of its national immunisation programme.

There are no plans to introduce a catch-up programme for the Men B vaccine to older children. Those who have a medical card are eligible to have the vaccine administered by their GP free of charge. However, the purchase of the vaccine is not covered by the medical card scheme.

In Ireland, the following meningitis vaccines are provided to children born on or after 1 October 2016 as part of the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule:

- 2 months - 6-in-1, pneumococcal vaccine (PCV) and Men B;
- 4 months - 6-in-1 and Men B (Meningococcal B);
- 6 months - 6-in-1, PCV and Men C (Meningococcal C);
- 12 months - Men B;
- 13 months - Hib/Men C and PCV.

Note that the 6-in-1 vaccine contains Hib (*Haemophilus influenzae b*).

Adolescents are also given a Men C booster vaccine in the first year of secondary school against meningitis as part of the School Immunisation Programme.

It is important to note that, although some of the recent notified cases are related to Meningitis B, none of the deaths have been attributed to this strain of the disease.

Mental Health Services Staff

352. Deputy Paul Kehoe asked the Minister for Health the position regarding recruitment and appointments (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4002/19]

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

Abortion Services Provision

353. Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the case in which a woman has been denied access to an abortion in the Coombe maternity hospital, Dublin; if he has contacted the hospital on the matter; his plans to ensure this will not happen again; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4007/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy is aware, the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 was signed into law by the President on 20 December 2018, and services for termination of pregnancy commenced four weeks ago, on 1 January 2019.

I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers; however, it would not be appropriate for me, as Minister for Health, to comment on any individual case.

I am advised that the Coombe Hospital is currently providing terminations in emergency situations and in cases of fatal foetal abnormality.

Section 11 of the Act sets out the law on access to termination of pregnancy in cases where there is a condition present affecting the foetus that is likely to lead to the death of the foetus before or within 28 days of birth.

The operation of the legislation is entirely a matter for attending clinicians. Neither the Minister nor the Department of Health has any role in the medical management of cases. Where a patient requires care not available in a particular location, the patient should be transferred to a hospital/service where the necessary care is available.

The Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 makes provision for women in cases where a medical practitioner has not given an opinion or has given an opinion that would not lead to certification for termination of pregnancy to be carried out. Section 13 of the Act provides that the woman, or a person acting on her behalf, may make an application to the HSE for a review of the relevant decision. Within 3 days of receiving such an application, the HSE must convene a committee of medical practitioners to review the relevant decision. The committee must complete its review not later than 7 days from the date on which it was established.

The National Women and Infants Health Programme continues to engage with the Dublin

Midlands Health Group and the Coombe Hospital regarding termination of pregnancy service provision.

Hospitals Data

354. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Health the activity levels at Mallow General Hospital for elective and non-elective surgeries and for acute medical interventions in each of the years 2015 to 2017, in tabular form. [4014/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the activity levels at Mallow General Hospital for elective and non-elective surgeries and for acute medical interventions in each of the years 2015 to 2017, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Staff Data

355. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Health the number of medical and surgical consultant posts assigned to Mallow General Hospital; and the range of disciplines to which these posts are assigned. [4015/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

356. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for University Hospital Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4018/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

357. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Health the status of knee surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4026/19]

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

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

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

Home Help Service Provision

358. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Health if the full support required via home help can be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4027/19]

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

Hospitals Data

359. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the number of patient discharges from hospitals in which patients were discharged to no fixed abode or address in each of the years 2011 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4030/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

General Practitioner Services

360. Deputy James Browne asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to address general practitioners charging medical card holders €25 for blood tests; the steps he will take to address general practitioners refusing medical card holders referrals to free HSE blood test clinics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4048/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the terms of the current GMS contract, GPs are required to provide eligible patients with "all proper and necessary treatment of a kind usually undertaken by a general practitioner and not requiring special skill or experience of a degree or kind which general practitioners cannot reasonably be expected to possess." There is no provision under the GMS GP contract for persons who hold a medical card or GP visit card to be charged for routine phlebotomy services provided by their GP which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition.

The HSE has advised GPs that where a blood test forms part of the investigation or necessary treatment of a patient's symptoms or conditions, this should be free of charge for patients who hold a medical card or GP visit card. Notwithstanding this, I am aware that some GPs are charging GMS patients for phlebotomy services in some circumstances.

This is a matter of concern for me as it has long been the position, under successive Governments, that no user charges should apply to GP services provided to GMS and GP visit card patients. If a patient who holds a medical card or GP visit card believes he or she has been incorrectly charged for routine phlebotomy services by his or her GP, then that patient should report the matter to their HSE Local Health Office.

In relation to GPs refusing to refer medical card patients to HSE blood test clinics, neither my Department nor the HSE are aware of such an issue. If the Deputy would like to supply further details of a particular case he is aware of to my Department, I will ask the HSE to look into the matter.

Hospital Waiting Lists

361. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Health if an appointment at WUH urology department will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [4056/19]

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

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

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

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

362. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for orthodontic care which was requested in October 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4057/19]

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

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

363. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 13 years of age in County Tipperary on a waiting list to commence orthodontic care; the number

on the list for zero to 12, 13 to 24, 25 to 36 and greater than 36 months, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4058/19]

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

Disabilities Assessments

364. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) in County Cork will undergo an assessment for autism spectrum disorder; the intervention services available for the child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4061/19]

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.

General Medical Services Scheme Data

365. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of GMS general practitioners in Dublin 15; the number of GMS general practitioners per CHO group nationally; the breakdown by population in this regard; the number of public health nurses in each CHO group nationally; the breakdown by population in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4071/19]

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.

Industrial Disputes

366. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he and the HSE will engage with a union (details supplied) to resolve the ongoing issues which have led to paramedics going on strike. [4072/19]

397. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the actions he plans to take to resolve a dispute (details supplied). [4196/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 366 and 397 together.

SIPTU is recognised by the HSE and has negotiating rights for front-line ambulance grades employed by the Executive. As a result, the HSE deducts subscriptions at source for those ambulance staff that are members of that union. However, the National Ambulance Service

Representative Association (NASRA) is not recognised by the HSE and, therefore, does not have negotiating rights.

Whilst individuals have a right to membership of any trade union, if they choose to join an association which is not recognised by their employer, such membership is not facilitated by their employer. This means that the HSE does not facilitate deduction of union subscriptions for this particular Association.

It is not possible to engage with the PNA as it is an organisation with no negotiating rights in respect of front-line ambulance personnel.

Hospitals Building Programme

367. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the other departmental capital budgets that will see funding cuts in order to compensate for the overrun for the new children's hospital in 2019; the amount in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4079/19]

368. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the health capital projects that will see funding cuts in order to compensate for the overrun for the new children's hospital in 2019; the amount in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4080/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 367 and 368 together.

My Department is working with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Health Service Executive on capital planning for 2019 and subsequent years having regard to the increased capital costs of the new children's hospital, following Government's approval to proceed with phase B of the new children's hospital and outpatient and urgent care centres.

The Health Service Executive is currently developing its Capital Plan for 2019. The requirements of the new children's hospital and other health capital projects, currently at various stages of development, are being considered as part of this process.

Hospital Staff Data

369. Deputy Mary Butler asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant cardiologist whole-time equivalent posts in place in UHW; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4082/19]

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

Hospital Staff Data

370. Deputy Mary Butler asked the Minister for Health the number of whole-time equivalent cardiac consultants required to provide 24-7 cardiac cover at UHW; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4083/19]

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.

Questions - Written Answers
Hospital Consultant Contracts

371. Deputy Mary Butler asked the Minister for Health if enhanced cardiac care was provided at UHW on Saturday and Sunday whether the current consultant cardiologists employed at UHW under their current contracts would be able to provide this extra cover. [4084/19]

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

Hospital Consultant Contracts

372. Deputy Mary Butler asked the Minister for Health the rota of consultant cover for the emergency department at UHW for all weekends from January 2018 to December 2018; and if consultant cover at weekends for the emergency department is voluntary or a condition of contract. [4085/19]

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

Hospital Services

373. Deputy Mary Butler asked the Minister for Health if the mobile unit located at UHW which provides diagnostic cardiac care is capable of delivering PPCI intervention care in its current format; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4086/19]

375. Deputy Mary Butler asked the Minister for Health when he expects the appointment of an additional cardiology consultant at UHW to provide for an expansion of cover from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday to Friday; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4088/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 373 and 375 together.

In 2016, the Herity Report concluded that the needs of the effective catchment population of University Hospital Waterford, UHW, could be accommodated from a single cath lab and recommended that the operating hours of the existing cath lab should be extended. Approval and funding has been provided for the additional staff required to facilitate this service expansion and five staff - Grade IV Admin, Porter, Senior Cardiac Physiologist, Senior Radiographer and Staff Nurse - have now been recruited on an 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. working day basis. Furthermore, the recruitment of a cardiologist to facilitate an increase in the operating hours of the existing cath lab is also being progressed by the HSE.

A mobile cath lab has also been deployed at UHW since October 2017 to conduct diagnostic cardiac procedures. In Autumn 2018, it was replaced with a relocatable cath lab, operating on the same basis as the mobile cath lab, that is, it carries out diagnostic cardiology procedures only. The contractual arrangements currently in place at UHW are for the provision of a unit capable of carrying out diagnostic cardiac procedures only.

I remain committed to the provision of a second cath lab in University Hospital Waterford. It is intended that the cost of progressing the project to design, planning and construction stages will be considered in the context of the HSE's Capital Plan for 2019, which is currently being finalised.

The Herity Report also recommended that the current 9 to 5 provision of emergency pPCI services should cease to allow the hospital focus on the much larger volume of planned work. I asked my Department to address the implications of this recommendation by undertaking a National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services. The aim of this Review is to achieve optimal patient outcomes at population level with particular emphasis on the safety, quality and sustainability of the services that patients receive by establishing the need for an optimal configuration of a national adult cardiac service. As set out in the National Development Plan 2018-2027, investment in cardiac cath labs and other cardiac services infrastructure nationally will be informed by the outcome of the National Review, which is expected to be complete by June 2019.

Hospital Services

374. Deputy Mary Butler asked the Minister for Health if funding of €4.35 million has been agreed and allocated to provide a permanent second catheterisation laboratory at UHW as per a previous meeting with Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas from County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4087/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following the publication of the Health Service Executive's National Service Plan for 2019, the HSE is currently developing its Capital Plan for 2019. The HSE Capital Plan will determine the projects that can progress in 2019 having regard to the available capital funding, the number of large national capital projects currently underway and the relevant priority of each project. The requirements of University Hospital Waterford and other health capital projects, currently at various stages of development, are being considered as part of this process.

Question No. 375 answered with Question No. 373.

HSE Reviews

376. Deputy Mary Butler asked the Minister for Health the expected completion date of the national review for cardiac services being undertaken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4089/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Review of Specialised Cardiac Services is ongoing and it is expected that the work will be completed by the end of June 2019.

The aim of the National Review of Specialised Cardiac Services is to achieve optimal patient outcomes at population level with particular emphasis on the safety, quality and sustainability of the services that patients receive through establishing the requirements for an appropriate configuration of a national adult cardiac service. As set out in the National Development Plan 2018-2027, investment in cardiac catheterisation laboratories and other cardiac services infrastructure nationally will be informed by the outcome of the National Review.

Ambulance Service Response Times

377. Deputy Peadar Tóibín asked the Minister for Health the average and longest ambulance response times for each of the past five years in each of the eight health ambulance regions. [4098/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, I have asked the

HSE to reply to you directly.

National Children's Hospital Expenditure

378. Deputy Jonathan O'Brien asked the Minister for Health the projected cost escalation for the national children's hospital since October 2018; the manner in which the cost overrun will be spread over the following years until the completion of the project; the way in which revenue will be found and sourced to fund the overrun; if the cost overrun will affect the National Development Plan 2018-2027; the way in which it will affect voted capital ceilings for the years 2019 to 2022; and the capital projects in health and other votes which will be stalled, delayed or cancelled as a result of these adjusted capital ceilings. [4103/19]

386. Deputy Jonathan O'Brien asked the Minister for Health the capital projects that will be delayed or deferred across all Departments due to the cost overruns of the national children's hospital by the date on which they were due to commence in tabular form; and the date to which they have been deferred. [4151/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 378 and 386 together.

My Department is working with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Health Service Executive on capital planning for 2019 and subsequent years having regard to the increased capital costs of the new children's hospital, following Government's approval to proceed with phase B of the new children's hospital and outpatient and urgent care centres.

The Health Service Executive is currently developing its Capital Plan for 2019. The requirements of the new children's hospital and other health capital projects, currently at various stages of development, are being considered as part of this process.

Respite Care Services

379. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health when the *in loco parentis* principle will be addressed in respect of the provision of respite care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4105/19]

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

Respite Care Services Data

380. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the number of day and overnight respite care sessions provided in 2017 compared to 2018, by CHO and LHO in tabular form. [4106/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in

the programme for partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

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

Treatment Abroad Scheme

381. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will fund treatment for a person (details supplied) in London in view of the fact that the treatment is not available here; if the matter will be expedited in further view of the fact that alternative forms of treatment and other existing treatments here have failed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4114/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE operates the Treatment Abroad Scheme (TAS) for patients entitled to treatment in another EU/EEA Member State under EU Regulation 883/2004, where the treatment is not available in the Irish public hospital system.

The treatment must be a treatment which the patient could legally avail of in the public healthcare system in Ireland if the treatment were available in Ireland.

GPs refer patients to consultants for acute care and it is the treating consultant who, having exhausted all treatment options including tertiary care within the country, refers the patient abroad under the terms of the TAS. The consultant must specify the specific treatment and in making the referral accepts clinical responsibility in relation to the physician and facility abroad where the patient will attend.

Applications to the TAS are processed and a determination given in accordance with the statutory framework prior to a patient travelling to avail of treatment. The statutory framework stipulates the patient must be a public patient and is required to have followed public patient pathways.

Information on the TAS can be accessed on the HSE treatment abroad website and also by phone at 056 7784551.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

382. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to include more organisations such as an organisation (details supplied) under the section 39 agency pay restoration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4125/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): You will be aware that in February 2018, an agreement was reached at the Workplace Relations Commission, WRC, between my Department, the HSE and health sector trade unions in relation to a process aimed at resolving the pay restoration issue for staff employed by section 39 bodies in 50 pilot organisations. The 50 organisations included were agreed at the WRC by all parties.

I asked the HSE to engage with the Section 39 organisations to establish the facts around what cuts were applied and how and when they were implemented. The HSE completed the

first phase of their work in relation to the agencies identified as part of the WRC process. This exercise has shown that of the agencies who returned data, a majority did apply pay reductions of some form. It also showed that some agencies made some form of pay restoration between 2016 and 2018.

Following constructive engagement with the assistance of the Workplace Relations Commission, an agreement was reached on 2 October between the parties. Pay restoration will commence with an annual pay increase of up to €1,000 in April 2019 for those employed by the 50 organisations involved in the pilot. Any outstanding balance will be paid in two equal amounts in 2020 and 2021.

The HSE are undertaking a further validation exercise of those 50 pilot organisations and their funding requirements to enable the pay restoration. Further information was requested from these organisations. Some of the organisations which did not form part of this pilot phase are likely to have pay restoration issues also. A process of engagement to address this will commence in 2019.

Health Services

383. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4139/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

384. Deputy Barry Cowen asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and when the person can expect a hospital appointment. [4144/19]

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

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

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

HSE Staff Remuneration

385. Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) who entered a new contract with the HSE and commenced work on 9 November 2018

will receive payment for working duties; his views on whether the process in place is adequate with new employees having to wait three months to receive payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4145/19]

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

Question No. 386 answered with Question No. 378.

Hospital Appointments Status

387. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be arranged for a person (details supplied). [4156/19]

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.

Addiction Treatment Services

388. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons treated for gambling addiction in each of the years 2015 to 2018, by age range, gender and the geographical location in which they were treated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4157/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospitals Building Programme

389. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the status of the development of the rehabilitation unit at Roscommon University Hospital; when planning will be submitted for the project; the overall capital allocation for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4160/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to

you directly in relation to this matter.

Hospitals Building Programme

390. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Health the status of plans for the ward block extension at Portiuncula hospital, Ballinasloe, County Galway; the stage the proposed development is at; when the finalisation of financing will be achieved; the timeframe for completion of works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4161/19]

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

Hospitals Building Programme

391. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Health if the design stage of the new central sterile services department at Roscommon University Hospital will be progressed in 2019 in order to meet the required HIQA standards; the funding allocated to progress the project through the design phase; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4162/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospitals Capital Programme

392. Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher asked the Minister for Health if the capital commitment for the comprehensive upgrade of hospitals (details supplied) is secure and will not be subject to a review in view of the capital overspend on the national children's hospital; if the commitment given by him and the HSE to provide additional capital for the long-term stay units in the hospitals is guaranteed; if works will commence in 2019 as promised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4163/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive is currently developing its Capital Plan for 2019. The HSE Capital Plan will determine the projects that can progress in 2019 having regard to the available capital funding, the number of large national capital projects currently underway and the relevant priority of each project. The requirements of community nursing units and other health capital projects, currently at various stages of development, are being considered as part of this process.

Health Insurance Cover

393. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Health the actions he is taking to prohibit health insurers from excluding model 2 public hospitals for elective procedures; his views on whether it is acceptable that insurers will exclude procedures in one hospital within a hospital group but cover it in another hospital within the group with the same consultant performing the procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4185/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As Minister for Health I do not have a role

in the commercial decisions of any private health insurance provider. It is important to note that private health insurance companies are free to design the products they provide, as long as they comply with the Minimum Benefit Regulations.

The Minimum Benefit Regulations ensure that all private health insurance consumers obtain an appropriate minimum level of health insurance cover regardless of what plan they purchase and that every plan available is inclusive of a minimum suite of benefits/procedures, some of which are available to the market as a whole and some of which will be applicable specifically to either men or women.

The matter that the Deputy has raised does not fall under the scope of the Minimum Benefit Regulations. Health insurance customers should ensure that they have an adequate level of cover, which is suitable for their needs and allows them to receive treatment in their preferred location.

It is also important to note that every citizen is entitled to opt to be treated under the public healthcare system, which may include the hospitals that are not covered for the treatment under a particular private health insurance policy.

HSE Properties

394. Deputy Paul Kehoe asked the Minister for Health if a decision has been made regarding the use of a building (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4186/19]

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

Health Services Provision

395. Deputy Paul Kehoe asked the Minister for Health if the location of a service (details supplied) has been confirmed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4193/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Provision

396. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment with a consultant from CAMHS; the average waiting time for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4195/19]

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

Question No. 397 answered with Question No. 366.

Questions - Written Answers
Mental Health Services Data

398. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Health the number of children and adolescents in Cork city and county on a waiting list for CAMHS services; the length of time they have been waiting in bands of three months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4198/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

399. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Health the length of time a person (details supplied) must wait for cataract surgery; the average wait time for such surgery in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4206/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving access to hospital treatment is a key priority for Government.

It is acknowledged that cataract surgery is among the most common surgical procedures carried out in the Ophthalmology specialty. It was in this knowledge that when proposals for the joint HSE/National Treatment Purchase Fund Inpatient and Day Case Action Plan were under development last year, I sought a particular focus on reducing waiting times for a number of high volume specialties including cataracts. The Action Plan, allocated a quarter (5,000 out of 20,000) of the planned NTPF procedures to cataract treatments.

Waiting list figures for December 2018, published by the NTPF show that considerable improvements have been made to the number of patients waiting for an Inpatient or Day case procedure which have fallen to 70,204 from the peak of 86,100 in July 2017. This represents a reduction of over 18% in the overall number of patients waiting for a procedure. Over the same period, the waiting lists for Cataracts has reduced from over 10,000 to 6,440 representing a reduction of 36%.

In 2018, the Action Plan also recommended that the HSE and NTPF identify sustainable initiatives to improve waiting times. In this context, a dedicated centre for cataract surgery in Nenagh opened last July, and at full capacity will be capable of delivering up to 2,000 procedures annually. The centre is ideally located to enable the UL hospital group, in collaboration with the HSE and NTPF, to maximise the use of the Centre through collaboration with other hospital groups so that patients from surrounding regions can be referred to the Centre for their treatment.

In relation to the average wait time for cataract surgery in Co. Limerick, please see the following table.

Average Wait Time for Cataract Surgery Limerick vs Nationally as at 24/01/2019

Date	Area of Residence	Average Wait Time (Days)
24/01/2019	Limerick	148
25/01/2019	National	145

In relation to the patient query element of the question, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Administration

400. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of unannounced missed hospital appointments at Sligo University Hospital and St. Patrick's hospital, Carrick-on-Shannon, respectively, in 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4212/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the number of unannounced missed hospital appointments at Sligo University Hospital and St. Patrick's Hospital, Carrick-on-Shannon, respectively in 2017 and 2018, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

401. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting lists for eye appointments, including outpatients and inpatients, and procedures to be carried out in County Laois; the number of doctors who are working on same in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4213/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the number of persons on the waiting lists for eye appointments including outpatients, inpatients and procedures to be carried out in County Laois and the number of doctors that are working in same in County Laois, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Respite Care Services Provision

402. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of, and if he will address, the ongoing respite crisis for families in County Cavan (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4214/19]

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

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

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

Health Services Staff Remuneration

403. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the reason suitably qualified counsellors and psychotherapists cannot be facilitated with special type consultation, special service or out of hours payment systems similar to general practitioners (details supplied) in County Kerry. [4216/19]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

404. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the implementation of the changes to the fair deal scheme agreed some months ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4217/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The proposed policy change to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), to cap contributions from farm assets at 3 years where a family successor commits to working the productive asset, has been approved by Government. My Department is working on the development of draft Heads of Bill while considering a number of complex ancillary policy and operational matters which may need to be addressed in the proposed legislation.

It is intended that this proposed policy change, the 3 year cap, will be extended to eligible existing participants in long term residential care so that they are not disadvantaged, but that there would be no retrospective recoupment of contributions for those who have paid contributions over and above the 3 year period.

A draft General Scheme of a Bill is currently with legal advisers for advice and legal quality control review. Subject to legal advice, I expect to bring the heads of bill to Government soon. The changes to the Scheme will come into effect in 2019 subject to the legislative process.

Disability Services Funding

405. Deputy Joe Carey asked the Minister for Health when 2019 budget allocations will be made known to the charitable disability organisations in order that a person (details supplied) with a disability can take up a position within the disability services sector in view of the fact that the service is currently being curtailed due to the lack of available funding and budget allocations from the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4218/19]

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

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

406. Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a person (details supplied) in receipt of the fair deal nursing home support grant was billed after the person transferred from one nursing home to a new facility. [4219/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), commonly referred to as Fair Deal, is a system of financial support for people who require long-term residential care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

Applicants to the scheme can choose any public, voluntary or approved private nursing home. However, in order for financial support to be provided, the nursing home must have an available bed and be able to cater for the applicant's care needs.

As per the Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2013, a discharge shall be discussed, planned for and agreed with a resident and, where appropriate, with their family or carer, and in accordance with the terms and conditions of the contract agreed in accordance with Regulation 24.

Where an issue arises with respect to an individual nursing home, the procedure in place and the best course of action is to engage with the nursing home itself, specifically through its complaints process. Each nursing home is required, by law, to have a written complaints procedure and to make this clearly available to residents. Nursing homes are required to investigate all complaints promptly and to provide the complainant with the outcome of the investigation promptly, along with providing an appeal mechanism.

If the person is unhappy with how their complaint has been processed they can then escalate the complaint to the Office of the Ombudsman, who will examine the issue on their behalf. There is no charge for this, however, typically the Office of the Ombudsman requires that the person in question has first engaged with the nursing home through the defined complaints process.

Medical Card Drugs Availability

407. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the reason certain medications have been taken off the medical card scheme list of medications for a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [4220/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility

408. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if access under the long-term illness scheme will be expanded to include all persons with ulcerative colitis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4224/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus;

and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme at this time. However, I wish to inform the Deputy that it is proposed that the LTI Scheme would be included as part of a review of the basis for existing hospital and medication charges, to be carried out under commitments given in the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

409. Deputy Martin Ferris asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) with a diagnosis of cancer will be refunded the cost of the chemotherapy drugs which the person incurred during an application for a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4228/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospitals Capital Programme

410. Deputy John Deasy asked the Minister for Health if the finance required to progress the proposed second catheterisation laboratory project at University Hospital Waterford to design, planning and construction stages will be made available under the capital plan of the HSE for 2019; and when the capital plan will be published. [4229/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following the publication of the Health Service Executive's National Service Plan for 2019, the HSE is currently developing its Capital Plan for 2019. The HSE Capital Plan will determine the projects that can progress in 2019 having regard to the available capital funding, the number of large national capital projects currently underway and the relevant priority of each project. The requirements of University Hospital Waterford and other health capital projects, currently at various stages of development, are being considered as part of this process. Once the HSE has finalised its Capital Plan for 2019, it will then be submitted to me for consideration.

Hospital Facilities

411. Deputy John Deasy asked the Minister for Health if an assessment has been made as to whether the modular catheterisation laboratory at University Hospital Waterford could be upgraded to both diagnostic and interventional capabilities pending the provision of a second permanent catheterisation laboratory. [4230/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In 2016, the Herity Report concluded that the needs of the effective catchment population of University Hospital Waterford (UHW) could be accommodated from a single cath lab and recommended that the operating hours of the existing cath lab should be extended. Approval and funding has been provided for the additional staff required to facilitate this service expansion and five staff (Grade IV Admin, Porter, Senior Cardiac Physiologist, Senior Radiographer and Staff Nurse) have now been recruited on an

8am to 8pm working day basis. Furthermore, the recruitment of a cardiologist to facilitate an increase in the operating hours of the existing cath lab is also being progressed by the HSE.

A mobile cath lab has also been deployed at UHW since October 2017 to conduct diagnostic cardiac procedures. In Autumn 2018, it was replaced with a relocatable cath lab, operating on the same basis as the mobile cath lab, i.e. it carries out diagnostic cardiology procedures only. The contractual arrangements currently in place at UHW are for the provision of a unit capable of carrying out diagnostic cardiac procedures only.

I remain committed to the provision of a second cath lab in University Hospital Waterford. It is intended that the cost of progressing the project to design, planning and construction stages will be considered in the context of the HSE's Capital Plan for 2019, which is currently being finalised.

The Herity Report also recommended that the current 9 to 5 provision of emergency pPCI services should cease to allow the hospital focus on the much larger volume of planned work. I asked my Department to address the implications of this recommendation by undertaking a National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services. The aim of this Review is to achieve optimal patient outcomes at population level with particular emphasis on the safety, quality and sustainability of the services that patients receive by establishing the need for an optimal configuration of a national adult cardiac service. As set out in the National Development Plan 2018-2027, investment in cardiac cath labs and other cardiac services infrastructure nationally will be informed by the outcome of the National Review, which is expected to be complete by June 2019.

Health Services Provision

412. Deputy John Deasy asked the Minister for Health if recommended timelines for the provision of additional facilities or staff contained in the national review of cardiology services scheduled to be completed by June 2019 will be affected or informed by the expenditure implications arising from the new national children's hospital. [4231/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Review of Specialised Cardiac Services is currently ongoing and it is expected that the work will be completed by the end of June 2019. A report on the Review will then be published. As I am sure the Deputy will appreciate, given that the Review is currently ongoing, it would be inappropriate for me to predetermine any outcomes or recommendations that may ultimately emerge from the National Review. Separately, the Health Service Executive is currently developing its Capital Plan for 2019. The HSE Capital Plan will determine the projects that can progress in 2019 having regard to the available capital funding, the number of large national capital projects currently underway and the relevant priority of each project. The requirements of the new children's hospital and other health capital projects, currently at various stages of development, are being considered as part of this process.

Legislative Process

413. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Health the legislation, including heads of Bills, from his Department which has been sent to EU institutions before publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4251/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The information requested is currently being compiled by my Department and will be provided to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Questions - Written Answers
Medicinal Products Reimbursement

414. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the number of requests made by general practitioners on behalf of patients seeking to have lidocaine plasters made available through the community drugs scheme by county since 2017; and the number of outstanding requests made by general practitioners that have not been responded to in tabular form. [4271/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

415. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the number of patients whose general practitioners have prescribed lidocaine from 2017 and requested that the treatment be made available under the community drugs scheme in tabular form. [4272/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Provision

416. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Health if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); the requirements in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4273/19]

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

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Administration

417. Deputy Imelda Munster asked the Minister for Health the criteria used by Louth and Meath child and adolescent mental health services to accept a child into the service. [4276/19]

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

418. Deputy Imelda Munster asked the Minister for Health the range and type of conditions that the Louth and Meath child and adolescent mental health services deem not to be relevant or that do not warrant admission or assessment into the services; the reasons for these decisions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4277/19]

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

419. Deputy Imelda Munster asked the Minister for Health the risk assessment used to refuse a child admission into the Louth and Meath child and adolescent mental health services; and the process used such as MDT meetings. [4278/19]

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

420. Deputy Imelda Munster asked the Minister for Health the advice given to parents and guardians and referrers as to further referral pathways available to children refused access to the Louth and Meath child and adolescent mental health services. [4279/19]

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data

421. Deputy Imelda Munster asked the Minister for Health the number of children and adolescents on the Louth and Meath child and adolescent mental health services waiting list that are classified as either emergency, urgent or routine; and the average waiting time for assessment for each child as per each classification. [4280/19]

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

422. Deputy Imelda Munster asked the Minister for Health the staffing levels in the Louth and Meath child and adolescent mental health services by staff category (details supplied) in tabular form; the approved staffing levels in the categories; the level of unfilled posts per category; his views on the impact of the unfilled posts on waiting lists; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [4281/19]

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Provision

423. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health the nature of the out-of-hours service provided by the Louth and Meath child and adolescent mental health services for children and families in crisis. [4282/19]

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data

424. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health the number of appointments seen on a daily basis by each of the professional categories (details supplied) in the Louth and Meath child and adolescent mental health services. [4283/19]

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data

425. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health the amount of time set aside by professionals for administrative duties on a weekly basis by the Louth and Meath child and adolescent mental health services. [4284/19]

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

Question No. 426 answered with Question No. 351.

Vaccination Programme Data

427. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in each CHO area that have received the meningitis B vaccine privately through their general practitioner or pharmacist born before 1 October 2016 and that subsequently are not entitled to the meningitis B vaccine programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4299/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this PQ refers to information not readily available in my Department, I have referred it to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 428 answered with Question No. 351.

Home Help Service Provision

429. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made to reduce the waiting list and waiting time for home support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4301/19]

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

Primary Care Centres Provision

430. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if there will be no delay in providing a new health facility at a location (details supplied) in view of the cost overruns on the construction of the national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4310/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is intended that the new Primary Care Centre in Killeshandra will be delivered by means of operational lease, rather than funded directly as part of the HSE Capital Plan. Therefore it is not expected to be impacted by any funding requirements arising for the new children's hospital.

As the HSE has responsibility for the provision of Primary Care Centres, I have asked the Executive to reply directly to the Deputy with an update on the status of this project for his information.

National Children's Hospital

431. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if projects in an area (details supplied) will be delayed or deferred due to overruns on the capital budget of the national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4311/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive is currently developing its Capital Plan for 2019. The HSE Capital Plan will determine the projects that can progress in 2019 having regard to the available capital funding, the number of large national capital projects currently underway and the relevant priority of each project. The requirements of the new children's hospital and other health capital projects, currently at various stages of development, are being considered as part of this process.

National Children's Hospital

432. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 163 of 23 January 2019, the reason the definitive business case cannot be immediately released as per the process outlined in his reply to Parliamentary Question No. 552 of 4 April 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4312/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As per Parliamentary Question No. 163 of

23 January 2019, the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board produced the final project brief and definitive business case and I have asked the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board to respond to your request directly, as soon as possible.

Cancer Screening Programmes

433. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Health the status of the review of 335 positive BRCA results that were processed at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; his plans to review the 3,500 negative results; the timeline for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4313/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This issue was first raised in the House in November last year. At that time officials of my Department contacted the Health Service Executive (HSE). The HSE advised that in late October 2018, an error was discovered in correctly communicating a genetic test result by the Department of Clinical Genetics at Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin (OLCHC) following an enquiry by an oncologist for a patient with recurring cancer who had a genetic test, known as a BRCA test, in 2009. Crumlin Hospital commenced reviewing this incident as a matter of the utmost priority.

This error has been reported as an incident and is being managed in accordance with the HSE Incident and Risk Management policy, including in commencing an incident review process of this transcription error in correctly communicating the test result in a letter to the referring clinician. Direct contact was made with the patient involved in this incident, with an offer made for an Open Disclosure meeting to take place at the discretion of the patient.

As a precaution, OLCHC also instigated a review of the communication of all BRCA test results since 2006, firstly prioritising the 335 positive BRCA results processed by the Department of Clinical Genetics. I understand that the review carried out in Q4 2018 has concluded but as this is a service matter I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this issue.

For the sake of clarity, I would also like to stress to the House that there is no concern regarding the accuracy of the BRCA test itself. The error which has occurred relates to the correct communication of the test result.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

434. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Health when he expects the vacant post of consultant psychiatrist at a medical centre (details supplied) to be filled; when full mental health services will be resumed there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4319/19]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

435. Deputy Anne Rabbitte asked the Minister for Health the avenues available to support a person (details supplied) in receiving funding to pay a nursing home bill which accumulated over four weeks while awaiting fair deal approval; and if he will make a statement on the mat-

ter. [4337/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their income and assets while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

The Scheme covers the cost of the standard components of long-term residential care which are:

- Nursing and personal care appropriate to the level of care needs of the person;
- Bed and board;
- Basic aids and appliances necessary to assist a person with the activities of everyday living;
- Laundry service

The Scheme had a budget of €962 million for 2018, providing support to approximately 23,000 people by the end of the year. In order to manage the available funds within the budget throughout the year, a national placement list is operated by the HSE. Funding approvals issue to applicants in chronological order. State Support can only be paid from either the date that the application is approved, or the date of admission to the nursing home, whichever is the later.

In 2018 the time applicants to the Scheme spend on the placement list for funding did not exceed 4 weeks. This target has consistently been achieved since April 2015 and it is a significant reduction from the October 2014 wait time of 15 weeks. The target of 4 weeks for approval of funding remains a commitment in the Programme for Government.

In relation to the case raised by the Deputy I have asked the HSE to investigate the matter.

Cancer Screening Programmes

436. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of repeat cervical smear tests conducted since May 2018 that are now invalid owing to delays in assessing them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4339/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy will be aware of the current delay in processing smear tests, which is a priority concern for me, for my Department and for the HSE. In May 2018, I asked CervicalCheck to make the necessary arrangements to provide that any woman who had had a CervicalCheck smear test, and whose GP considered that they should have a further test, to access such a further test without charge. This decision was made in good faith to address the considerable fears of the many anxious women in Ireland as a result of significant media coverage of the issues that emerged in late April.

In the months since then, there has been a significant increase in the volume of women presenting for smear tests. This includes women who have availed of the out of cycle tests, but also a greater number of women presenting for scheduled screening. The HSE is working to source additional capacity to manage this backlog, notwithstanding global challenges with cytology capacity and resources, and is also working closely with the laboratories in maximising their capacity to deal with the demand. It is important to be clear that this issue will take some time

to resolve.

Some women will require to have their test repeated where there were delays in the technical fixing of the slide, a step which must be completed within six weeks of the smear being taken, or where the vial used to contain the sample expires. The HSE has advised that, from April to October 2018, there was a 0.29% rate of expired samples and vials. This is very similar to the same period in 2017 when it was 0.25%. The HSE advises that there are procedures in place to deal with this issue as and when it arises.

Where low grade changes are detected on a cervical smear test, a second test which looks for the HPV virus is then carried out. The Deputy will be aware that a separate issue has arisen in relation to this secondary HPV test. The HSE has advised that some HPV tests carried out by Quest Laboratories have been performed outside of the manufacturer's recommended time-frame. The clinical advice is that this issue poses a very low clinical risk to women; however, as a precaution, affected women will be offered a repeat test to provide them with reassurance. It is expected that up to 6,000 women will be invited for a repeat test. The HSE is working to finalise arrangements to communicate with these women.

In relation to the specific number of smear tests which have been repeated or require to be repeated, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Traveller Community

437. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health when he envisages the publication of the national Traveller health action plan (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4340/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) contains a set of specific actions aimed at improving the situation for Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland.

Recommendation 73 of the NTRIS states that:

'The Health Service Executive will develop and implement a detailed action plan, based on the findings of the All Ireland Traveller Health Study, to continue to address the specific health needs of Travellers, using a social determinants approach.'

The action plan is primarily a HSE Action Plan, I have referred the matter to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Provision

438. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Health if the commitment to have acute mental health beds returned to County Tipperary will be impacted by the overrun in the national children's hospital project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4345/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Health Service Executive is currently developing its Capital Plan for 2019. The HSE Capital Plan will determine the projects that can progress in 2019 having regard to the available capital funding, the number of large national capital projects currently underway and the relevant priority of each project. The requirements of the new children's hospital and other health capital projects, currently at various stages of development, are being considered as part of this process.

I have been pursuing over recent times with the HSE the question of additional mental health bed capacity for CHO5, including Tipperary, and I am awaiting a report in the near future from the Executive on the matter. I will certainly, in this context, bear in mind the issue raised by the Deputy.

Pharmacy Regulations

439. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Health his views on the concerns raised by many clinical pharmacists regarding the draft statutory instrument he has published to implement the falsified medicine directive; if his attention has been drawn to the concerns raised that the proposal will move onerous responsibilities from the hospitals onto pharmacists; his further views on whether this is in the best interests of patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4356/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Safety Features Delegated Regulation (EU 2016/16) provides that from February 2019, most prescription medicines and a very small number of non-prescription medicines will have to carry ‘safety features’ on their outer packaging. These safety features take the form of an anti-tamper device (e.g. foil seal, breakable cap) and a set of unique identifiers embedded in a 2D barcode on the pack.

The Delegated Regulation was finalised and published in 2016. The intervening 3 year transition period allowed time for all concerned parties to prepare well in advance of the legislation coming into full effect on 09 February 2019. Details of the requirements of the Delegated Regulation have been widely communicated to all sectors throughout this 3 year transition period.

The Delegated Regulation is directly applicable across all EU Member States. However, a Statutory Instrument is being prepared to ensure that the Irish legislative system is consistent with the requirements of the new Regulation.

A copy of the draft Instrument was recently circulated as part of a targeted consultation process. The consultation process provides a mechanism for stakeholders and interested parties to express concerns and to make submissions. The Department is considering all points submitted in the consultation, including the query on responsibility raised in this Parliamentary Question, prior to finalising the Statutory Instrument.

Mental Health Services Provision

440. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Health his plans to implement measures to ensure the provision of adequate mental health services and supports for homeless persons; his further plans to ensure that adequate mental health services and supports are developed for such persons in line with A Vision for Change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4364/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): 2016 was the 10th anniversary of the publication of the Report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy entitled A Vision for Change which laid out a pathway to progressive, modern and recovery-based mental health care in Ireland. 2016 also marked the end of A Vision for Change’s ten year term. In October 2016, the Government committed to:

- Complete an evidence-based expert review of international best practice in the area of mental health

- Establish an oversight committee to oversee the development of a new policy for mental health
- Direct the Health Service Executive to develop a multi-annual approach to the development of mental health services.

In October 2017, an Oversight Group was established to work on a refresh of the Vision for Change. The refreshed report is expected to be finalised in quarter 1, 2019 and will emphasise the importance of policy supporting tangible changes in the lives of people using mental health services.

A main aim of the refresh is to ensure that the main focus is on the needs of service users and wider population – not on the needs of the mental health system. A major national stakeholder consultation process occurred in 2018 in 5 counties that engaged with over 1000 individuals from community, statutory and voluntary groups. Social inequalities and social exclusion were main themes arising.

Consultation with the Department of Social Protection and the Homeless Agency was also undertaken. As a result, there will be a chapter in the refreshed policy that will seek to respond to health inequalities. It is my understanding that the final refreshed policy will make recommendations to address the mental health needs of vulnerable groups, including those who find themselves homeless.

In addition to the work on Vision for Change, budget 2019 provides for an additional €250,000 under New Development funding to support the current service improvement initiative for homeless persons already being progressed in mental health services and in collaboration with Social Inclusion services.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

441. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Health the reason pioglitazone remains an approved drug under the GMS for the treatment of diabetes in view of the fact that the US Food and Drug Administration has found it to be associated with bladder tumours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4367/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospitals Capital Programme

442. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Health the status of the project to renovate St. Patrick's Hospital, Cashel; the timeline for the project; if the capital project will be affected by the overrun on the national children's hospital project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4368/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive is currently developing its Capital Plan for 2019. The requirements of the new children's hospital and other health capital projects currently at various stages of development, including St. Patrick's Hospital, Cashel, are being considered as part of this process.

As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly regarding the current status of this project.

National Children's Hospital Expenditure

443. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the monthly timeline of each notification of cost increase that was provided to him by the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board regarding the construction costs of the new national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4399/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I was advised by my officials in September 2017 of a potential cost overrun of €61 m, related to a number of factors (including programme alignment, resequencing of works at OPD urgent care centres and fire certificate requirements). This was monitored through 2017 and 2018 with a view to offsetting the potential cost increases through a variety of measures.

I was next briefed on potential cost escalation on Monday 27 August 2018 following a meeting with Department officials and the Chair and CEO of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) on Friday 24 August 2018.

A further note was provided to me on 7 September 2018 updating me on the emerging position on foot of briefing provided to the Department by the NPHDB.

Further updates were provided on 1 October and again on 9 November 2018. The NPDHB Report on the Process to Guaranteed Maximum Price was submitted to the HSE on 12 November 2018 and submitted to my Department by the HSE. That report set out the confirmation of the GMP process which informed the preparation of the Memo that I brought to Government on 18 December 2018.

Primary Care Centres Provision

444. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if the planned primary healthcare centre (details supplied) in County Wicklow and its services or facilities are at risk of delay or cancellation due to the cost overruns on the new national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4417/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is intended that the new Primary Care Centre in Arklow will be delivered by means of operational lease, rather than funded directly as part of the HSE Capital Plan. Therefore it is not expected to be impacted by any funding requirements arising for the new children's hospital.

As the HSE has responsibility for the provision of Primary Care Centres, I have asked the Executive to reply directly to the Deputy with an update on the status of this project for his information.

Services for People with Disabilities

445. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4418/19]

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

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

Hospital Beds Data

446. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 172 of 23 January 2019, the location of the additional 240 beds in the past 12 months by hospital in tabular form. [4420/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Increasing bed capacity is a Government priority. Over the past 18 months an additional 240 beds have been opened of which as detailed in the table:

2017-2018 Acute Beds open

Hospital Group	Hospital	Type of bed	Number of beds
RCSI	Our Lady of Lourdes Drogheda	Acute beds (part of new bed block)	25
RCSI	Beaumont Hospital	Acute beds	20
DM	St. James's Hospital	Acute beds	23
DM	Naas General Hospital	Acute beds	11
IE	The Mater Hospital	Acute beds	24
Saolta	Galway University Hospital	Acute beds	28
UL	Limerick University Hospital	Short Stay beds	17
IE	St. Vincent's Hospital	Acute beds	22
IE	Mater Misericordiae University Hospital	HDU beds	2
IE	St. Luke's Hospital Kilkenny	Acute beds	14
RCSI	Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda	Acute beds (part of new ward block)	4
SSW	Cork University Hospital	Acute beds	30
SSW	Cork University hospital	Critical care beds	2
SSW	Waterford University Hospital	Acute beds	18

Hospital Group	Hospital	Type of bed	Number of beds
Total			240

Services for People with Disabilities

447. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) in County Cork is on a waiting list for a residential placement; if so, the position of the person on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4423/19]

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

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

Young Farmers Scheme

448. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the case of a non-payment to persons (details supplied) will be investigated in view of the fact they have been informed that all matters relating to same have been addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3838/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted an application to my Department under the 2018 Young Farmers Scheme. My Department is currently finalising the required administrative and on-farm checks in relation to a small number of Young Farmers Scheme applications and it is expected that these cases will be completed shortly.

Fisheries Protection

449. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if illegal commercial fishing activities by visitors to an area (details supplied) in County Kerry will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3839/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The monitoring and control of fishing vessels within Ireland's Exclusive Fisheries Zone are matters for the Irish control authorities. Under the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006, all operational issues concerning sea fisheries control are, as a matter of law, exclusively for the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority and the Naval Service. As Minister, I am precluded from getting involved in operational matters including those in relation to law enforcement.

I have passed on your query to the SFPA for direct response.

Sheep Welfare Scheme

450. Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the 2018 and 2019 sheep welfare scheme will issue to a farmer (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing the payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3867/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has no record of an application for participation in the Sheep Welfare Scheme from the individual named.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme

451. Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if lands (details supplied) not included under the designation of eligible townlands for the 2019 areas of natural constraint scheme can be reviewed with a view to inclusion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3960/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has recently concluded the redesignation of eligible lands for the 2019 Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme, as required under the EU Regulations. The lands referenced in the question, in Mossfield and Oakley Park, were not eligible for the ANC Scheme prior to this redesignation, and are also not eligible under the new designation of eligible lands. An independent appeals process is in place for any farmer who wishes to query the eligibility status of a townland. Further details are available on my Department's website: www.agriculture.gov.ie.

Basic Payment Scheme Data

452. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of 2018 BPS applicants by county; the number who received payments; the amount of expenditure in payments in 2017, by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3983/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The payment details per county as of 24/01/2019 are set out in the table. Regular pay runs will continue to take place to ensure that cases that become clear for payment are paid as quickly as possible.

County	Scheme Year	Num Apps	Num Elig Apps	Num Paid	Amt Paid BPS
CARLOW	2018	1,653	1,592	1,585	€21,579,657.6
CAVAN	2018	4,988	4,709	4,690	€34,034,330.68
CLARE	2018	6,206	5,928	5,923	€46,254,934.89
CORK	2018	13,254	12,748	12,686	€150,410,208.6
DONEGAL	2018	9,084	8,300	8,174	€56,678,621.47
DUBLIN	2018	659	622	619	€8,786,115.9
GALWAY	2018	12,408	11,756	11,708	€83,653,249.75
KERRY	2018	8,029	7,573	7,514	€65,551,005.96
KILDARE	2018	2,168	2,046	2,030	€28,786,586.21
KILKENNY	2018	3,458	3,325	3,296	€47,518,635.71
LAOIS	2018	2,988	2,891	2,880	€35,923,115.02
LEITRIM	2018	3,538	3,363	3,350	€20,395,848.84
LIMERICK	2018	5,262	4,980	4,954	€48,257,178.78
LONGFORD	2018	2,451	2,316	2,307	€18,360,769.33

County	Scheme Year	Num Apps	Num Elig Apps	Num Paid	Amt Paid BPS
LOUTH	2018	1,536	1,469	1,462	€17,784,563.16
MAYO	2018	11,781	11,249	11,165	€70,641,917.79
MEATH	2018	3,911	3,728	3,709	€49,455,514.74
MONAGHAN	2018	4,257	3,962	3,953	€27,154,154.06
OFFALY	2018	3,101	2,965	2,953	€33,068,659.6
ROSCOMMON	2018	5,851	5,577	5,558	€39,684,764.16
SLIGO	2018	4,092	3,862	3,844	€24,573,317.14
TIPPERARY	2018	7,061	6,757	6,735	€89,582,469.75
WATERFORD	2018	2,484	2,358	2,350	€35,389,124.05
WESTMEATH	2018	3,107	2,950	2,945	€31,085,286.16
WEXFORD	2018	4,101	3,972	3,955	€54,394,215.61
WICKLOW	2018	2,207	2,097	2,086	€27,448,768.23
TOTAL		129,635	123,095	122,431	€1,166,453,013

Basic Payment Scheme Data

453. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of eligible and ineligible farmers, respectively, enrolled in the basic payments scheme; the number of eligible farmers who have received a 2018 BPS payment by ranges (details supplied) in tabular form; the number who have not received the payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3984/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As of 24/01/2019, payments amounting to €1.166 bn had issued to 122,431 BPS applicants. There are 123,095 applicants currently deemed eligible. Remaining cases are being processed as a matter of priority, and in many of these cases applicants have yet to meet all the scheme requirements or submit relevant documentation in order to qualify for payment.

Regular pay runs will continue to take place to ensure that cases that become clear for payment are paid as quickly as possible.

Details of applicants paid under the requested ranges as of 24/01/2019 is set out in the table.

BPS +Greening

Payment range:	Number of Applicants:
Between €0 and €5,000	38,103
Between €5,000.01 and €10,000	34,786
Between €10,000.01 and €20,000	29,033
Between €20,000.01 and €30,000	10,873
Between €30,000.01 and €40,000	4,655
Between €40,000.01 and €50,000	2,064
Between €50,000.01 and €60,000	1,125
Between €60,000.01 and €70,000	614
Between €70,000.01 and €80,000	368
Between €80,000.01 and €90,000	243
Between €90,000.01 and €10,0000	154
Between €10,0000.01 and €11,0000	118
Between €110,000.01 and €120,000	88

Payment range:	Number of Applicants:
Between €120,000.01 and €130,000	52
Between €130,000.01 and €140,000	33
Between €140,000.01 and €150,000	29
Greater than €150,000.01	93
TOTAL	122,431

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

454. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the criteria used to classify farmers as eligible or ineligible for scheme payments in Pillar 1 and 2; and if the number of eligible and ineligible farmers combined equate to the number of farmers participating in a scheme, for example, GLAS. [3985/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The eligibility criteria for the wide range of CAP Pillar I and II schemes run by my Department are set out in the Terms and Conditions of schemes. These terms and conditions vary from scheme to scheme and full details are published on my Department's website www.agriculture.gov.ie

As you would expect, eligibility criteria vary from scheme to scheme. Some schemes are multi-annual in nature and whilst an applicant may be eligible to join, the eligibility status for payment each year will depend on the applicant meeting specific requirements before certain dates over the lifetime of the scheme. Other factors which can affect eligibility include the requirement for a participant to maintain certain farming practices or eligible land over the lifetime of a multi-annual scheme as failure to do so can affect eligibility for payments.

In some schemes an applicant can go from being eligible to being ineligible as normal processing is carried out during the year.

Agriculture Scheme Data

455. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers who applied to schemes (details supplied) in 2018; the number of eligible and ineligible participants, respectively; the number of eligible participants who passed all checks and were approved for payment; the number who received an advance payment for 2018 to date; and the most common reason for delays with payments. [3986/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department publishes a weekly scheme payments update. As of Friday 25th January, the position is as set out:

GLAS:

The GLAS scheme was fully subscribed following the third and final Tranche, GLAS 3, which closed for applications in December 2016.

The position for participants under existing GLAS 5 year contracts is as follows: at end December 2018 there were 49,100 active GLAS participants in all three tranches. To date, 44,275 GLAS participants have received their 2018 advance payment and are fully up to date with their payments.

In relation to outstanding 2018 payments a significant proportion relate to applicants who

have not yet fulfilled the requirements for payment. Non-compliances include the non-submission of Commonage Management Plans and Nutrient Management Plans, GLAS 1 and 2 cases where the mandatory GLAS training has not been completed, Low Emission Slurry Spreading and Rare Breeds forms not returned or cases where the GLAS participant has omitted to update the Department on issues crucial to the payment process.

Sheep Welfare Scheme:

The table shows the current position with regards to year 2 of the Sheep Welfare Scheme.

Scheme Year:	Yr 2 (2018)
Total Number of applications:	20,549
Number of applications withdrawn:	892
Number of applications remaining:	19,657
Number of eligible applications:	18,738
Number of applicants paid:	18,607

Participants in the scheme are required to submit their Sheep Census return within the specified timeframe for each year of participation in the scheme. The late or non-submission of applicants' Sheep Census as required under the Scheme terms and conditions is the primary reason for outstanding payments at this stage.

Knowledge Transfer:

The Knowledge Transfer (KT) Programme is a three year scheme. The first two years of the Programme have been completed.

In Year 1 there were approximately 19,100 eligible participants of which approximately 19,000 have been paid a total of €12.5 m. Remaining applications are being cleared on a case by case basis.

Following the conclusion of year 2 of the KT Programme some 18,700 participants are due a full or partial payment. Payments to farmers in respect of year 2 of the programme commenced in October 2018 in line with the Farmers Charter commitment, with some €9.9 m issuing to some 15,400 farmers. The remaining year 2 participant payments are being processed as a matter of priority and payments are continuing as more farmers meet their commitments to qualify for payment.

In addition to the farmer payments, facilitator payments of approximately €12.9 m have also issued in respect of year 1 and year 2 combined. The facilitator payment is made once the 25 working day participant pay-over period has elapsed and the Department receives confirmation from the facilitator that the farmer payments have been made via the appropriate procedures.

Outstanding payments relate, in the main to, the following issues:

- Changes of herd ownership during the scheme year
- The submission of a BPS application in a Herd/Registered Farm Partnership number other than that used to register/participate in the Knowledge Transfer Programme
- the manual submission of scheme completion information.

All of the above require significant additional investigation and subsequent manual intervention within the payment system in order to confirm all requirements have been completed and submitted correctly and cleared for payment.

Beef Data Genomics Programme:

The Beef Data and Genomics Programme provides for multi-annual payments to farmers for completion of actions which deliver accelerated genetic improvement in the Irish national herd and improvement of its environmental sustainability.

Payments under the 2018 Programme year for both BDGP I and BDGP II commenced in December 2018. A total of 24,543 active participants have received payment.

Where payment has not issued it is because the participant has not yet been found to be sufficiently compliant with the requirements of the scheme to allow for a payment to issue. Payments will continue to be made to participants over the coming weeks as they become compliant with the requirements of the Programme.

Animal Welfare

456. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the concerns raised regarding the welfare of dogs in a location (details supplied); if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that there is an online petition which has over 24,000 signatures; the action being taken in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4036/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the Control of Dogs Acts, local authorities have responsibility for the management of dog pounds. Enforcement of welfare standards for animals, including dogs, comes under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. My Department maintains a close working relationship with local authorities on dog welfare matters and has consulted with the relevant local authorities who avail of the services of the enterprise referenced who have indicated that the facility is maintained to an adequate standard and has passed all recent unannounced veterinary inspections.

GLAS Payments

457. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4094/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016 and has received all payments in respect of scheme year 2016.

In relation to payment for 2017, administrative checks involving a number of sections within the Department take place on all GLAS claims. All cases must clear validation checks before payment can issue.

An issue arose in this case for 2017 in relation to GLAS claims on a LPIS parcel without a reference/MEA area. The applicant has been advised, through their advisor, to contact the Department's Basic Payment Section directly in relation to this issue.

GLAS Payments

458. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive a GLAS payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4095/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received all payments in respect of scheme years 2015, 2016 and 2017.

In relation to the 2018 advance payment, an issue arose in relation to a GLAS claim on a LPIS land parcel without a reference/MEA area. My Department has been in contact with the applicant and their advisor in relation to this issue. Once this case clears all validations the 2018 advance payment will be processed. GLAS payments continue to be made on a weekly basis.

GLAS Payments

459. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a payment in the case of a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4236/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy would be aware from previous recent PQ's a review by the Director of Agriculture Appeals Office of the decision of the Appeals Officer has been requested in this case in accordance with the provisions of the Agriculture Appeals Act, 2001. The Agriculture Appeals Office has indicated that requests for reviews are generally dealt with in order of receipt and that both the Department and the person named will be advised, in writing, of the outcome when the review has been completed.

Legislative Process

460. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the legislation, including heads of Bills, from his Department which has been sent to EU institutions before publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4241/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has no input in the Miscellaneous Provisions (Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 29 March 2019) Bill as, based on current considerations, there is no requirement to alter primary legislation under my Department's remit for Brexit at this time. As a result no heads for the bill have been sent to EU institutions.

We will, however, be amending Statutory Instruments setting the time limits for pre-notification for imports to arrive in the State for the purposes of carrying out of documentary, identity and physical checks on imports of animals, plants, and products of animal and plant origin, as set out in EU legislation and will also have a separate Statutory Instrument dealing with movements of pets including movement from the UK post Brexit.

Throughout this work, the focus of the Department will continue to be on the need to discharge its legal responsibilities while ensuring the minimum possible disruption to trade and animal movements.

Questions - Written Answers
Harbours and Piers Development

461. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4267/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department owns, operates and maintains six designated State-owned Fishery Harbour Centres, located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Ros An Mhíl under statute.

In addition, my Department also has responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of North Harbour at Cape Clear, as well as the maintenance of a small number of specific piers, lights and beacons throughout Ireland, in accordance with the 1902 ex-congested Districts Board piers, lights and Beacons Act.

The responsibility for the development, and maintenance of Local Authority owned piers, harbours and slipways rests with each Local Authority in the first instance and their parent Department, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government thereafter.

However, as part of its annual Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme, my Department has provided limited funding to assist coastal Local Authorities in carrying out small scale projects for the development and repair of piers, harbours and slipways in their ownership.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that I have approved funding of €2m for the Local Authority element of my Departments 2019 Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme.

My Department has written to Coastal Local Authorities, inviting them to submit prioritised lists of projects for consideration. Following this, detailed applications will be requested from Local Authorities for short-listing and the finalized suite of projects will be prepared. Should an application be submitted by Kerry County Council in relation to The Glen Pier, Ballinskelligs under this programme, it will be given due consideration taking account of the terms and conditions of the scheme, the priority attached by the Council and available funds.

Harbours and Piers Development

462. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when works will commence on capital works at Killybegs Harbour Centre which were delayed in 2018; the budget allocated for these works in 2019; the scale and extent of works involved in the project; the timeline for the completion of the project on Killybegs Harbour Centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4270/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department owns, operates and maintains six designated State-owned Fishery Harbour Centres, located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Ros An Mhíl under statute. In addition, my Department also has responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of North Harbour at Cape Clear, as well as the maintenance of a small number of specific piers, lights and beacons throughout Ireland, in accordance with the 1902 ex-congested Districts Board piers, lights and Beacons Act.

Between the years 2010 to 2018, as part of my Department's Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme, in excess of €20 million has been invested in maintenance, development and upgrading works at Killybegs Fishery Centre.

The Harbour has been attracting increasing levels of fishing, commercial cargo and cruise liner activity and the need for additional berthing has been recognised. The Smooth Point project, when complete, will provide a much needed additional 120 metres quay space.

Because some of the material to be dredged was contaminated, the project was divided into two phases. Work on phase 1 of the project, which entailed the dredging and removal of the contaminated material, commenced in 2017 and was completed in 2018, the total cost of this phase including preparation, permitting and design costs stands at €6.5m.

I have just announced the details of a €35.7m Fishery Harbour and Coastal Development Capital Programme for 2019. Killybegs has been allocated in excess of €5m this year of which €4m. is earmarked for phase 2 of the Smooth Point project.

Phase 2 involves the dredging of the remaining uncontaminated material and construction of the 120 metres of berthing space. My Department's engineers are presently finalising tender documents with a view to initiating a public tender exercise. Following completion of the tender process and awarding of contract, works are expected to commence over the summer months with an estimated project duration of twelve months.

The final costs and timeline for phase 2 will only be determined following the competitive tendering process.

Felling Licences

463. Deputy Anne Rabbitte asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the criteria to seek an extension to a felling licence; the appeals mechanism based on hardship grounds in cases in which the person to whom the licence was granted dies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4308/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The tree felling licence referred to issued to the land owner in September 2016 and as such comes under the Forestry Act, 1946, which does not allow for the granting of extensions of general felling licences. Officials in my Department have already replied to representations in this matter advising that an extension is not possible, that as the licence has expired a new application must be made and included a form for that purpose.

Agriculture Scheme Penalties

464. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of administrative and on-farm inspection penalties issued under the ANC and BPS in each of the years 2015 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4362/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Clarification has been sought from the Deputy regarding the detail of the data being requested. On receipt of this information, the Department will prepare a reply and forward it to the Deputy.

Carbon Budget

465. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to produce a five year carbon budget for Ireland; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [4321/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The regulation of greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland is currently determined through two different mechanisms.

Emissions from power generation and large industrial installations are regulated by the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS), which imposes an overall emissions target at EU level rather than Member State level.

Emissions from other sectors of the economy, including agriculture, transport, buildings, waste, and other industrial sectors are subject to targets at Member State level. The 2009 Effort Sharing Decision (ESD) 406/2009/EC established binding annual greenhouse gas emissions targets for EU Member States for the period 2013 to 2020 for these non-ETS sectors. For the year 2020 itself, the target set for Ireland is that emissions should be 20% below their levels in 2005.

For the period to 2030, the recently agreed EU Effort Sharing Regulation sets out binding annual emission targets for each Member State for the period 2021 to 2030. Ireland's target under this Regulation will require a 30% reduction in 2005 levels of emissions by 2030. In addition to the specific target for 2030, the Effort Sharing Regulation also imposes annual emissions ceilings for each Member State over the period 2021-2030. These annual ceilings, therefore, determine the Member State's carbon budget for the period.

I have recently received a mandate from Government to begin the preparation of a new All of Government Plan to bring about a step change in our climate ambition over the next decade, and beyond. My vision is that this new Plan will set out the actions which must be taken to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. It will have a strong focus on implementation, including actions with timelines and steps needed to achieve each action, assigning clear lines of responsibility for delivery.

I am currently working with my officials to develop proposals for the new plan, and I am engaging with my colleagues across Government in this regard. These actions will cover:

- regulatory framework;
- adoption of known technologies;
- addressing market failure;
- driving change in business models;
- the public sector leading by example; and
- engaging with citizens and communities.

In the context of this ongoing work, I am considering possible approaches to the allocation of sectoral targets within the overall framework of the EU Effort Sharing Regulation.

Warmer Homes Scheme Eligibility

466. Deputy Dessie Ellis asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if an anomaly will be addressed by which persons who have previously had their attics insulated by the SEAI under the warmer homes scheme do not qualify for exterior insula-

tion which is now available under the scheme in view of the fact an address under current rules can only be visited once; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3879/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme is funded by my Department and administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). The scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty. To date over 135,000 homes have received free upgrades under the scheme, leaving the occupants better able to afford to heat their homes to an adequate level.

The aim of the scheme is to deliver a range of energy efficiency measures in a way which represents the best possible use of Exchequer funding, focusing eligibility to those in receipt of certain payments from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, such as the Fuel Allowance, and limiting each home to one visit for an energy efficiency upgrade. Last year, the scheme was expanded. Subject to survey by SEAI and assessment of potential for improved energy performance, the scheme can, in certain circumstances, include internal or external wall insulation. This will permit the upgrade of more property types such as homes with solid walls, and also increase the energy savings and emissions reductions that the scheme can achieve and will also enable future fuel switching.

Demand for the scheme is extremely high, reflecting the shift to deeper measures, and is impacted by longer delivery times associated with these type of works and the delivery capacity of SEAI's contractor panel. The construction market is currently under pressure to deliver new homes as well.

The measures offered under the scheme are currently being reviewed again in light of new Building Regulations coming into force later this year. Any works carried out under the scheme will need to comply with the requirements set out under those regulations, while also taking account of the budget available to the scheme.

While homes that previously received works under the scheme are not currently eligible for a second visit, consideration will be given to revisiting these properties later in 2019, where feasible and appropriate.

Telecommunications Services Provision

467. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the options open to secure landline, mobile telephone and broadband services for a property (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3884/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP. This intervention is the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. My priority is to bring the procurement process to a fair and impartial conclusion as quickly as possible and I will bring a recommendation to Government in this regard in the coming weeks.

The provision of telecommunications services in Ireland is undertaken by private companies operating on a commercial basis in a liberalised market. As such, my Department is not in a position to advise on the specific telecommunications packages(landline, mobile telephone and broadband) open to specific areas or premises.

The Commission for Communications Regulation, ComReg, has designated eir as the universal service provider of basic fixed line telephone services, which includes, among other things, an obligation to provide a telephone service in response to any reasonable request at any fixed location in the State.

Comreg also operates a price comparison website at <https://www.comreg.ie/compare>. This site informs consumers on prices and packages of a variety of telecommunications services, including landline, mobile phone and broadband services.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing. 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.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

468. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the national broadband plan; when an area (details supplied) will have full broadband cover; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3885/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. This is being achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. In 2012, less than 700,000, or 30% of all 2.3 million Irish premises had access to high speed broadband. When this Government came into office, this had risen to 52%. Today, 74% of premises can access high speed broadband.

The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP. This intervention is the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. My priority is to bring the procurement process to a fair and impartial conclusion as quickly as possible and I will bring a recommendation to Government in this regard in the coming weeks.

I note that there is some deployment of infrastructure by eir in the area of the premises referred to by the Deputy. This is part of that company's ongoing rural fibre rollout.

eir's rural investment in high speed broadband is an entirely commercial undertaking, and not part of the planned State Intervention network. Although the deployment is monitored under the terms of a Commitment Agreement signed between the company and my Department, it is not funded by the State and it is not planned, designed or directed by my Department in any capacity. The selection of what premises are to be served under eir's deployment is a commercial decision for that company. My Department has no statutory authority or function to intervene in the company's commercial decisions, nor in any decisions relating to the roll out and siting of infrastructure throughout Ireland by service providers operating in a liberalised market.

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. 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.

Broadband Service Provision

469. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when broadband will be made available to a location (details supplied) in County Cork; if the location will benefit from State intervention; if not, if reliance is being placed on the private sector to deliver same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3930/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the BLUE area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The BLUE areas are where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

Where a citizen living in a Blue area is unable to obtain a high speed broadband service, I would encourage them to email my Department at broadband@dccae.gov.ie with their Eircode and details of the service providers they have contacted and the issues encountered in respect of accessing high speed broadband.

Where commercial operators' plans for providing high speed broadband in BLUE areas do not materialise, premises may be included as part of the State led intervention in order to achieve the Government's commitment to deliver access to high speed broadband to every premises in Ireland.

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. 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.

Renewable Heat Incentive

470. Deputy Charlie McConologue asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the opening of the second phase of the renewable heat support scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4004/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH) has been developed to financially support the adoption of renewable heating systems by commercial, industrial, agricultural, district heating and other non-domestic heat users not covered by the EU Emissions Trading System. Under Project Ireland 2040, the National Development Plan published earlier this year sets out an allocation of €300 million for the rollout of the scheme for the period 2018 to 2027.

The first phase of the scheme, an installation grant for heat pumps, opened for applications on 12 September 2018. This phase of the scheme will support ground, air and water source electric heat pump installations providing grant-aid of up to 30% of the installation cost. The first phase of the scheme was implemented under the State aid General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) and did not require prior approval from the European Commission.

The second phase of the scheme, an operational support for biomass boilers and anaerobic digestion heating systems, cannot be accommodated within the provisions of the GBER and, therefore, must follow the full State aid notification process. It is intended to open the second phase of the SSRH for applications early this year, subject to the State aid process. My Department is engaging with the European Commission in order to obtain this approval.

The Scheme Overview is available on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/Scheme%20for%20Renewable%20Heat%20Scheme%20Overview.pdf>.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), as scheme administrator of the SSRH, is currently finalising the detailed Terms and Conditions for the operation support element of the scheme. In order to assist stakeholders, the SEAI has published a working draft of the Terms and Conditions for the scheme on their website. This can be found at: <https://www.seai.ie/resources/publications/Support-Scheme-Renewable-Heat-Draft-Terms-and-Conditions-.pdf>

National Broadband Plan Administration

471. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the property at a location (details supplied) is included as part of the national broadband plan; the timeframe for the delivery of broadband to this location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4113/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP. This intervention is the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the

final stage. My priority is to bring the procurement process to a fair and impartial conclusion as quickly as possible and I will bring a recommendation to Government in this regard in the coming weeks.

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. 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.

Mobile Telephony Services

472. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to rectify the 29 mobile telephone black spots as identified by Tipperary County Council in view of the negative impact on the economic development of the areas affected. [4153/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Providing telecommunications services, including mobile phone services, is a matter for the relevant service providers operating in a fully liberalised market regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), as independent Regulator. I do not have statutory authority to require commercial companies to rollout services and make specific investments in particular locations.

The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce worked with key stakeholders to produce a report in December 2016, available on my Department's website, which contained 40 actions to alleviate some of the coverage deficits across the country. An Implementation Group is overseeing the implementation of the actions and comprises all key stakeholders responsible for delivery. The Implementation Group meets on a quarterly basis and publishes quarterly progress reports on the implementation status of actions.

The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce Implementation Review 2017 published in February 2018, comprehensively outlines the progress made in 2017 on the actions identified by the Taskforce. Of the 40 actions, 29 had been completed, with work on the remaining 11 carrying into the 2018 Work Programme. Following close engagement with stakeholders at the inaugural National Stakeholder Forum 2017, an additional 23 new measures were identified for delivery in 2018.

The outcome of discussions at the second Annual National Stakeholder Forum held in October 2018 informed preparation of the 2018 Annual Review report, which will be published in Q1 2019 together with the 2019 Work Programme.

With respect to identifying local blackspots, both the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and the Department of Rural and Community Development worked with a pilot group of local authorities to identify the issues associated with mapping local blackspots. This pilot exercise has been completed, with all local authorities having been asked to map local blackspots and identify infrastructure that could potentially be used to provide additional coverage on an economic basis. This includes blackspots identified by Tipper-

ary County Council under this action.

Various other initiatives are underway which will address blackspots around the country:

- 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 within the 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.

- 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.

In tandem with the work of the Taskforce, the release by ComReg of the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band, which has been identified at EU level as a primary band suitable for 5G rollout, will also contribute to addressing increasing mobile data demands and improve mobile coverage. Mobile operators' commercial investment has also resulted in improved services, following ComReg's 2012 multi-band spectrum auction. At least one operator now has in excess of 90% 4G population coverage.

All of these initiatives should help enhance the quality of mobile phone and data services, particularly in rural areas, including in County Tipperary.

Legislative Process

473. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the legislation, including heads of Bills, from his Department which has been sent to EU institutions before publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4244/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): There has been no legislation or heads of bills sent to EU institutions by my Department prior to publication in the period in question.

Illegal Dumping

474. Deputy John Curran asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of funding spent to combat illegal dumping nationally in each of the years 2016 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4297/19]

475. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of funding allocated to combat illegal dumping by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4298/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 474 and 475 together.

The total cost of illegal dumping is not collated by my Department as it includes local authority enforcement, disposal and legal costs and also involves costs for other State agencies such as An Garda Síochána. Illegal dumping is first and foremost a matter of individual responsibility and compliance with the law. While enforcement action in this area is a matter for local authorities, my Department encourages a multi-faceted approach to tackling the problem, incorporating enforcement, public awareness and education and, as such, provides funding to support the activities of the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities of approximately €1 million per annum and of the network of local authority waste enforcement officers of approximately €7.4 million per annum.

In addition, my Department has developed the Anti-Dumping Initiative to work in partnership with local authorities and community organisations in identifying high risk or problem areas, developing appropriate enforcement responses and carrying out clean-up operations. Since 2017 funding of €3.3 million has been made available from the Environment Fund in this regard which has supported over 400 projects across all 31 local authority areas, remediating black spots and equipping local authority enforcement officers with the latest technologies available to support SMART enforcement of our waste laws.

A review of this initiative has been undertaken to inform a 2019 anti-dumping work programme and the criteria for the selection of projects will be communicated to local authorities shortly.

Legislative Measures

476. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when legislation on drones (details supplied) will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3798/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Ireland already has a regulatory framework in place for drones - as set out under S.I. 563 of 2015 - which is now being enhanced by a new and very comprehensive EU Regulation - 2018/1139 (EU) - which sets out comprehensive rules relating to aviation safety and provides for new rules for drones.

Ireland has been at the forefront of drone regulation within the EU, and currently under our national rules all drones operating in the State with a mass of 1 kg or greater are required to be registered with the IAA. Registration is also required for drones with a mass of less than 1 kg where the operator wishes to fly at or above 15 metres above the ground (or water). When a drone is registered, there are restrictions where it may be flown, and it is limited to an operating height of not more than 120 metres above the ground (or water), unless specifically permitted by the IAA. There are also restrictions on flying drones near people, buildings and vehicles. To date, over 10,000 drones have been registered with the IAA.

The national rules also set the requirements for drone operations in the vicinity of aerodromes. For aerodromes within controlled airspace - such as Dublin, Cork, Shannon and Ireland West at Knock - drones are prohibited entirely, except as permitted by the IAA. For aerodromes in uncontrolled airspace, a drone may not be operated within 5km during periods

of aircraft operations, again unless the aerodrome operator or the IAA has given permission.

With regard to the new EU Regulation, I can advise the Deputy that the first set of detailed implementing rules for the operation of drones are currently being developed by the European Commission. Until these new pan-European rules are released, the Irish Aviation Authority will continue to apply the existing national regulatory requirements in accordance with S.I. 563 of 2015 for the registration and operation of drones.

Brexit Issues

477. Deputy Lisa Chambers asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the preparations made at the Port of Cork in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3813/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): An interdepartmental committee established in 2018, which includes the Revenue Commissioners, my own Department, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), the Health Service Executive's Environmental Health Service and the OPW, has been meeting regularly to assess and coordinate the additional infrastructure requirements of our Ports and Airports in preparation for Brexit.

The two ports which will be mainly affected by Brexit when the UK becomes a Third Country are Dublin and Rosslare. The OPW is engaging with the relevant stakeholders to ensure that the additional infrastructure to carry out any necessary import controls becomes operational in a timely manner.

There are no sanitary and phytosanitary checks carried out in the Port of Cork. The port is, however, approved to handle bulk shipments of wood and plant-based derivatives at the current container terminal in Tivoli and has been engaging with DAFM in respect of its existing third country trade (bulk wood products).

Port of Cork has identified the need for a BIP (Border Inspection Post) in their plans as part of a new €86 million container terminal in Ringaskiddy and the Port has engaged with both Customs and the DAFM on this matter. Should there be modal shift from RORO to LOLO the Port of Cork has spare capacity to cater for additional LOLO.

My Department has also sought to assess the existing maritime capacity for direct sailings between Ireland and continental EU ports as a potential alternative route for trade currently using the Landbridge. Brittany Ferries has already recently established a new direct route from Cork to Santander in Spain, creating capacity for 35,000 additional freight units annually.

Taxi Data

478. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of registered taxis and hackneys by area in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3707/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including the licensing of vehicles within this sector, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply to him. I ask him to advise my private office if he does not receive a response within 10 working days.

Departmental Funding

479. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the subsidies available to shipping companies registered here; their purpose; and their cost. [3708/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department does not subsidise any shipping companies. All shipping companies operating services in and out of the country are private commercial companies and receive no State funding.

The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has responsibility for the subsidised ferry services to offshore islands and can supply details in that regard.

Airport Security

480. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 227 of 16 January 2019, the reason a recommendation from a contracted auditor for the removal of exemption for law enforcement officers is being implemented (details supplied). [3750/19]

481. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 227 of 16 January 2019, the reason a recommendation is being implemented by a contracted auditor for the removal of the authorised officers of the Airport Police Service from the security compliance exemption list (details supplied). [3751/19]

482. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a member of An Garda Síochána and-or a member of the Defence Forces who has undergone a once-off background check on entering the service will continue to be exempt from searches in cases in which they enter and exit airport facilities and different areas within an airport campus in view of a proposal that airport police who undergo three-yearly Garda vetting will not be exempt from such searches. [3752/19]

483. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the initial proposal to remove authorised officers of the Airport Police Service from the airport security compliance exemption list was put forward; the person or body that originally suggested same; the reasoning for the proposal; and the objective that will be achieved by the removal of the exemption. [3753/19]

484. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if possession of a full background check such as is held by gardaí and members of the Defence Forces is an acceptable level of security compliance to maintain the position of a person on the airport security compliance exemption list. [3754/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 480 to 484, inclusive, together.

Airport security arrangements continue to be developed in accordance with commitments made in the 2015 National Aviation Policy (NAP), which was developed by the Department following extensive industry and stakeholder consultation. The NAP committed to introduce a risk-based approach to ensure Ireland has a robust and efficient aviation security system.

Questions - Written Answers

The new enhanced staff screening procedures that the Deputy raises were decided by my Department and adopted by the National Civil Aviation Security Committee (NCASC) on the basis of a risk assessment by the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA), which has responsibility for overseeing compliance with aviation security requirements in Ireland. The NCASC has members taken from key Government Departments, the Revenue Commissioners, An Garda Síochána, the Defence Forces, and industry (both airports and airlines). A number of reviews/audits of security practices and procedures at the State airports pointed to the need to introduce improvements in staff screening arrangements. In particular, in 2017 the Department invited the Paris-based, intergovernmental European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC) to review security at Dublin Airport. A number of recommendations were made, including relating to improving security screening and checks for insider threats. The Department and the IAA have set about implementing these nationally as part of the National Civil Aviation Security Programme.

On 1 June 2018 my Department issued notice of the new screening procedures, and work has been ongoing at the airports in preparation for the introduction of the new procedures, which take effect from 30 January 2019. What this means in practice is that affected staff will no longer have unchecked access to the designated secure areas of the airport; rather they will have to undergo security checks. It will be a quick and streamlined process, with special facilities provided. I wish to assure the Deputy that it has been made quite clear to all of those involved that personnel will continue to be exempt from security screening if they are responding to any emergency situation. The Department has been in regular communications with the Revenue Commissioners' management, airport management and the Airport Police, and a lot of work has been undertaken at all of the airports to develop and communicate the procedures and protocols that will now be put into effect. The introduction of these new measures will improve security practices and security culture at our airports, which is in everyone's best interests.

The audit in January 2019 to which the Deputy refers was an inspection of the IAA by the European Commission, and part of this inspection was conducted at Dublin Airport. The results of this inspection have not yet been released.

Road Network

485. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a crash barrier will be erected outside a property (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3762/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and operation of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. I ask the Deputy to advise my private office if he does not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects Status

486. Deputy Tom Neville asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position in which the Cork and Limerick motorway is tiered on a priority list with the Macroom bypass and the Dunkettle interchange. [3787/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and operation of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. I ask the Deputy to advise my private office if he does not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Services

487. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a bus shelter will be installed at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3811/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport infrastructure, including the provision of bus shelters. I am advised that the NTA has developed a strategy for determination of investment in the installation of bus shelters around the country.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. I ask him to advise my private office if he does not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Public Transport Initiatives

488. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated amount it would cost to adopt free public transport on Cork city orbital routes on the bus network for holders of Leap cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3837/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for public transport fares and I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. I ask him to advise my private office if he does not receive a reply within ten working days.

Transport Policy

489. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided for independent expert assistance to resident groups seeking to understand or amend the BusConnects proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3840/19]

490. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided for independent expert assistance to resident groups seeking to understand or amend MetroLink proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3841/19]

491. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his atten-

tion has been drawn to the fact that residents living on and around Mobhi Road are experiencing difficulty assessing the way in which the BusConnects and MetroLink proposals will affect their community; and if he will consider furnishing independent expert assistance to them in this regard. [3842/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 489 to 491, 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 statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the development of BusConnects and MetroLink.

As the Deputy is aware, extensive public consultations are taking place with regard to both projects.

In relation to proposals to develop new bus lanes as part of the BusConnects programme, any property owner whose property is impacted by the development of the new bus lanes is offered a one-to-one meeting by the NTA and I would encourage any such property owner to meet with the NTA to discuss the proposals and their implications. In addition to that personalised consultation with individual property owners, the NTA publishes detailed booklets in relation to each proposed “corridor”, establishes a community forum for each corridor and holds public information events in relation to the various corridors. The Deputy will, I am sure, acknowledge the extensive scope of this non-statutory consultation process.

In relation to MetroLink, I understand the NTA is finalising its review of the thousands of submissions received as part of last year’s extensive public consultation process and will in the coming months re-engage with the public on a fresh round of public consultation on what will be referred to as the “Preferred Route”. That will be a further opportunity for people to review and consider proposals and engage with the NTA and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) during that public consultation process.

I note the Deputy’s comments with regard to Mobhi Road and would refer to my comments above in relation to MetroLink and its impending consultation period and note that consultations on BusConnects proposals which may impact that area will commence in mid-February.

I am satisfied that the processes I have referred to above provide ample opportunity for people to understand the implications of any proposals and I would encourage as many people as possible to engage with these extensive consultation processes on these two potentially transformative public transport initiatives.

Greenways Development

492. Deputy Peadar Tóibín asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the projected expenditure of €53 million on the development of new rural greenways in each of the years 2019, 2020 and 2021; the major developments and the projected expenditure for each during the three-year period; his plans and the projected costs for the construction of the next phase of the Boyne greenway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3863/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department officials are currently assessing the detailed Greenways applications submitted following the recent funding call which closed on 30th November 2018. It is my intention to announce the allocations from this round in Q2 of this year. €13.3 million has been allocated in the 2019

Revised Estimates for Greenways development in 2019 and there are indicative allocations of €19m in 2020 and €20m in 2021.

In regard to the proposed Boyne Greenway, among the applications received was one from Fingal County Council, in conjunction with Meath County Council, for planning and design funding for the ‘Newbridge to Newgrange’ Greenway, which will incorporate the Boyne Valley Greenway. An estimate of construction costs was included in their application of €20m-€25m for the entire route.

Road Projects Status

493. Deputy Michael Lowry asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Limerick to Waterford primary route, the N24, was identified by Transport Infrastructure Ireland as a priority project for upgrading works (details supplied); when a decision will issue from TII on the project appraisal plans for both sections of the N24 in view of the importance of the road as a corridor link from Rosslare Europort to the west of Ireland; if the project will be accelerated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3865/19]

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 national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a more detailed and direct reply on the current status of N24 projects. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Public Transport Fares

494. Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a person aged under 18 years of age and older than 16 years of age must pay the full adult price despite being a student in second level education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3872/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the regulation of fares in relation to public passenger transport services. I have, therefore, referred the Deputy’s question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Projects Expenditure

495. Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the work being carried out on the M7 is on budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3873/19]

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 construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Public Transport

496. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of funding that has been allocated to the BusConnects project in County Galway; and the status of the plan. [3887/19]

498. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of funding that has been allocated to BusConnects in County Cork; and the status of the plan. [3914/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 496 and 498 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. In that regard, the Deputy is presumably aware that the National Development Plan provides an indicative allocation of €200m for the implementation of BusConnects in Galway city and a further €200m for implementation in Cork city. A copy of the National Development Plan is available on the www.gov.ie website.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in our cities, including BusConnects.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Bus Éireann Fleet

497. Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the new Bus Éireann low floor buses allocated by the National Transport Authority to city services have a different colour livery from the rest of the Bus Éireann fleet; the engagement the NTA had with disability advocates prior to these vehicles arriving in County Waterford; if these buses are surplus fleet that was originally allocated to a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3905/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure, including bus fleet purchase.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Question No. 498 answered with Question No. 496.

Road Safety

499. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that lights at key junctions along the M6 and the M7 have been dimmed; and his views on whether this is appropriate and safe for road users. [3917/19]

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 maintenance, improvement and operation of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Services

500. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if an official bus stop will be put in place at a location (details supplied). [3918/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport infrastructure including the provision of bus shelters. I am advised that the NTA has developed a strategy for determination of investment in the installation of bus shelters around the country.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Proposed Legislation

501. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the large public service vehicles Bill will be brought forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3920/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The large public service vehicle licensing regime is a multi-faceted framework which regulates: entry into the profession of a road passenger transport operator; vehicle standards and suitability for carriage of passengers; and access to operate certain routes. This framework requires cross agency collaboration and encompasses multiple state agencies including An Garda Síochána, the Road Safety Authority, The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the National Transport Authority.

The licensing of large public service vehicles is governed by multiple pieces of legislation including the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009, the Road Traffic and Transport Act 2006, the Road Safety Authority (Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness) Act 2012 and the Road Traf-

fic Act 1961.

I have no plans at present to bring forward a Large Public Services Vehicle Bill. However my Department is engaged in an ongoing review of the regulatory regime applying in this sector.

Road Projects Status

502. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the northern relief road for Mallow, County Cork, will begin construction. [4012/19]

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 construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Park and Ride Facilities

503. Deputy Declan Breathnach asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the need for a park and ride facility on the M1 at two interchanges (details supplied) at which cars park dangerously near these junctions daily; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4118/19]

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 operation, improvement and maintenance of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

Noting the above position and that the specific issue, to which you refer, relates to an operational matter for TII, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

504. Deputy Shane Cassells asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the funding allocations for the sports capital programme will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4197/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme opened for applications on Friday 7 September and the application period closed on Friday 19th October. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding.

186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round

of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January.

For the first time, applicants who have submitted incorrect documentation under this round will be given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a number of months to have all applications assessed. Accordingly, I expect that it will be at least the second quarter of this year before the full set of allocations under this current round of the programme are announced.

Bus Services

505. Deputy Peter Burke asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the NTA will be requested to investigate potential route changes of an outsourced service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4203/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally. In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Legislative Process

506. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the legislation, including heads of Bills, from his Department which has been sent to EU institutions before publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4257/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): A draft copy of Regulations transposing EU amending Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment - was forward to the Commission in 2018.

Rail Services Provision

507. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of completing phase two of the Navan rail line. [4327/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware the issue of a potential extension of the existing Dunboyne/M3 Parkway line was considered by the National Transport Authority (NTA) during its development of the statutory Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016 to 2035.

The Strategy stated that based on current population and employment forecasts, the level of

Questions - Written Answers

travel demand between Navan, Dunshaughlin and various stations to the city centre was insufficient to justify the development of a high-capacity rail link at that current time. Instead the Strategy proposed an enhanced bus service along the corridor and the development of a bus hub in Navan. In this regard, Bus Éireann introduced a new service on the N2 Corridor in late 2017. Furthermore, Meath County Council, in collaboration with the NTA, is currently progressing the development of a bus hub as provided for by the Transport Strategy.

Importantly, the Transport Strategy clearly states that the issue of a rail link to Navan should be kept under review and that the corridor previously identified for a Navan rail link should be protected from development. This issue remains under review and will be considered again as part of the statutory review of the current Strategy which must be reviewed every 6 years following publication.

In light of their statutory responsibilities on the matter I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please contact my office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Public Transport Subsidies

508. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the subvention provided to Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus and Luas in 2018; and the amount planned to be allocated in 2019. [4328/19]

509. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the PSO funding to each public transport operator that was allocated in each year since 2006, by existent services and new services, respectively. [4329/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 508 and 509 together.

The PSO funding provided to Iarnród Éireann, Bus Eireann and Bus Átha Cliath from 2006 - 2009 can be seen in the following table.

	IÉ (€000)	BÉ (€000)	BÁC (€000)
2006	188,716	26,459	69,845
2007	189,910	36,595	80,078
2008	181,152	41,846	85,629
2009	170,624	49,365	83,199

Since 2010, the award of Public Service Obligation (PSO) funding falls under the independent statutory remit of the National Transport Authority (NTA). The allocations to the companies are decided by the NTA in exercise of its statutory mandate and in accordance with the various contract arrangements that it has in place with PSO service providers. I have therefore referred the part of the Deputy's questions which relates to 2010 onwards to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles

510. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of applications made to the grant scheme for wheelchair accessible vehicles in 2018; and the

number of those applications granted and denied, respectively, by county. [4330/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including the licensing of wheelchair accessible taxis and wheelchair accessible hackneys, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

Accordingly, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Ministerial Meetings

511. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of times he has met with each of the agencies and companies under the aegis of his Department in the past year, in tabular form. [4331/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The table sets out the meetings I have had in the past year with agencies and companies under the aegis of my Department.

Agency/Company	Number of Meetings
Bus Eireann	1
CIE	1
Commission for railway Regulation	1
daa	2
Dublin Bus	2
Failte Ireland	2
IAA	4
Irish Rail	1
Medical Bureau of Road Safety	4
NTA	8
RSA	11
Sport Ireland	5
TII	5
Tourism Ireland	3

Rail Network

512. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding provided to Iarnród Éireann under the infrastructure management multi-annual contract in each year since 2006. [4332/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the Infrastructure Manager Multi-Annual Contract (IMMAC) provides the funding framework for the maintenance and renewal of our railway infrastructure. Funding is provided to the Infrastructure Manager (or IM) division of Iarnród Éireann and that funding is derived from two sources:

- an annual Exchequer contribution; and

- access charges payable by railway undertakings which make use of the railway infrastructure.

The vast majority of the funding is provided by the annual Exchequer contribution, while the smaller amount provided by railway undertakings' access charges is largely comprised of fees paid by Iarnród Éireann's Railway Undertaking (or RU) division, which is itself in receipt of significant Exchequer funding under its Public Services Contracts with the National Transport Authority.

The IMMAC was established in 2014 and succeeded the Railway Safety Programme which ended in 2013 and which was a different funding programme.

Details of the Exchequer IMMAC contribution made in each year since 2014 is provided in the following table.

Year:	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Funding (€m):	140.49	144.17	134.00	158.77	160.00

A new IMMAC is currently being finalised to provide for the next multi-annual period. However, I can inform the Deputy that the increases I secured in Budget 2019 mean that the Exchequer contribution will increase this year by approximately 23% to €197 million. This means that the steady state funding requirement (as measured on an annualised basis) is met for 2019 and represents significant, and very welcome, progress.

Sports Funding

513. Deputy Noel Rock asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if emergency funding will be made available to repair the crack in the surface at the throwing circle in a stadium (details supplied) to allow high-level athletes to train there rather than travel outside Dublin and miss college lectures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4336/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Sport Ireland is the statutory body with responsibility for the operation of the stadium to which the Deputy's question refers. I have referred the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland for direct reply in relation to this matter. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Illegal Adoptions

514. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 58 of 22 January 2019, the percentage of the 126 persons with illegal birth registrations adopted from St. Patrick's Guild who have now been informed of their illegal registration; and the percentage of the group who have been offered counselling services. [3710/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The progress made regarding contacting those affected by the cases of illegal registrations discovered in the St. Patrick's Guild records is a matter for Tusla and the process is still ongoing.

The Deputy will be aware that the process of contacting people in these circumstances is a sensitive and complex one and the pace must respect the wishes of the individual involved. Tusla has indicated that all relevant persons who have been contacted by Tusla and who wish to

engage with Tusla services have been offered counselling support.

I understand that Tusla has also responded directly to the Deputy in relation to this matter.

Early Years Sector

515. Deputy Peadar Tóibín asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the planned changes to school-age care; the rationale for the 12:1 staff-to-child ratio in view of the fact that primary-age children are often in classes with staff-to-child ratios of up to 40:1; when the changes will come into effect; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3749/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The regulation of school-age childcare is an important measure to secure children's health, safety and welfare. The registration of school-age childcare services is also necessary given the restriction of the Affordable Childcare Scheme to services that are registered with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Initial regulations will come into force on 18th February, enabling services to register in time to take part in the Affordable Childcare Scheme when it opens later this year.

The primary focus of the initial regulations is that school age childcare services are registered with Tusla. The regulations also specify requirements on Garda vetting of staff, insurance, access to outdoor space, and the maintenance of policies and procedures on child safeguarding, fire safety, complaints, administration of medication, dropping off and collection of children, and other key policies.

The requirements being introduced include a minimum ratio of 1 adult to 12 children. The 1:12 ratio was determined following the advice of the School Age Childcare Standards Working Group, which submitted draft proposals on quality standards for school-age childcare to my Department in 2018. Membership of the Standards Working Group included organisations that represent full-day care providers, parents, primary schools, children's rights and regulators, as well as organisations focused on the quality of school-age childcare. In developing their proposals, the Working Group reviewed international evidence and practice, in which there is considerable variation in ratio requirements. The School Age Childcare Standards Working Group was reconvened for a meeting with officials from my Department in September 2018, during drafting of the School-Age Childcare Regulations, for consultation specifically on the adult-child ratio and outdoor space requirements.

The Standards Working Group recommended a ratio of 1:11. The previous working group to examine the issue, which issued the report 'Developing School Age Childcare' in 2005, under the auspices of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, recommended a 1:8 ratio at that point in time. A higher ratio of 1:12 has been adopted for the Regulations, reflecting the fact that the age-group is on average higher than that in the Early Childhood Care and Education programme, for which a 1:11 ratio is required.

School-age childcare services cater for children of very varied ages, from 4 to 14 years of age, though data from Pobal's Early Years Sector Profile suggests that the majority of children attending school-age childcare are less than 8 years old.

Comparison with the pupil-teacher ratio in schools must take into account the fact that the classroom environment in a school is very different from a childcare setting, and that school-age childcare services are not provided by the State. Similarly, the National Youth Council of Ireland, in its 2015 publication 'Working Safely in a Youth Club', recommends a ratio in youth clubs - which may cater for young people of school-going age - of 1 adult to 8 young people.

Furthermore, school-age childcare can involve full-day participation (during holiday periods) of up to 10 hours. For a similar reason, whereas the ratio for sessional care for 3-5 year olds is 1:11, the ratio for full-day care for the same age-group is 1:8.

The regulations come into force on 18th February. Existing services will have either 6 or 3 months in which to apply for registration with Tusla, depending on whether or not they are also registered pre-school services. The 1:12 ratio as required in the regulations will apply to all school age childcare services. The 3-6 month period for registration is intended to allow existing providers time to prepare. Acknowledging that some services may require time to adjust to the new ratio requirement, officials in my Department are currently and expediently examining the matter of commencement of the ratio requirement and will issue a further communication very shortly.

The regulations coming into force in February are initial regulations, and a public consultation process is planned for 2019 on the development of more comprehensive regulations.

Youth Work Projects Funding

516. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way in which a project (details supplied) in Dublin 11 is funded by her Department; when she last visited the project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3795/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The project referred to by the Deputy receives funding from my Department through the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and Community Childcare Subvention Plus (CCSP) programmes. In addition, the project also receives funding from Tusla under the School Completion Programme (SCP).

The CCS Programme is a childcare programme targeted to support parents on a low income to avail of reduced childcare costs at participating community childcare service. The CCSP Programme provides support for certain parents to avail of reduced childcare costs at participating privately owned childcare services and also at community not-for-profit childcare services. The project is one of 830 childcare services in contract with my Department to deliver the CCS programme, and one of 3,132 childcare services in contract with my Department to deliver the CCSP programme.

The SCP programme focuses on targeting and providing supports to young people identified to be most at risk of early school leaving. There are currently 124 SCP projects covering 467 primary schools and 244 post primary schools.

The project last had a Ministerial visit in July 2015.

Child Protection

517. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if Tusla has a written policy on the use of section 13 of the Child Care Act 1991 (details supplied) regarding a newborn infant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3955/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Under Section 3 of the Child Care Act 1991 Tusla has a statutory function to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection. This applies to all children, regardless of their age.

When a referral about a child welfare or protection concern is made, Tusla social workers must assess the circumstances of the child or children involved. Appropriate action to ensure the safety and protection of that child or children must be taken. These actions can include applying to the District Court for an order under Section 13 of the Child Care Act if the child or children are considered to be at immediate and serious risk. Practitioners can refer to the Child Welfare and Protection Practice Handbook for guidance on the appropriate use of Section 13 in child welfare and protection proceedings.

All referrals of child protection and welfare are subject to a standard business process, which ensures that referrals are screened for eligibility for a service and subjected to a preliminary enquiry, to establish whether it is necessary to complete an initial assessment. Initial assessments are carried out using the national approach to practice, Signs of Safety. The emphasis at all times is on Tusla working together with the child and family to plan for the child's safety. At any stage during this process, if a child or children is considered to be at immediate and serious risk, Tusla can apply to the District Court for an order under Section 13 of the Child Care Act to ensure the safety of that child.

Children in Care

518. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children taken into care under sections 12, 13 or 17 of the Child Care Act 1991, in cases in which the child was under 30 days and under one year of age, in each of the years 2013 to 2018. [3956/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have been provided by Tusla with data on the number of children taken into care under Section 13 or 17 of the Child Care Act 1991. Children are not admitted to care under Section 12 of the Act, which is only used by An Gardaí Síochána to remove a child to safety.

Data on admissions of children aged under 30 days is not collated nationally and the data provided is a count of admissions into care of children aged under 1 year. It should also be noted that data for 2018 is not yet available.

Table 1: Admissions of children aged under 1 year into care following the use of Sections 13 and 17 of the Child Care Act 1991

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Section 13	41	32	45	28	30
Section 17	56	51	57	41	48

It is important to note the data is a count of admissions and not individual children, as a child may have more than one admission in the year.

Child and Family Agency Policy

519. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if Tusla has a written policy for engaging with parents with disabilities in the context of childcare proceedings. [3957/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, recognises that some parents, including those with a disability, may need

additional support and special consideration in respect of their disabilities and their parenting capacity. The Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook outlines that, in circumstances where a parent/carer has a disability, it is likely that there may be a number of professionals from different services involved. It is important that these professionals work together when enquiries and assessments are being conducted, to identify any links between the parent's disability and the impact on the child. Any assessment should include an understanding of the needs of the family and individual children.

Legal representation is provided by the Legal Aid Board to parents who meet the eligibility criteria, and this includes parents with disabilities. Advocacy services are also provided by voluntary agencies, such as the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities, to parents with disabilities whose children are the subject of a court order.

The national approach to practice, 'Signs of Safety', highlights the importance of considering complicating factors including parental disability in a child's life when a child protection concern is raised. Professionals involved must consider the impact of parental disability on the child and plan accordingly. Communication with parents is a key factor in the 'Signs of Safety' framework. Working together to ensure that parents are clearly aware of concerns regarding their child's safety and contributing to plans to address those concerns is a cornerstone of this approach.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

520. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if other sites similar to Tuam have been identified by her Department as necessitating excavations in which the potential for the presence of human remains exists. [4013/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The statutory Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and certain related matters) is tasked with examining burial arrangements for persons who died while resident in these institutions. My Department is not separately investigating these matters.

In its fourth interim report, which I published last week, the Commission reiterates the significant challenge of investigating the burial arrangements in respect of a number of these institutions. The report notes that people have recently come forward with additional information and the Commission is in the process of checking this information. As part of this process, the Commission recently commenced geophysical surveys on the burial grounds associated with the former Sean Ross Abbey institution in Co. Tipperary.

Furthermore, the Commission plans to submit a detailed interim report on its investigations into burial arrangements by the 15 March 2019. The report will include the Commission's assessment of burial arrangements at the site of the former Tuam institution and other major institutions.

I will examine this report and consider any findings or recommendations made at that time in consultation with my Government colleagues.

Affordable Childcare Scheme

521. Deputy Denise Mitchell asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the potential impact of the introduction of the affordable childcare scheme on community services

providing the community childcare subvention programme has been assessed; her plans to produce a report on the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4183/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Government policy relating to the new Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) was informed by evidence and with the best interests of children and families in mind. The legislation supporting the scheme, the Childcare Support Act 2018, was the subject of much discussion in the Houses and many elements of the policy were considered by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children on a number of occasions. A Regulatory Impact Analysis was conducted as part of the ACS development.

The Affordable Childcare Scheme, when introduced, will represent a major landmark for all children and families in Ireland, and especially for lower income families and lone parents. It may be accessed by all families and not just those working or studying full time. International reports have stated that ACS will significantly address affordability for lower income families and, for example, Ireland will change from being the most expensive country in the OECD for childcare for lone parents, to 11th position. This will have strong benefits to the community childcare sector.

Community Childcare settings provide a valuable service to children and families across the country. These services often provide vital childcare and support to vulnerable families in areas of disadvantage. In the last 4 years, the DCYA has increased funding for early learning and care and school age childcare by 117%. A significant proportion of this funding has been targeted at families who use community childcare services, thus assisting with sustainability issues expressed in recent years. The ACS will further increase investment in childcare and will reduce the top-up many parents have to pay for their childcare, with many benefits accruing for services, one of which is to lessen bad debt experienced by community providers, an issue raised by them with the DCYA in recent years. The ACS is also expected to increase demand for services thus ensuring that community services can operate at full capacity with efficiencies ensuing.

Any community service which is currently experiencing sustainability challenges, or, which fears the impact of the introduction of the ACS, should contact its local Childcare Committee or Pobal immediately. A number of supports are available to them. Pobal and the 30 local Childcare Committees will provide expert non-financial assistance and support in the first instance to identify root cause and ways to address this. Additionally, €1.7m has been allocated for targeted sustainability purposes in 2019.

As well as the analysis already completed and the sustainability features already built in to the ACS, work is ongoing to assess any potential negative impact of the introduction of the ACS on those community services which currently provide the community childcare subvention programme. As stated above, the Department is actively urging services that believe they are at risk to make themselves known so that available support measures can be put in place.

There are currently no plans to further report on the matter.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

522. Deputy Tom Neville asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding provided for the early childhood care and education scheme in 2018 and 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4232/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In 2018,

€303.4m was allocated for the funding of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme. This level of funding facilitated the attendance of c. 119,000 children in the ECCE pre-school programme. In 2019, €298.1m has been allocated for the ECCE scheme based on an anticipated c. 109,000 children registering with ECCE providers.

It should be noted that a number of policy changes to the ECCE scheme were instituted in September 2018 (effective for the academic year 2018/19), including the transition from multiple ECCE intakes in the academic year to a single intake occurring in September. In addition, the minimum age of qualification for ECCE was lowered to 2 years and 8 months; allowing a greater cohort of children to take advantage of the extension of ECCE entitlement to a full two years.

The budget allocation of 2019 reflects lower take-up, largely accounted for by declining birth rate and partly due to some children who are eligible for ECCE, registering instead with other government childcare schemes. This sometimes occurs because, at present parents can only register for one early learning and childcare scheme at a time. If the parent requires part time or full time day care, whereas ECCE covers 3 hours per day only, another scheme may be more attractive and may reduce the co-payment required by parents. The budget for these schemes has increased in the recent years.

However, the Affordable Childcare Scheme that is being introduced later this year will allow parents to register for ACS as well as ECCE, ensuring that children who need subsidised early learning and care or school age childcare, above and beyond ECCE hours, can avail of it in a more streamlined manner.

Early Childhood Care and Education

523. Deputy Tom Neville asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated annual cost of providing an additional two hours of free preschool education through the early childhood care and education scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4233/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): €298.1m has been allocated to the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme in 2019. Currently, children registered on ECCE receive 15 hours of free pre-school education per week.

Should the 15 hour entitlement be increased by 2 hours per week to a total of 17 hours per week, this would result in an estimated additional cost of €39.7m in 2019. Should the 15 hour entitlement be increased by an additional two hours per day, up to a total of 25 hours per week, the additional cost would be €198.7m in 2019.

It should also be noted that the hours of subsidy under the Affordable Childcare Scheme, which will be introduced in late 2019, are intended to wrap around a child's participation in ECCE. Therefore, any increase to the maximum number of eligible hours under ECCE would lead to an associated reduction in the cost of the Affordable Childcare Scheme. However, the impact of this effect has not been fully quantified and has therefore not been taken into account in the costing figures provided within this reply.

Variables	Hours p/week	Cost per annum (based on 2019)	Effect
Current entitlement	15 hours p/week	€298.1m	-
2 hours additional p/ week	17 hours p/week	€337.8m	€39.7m increase in funding required

Variables	Hours p/week	Cost per annum (based on 2019)	Effect
2 hours additional p/ day	25 hours p/week	€496.8m	€198.7m increase in funding required

Legislative Process

524. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the legislation, including heads of Bills, from her Department that have been sent to EU institutions before their publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4243/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I confirm that no piece of legislation (including Heads of Bills) from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs have been sent to EU institutions before their publication.

In relation to the Miscellaneous Provisions (Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 29 March 2019) Bill 2019, and Brexit Preparedness and Contingency planning more generally, the Government continues to engage with the EU institutions and other Member States to ensure a coordinated approach, where appropriate.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

525. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if legislation will be brought forward to amend the Residential Institutions Redress Act 2002 to provide for a redress function to incorporate the survivors of mother and baby homes. [4292/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have no plans to bring forward legislation to amend the Residential Institutions Redress Act 2002. As the Deputy will be aware, my colleague the Minister for Education and Skills is responsible for this legislation and related arrangements. The redress scheme established under this act has not been extended to any additional institutions since 2005.

I understand that when the Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse was published in 2009 there were a number of calls for the redress scheme to be extended to include additional institutions, including some mother and baby homes. These calls have been reviewed on a number of occasions by previous Governments with no change in the institutions covered by the scheme.

In 2016 the Second Interim Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes made a recommendation that the decision to exclude unaccompanied children who were resident in mother and baby homes from the Residential Institutions Redress Act should be re-examined by Government.

In examining this matter the Government decided it would not be appropriate to consider any such arrangements in advance of the findings and conclusions of the Commission on relevant matters. When the Commission submits its final reports, its conclusions on all matters regarding the treatment of former residents of Mother and Baby Homes will be taken into careful consideration when determining the State's response.

In the interim, the Government has agreed to consider supports and services to respond to the identified health and well-being needs of former residents. In July of last year I established

the Collaborative Forum, as a progressive response to the theme of “nothing about us without us” which emerged from my consultations with former residents of these institutions. This innovative approach has empowered former residents to actively contribute to the Government’s deliberations on matters of concern to them and their families.

The Forum has recently submitted its first report to me and I will be bringing my recommendations to Government in the coming weeks.

Youth Services Funding

526. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if funding will be restored to local youth groups to 2008 levels in order to prevent the return of the stigmatisation that was experienced in the past (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4369/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department was first established in 2011. As the Deputy is aware my Department, along with all government departments, was required to deliver substantial savings on all funding programmes in line with the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure 2012-2014. However, my Department sought to ensure front line youth services, particularly those for the most vulnerable young people, were protected as far as possible from the impact of the reduction in funding.

In recent years funding for the provision of youth services has been increased on an annual basis.

The overall budget for the youth sector in 2018 is € 58.9m in current expenditure, an increase of €7m in the youth funding provided in 2016.

Budget 2019 has provided a further increase of €1.5m in youth funding.

My Department has commenced a process to identify service development needs for 2019 and to finalise the 2019 youth funding allocations. The primary purpose of this process is to ensure that youth services are sufficiently resourced to meet the needs of young people and particularly those who are at risk of drugs or alcohol misuse, early school leaving, homelessness or who are living in disadvantaged communities.

In this regard, officials within my Department are currently processing funding renewal applications on behalf of both national youth organisations and youth projects throughout the country. Every effort will be made to complete this process as soon as possible and all youth organisations and youth services will be notified of their allocation at the earliest possible date.

I understand that in 2011 that Ballymun Regional Youth Service and Poppintree Youth received a combined total of €539,104 in youth funding from my Department. In 2018 these services received youth funding with a combined total of €1,442,794.

Child Protection

527. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of actions arising from an audit (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4370/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I thank the

Deputy for her question. I met with Dr. Shannon after the publication of his report to better understand the intent of the recommendations it contained, and to seek clarity on the measures that would be applied to assess their implementation. Following these discussions Dr. Shannon and I agreed the Action Plan.

I am pleased to report progress has been made on the recommendations. While many of the recommendations for Tusla are of an ongoing nature, I sought assurance at the start of this process that the issues identified are kept to the fore across child protection assessments and on-going engagement with vulnerable families.

The ongoing implementation of ‘Signs of Safety’ as the national approach to child protection provides an increased level of analysis and judgement, which will improve consistency in determining appropriate response pathways for children and families, ensuring they receive a proportionate and timely response.

Joint working between Tusla and An Garda Síochána has been enhanced on a number of levels. In relation to Tusla’s engagement with An Garda Síochána, the Joint Working Protocol has been operational since Quarter 1, 2018. Work has now commenced on the joint auditing of its implementation.

The Tusla/An Garda Síochána Joint Data Sharing Agreement is expected to be signed off by Tusla’s Interim CEO and the Garda Commissioner in Quarter 1, 2019.

An Garda Síochána has established the National Child Protection Unit, which is now operational. In October 2018, Tusla assigned a senior staff member for secondment to this Unit with specific responsibility for the development of a joint working model. A draft Specialist Interviewing Protocol is under consultation, with a target launch date end of February 2019.

Progress has also been made on developing the out of hours social work service. A single national out of hours number went live on 3rd December 2018 and is available to members of An Garda Síochána, Out of Hours GP services and the Accident and Emergency service. This service provides access to an on-call social worker at regional/area level who can go the scene of an incident in specific cases of a serious nature.

Dr Shannon’s findings on the manner in which Section 12 circumstances were managed by An Garda Síochána prompted me also to request Tusla to commission research into how social workers made decisions when a child came into their custody, following the use by An Garda Síochána of Section 12. This research was undertaken by NUI Galway and a final report is expected early this year.

As the Deputy will be aware, the focus of Dr. Shannon’s audit of the application of Section 12 was An Garda Síochána, and the majority of recommendations focus on improving Garda practice in these situations. The report also identified key areas for improvement in Tusla practice and the Action Plan I agreed with Dr Shannon specifically addressed these areas. While not all actions are yet completed, I am confident that the changes that have and are being put in place are bringing about significant improvements.

I have also established an interdepartmental group to put in place arrangements for cross-agency centres to support children and families who have suffered from child sexual abuse.

‘One House’ centres are intended to provide services for children and adolescents where there is a concern that sexual abuse may have occurred. The intention is that the centres will support children who have suffered sexual abuse while accessing care or health services, and engaging with the criminal justice system. The ‘One House’ will bring together the forensic, protection, health, therapeutic and policing services in a child centred way in order to mini-

mise as far as possible any additional trauma for the child and their family. The centres should improve the efficiency and effectiveness of child sexual abuse services and develop specialist expertise, skills and knowledge in this complex area, for the benefit of children who have suffered from sexual abuse and their families.

Community Services Programme Funding

528. Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the rural community affair, Pobal, regarding CSP funding; and the date of its implementation. [4050/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I understand the Deputy is referring to the Community Services Programme (CSP) and, in particular, to the eligibility of a participant in a specific CSP supported organisation who has reached 66 years of age.

The CSP supports around 400 community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model with funding provided as a fixed annual contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent positions. This contribution must be co-funded by the organisations concerned from other sources, for example, from income received from the public use of their facilities and services.

CSP eligibility criteria currently preclude supported organisations, including the organisation in question, from using CSP funding to co-fund salaries of employees once they reach 66 years of age. That said, the internal operations of CSP supported organisations, including general employment issues relating to CSP supported posts, are solely matters for the Boards of those organisations to manage as the respective employers. Accordingly, supported organisations may continue to employ persons once they reach their 66th birthday, but the funds to do so must come from a non-CSP source.

My Department will shortly commence a review of the CSP and there are no immediate plans to change any programme criteria pending completion of this review. The review will help inform decisions on the future shape of the programme, including *inter alia* programme funding arrangements and age related eligibility criteria. Subject to a successful tender process, I expect a reviewer to be appointed before the end of February. The review will take six months and should be completed in early Autumn 2019.

Walks Scheme

529. Deputy Aindrias Moynihan asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when he plans to reopen the rural walks scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3712/19]

530. Deputy Aindrias Moynihan asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress which has been made towards reopening the rural walks scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3713/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 529 and 530 together.

The Walks Scheme currently covers 39 trails, with payments made to approximately 1,900 private land-holders to maintain those trails.

The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to increase the number of walks covered by the scheme. In line with this commitment, funding for the scheme was doubled in Budget 2019 - from €2 million to €4 million - to allow this expansion to proceed.

I will shortly be initiating a review of the operation of Walks Scheme which will inform decisions regarding the expansion of the scheme. However, in order to be in a position to bring new trails on to the scheme as soon as possible, I will also be inviting Local Development Companies and Local Authorities, in the coming weeks, to submit expressions of interest in respect of trails that meet specific qualifying criteria, for consideration for inclusion in the scheme.

This process will enable my Department to identify, very quickly, the initial trails for inclusion in the expanded scheme, with additional walks to join the scheme on an incremental basis.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

531. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his attention has been drawn to a matter (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3743/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The first call for applications for the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund closed in September 2018. €1 billion is committed to the Fund over a 10 year period to support rural economic development and help build strong communities with €55 million allocated to the fund in Budget 2019.

Applications made for the Fund are currently being examined by the Project Advisory Board, made up of representatives from key Government Departments and external experts, which was established to oversee the assessment process.

My role is to consider and approve the recommendations that emerge from the assessment process outlined above. The process of assessment for the first call for proposals is ongoing.

However, I am now informed that my Department is aware of concerns relating to a particular application and this matter will be dealt with appropriately.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

532. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his views on a matter (details supplied). [4000/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Under Project Ireland 2040, the Government has committed €1 billion to the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund over a 10 year period to support rural economic development and help build strong communities. The Fund has been allocated €315m over the period 2019 to 2022, with €55m set aside in my Department's budget for successful projects in 2019.

The first call for applications for the Fund closed at the end of September and there was an excellent response from all across the country, with 280 applications received.

Applications for the Fund are currently being examined by the Project Advisory Board, made up of representatives from key Government Departments and external experts, which was established to oversee the assessment process. Category 1 "shovel ready" projects were prioritised in the assessment process in the first instance and Category 2 projects - those which

need development funding to become potential Category 1 applications in future calls for applications - are also now being considered.

My role is to consider and approve the recommendations that emerge from the assessment process outlined above. While the process of assessment for the first call for proposals remains ongoing, I expect that a further announcement detailing successful Category 1 and Category 2 projects will take place shortly, with a second call for the Fund taking place later in the year.

Rural Recreation Policy

533. Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the timeline for the roll-out of the Bill to protect landowners from claims by hill walkers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4009/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The introduction of a National Indemnity Scheme is a key priority for my Department to support the continued provision of access to the countryside for recreational users on a permissive access basis.

My Department has been working to develop a scheme to indemnify private land owners with regard to the use of their lands for recreational purposes. In this context, my officials have been in contact with the State Claims Agency and the Attorney General's Office with a view to progressing the matter.

My Department has been advised that the proposed indemnity scheme should be underpinned by legislation, and my officials are now in the process of identifying the precise legislative requirements and processes required give effect to the scheme.

This is a complex issue and the legal rights of landowners must be considered and respected, while trying to facilitate access to their lands for recreational users on a permissive basis.

However, I have asked my officials to review all the advice received to date and to prioritise the development of clear legislative proposals to have the scheme progressed and rolled out on a phased basis as soon as possible.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme Funding

534. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the moneys allocated specifically for projects in Mallow town by a partnership (details supplied) in each of the years 2012 to 2019; and the locations to which the moneys were allocated in tabular form. [4016/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The partnership company referred to by the Deputy delivers a range of funding streams on behalf of a number of different organisations, including my Department. My Department does not have information in respect of all of these funding streams or of the specific projects that may have been funded.

In respect of my own Department, the partnership company is the Programme Implementer for the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SCIAP). Table 1 provides details of the funding provided to the partnership company under this programme for the years 2012 to 2019.

The partnership company delivered the 2007-2013 LEADER Programme as a Local Action Group (LAG) and details of the funding provided to the partnership company in each of the years 2012 to 2016 are provided in Table 2. I understand that no LEADER projects were funded in Mallow during this period as Mallow was not eligible for LEADER funding at that time.

The approach to the delivery of the LEADER programme changed in 2016. A funding agreement was signed with the North Cork Local Community Development Committee in 2016 to deliver LEADER 2014-2020 as the Local Action Group in North Cork. The partnership company continues to implement the LEADER 2014-2020 programme in conjunction with the North Cork LAG, and is the point of contact for all potential applicants. Mallow is now eligible for funding under the new LEADER programme; however the allocation of funding to individual projects is a matter for the Local Action Group rather than the partnership company.

The North Cork LAG has an allocation of almost €5.1 million under the 2014-2020 LEADER Programme. The allocation is provided for the duration of the programme rather than on an annual basis as this provides greater flexibility for Local Action Groups to manage their resources over the full duration of the programme.

Table 1: Funding provided under SCIAP in the period 2012-2019

Years	Allocations
2012	€450,939.83
2013	€398,789.67
2014	€419,374.00
2015	€277,433.00
2016	€275,392.00
2017	€275,392.00
2018	€283,654.00
2019	€283,654.00
Total	€2,664,628.50

Table 2: Funding provided under LEADER in the period 2012-2016.

Years	Payments
2012	€1,212,829.76
2013	€1,264,467.54
2014	€1,276,918.01
2015	€303,547.76
2016	€187,217.01
Total	€4,244,980.08

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme Funding

535. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the moneys allocated specifically for projects in Fermoy town by a partnership (details supplied) in each of the years 2012 to 2019; and the locations to which the moneys were allocated in tabular form. [4017/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The partnership company referred to by the Deputy delivers a range of funding streams on behalf of a number of different organisations, including my Department. My Department does not have

Questions - Written Answers

information in respect of all of these funding streams or of the specific projects that may have been funded.

In respect of my own Department, the partnership company is the Programme Implementer for the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SCIAP). Table 1 provides details of the funding provided to the partnership company under this programme for the years 2012 to 2019.

The partnership company delivered the 2007-2013 LEADER Programme as a Local Action Group (LAG) and details of the funding provided to the partnership company in each of the years 2012 to 2016 are provided in Table 2.

The approach to the delivery of the LEADER programme changed in 2016. A funding agreement was signed with the North Cork Local Community Development Committee in 2016 to deliver LEADER 2014-2020 as the Local Action Group in North Cork. The partnership company continues to implement the LEADER 2014-2020 programme in conjunction with the North Cork LAG, and is the point of contact for all potential applicants. The allocation of funding to individual projects in Fermoy is a matter for the Local Action Group rather than the partnership company.

The North Cork LAG has an allocation of almost €5.1 million under the 2014-2020 LEADER Programme. The allocation is provided for the duration of the programme rather than on an annual basis as this provides greater flexibility for Local Action Group's to manage their resources over the full duration of the programme.

Table 1: Funding provided under SCIAPI in the period 2012-2019

Years	Allocations
2012	€450,939.83
2013	€398,789.67
2014	€419,374.00
2015	€277,433.00
2016	€275,392.00
2017	€275,392.00
2018	€283,654.00
2019	€283,654.00
Total	€2,664,628.50

Table 2: Funding provided under LEADER in the period 2012-2016.

Years	Funding
2012	€1,212,829.76
2013	€1,264,467.54
2014	€1,276,918.01
2015	€303,547.76
2016	€187,217.01
Total	€4,244,980.08

Mobile Telephony Services

536. Deputy Niall Collins asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development further to Parliamentary Question No. 1013 of 15 January 2019, if he will provide a schedule

(details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4081/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): In 2017, officials from my Department, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and a small number of Local Authorities met to examine the potential for mapping mobile phone black spots in Ireland.

On foot of these meetings, an invitation was issued in late 2017 to all Local Authorities to provide data on 5-6 prioritised local black spots.

Some Local Authorities provided details of more than the 5-6 black spots requested. However, the intention was only to identify areas of immediate priority for the purposes of the exercise in question, rather than to compile a definitive list of black spots across the country.

While the exercise was informative, it was not comprehensive. Of the thirty one Local Authorities, only seventeen returned data to feed into the exercise. The majority of Local Authorities did not have the capacity to carry out technical testing. Furthermore, the methods used to collect the data varied.

Simultaneously, mobile network operators and infrastructure providers were increasing the number of mobile phone sites in service, as well as upgrading existing networks. As a consequence, the data that was collected in 2018 only represented a snapshot in time for certain areas and could not be interpreted as a definitive source of information regarding mobile phone black spots. Nor would it be a fair reflection of the current situation, as network developments are taking place on an on-going basis.

ComReg will shortly be publishing a national map of mobile phone coverage for 2G, 3G and 4G services. This map will show the quality of mobile phone coverage across the county and is a key deliverable of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce.

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

537. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if additional funding will be provided for the local improvement scheme to local authorities particularly in counties Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal and Roscommon in order to clear the backlog of applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4102/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Local Improvement Scheme, or LIS, is a programme for improvement works on small private or non-public roads in rural areas. The scheme is now funded by my Department and is administered through the Local Authorities. It is a matter for the Local Authorities to prioritise the roads to be completed under the scheme.

As the Deputy may be aware, there was no dedicated funding for this scheme for a number of years due to constraints on public expenditure. However, I was very conscious of the underlying demand for the scheme in rural areas throughout the country.

I reintroduced the LIS in September 2017 and allocated a total of €17.4 million to Local Authorities for LIS roads in 2017.

In 2018, I allocated almost €21 million for LIS roads in two phases.

It is clear that there is a continuing demand for LIS funding in rural communities across Ireland, and I have therefore secured an allocation of €10 million for the scheme in my Depart-

ment's Estimate for 2019. I will be announcing details of LIS 2019 in the coming weeks.

Seniors Alert Scheme

538. Deputy Noel Grealish asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if grants are available for the provision of house alarms for those over 65 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4117/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department is responsible for the Seniors Alert Scheme which encourages community support for vulnerable older people in our communities through the provision of personal monitored alarms to enable them to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. Funding is available under the scheme towards the purchase by a registered community-based organisation of a personal alarm or pendant.

Following a review, a new version of the scheme came into effect on 1 November 2017. A number of changes were introduced under the new scheme including the provision of free monitoring for the first year and a revision of the living alone requirements. I am pleased to advise the Deputy that the revised scheme has been a resounding success with unprecedented levels of demand for the new package.

The issue of the introduction of funding for the installation of house alarms is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality.

LEADER Programmes Expenditure

539. Deputy Dara Calleary asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount allocated to each local action group, LAG, under the 2014 to 2020 LEADER programme; the amount expended under the programme in each LAG as at 31 December 2018; the percentage of the total spend to date of the amount allocated to each LAG as at 31 December 2018; the amount expended to date on project costs by each LAG as at 31 December 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4146/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER is a multi-annual programme with a total budget of €250 million over the period 2014-2020. €220 million of this funding has been allocated to the Local Action Groups (LAGs) throughout the country who deliver the LEADER programme. This funding is allocated to the LAGs for the full period of the programme.

The remaining €30 million is available for schemes to be delivered at a national level.

Table 1 provides details as at 31 December 2018 of:

- The allocations to the LAGs under the LEADER 2014-2020 programme;
- The total expenditure by LAG which includes the administration costs of the LAGs and the cost associated with their engagement with promoters to develop projects;
- The total expenditure expressed as a percentage of the LAG's allocation; and,
- The total expenditure incurred on LEADER projects.

There was a significant increase in both project approvals and expenditure in 2018. I am

confident that the progress now being made by the LAGs in approving projects, along with the administrative improvements introduced by my Department, will result in a continued increase in project approvals and payments under the LEADER programme during 2019.

Table 1: LEADER expenditure data as of 31 December 2018.

Local Action Group	Total Allocation	Total Spend	% of Allocation Spent	Project Spend
Carlow	€6,416,803	€1,231,850	19	€766,514
Cavan	€8,522,286	€1,053,659	12	€398,960
Clare	€8,920,225	€1,736,249	19	€460,913
Cork North	€5,091,846	€1,293,448	25	€463,909
Cork South	€3,831,303	€792,008	21	€208,113
Cork West	€5,015,674	€983,997	20	€146,440
Donegal	€12,913,878	€3,224,321	25	€1,728,046
Dublin Rural	€6,370,438	€1,038,829	16	€376,806
Galway East	€7,655,851	€971,723	13	€21,367
Galway West	€4,540,033	€547,284	12	€102,284
Kerry	€10,219,868	€2,126,801	21	€724,370
Kildare	€5,261,600	€528,832	10	€57,827
Kilkenny	€7,791,573	€1,759,865	23	€562,570
Laois	€7,124,587	€1,017,114	14	€398,690
Leitrim	€5,998,475	€995,787	17	€368,803
Limerick	€9,276,594	€1,876,017	20	€480,115
Longford	€7,597,623	€690,735	9	€51,398
Louth	€6,101,862	€845,134	14	€212,238
Mayo	€11,121,432	€1,918,002	17	€496,612
Meath	€6,903,124	€856,012	12	€37,301
Monaghan	€7,592,720	€956,612	13	€331,873
Offaly	€8,036,764	€1,839,736	23	€951,892
Roscommon	€8,852,659	€1,043,305	12	€198,518
Sligo	€7,655,648	€1,260,698	16	€743,910
Tipperary	€10,103,443	€1,463,204	14	€450,879
Waterford	€7,522,796	€2,440,944	32	€1,595,104
Westmeath	€7,384,206	€1,010,155	14	€254,216
Wexford	€9,840,141	€1,299,583	13	€470,699
Wicklow	€6,336,549	€814,807	13	€103,759
Grand Total	€220,000,000	€37,616,713	17	€13,164,126

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

540. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount allocated to each local authority under the town and village renewal scheme in each year since it was established; the amount expended by each local authority at the end of each such year to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4192/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Town and Village Renewal Scheme was introduced in the second half of 2016 and, to date, almost €53

million has been approved for more than 670 projects across the country.

The following tables detail the funding allocated to each local authority under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme in each of the years 2016, 2017 and 2018, and the cumulative amount paid by my Department against those allocations at the end of each year.

Payments in respect of the 2016 scheme were made in November 2016. The 2017 and 2018 schemes provided for payments on a phased basis. The 2017 scheme allowed for the drawdown of 50% of funding on certification that 20% of the works had been completed. The 2018 scheme allowed for 50% of funding to be drawn down on certification that 50% of expenditure had actually been incurred by the Local Authority. The tables reflect the amounts paid to Local Authorities on this basis for 2017 and 2018.

It should be noted that projects under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme can typically take 12 to 18 months to complete. The 2018 allocations under the 2018 scheme were announced on 5 October 2018.

2016 Town and Village Renewal Scheme

Local Authority/County	2016 T&V Funding Allocated	Payments made as at 31/12/2016	Payments made as at 31/12/2017	Payments made as at 31/12/2018
Carlow	€380,000	€380,000	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Cavan	€380,000	€380,000	€343,750.00	€380,000.00
Clare	€380,000	€380,000	€374,962.00	€380,000.00
Cork	€380,000	€380,000	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Donegal	€380,000	€380,000	€0.00	€380,000.00
Dublin	€380,000	€380,000	€312,204.00	€316,708.00
Galway	€380,000	€380,000	€360,806.00	€361,786.00
Kerry	€380,000	€380,000	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Kildare	€380,000	€380,000	€151,638.00	€255,449.00
Kilkenny	€380,000	€380,000	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Laois	€380,000	€380,000	€249,379.00	€380,000.00
Leitrim	€380,000	€380,000	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Limerick	€380,000	€380,000	€285,650.00	€380,000.00
Longford	€380,000	€380,000	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Louth	€380,000	€380,000	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Mayo	€380,000	€380,000	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Meath	€380,000	€380,000	€337,270.00	€380,000.00
Monaghan	€380,000	€380,000	€377,324.00	€379,923.00
Offaly	€380,000	€380,000	€285,000.00	€380,000.00
Roscommon	€380,000	€380,000	€297,803.00	€380,000.00
Sligo	€380,000	€380,000	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Tipperary	€380,000	€380,000	€342,991.00	€377,507.00
Waterford	€380,000	€380,000	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Westmeath	€380,000	€380,000	€313,400.00	€380,000.00
Wexford	€380,000	€380,000	€321,759.00	€380,000.00
Wicklow	€380,000	€380,000	€352,000.00	€307,750.00
Total	€9,880,000	€9,880,000	€8,505,936.00	€9,599,123.00

2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme

Local Authority/ County	2017 T&V Funding Allocated	Payments made as at 31/12/2017	Payments made as at 31/12/2018
Carlow	€884,488	€0	€842,668
Cavan	€929,688	€0	€555,062
Clare	€944,000	€0	€540,000
Cork	€1,347,827	€0	€960,466
Donegal	€1,159,000	€0	€399,796
Dunlaoghaire/Rath- down	€80,000	€40,000	€40,000
Fingal	€252,000	€12,000	€200,212
Galway	€1,004,231	€0	€948,231
Kerry	€868,472	€99,440	€252,386
Kildare	€416,403	€0	€287,205
Kilkenny	€873,364	€0	€387,307
Laois	€983,407	€0	€451,501
Leitrim	€1,098,538	€0	€641,944
Limerick	€1,087,943	€358,680	€492,193
Longford	€637,400	€0	€386,200
Louth	€775,726	€0	€465,016
Mayo	€1,348,178	€82,000	€642,089
Meath	€901,724	€0	€664,874
Monaghan	€580,000	€290,000	€125,887
Offaly	€300,000	€0	€100,000
Roscommon	€575,508	€0	€420,300
Sligo	€1,063,968	€0	€830,000
South Dublin	€20,000	€0	€0
Tipperary	€857,384	€0	€599,622
Waterford	€625,800	€0	€372,300
Westmeath	€596,000	€0	€356,214
Wexford	€1,157,525	€0	€624,078
Wicklow	€262,828	€0	€118,828
Total	€21,631,402	€882,120	€12,704,377

2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme

Local Authority/County	2018 T&V Funding Allo- cated	Payments made as at 31/12/2018
Carlow	€786,118	€0
Cavan	€530,000	€0
Clare	€581,000	€0
Cork	€1,001,800	€0
Donegal	€1,100,000	€0
Dunlaoghaire/Rathdown	€100,000	€0
Fingal	€597,960	€0
Galway	€900,000	€0

Questions - Written Answers

Local Authority/County	2018 T&V Funding Allocated	Payments made as at 31/12/2018
Kerry	€476,000	€0
Kildare	€520,000	€0
Kilkenny	€652,280	€0
Laois	€872,094	€0
Leitrim	€737,520	€0
Limerick	€963,918	€0
Longford	€593,856	€0
Louth	€892,157	€0
Mayo	€1,183,615	€0
Meath	€670,834	€0
Monaghan	€868,500	€0
Offaly	€1,300,000	€0
Roscommon	€880,000	€50,000
Sligo	€1,138,400	€0
Tipperary	€913,266	€0
Waterford	€756,000	€0
Westmeath	€452,000	€0
Wexford	€1,334,798	€0
Wicklow	€518,005	€0
Total	€21,320,121	€50,000

Departmental Funding

541. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation of funding per scheme administered by his Department in counties Sligo and Leitrim in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4211/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The figures requested by the Deputy for my Department have been collated in the following table. Where fields have been left blank this indicates that the scheme in question was not in operation in that particular year. For 2019, funding allocations have yet to be confirmed for the majority of schemes administered by my Department.

Scheme	Sligo 2016 €	Sligo 2017 €	Sligo 2018 €	Sligo 2019 €	Leitrim 2016€	Leitrim 2017€	Leitrim 2018€	Leitrim 2019€
Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme	92,152.50	970,275	782,240	226,092	480,000	1,050,153	40,000	496,019
CLÁR	598,400	351,216	424,540		274,800	485,154	451,465	
Local Improvement Scheme		496,158	606,870.40			487,947	550,121	

Scheme	Sligo 2016 €	Sligo 2017 €	Sligo 2018 €	Sligo 2019 €	Leitrim 2016€	Leitrim 2017€	Leitrim 2018€	Leitrim 2019€
Demonstration Projects			20,000					
Digital Innovation Programme			105,000					
REDZ Schemes	800,000				300,000			
Town and Village Renewal Scheme	285,000	970,768	1,038,400		310,000	998,538	637,520	
Dormant Accounts Fund Social Enterprise Measure				109,550		153,001		95,430
Rural Regeneration and Development Fund				€687,000*				
Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme	585,514	585,514	585,514	585,514	524,650	524,650	524,650	524,650
Communities Facilities Scheme (CFS)		64,500				64,500		
Re-cast RAPID		64,500				64,500		
Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) Incl. Men's Shed fund			263,402	Funding allocation to be confirmed			189,068	Funding allocation to be confirmed

* Two projects were approved for funding under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund for Sligo in November 2018, for a total of €1,115,752. A figure of €687,000 of this allocation is scheduled to be spent in 2019.

LEADER has a total budget of €250 million over the period 2014-2020. €220 million of this funding has been allocated to the Local Action Groups (LAGs) throughout the country who

deliver the LEADER programme. The remaining €30 million is available for schemes to be delivered at a national level. The funding which has been allocated to the LAGs is provided for the duration of the programme, rather than on an annual basis. This provides greater flexibility to the LAGs in managing their resources. Sligo has been given an allocation of €7,655,647.81 for the duration of the programme; and Leitrim has been given an allocation of €5,998,474.74.

The Seniors Alert Scheme is demand led and funding is allocated to meet the demand under the Scheme and not divided on a geographical basis. My Department is in a position to give participant numbers by county only. The lot-based tender system for suppliers combines a number of counties into each of the seven lots, and payments are made to the suppliers in each of these lots. Therefore it is not possible to say with full accuracy how much funding has been given to each county.

The number of participants in the Seniors Alert Scheme in each county over the period requested are as follows:

Sligo: 161 (2016), 275 (2017), 447 (2018); Leitrim: 97 (2016), 178 (2017), 203 (2018).

Further information about all the schemes in my Department is available on my Department's website.

Mobile Telephony Services

542. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the details and locations of each of the 64 mapped local mobile telephone black spots in County Galway in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4225/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): In 2017, officials from my Department, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and a small number of Local Authorities met to examine the potential for mapping mobile phone black spots in Ireland.

On foot of these meetings, an invitation was issued in late 2017 to all Local Authorities to provide data on 5-6 prioritised local black spots.

Some Local Authorities provided details of more than the 5-6 black spots requested. However, the intention was only to identify areas of immediate priority for the purposes of the exercise in question, rather than to compile a definitive list of black spots across the country.

While the exercise was informative, it was not comprehensive. Of the thirty one Local Authorities, only seventeen returned data to feed into the exercise. The majority of Local Authorities did not have the capacity to carry out technical testing. Furthermore, the methods used to collect the data varied.

Simultaneously, mobile network operators and infrastructure providers were increasing the number of mobile phone sites in service, as well as upgrading existing networks. As a consequence, the data that was collected in 2018 only represented a snapshot in time for certain areas and could not be interpreted as a definitive source of information regarding mobile phone black spots. Nor would it be a fair reflection of the current situation, as network developments are taking place on an on-going basis.

ComReg will shortly be publishing a national map of mobile phone coverage for 2G, 3G and 4G services. This map will show the quality of mobile phone coverage across the county

and is a key deliverable of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce.

Legislative Process

543. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the legislation, including heads of Bills, from his Department that was sent to EU institutions before publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4255/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I can confirm that my Department has not sent any pieces of legislation to EU institutions for the period in question.

In relation to the Miscellaneous Provisions (Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 29 March 2019) Bill 2019, and Brexit Preparedness and Contingency planning more generally, the Government continues to engage with the EU institutions and other Member States to ensure a coordinated approach to Brexit, where appropriate.

LEADER Programmes Expenditure

544. Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the capital expenditure to date of LEADER projects in County Donegal as per the LEADER programme 2014 to 2020; the projects allocated funding that have not drawn down the approved funding in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4274/19]

545. Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the level of funding committed to date under the 2014 to 2020 LEADER programme in County Donegal ; the successful drawdown of funding to date by project in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4275/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 544 and 545 together.

LEADER is a multi-annual programme for the period 2014-2020 and has a total budget of €250 million over that period. The programme is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) which deliver funding in accordance with Local Development Strategies that have been agreed for each LAG area. The Local Action Group in Donegal has an allocation of approximately €12.9 million for the period of the programme.

To date 104 projects with a grant value of over €4.3 million have been approved for LEADER funding in Donegal. Funding under LEADER is drawn down as projects incur expenditure and submit payment claims to my Department. To date, claims in excess of €750,000 have been drawn down in respect of projects in County Donegal.

Table 1 provides details of the projects approved to date in County Donegal and details of payments made, where applicable.

The level of project activity under the LEADER programme has increased significantly in 2018 and I am confident that the progress now being made by the LAGs in approving projects, along with the administrative improvements introduced by my Department over the last year, will result in a continued increase in project approvals and payments under the LEADER programme during 2019.

Table 1: LEADER projects approved in Donegal and the corresponding grant amounts paid as at 20 January 2019

Project Name	LEADER Grant Amount	Amount Paid to date
Acoustic Panels for Cranford Community Centre	€8,902	€0
Addition of Innovative Screening Plant to Provide New Screening Service	€195,398	€0
Áislann Chill Chartha CLG	€5,084	€5,079
Amazing Grace Yacht Charter (Ireland) Ltd	€102,481	€0
Ballybofey United Community Sports Facility	€156,694	€0
Ballyliffin & Clonmany Destination brochure	€18,484	€18,484
Ballyliffin Film Festival 2017	€14,813	€14,813
Ballyliffin Film Festival 2018	€17,918	€0
Ballyshannon Town Clock Development Plan	€16,000	€0
Banba's Crown - Inishowen's Digital Magazine	€7,500	€0
Binion Bay Caravan and Camping Facility	€33,493	€13,579
Bruckless Community Centre Renovations	€57,701	€57,041
Buncrana Youth & Community Development Company Ltd	€18,374	€18,374
Centre Enhancement Project	€28,215	€28,215
Club Gleacaíochta Ghaoth Dobhair	€8,200	€8,008
Comharchumann na nOileáin Beaga	€1,274	€0
Coastal Defense Forts	€6,000	€0
Coastal Explorers Programme	€47,550	€47,550
Coiste Cairde Bhun an Inbhir - Athchóiriú ar an choláiste	€14,258	€14,258
Coiste Forbartha Dhobhair Teo - Athchóiriú ar an Urlár	€14,046	€14,046
CoLabora European cooperation project on co-working spaces in rural areas	€5,986	€0

Project Name	LEADER Grant Amount	Amount Paid to date
Comharchumann Forbartha Ghaoth Dobhair - Athnu-achan aiseanna ag an Chran-nóg	€2,673	€0
Comhlacht Forbartha an Tearmainn - Broadband	€3,874	€3,294
Comhlacht Forbartha an Tearmainn - Trealamh Ríomhaireachta	€4,241	€4,190
Community Archaeology Training Project	€4,990	€4,990
Community Sports and Recreational Facility including Meeting Room and Associated Works	€80,601	€0
Computer and Training Suite	€6,387	€6,387
Cursáí Oiliúna & Sábhaltachta	€4,400	€0
Development Lough Mardal Lodge Glamping Site	€100,185	€0
Development of Astro Turf Pitch	€149,726	€0
Development of Bundoran Community Centre	€100,000	€0
Development of Churchill Community Playground	€96,126	€0
Development of Kilmacrennan Community Playground	€52,799	€0
Development of Oakwell Log Cabin Self-Catering Accommodation	€146,400	€0
Development of Software and Marketing for Green Golf Travel	€12,092	€0
Donegal Community Governance LEADERship Project	€72,650	€0
Drumhome Columban Monastic Site Feasibility Study	€4,894	€0
Enhancement Works at St. Brigid's Community Centre	€33,355	€0
Enhancement works at Inver Community Centre to improve the energy efficiency of building	€60,483	€0
Enhancement works to Car-park and Security System and provision of seating.	€23,643	€0

Questions - Written Answers

Project Name	LEADER Grant Amount	Amount Paid to date
Extension to Kerrykeel Fan-net Community Hall	€22,875	€0
Feasibility & Analysis Study	€19,530	€0
Feile na hInse 2018	€19,456	€0
Feistiú Ionad ilchuspóireach Naomh Fhionain	€68,783	€33,500
Fit-out of extension to Ra-phoe Orange Hall	€7,895	€0
Glamping Villa's @ Wild Atlantic Camp	€200,000	€0
Glenties Village Enhancement Works	€9,568	€0
Guth na Rosann Teo - Tarchuradóir	€4,205	€0
Halla Naomh Bhríde	€14,682	€14,682
Hoist Away	€115,402	€86,443
Hydro Electric Power Scheme	€22,410	€0
ICMN Research & Development Feasibility Project	€7,020	€3,924
Illies Community Centre	€22,899	€22,899
Inch Island Wetland Biodiversity Project	€2,364	€0
Inishowen River Guardians	€32,869	€0
Installation of 3G playing surface - Sport hall project	€19,219	€18,773
Installation of small scale Broadband equipment in Bundoran Community Centre	€2,900	€0
Invest Letterkenny - The Full Story (Pedestrian Counters)	€3,080	€0
Ionad Eachtraíochta Ghabhla	€9,940	€0
Ionad Pobail Dhún Lúiche	€10,000	€10,000
Kerrykeel Village Enhancement Works	€7,164	€0
Lands of Eoghain Festival	€4,576	€4,576
Leave No Trace Training Programme	€81,846	€0
Malin Head Demo Kitchen	€9,713	€0
Manorcunningham Community / Youth Facility project	€27,886	€27,886
Monreagh Hall	€150,000	€109,815
Multi Purpose Sports Field	€88,077	€0

Project Name	LEADER Grant Amount	Amount Paid to date
Nature of Innovation Co-operation Project	€5,374	€0
O Doherty's Keep Development Project	€29,336	€0
Páirc Phéile Uile-aimsire Phobal Eascarrach	€144,481	€0
Phase 2 works to Lifford Old Courthouse	€118,100	€0
Phase 3 Riverwalk	€28,377	€0
Photos from Ireland - photography tours and workshops	€4,590	€4,590
Publication of a Series of Books on Donegal's Heritage Railways	€8,695	€0
Purchase of Eskoskeleton Bionic Rehabilitation Suit	€121,035	€0
Rebuilding of Newtowncunningham Orange Hall	€150,000	€0
Recreational Rowing	€5,925	€5,925
Refurbishment and Upgrade of St. Anne's Hall	€200,000	€0
Refurbishment of Letterkenny CDP Premises	€21,664	€0
Refurbishment of St. Johnston Orange Hall	€20,080	€0
Renovation works to first floor of St. Conal's Church for use by people with disability	€36,968	€0
Rockfield Community Hall Enhancement Works	€19,763	€0
Roll-out of Practice Uilleann Pipes Scheme	€5,250	€0
Set up of Awaken Adventure an outdoor adventure company	€4,502	€0
Set-up of Glenties Community Centre Computer Suite	€9,960	€0
Siopa Caife na Cultúrlainne	€5,917	€0
Slí Mara Thoraí Teoranta	€82,625	€0
St. Johnston & Carrigans FRC Computer Room Upgrade	€7,563	€0
St. Johnston Hall Lift Installation	€30,842	€0

Project Name	LEADER Grant Amount	Amount Paid to date
Staidéar féidearthachta ar fhorbairt ar shean stáisiún an Gharda Cósta ag Cionn Fhánada	€16,790	€16,790
Státse infhillte don Ionad	€6,897	€0
Study into the potential for the development of goat milk in Donegal	€15,120	€0
Suile Centre	€177,127	€0
The Ballyshannon Port Heritage Project Business Plan	€15,000	€0
The Shannon-Erne Pilgrim Way Baseline Study	€5,537	€0
Trail Head - Ballybofey Riverside Walk	€10,720	€0
Trealamh Súgartha & Aclaíochta	€11,606	€0
Uirlísí Ceoil	€3,621	€0
Upgrade of Computer Suite in Tirhugh Resource Centre	€7,320	€0
Upgrade of Niall Mór Community & Enterprise Centre	€19,249	€0
Upgrade of Roof at Foresters Community Hall	€116,511	€0
Upgrading of B&B	€7,596	€0
Wild Ireland	€75,500	€30,000
Wild West Inishowen	€110,946	€110,946
Totals	€4,382,830	€759,054

Personal Micro Credit Scheme

546. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a credit union incurs the loss of a loan (details supplied), whether the loan defaults and is not repaid; if not, whether there is a State guarantee in such cases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3830/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Personal Micro Credit Scheme (PMC) provides for small scale loans, ranging from €100 to €2,000 known as It Makes Sense loans, by credit unions to borrowers who have difficulty accessing low cost credit. Currently 111 credit unions, at 272 locations are participating in the scheme.

An Post facilitates the repayment of PMC loans for social welfare recipients who receive their payment through the post office, by utilising the Department's Household Budgeting facility to deduct the repayment amount from the social welfare payment and transmitting it onward to the relevant credit union. For borrowers receiving their weekly social welfare payment electronically into an account, the repayment method is by direct debit or standing order.

The It Make Sense Loan is funded by the individual credit unions participating in the scheme. Each credit union assesses loan applications in line with the credit policy underpinning the It Makes Sense loan scheme. If an It Make Sense borrower defaults on loan repayment, the credit union bears the loss in the same way as for any of its other loan products. There is no State guarantee in place.

The credit policy underpinning the It Makes Sense Loan sets out a number of factors to assist credit unions with the loan decision process, a key factor of which is an assessment of the capacity and willingness of the borrower to repay.

In addition, in order to support participating credit unions the PMC project team provides support and training to all credit unions offering the loans and there is a helpdesk in place to assist them with any queries that may arise.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

547. Deputy Eamon Scanlon asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a jobseeker's allowance payment for a person (details supplied) has been reduced; if the file will be reviewed in view of a change of circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3768/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned was awarded Jobseekers Benefit, a PRSI contribution based payment(JB) on 21-Sep-2018 at a reduced rate of € 88.90 per week. This was based on the contributions paid and the rate of earnings while in employment. He was advised by INTREO staff of his right to apply for a means tested Jobseekers Allowance (JA), payment and made a claim for same effective from the same date.

A Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA)payment of € 107.10 per week was being paid a pending a final decision on his JA claim. The combination of payments brought the total received to €196.00 per week. Both JA and SWA payments are subject to a means test and certain other scheme rules. SWA payment was stopped as and from 12th December 2018 pending the outcome of an investigation of circumstances. The payment of €88.90 per week continues to be paid whilst the investigation is ongoing. Should the customer wish to discuss these matters in greater detail he should contact his local Intreo Centre.

This investigation is ongoing and will be concluded in early course, when a decision on the claim will be made.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Payments

548. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kildare has had her disability allowance cut; and the status of an invalidity pension application. [3784/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned has had an Increase for Qualified Child Allowance (IQC) in respect of her daughter re-instated on her Disability Allowance (DA) pay-

ment with effect from 4 July 2018.

Arrears of payment due issued to the person concerned on 24 January 2019.

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 lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 28 September 2017. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 31 January 2019. Any arrears due from 28 September 2017 to 30 January 2019 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue as soon as possible. The lady in question was notified of this decision on 24 January 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

549. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding an illness benefit claim by a person (details supplied) in County Kildare. [3785/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department administers the Illness Benefit scheme to those customers who cannot work because they are sick or ill provided they are covered by the appropriate class of social insurance (PRSI) and satisfy the PRSI conditions.

The illness benefit claim from the person concerned has been fully paid up to date. A total of €497.90 of illness benefit arrears issued to his bank account on the 17th January 2019, and his regular weekly payment is due to reach his account on the 24th January 2019 bringing his payment up to date.

He is medically certified until the 23rd February 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Brexit Issues

550. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the measures that have been put in place to ensure that residents here who are recipients of British pensions will be able to receive their pensions in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3790/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Government and the EU remain committed to securing a negotiated Brexit outcome. We have been planning for all Brexit scenarios but in light of uncertainties in London and the Brexit deadline of 29 March, the Government decided at its meeting of 11 December that immediate priority must now be given to preparations for a no deal Brexit and that Government Departments and state agencies should urgently take forward work on that basis.

The Contingency Action Plan which the Government published on 19 December sets out in comprehensive terms, the challenges to be faced and the actions taken and planned by the Government across key sectors in the event of a no deal Brexit scenario.

My key area of interest is the impact of Brexit on the current reciprocal arrangements for social insurance schemes, social assistance schemes and child benefit under the Common Travel Area between Ireland and the UK, including Northern Ireland.

Last year, I met with the then UK Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and we agreed the objective of ensuring that the reciprocity of social welfare rights and entitlements, which currently exist for Irish and UK citizens moving within Ireland and between Ireland and Britain under the Common Travel Area, are safeguarded and maintained. Because of the unique nature of the Common Travel Area and the specific rights which it provides and will continue to provide for Irish and British citizens in each other's countries, it is imperative that Ireland and the UK have an agreement to provide for social protection. I intend that the agreement would be signed at technical level shortly

In addition the General Scheme of the Miscellaneous Provisions (Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 29 March 2019) Bill which the Government published last week (24 January 2019) is part of a framework of wider planning and preparations for the possibility of a no deal Brexit, which the Government still hopes can be avoided.

Part 11 of the General Scheme sets out proposed amendments to the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2015 (as amended). These amendments are being introduced in line with the Government's Brexit priority of maintaining the Common Travel Area.

The amendments give the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection powers to make regulations with regard to a number of issues such as: the treatment of events of facts in the UK as they relate to claims and payments; taking account of social insurance contributions for the purposes of determining eligibility for social insurance payments; the avoidance of multiple payments; arrangements regarding frontier workers; and the appropriate exchange of information with the proper authorities in the UK (in accordance with the provisions of the GDPR).

Community Employment Schemes Review

551. Deputy Eamon Scanlon asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if clarification will be provided on the purpose of the establishment of an interdepartmental group aimed at examining the overall organisational and governance arrangements for community employment sponsor organisations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3820/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department operates a number of employment support schemes including Community Employment (CE), JI and the RSS. These schemes have a very significant social inclusion focus, are well embedded in our local communities nationally and are generally engaged in significant levels of local service support and delivery.

The RSS and JI are considered to be Social Inclusion placements whereas the CE placements are categorised into two strands, Social Inclusion and Activation. The Activation placements provide unemployed individuals with work experience, training and development to assist them achieve sustainable employment. The Social Inclusion placements are more suited to adults who need additional supports e.g. older unemployed workers, persons with a disability, travellers, homeless people, refugees, those requiring drug rehabilitation and ex-offenders. The expected pace of progression from a social inclusion placements is much lower than that of a participant in an activation placement.

I sought the agreement of Government to establish an Interdepartmental Group to explore the most appropriate organisation arrangements, including which Department should host the Community Employment Social Inclusion placements including, Drug Rehabilitation and Childcare CE schemes as well as the Rural Social Scheme and the Job Initiative scheme as I believe that we need to establish an appropriate home and structure for these social inclusion placements.

I believe that we need to take a wholly inclusive approach for people who participate in CE and to include an appropriate focus on their ongoing contribution to the provision of services in local areas.

My Department's main focus, as a Public Employment Service, has to remain on activation and to progress as many participants as possible from CE into full-time and sustainable employment. It is also my strong view that local services which are supported by these social inclusion placements must be safeguarded into the future.

JobPath Programme

552. Deputy Marc MacSharry asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the case of a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3822/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The primary purpose of the activation services provided by my Department, including the JobPath service, is to assist and support jobseekers to look for and sustain full time employment.

My Department refers long-term job seeking customers to the JobPath service to receive one-to-one intensive and regular engagement with a personal adviser who will assess their skills, experience, challenges and work goals and agree a "personal progression plan" that includes a schedule of activities, including relevant training and educational programmes to assist them in finding full-time sustainable employment. There are no barriers to any participants pursuing training, including further education and training courses, providing they are relevant to the agreed personal progression plan.

The JobPath providers arrange for the delivery of a broad range of education and training courses with a particular and strong focus on upskilling the long term unemployed. In addition, JobPath participants may also apply for the Back to Education Allowance Scheme in order to pursue second and third level courses.

Both Seetec and Turas Nua have their own discretionary funds available to pay for training courses and the decision to approve or reject any request for funding is solely at the discretion of the JobPath provider.

An Officer of my Department contacted Seetec regarding this customer. They confirmed that the training requested was a QQI Module course with a private training company. Seetec advised the customer that this module is offered by the local Education & Training Board (ETB) as part of a 2 module part time fully funded course. The customer was advised to enrol with the ETB, to which she was in agreement.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

553. Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Cork has sufficient PRSI contributions to qualify for illness benefit. [3826/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department has not as yet received a claim from the person concerned for Illness Benefit.

However the person concerned would appear to have the necessary PRSI contributions for Illness Benefit if she is making a claim from the 31st December 2018. She would qualify at a rate of €198 per week.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Payments

554. Deputy Tom Neville asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if discrepancies in payments to a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3845/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned was in receipt of Occupation Injury Benefit from the 19th April 2018 to the 17th October 2018, at which point his entitlement under this scheme exhausted.

The person concerned was then assessed for Illness Benefit. However he did not qualify for payment as he did not have enough PRSI contributions in the relevant tax years. In order to qualify for Illness benefit a person must have 39 PRSI contributions paid or credited the relevant tax year or 26 weeks of PRSI contributions paid in the relevant tax year, and 26 weeks of PRSI contributions paid in the tax year immediately before the relevant tax year. The relevant tax year is the second last complete tax year from before the claim is made.

The person concerned qualifies for Illness Benefit payment from the 7th January 2019 as he now has the enough PRSI contributions in the relevant tax year, which changes on that date, to qualify for payment. He is now paid up to 16 January 2019 as that is the date on his most recent medical certificate.

If the person concerned remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted to the Department as soon as possible in order for further payments to issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

555. Deputy Anne Rabbitte asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if legislation was amended to enable persons working one day per week to avail of local community employment schemes, such as in the case of a person (details supplied). [3888/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Community Employment (CE) is an active labour market programme designed to provide eligible long-term unemployed people and other disadvantaged persons with an opportunity to engage in useful work within their communities on a temporary, fixed-term basis. CE helps unemployed people to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to a work routine and to assist them to enhance or develop both their

technical and personal skills.

People in receipt of jobseekers payments for 12 months or more may be eligible for CE. However, if a person works more than 30 days during the 12-month qualifying period, they become ineligible. This is because persons who have gained work in excess of 30 days are not considered to be as far removed from the workforce as persons who have worked less than 30 days and are therefore better suited to other interventions instead of CE.

If a person has exceeded the 30 days, they may become eligible again in the future if they are still signing on when the number of days worked within the 12-month qualifying period has dropped below 30 days.

Invalidity Pension Applications

556. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in the case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3903/19]

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.

A claim for IP was received from the gentleman concerned on 8 November 2018. In order to establish medical suitability two forms were sent to him on 23 January 2019. On receipt of the completed forms, the IP claim will be processed as quickly as possible and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Data

557. Deputy Brendan Howlin asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the provisions of the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 will be applied to supervisors of community employment schemes and other activation and community programmes funded by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3908/19]

558. Deputy Brendan Howlin asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of community employment scheme supervisors who have sought permission to stay in employment beyond the age of 66 years of age as provided for other public servants under the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3909/19]

559. Deputy Brendan Howlin asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of community employment scheme supervisors who are aged 65 years of age or over; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3910/19]

560. Deputy Brendan Howlin asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of participants on community employment schemes over 60 years of age by year in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3911/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 557 to 560, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy is aware the provisions of the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 relates to public service employees only.

Participants and supervisors on community employment programmes operated by my Department are employees of private companies in the community and voluntary sector that receive public funding. They are not employees of my Department or public servants, therefore the provisions of the Act do not apply to them.

My Department does not provide funding for participant or supervisors who have reached the State Pension age.

There are currently 44 supervisors on Community Employment schemes aged between 65 and 66.

There are 4,655 participants on Community Employment schemes aged between 60 and 66, details are set out in Table 1.

Table 1 - Community Employment scheme participants over 60 years

Participant Age	Number
60 years	802
61 years	828
62 years	874
63 years	831
64 years	732
65 years	588
Total	4,655

Departmental Staff

561. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the number of staff based in Kilbarrack and Coolock, Dublin 5, will be increased; the grades that will be assigned to these positions; the dates on which they will be recruited or allocated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3924/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department, like all Government departments and agencies, is required to operate within a staff ceiling figure and a commensurate administrative staffing budget, which for this Department has involved reductions in staff numbers.

My Department continues to focus on prioritising the filling of critical posts. The staffing needs for all areas within the Department, including its offices in Kilbarrack and Coolock, are continuously reviewed, taking account of workloads, management priorities and the competing demands arising, to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources with a view to providing an efficient service to those who rely on the schemes operated by the Department.

In accordance with relevant Department of Public Expenditure and Reform circulars and guidelines, when a permanent post is approved to be filled, the assignment will be made from either a panel created through a Public Appointment Service competition or from an internal Departmental promotion panel or from the relevant transfer list.

My Department is actively working on filling 1 Executive Officer post in Kilbarrack and 1 Clerical Officer post in Coolock and anticipates that these posts will be filled very shortly.

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

562. Deputy Jan O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if asylum seekers who have completed a first year of a course of study in a higher education institution under the sanctuary and refugee programme and who are subsequently granted status to remain here can qualify for the back to education allowance for the remainder their course of study (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3989/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The back to education allowance scheme (BTEA) is one of the Department's activation interventions designed to support second chance education. It enables eligible persons to pursue education and to continue to receive their existing welfare payment for the duration of a course of study. All BTEA participants must re-establish their entitlement to the qualifying welfare payment at the beginning of each and subsequent academic year.

BTEA is not available to students in the circumstances as referred to by the Deputy as they do not have an on-going entitlement to a qualifying social welfare payment.

The BTEA is not intended as an alternative form of funding for people pursuing third-level education. The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Grant, payable by the Department of Education and Skills, represents the primary support for persons pursuing education. The eligibility rules that govern the payment of a student maintenance grant are a matter for that Department. The Deputy should also note that applicants approved for BTEA are not eligible for a maintenance grant from SUSI. Additionally, I understand that the supports on offer through sanctuary scholarships should remain available to recipients throughout the duration of their course.

I would advise that any person who is experiencing financial hardship to engage with my Department's Community Welfare Service which may be able to offer support under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme. I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Eligibility

563. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4003/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): This applicant was on Jobseekers Benefit in September 2018, when she applied for Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) for which she qualified. The rules and regulations in relation to BTEA changed for the 2015/2016 academic year, where the cumulative total was not to be frozen.

I am advised by my Department that in general, this would be conveyed by the Case Officer to the customer at the time of application. It is open to the customer to apply for Jobseekers Allowance or Jobseekers Credits once her Jobseekers Benefit exhausts. Should the customer wish to discuss their case in greater detail he should contact her local Intreo Centre.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Social Welfare Code

564. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 202 and 274 of 3 May 2017, Nos. 112, 170, 226 and 253 of 4 October 2018 and No. 215 of 11 October 2018, if she has considered the situation of persons in receipt of long-term social welfare payments who are debarred from renting out a spare room in their home at the risk of losing some of their social welfare payment; if steps can be taken to bring them into line with PAYE workers who can rent out a room tax free under the rent a room scheme in the context of the housing shortage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4021/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Social welfare legislation provides that for social assistance schemes all income and capital (such as savings, investments and property other than the family home) belonging to the claimant and his or her spouse/partner, where applicable, are assessable for means assessment purposes.

Where an individual is renting part of their family home, the cash value of the rental income is assessed. However, such rental income is reduced by a range of deductions. These include:

- i. a proportion of any mortgage interest paid by the claimant on the part of the property rented;
- ii. a 15% deduction for voids (i.e. periods when the accommodation is vacant between lettings); and,
- iii. if the rooms let are furnished, a 5% deduction for wear and tear.

In this regard, the cash value of any rental income is not assessed in full, as at least 20% of such income may be disregarded.

Fully disregarding all rental income would run contrary to the policy of ensuring that social welfare expenditure is targeted to those who need it the most. It could also potentially negatively impact on the incentive to work for working age recipients. It should be noted that in the case of the State Pension (Non-Contributory) and Widow's/Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Pension (Non-Contributory), social welfare legislation provides that no assessment is made of any money received in respect of rent from a person who lives with the pensioner where, but for that person, the pensioner would be living alone.

Any change to my Department's means assessment policies would have to be considered in the overall policy and budgetary context.

EU Directives

565. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the transposition into law of the EU directive on the activities and supervision of institutions for occupational retirement provision, IORP II; her plans to make changes to the provision that single member schemes will no longer be allowed to enter into new borrowing agreements except for short-term and liquidity purposes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4060/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The over-arching objective of IORP II Directive is to facilitate the development of occupational retirement savings in the EU. Many of the provisions contained within the Directive will sup-

port positive reform of the Irish occupational pension sector. The Directive provides for a range of new requirements concerning governance, management standards in schemes, safekeeping of assets, the need for clear and relevant information to members, the removal of obstacles to cross-border provision of pension services and the facilitation of cross border transfer of schemes. There are also provisions that will enhance the powers of the Pensions Authority for effective supervision of occupational pensions.

The IORP II Directive was the result of almost three years of discussion and negotiation and came into force on 12 January 2017. Officials in my Department, supported by the Pensions Authority, are managing the transposition process of the IORP II Directive. This is a substantial Directive and preparation of regulations to transpose the Directive are at an advanced stage. It is expected that transposition into Irish law will be achieved later this quarter. This timeframe is in keeping with many other EU countries.

Codes of practice will be issued by the Pensions Authority following approval of the Minister. The codes will expand on requirements, policies and principles prescribed in the transposing regulations. They will explain in practical detail what the Authority will expect from trustees to demonstrate their commitment to serving the best interests of members, deferred members and other beneficiaries.

To ensure that schemes are informed of their obligations under the Directive, the Pensions Authority will also undertake a communication campaign on the implementation of the Directive. The Authority will engage and consult with industry stakeholders and trustees on implementation of the new regulatory regime and related codes of practice. The emphasis of this engagement will be on providing sufficient support, time and information in order for industry and trustees to plan for and make the changes needed.

While the Directive allows Member States not to apply some of the provisions to smaller schemes, I believe all schemes should be subject to sound protections for pensions and consumers. Money saved for pension purposes should be properly protected to ensure that the saver has adequate resources for retirement years. To exclude small schemes from the provisions of the Directive would be contrary to the policy of enhancing standards for consumers.

Article 19 of the Directive sets out the investment rules for occupational pension schemes. The underlying principle for capital investment is for schemes to invest in accordance with the 'prudent person' rule and the other specific rules set out in the Article. It is recognised that there should be an appropriate level of investment freedom for schemes within prudent limits and this is reflected in the rules. Assets must be predominantly invested on regulated markets, i.e., at least 50%. This allows adequate scope for investment in instruments with a long-term economic profile and non-listed undertakings such as property and infrastructure.

The application of the Directive is prospective, not retrospective so these changes will not affect existing investments and borrowings by schemes. From transposition forward, single member schemes will no longer be allowed to enter into new borrowing agreements, except for short term and liquidity purposes, and all future investments will have to be in accordance with the rules in the Directive. Accordingly, no current investment plans are impacted or jeopardised.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Data

566. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection

the number of JobPath participants who have taken up another scheme (details supplied) as permitted since June 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4108/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department operates a number of employment support programmes including Community Employment (CE) and Tús. These schemes help to break the cycle of unemployment, provide work experience and improve a person's chances of returning to the labour market.

As the Deputy is aware, customers of my Department who are engaged with the JobPath service have, from 1st June 2018, the option of taking up a placement on Community Employment (CE) and Tús while continuing to engage with the JobPath service. This change ensures that jobseekers can benefit from the job-seeking support of the JobPath service while also availing of a part-time work placement provided by Tús or CE.

My Department's records indicate that up to end of December 2018, 953 persons engaged on JobPath have taken up places on CE and 673 of those engaged on JobPath have started with Tús.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

JobPath Data

567. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons referred to JobPath since it commenced; and the number of persons who have been referred to JobPath for a second time. [4109/19]

568. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount spent on JobPath in 2018. [4110/19]

582. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons who have commenced employment through the JobPath scheme by county since its introduction in tabular form. [4376/19]

584. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons engaged with JobPath by county; and the number of those with a penalty rate in place by county in tabular form. [4424/19]

585. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons engaged with JobPath since its introduction in 2015; and the number of penalty rates applied in each county over the same period by county in tabular form. [4425/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 567, 568, 582, 584 and 585 together.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) provides a range of activation supports catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant from the labour market to secure and sustain full-time paid employment. These supports include the JobPath service.

JobPath is a service that supports people who are long-term unemployed to obtain and sustain paid employment. The service was launched in 2015 on a 'rolling basis' with referral numbers gradually increasing over time. Between July 2015 and January 2019 some 205,000 jobseekers had engaged with the service.

My Department selects clients for the JobPath service by means of a random selection process and protocols for selection currently preclude the selection of anyone who has already completed 52 weeks with the JobPath service within the previous four months. If, however, at the end of this period the jobseeker has not engaged in other activation supports and services they then become eligible for selection for a second period of activation on the JobPath programme.

To date just over 21,000 jobseekers have commenced a second engagement period with the service, having availed of the service previously.

Jobseekers referred for a second time will start working with a Personal Advisor, who will review their development during their previous time with the service and together they will prepare a new personal progression plan to build on that progress. The actions and tasks agreed will be based on their previous engagement, with particular focus on the identified barriers, which are preventing the person moving into full time suitable employment.

Between July 2015 and January 2019 approximately 14,000 Jobseekers had a penalty rate applied to their payment at some point during their engagement period with the JobPath service.

These are broken down by county in table 1.

There are currently some 79,000 people engaged with the service, of which 432, or 0.5% have a current penalty rate applied to their payment. This figure is consistent with the overall level of penalty rate applied across all Job Seekers.

These are broken down by county in table 2.

JobPath providers do not apply or recommend the application of a penalty rate of payment. They simply advise my Department if a jobseeker is failing to attend activation meetings. Officials in my Department then contact the Jobseeker and seek to arrange a meeting to discuss the matter directly with them. The application of penalty rates is entirely a matter for my Department and officials involved will take all relevant factors into account.

In the interests of natural justice, a jobseeker who fails to participate in the activation process, whether that is provided directly by the Intreo Service or via a contracted service provider, is given both written and verbal warnings and an opportunity to comply before a reduced rate of payment is applied. Furthermore, Jobseekers can, through co-operation with the activation service of my Department, benefit from early re-instatement of the full rate of Jobseeker's payment.

The legislation underpinning the application of reduced rates of payment is provided for in the Social Welfare Act 2010. All decisions on the application of reduced rates of payment are made by Deciding Officers and are based on all the available evidence and the circumstances of each case. The Jobseeker can appeal the Deciding Officer's decision through the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO).

Reduced rates are only applied where a job seeker fails to engage as requested, and following at least two warnings, with the Department's employment services.

To date, some 46,000 jobseekers have commenced employment during their engagement period with JobPath as set out in table 3.

There are two phases to the Jobpath service. During the first phase, of 12 months duration, a personal advisor (PA) provides practical assistance in searching, preparing for, securing and sustaining employment. The second phase starts if the jobseeker is successful in finding

work. During this phase the PA continues to work with the client for a further period of up to 12 months. In addition to the two phases jobseekers may also undertake training while with the service and this may extend the period the jobseeker is supported through the service for up to a further 6 months.

It should be noted that the figures presented in Table 3 are representative of the entire cohort of JobPath clients between July 2015 and January 2019 and all Job starts in the same period. Many clients who are currently engaged with JobPath are still in the first phase of the service and will not have had sufficient time with the service to have gained employment. It is expected that this performance will improve as more clients complete their engagement with the service

I trust that this clarifies matter for the deputy.

Table 1: People engaged with JobPath since its introduction in 2015

County	Jobseekers who engaged with Jobpath July 2015 - January 2019	Jobseekers who had a penalty rate applied during their engagement with JobPath July 2015 - January 2019
Carlow	4765	160
Cavan	4659	500
Clare	4919	360
Cork	18059	660
Donegal	10645	470
Dublin	41215	3400
Galway	9195	630
Kerry	6975	480
Kildare	8331	640
Kilkenny	4070	180
Laois	4671	550
Leitrim	1962	200
Limerick	9950	730
Longford	4166	360
Louth	8777	750
Mayo	6277	30
Meath	4458	320
Monaghan	2719	300
Offaly	5560	570
Roscommon	1929	80
Sligo	3198	150
Tipperary	8861	510
Waterford	7145	210
Westmeath	6860	580
Wexford	9795	740
Wicklow	6023	440
Total	205184	14000

Table 2: Jobseekers currently engaged with JobPath who currently have a penalty rate applied.

Questions - Written Answers

County	Currently engaged with JobPath.	Currently engaged with JobPath with a current Penalty Rate
Carlow	1775	N/A
Cavan	1727	10
Clare	1845	N/A
Cork	6163	16
Donegal	4421	33
Dublin	17370	186
Galway	3936	24
Kerry	2419	N/A
Kildare	2829	9
Kilkenny	1469	8
Laois	1817	8
Leitrim	860	N/A
Limerick	3525	20
Longford	1451	N/A
Louth	3656	13
Mayo	2802	N/A
Meath	2086	13
Monaghan	1110	7
Offaly	2016	12
Roscommon	892	N/A
Sligo	1350	N/A
Tipperary	3176	14
Waterford	2245	N/A
Westmeath	2557	9
Wexford	2992	26
Wicklow	2304	N/A
Total	78793	432

Please note: Counties marked 'N/A' are those counties where there are 5 penalty rates (or less) currently in place, these are not shown within the table however they are included in the overall total.

Table 3: Jobseekers engaged with JobPath who have commenced employment July 2015- January 2019

County	Jobseekers engaged with JobPath who have commenced employment July 2015 - January 2019
Carlow	1235
Cavan	934
Clare	1127
Cork	4484
Donegal	1739
Dublin	8475
Galway	1796

County	Jobseekers engaged with JobPath who have commenced employment July 2015 - January 2019
Kerry	2016
Kildare	2436
Kilkenny	1076
Laois	1079
Leitrim	384
Limerick	2570
Longford	872
Louth	1868
Mayo	854
Meath	800
Monaghan	687
Offaly	1349
Roscommon	307
Sligo	597
Tipperary	2142
Waterford	1816
Westmeath	1536
Wexford	2624
Wicklow	1341
Grand Total	46144

JobPath Programme

569. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to research carried out by Waterford Institute of Technology into JobPath following interviews with JobPath participants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4111/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Academics from Waterford Institute of Technology recently made statements to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The statements made reference to research undertaken where 121 unemployed persons had been interviewed as part of their research into experiences of unemployment. 25 of those who partook in the research reported an experience of the JobPath programme. It is unclear from the statements made as to the degree to which those interviewed reflect a representative sample of service users upon which the conclusions and recommendations contained are based.

However, it should be noted that reports to the Committee are at variance with the surveys conducted by the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) and contrary to the feedback and findings arising from research carried out by an independent external consultants W5. This research specifically assesses the level of satisfaction with JobPath services across the country. In summary, the W5 surveys conducted in 2016, 2017 and 2018 reflect the views of some 6,000 jobseekers and found that JobPath participants view the service very positively. On the key aspects of premises, staff, services and processes, reaction is almost uniformly positive and at odds with the findings of the authors' report.

All of the evidence available to my Department indicates that the experience of customers who have engaged with the JobPath service to date has been quite positive. In addition the service providers are subject to regular audits and inspections. The Department's contract with the JobPath provider requires them to have a comprehensive Complaints Process and this is advertised in every provider location. The process contains various levels of escalation, allowing complaints to be dealt with at a level appropriate to the concern.

Up to December 2018, approximately 201,972 Jobseekers have engaged with the JobPath service, with only 836 complaints received in total – 0.41 per cent. The Department has completed 10 reviews of complaints and participants have the option of requesting the Ombudsman to conduct a further review, although to date none have done so.

With regard to the issue of penalty rates of payment, jobseeker payments are conditional on jobseekers being genuinely available for work. The activation and employment support services provided by the Department, at significant expense, are designed to help jobseekers secure employment. In line with the principle of rights and responsibilities jobseekers are entitled to be provided with these services but are also required to engage with the services when they are made available. This obligation applies irrespective of whether the service is provided by my Department's own case officers, those employed by the Local Employment Service or by JobPath. Failure, without good cause, to engage with the services can result in a reduction in the payment to the jobseeker. However reductions are only applied after the jobseeker has been given due notice on two occasions and an opportunity to provide an explanation for their non-engagement and to re-engage with the services. All decisions on the application of a reduced rate of payment are made by staff of the Department.

Where the Jobseeker is dissatisfied with this Decision it is open to that individual to appeal the decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office. Should an appeal against a Decision to apply a penalty rate be upheld, the amounts withheld from the jobseeker payment would be refunded to the person concerned.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

570. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 1118 of 15 January 2019, the value or purpose of allocating credited contributions from February 2018 in respect of a claim for illness benefit by a person (details supplied); if the person's application has been refused; if the person qualifies for invalidity pension; and if not, if the person will be refused for the same reasons. [4115/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Credited contributions (credits) are social insurance contributions designed to protect the social insurance entitlement record of insured workers who are not in a position to make PRSI contributions. Credits are awarded in circumstances such as unemployment or illness, and their purpose is to help protect the social insurance entitlements of insured persons during periods when they may not be in a position to pay contributions. Credits may enable insured workers to qualify for various social insurance benefits.

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 PRSI contribution conditions for IP are that a person must have at least 260 (5 years)

paid PRSI contributions since entering social insurance and 48 contributions paid or credited in the last or second last complete contribution year before the relevant date. Only PRSI classes A, E, H or S contributions are reckonable for IP purposes.

Entitlement to IP can only be determined on receipt of a completed application form. To date, there is no record of the Department having received a claim for IP from the lady concerned. I have arranged for an application form to be issued to her on 25 January 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Security of the Elderly

571. Deputy Noel Grealish asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if grants are available for the provision of house alarms for those over 65 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4116/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am informed that the Department of Rural and Community Development funds the Senior Alert Scheme and Pobal administer this on behalf of that Department. This provides funding for a personal monitored alarm, connected to a contact centre to enable older persons of 65 or older and of limited means, to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind.

Any decision to extend that scheme to house alarms, rather than personal alarms, would be a matter for the Minister for Rural and Community Development.

The Telephone Support Allowance (TSA) is a weekly payment of €2.50, which may assist people who qualify under the Senior Alert Scheme, among others. Customers of my department who are in receipt of a qualifying payment and who are also in receipt of the Living Alone Allowance and the Fuel Allowance automatically qualify for the TSA. Approximately 127,000 customers are in receipt of the TSA payment. The estimated full year cost of the scheme is over €16 million. The primary objective of the TSA is to allow the most vulnerable people at risk of isolation, including the elderly and those with disabilities, access to personal alarms or phones for security. However, there are no criteria attached to the payment which require the purchase of an alarm or phone of any description.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

572. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the employment contributions in respect of an application for illness benefit by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4141/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned was advised by letter dated 14th January 2019 that she was not entitled to payment of Illness Benefit as she does not satisfy all of the contribution conditions.

In order to qualify for an illness benefit payment a claimant must have 104 total PRSI contributions paid since entering insurable employment. According to the department's records the person concerned has 99 paid contributions.

If the person concerned believes she has further contributions that are not reflected in the department's records, she should supply the department with evidence of this from her employer and her entitlement to Illness Benefit will be reviewed.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Treatment Benefit Scheme Data

573. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons who applied for hearing aids under the treatment benefit scheme in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the cost in each of the years in the same period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4154/19]

574. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the hearing aid grant was last reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4155/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 573 and 574 together.

The numbers of applications for hearing aids under the Treatment Benefit scheme in the years 2016 to 2018 are detailed in the following table. There has been an increase in applications of over 50% in the last number of years; this included a significant increase since the self-employed first qualified for the scheme in March 2017.

Year	Number of applications	Costs in euros
2016	9,560	7.45m
2017	12,539	10.33m
2018	14,689	12.74m

The grant payable in respect of the purchase of hearing aids under the treatment benefit scheme is regularly reviewed in light of changes in technology and associated market costs.

The current grant available is 50% of the cost of the hearing aid, to a maximum of 500 euro per aid, (maximum of 2 aids in a 4 year period) and has been in place since 2012.

I hope this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

575. Deputy Martin Ferris asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) who is in receipt of a small UK pension is entitled to the living alone and fuel allowances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4182/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 28 weeks (a total of €630 each year) from October to April, to over 372,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €240 million in 2019. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

It is important to note that people in receipt of a British State pension or an equivalent pen-

sion from other EU countries are eligible to receive the fuel allowance payment on the same basis as Irish State pension recipients. For my Department to determine a person's entitlement to fuel allowance he or she must submit an application form. My Department has no record of the person concerned submitting an application for fuel allowance.

The Living Alone Increase is a €9 increase in the weekly rate of payment of certain Irish social protection payments, awarded where the recipient is living alone. These payments include State pensions, disability allowance, invalidity pension, incapacity supplement and blind pension. It is not a stand-alone payment.

People in receipt of the British state pension or equivalent payments from other EU countries, are not entitled to receive the Irish living alone increase to that payment, as the respective rates of those payments to people living alone or with other people, are set by national legislation in those countries. There are no circumstances where the living alone increase can be paid to people who are not in receipt of a qualifying payment from my Department in the first place.

Certain people who live in Ireland and receive a UK pension may qualify for a State pension (non-contributory). This is a means-tested payment for people aged 66 and over, who do not qualify for a State pension contributory, or who only qualify for a reduced rate contributory pension based on their social insurance record. To be eligible for a State pension (non-contributory), an applicant must:

- be aged 66 years or over,
- have a legal right of residence in the State,
- be habitually resident in the State,
- have a valid Personal Public Service Number (PPSN),
- satisfy a means test, and
- if awarded the pension, continue to satisfy the Habitual Residence Condition and the applicable means test.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

576. Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason for irregular payment amounts of illness benefit to a person (details supplied). [4200/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned is fully paid up to the 26th January 2019. Her payment pattern is determined by the date her medical certificates are received and the dates her payments are due.

A payment of €162.78 issued to her bank account on the 8th January 2019 that paid her for the period of 8th January - 12th January 2019.

A further payment of €195.33 issued to her account on the 15th January 2019 that paid her for the period of 14th January - 19th January 2019.

Her most recent payment issued on the 23rd January 2019 for the period of 21st January -

26th January 2019.

The person concerned is currently certified up to the 3rd February 2019 and a further payment will issue to her this week.

If she remains ill and unfit for work, further medical certificates should be submitted to the Department as soon as possible in order for payments to issue in a timely manner.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

577. Deputy Willie O'Dea asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on an invalidity pension application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4223/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 29 March 2018. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 07 February 2019. Any arrears due from 29 March 2018 to 06 February 2019 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue as soon as possible. The lady in question was notified of this decision on 24 January 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Legislative Process

578. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the legislation, including heads of Bills, from her Department that was sent to EU institutions before publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4248/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): No pieces of legislation or draft heads of bills have been sent by my Department to EU institutions before their publication during the period of the 32nd Dáil.

In relation to the Miscellaneous Provisions (Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 29 March 2019) Bill 2019, and Brexit Preparedness and Contingency planning more generally, the Government continues to engage with the EU institutions and other Member States to ensure a coordinated approach, where appropriate.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

579. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will give consideration to backdating the arrears payments to pensioners affected by the budget 2012 rate band changes back to January 2013; the estimated cost of the restoration; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4324/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The

rates of payment, and qualification rules for benefits paid by my Department change from time to time with the approval of Government and the Oireachtas. Generally these are improvements, at times of inflation and economic growth, but during the economic crisis (and the very significant price deflation at that time), there were reductions in a wide range of payments, which were necessary to manage the very large current budget deficit that the economic turn-down created. More recent budgets have seen a number of improvements in the rates of payments across a number of schemes, as the economy has recovered, and the government has tried to restore and improve rates as this has become possible, while mindful not to repeat the mistakes which caused the economic crisis in the first place.

Such increased rates of payment are not backdated to dates before those changes are announced, and applicants receive their payment based on the correct rules that apply at that time.

In January last year I announced a new Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to calculating the entitlement of pensioners who reached state pension age from September 2012 (i.e., those born on or after 1 September 1946). In this announcement, I stated that payments would be due from March 30th 2018 in keeping with other budgetary increases that had also been announced. However, the practical steps required to implement these new payments, including development of supporting legislation and IT systems, meant that the first payments would be made in the first quarter of 2019, with arrears paid where appropriate.

My Department is in the process of reviewing those pensioners in receipt of a contributory state pension below the maximum rate. Payments are expected to be processed in the coming months and will be backdated to March 30th 2018, or their 66th birthday, whichever is later. The cost of this change in 2019, including 2018 arrears, is expected to come to something in the region of €54 million, plus inflows from other payments, such as non-contributory pensioners who will now qualify for a higher rate contributory pension. The precise figure will depend upon a number of factors, including take-up of HomeCaring periods, and also the inflows from other payments, where a person has no existing SPC claim in the system.

It is more difficult again to give a precise figure for what would be the cost of backdating payments for this change to six years ago, as this would include a number of people who have passed away over the years, and are not, therefore, among current pensioners who are being reviewed. A tentative estimate would suggest the cost to be in the region of €220m if the new rules were to apply for all who reached state pension age after January 1st 2013.

However, aside from the general principles involved in backdating, if there was to be such a measure introduced for pensioners, there would be calls for similar backdating from many other customers who saw reductions in their payments during the recessionary period. This would make the ultimate cost of such backdating a multiple of its cost in the context of pensions.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Departmental Schemes

580. Deputy Noel Rock asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to increase the compulsory retirement age to 70 for those on community employment and job initiative schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4335/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I presume that in asking this question the Deputy is alluding to the provisions of the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018. Responsibility for this legislation lies with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. As the Deputy is aware the provisions of

the Act apply to public service employees only.

Participants and supervisors on Community Employment and Job Initiative schemes are employees of private companies in the community and voluntary sector that receive public funding. They are not employees of my Department or public servants, therefore the provisions of the Act do not apply to them.

My Department does not provide funding for participant or supervisors who have reached the State Pension age.

Local Employment Service

581. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the preliminary work completed on tendering for the local employment service; her plans to commence a tender process for the service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4341/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department oversees the procurement for JobPath , the Local Employment Services (LES) and Jobs Clubs. The LES and Job Clubs are currently on annual contracts which are reviewed on an ongoing basis. The contracts for JobPath are due to expire at end-2019, with some contractual provisions for extension, although this is not envisaged at this point.

In this context, my Department is continually engaged in ensuring all contracted public employment services are fit for purpose. No formal tendering process for 2020 is currently underway and no final decisions have been made in this regard.

My Department will continue to consult with the relevant stakeholders to ensure that any future contracted PES gives the best possible service for those who wish to return to the labour market.

Question No. 582 answered with Question No. 567.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

583. Deputy Willie Penrose asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the amount of tax paid is not allowed as a deduction in terms of the calculation of means in respect of a person applying for a disability allowance (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4398/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Social welfare legislation provides that all income and property belonging to the claimant (and his or her spouse/partner, where applicable) is assessable for means testing purposes for social assistance schemes, such as Disability Allowance. In the assessment of earnings, various disregards and tapers are in place to ensure that financial incentives exist to take up employment.

Earnings assessed for means testing purposes generally is based on gross earnings before tax but after PRSI contributions, superannuation/PRSA contributions and trade union subscriptions.

The current entry points to the tax net ensures that employees do not have to pay income tax until earnings reach €16,500 per annum for a single person, €24,750 per annum for a married

one-earner couple and a single parent, and €33,300 per annum for a married two-earner couple. Allowing taxation as a deduction would mean that the social welfare system, in effect, refunds a person's tax liability.

It should be noted that the recently enacted Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Act 2018 implemented the Make Work Pay recommendation to remove the requirement that employment must be of a rehabilitative nature in order to qualify for the Disability Allowance earnings disregards. Accordingly, all Disability Allowance recipients in employment from the 31st of December 2018 will benefit from a €120 disregard of earnings from employment, with earnings between €120 and €350 per week assessed at 50%.

Any such change to the disregard for outgoings such as taxation when assessing a customer's income or means would need to be considered in the overall policy and budgetary context.

Questions Nos. 584 and 585 answered with Question No. 567.

Local Authority Housing Maintenance

586. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding allocated towards the repair and refurbishment of local authority housing in budgets 2016 to 2019; the amount allocated specifically towards energy retrofit works; the amount spent by each local authority on energy retrofit works for local authority housing stock in each of the years 2016 to 2018; if funds allocated to local authorities for energy retrofit were unspent; and if so, the amount. [3717/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966, provides that the management and maintenance of local authority housing stock is a matter for each individual local authority. This includes maintenance programmes and carrying out of responsive repairs and pre-letting repairs.

However, my Department is committed to supporting local authorities in terms of various targeted stock upgrade programmes, including large-scale urban regeneration programmes, support for the return of vacant units to productive use, the Energy Retrofitting Programme and adaptations and extensions for people with disability in social homes.

Regarding the Energy Retrofitting Programme, the funding available in the 3 years in question was €30m in 2016, €22m in 2017 and €25m in 2018 . The funding drawn down by each local authority for 2016-2018 is set out in the following table.

	2016	2017	2018
Local Authority	Funding Drawn-down€	Funding Drawn-down€	Funding Drawn-down€
Carlow	48,750	169,812	236,883
Cavan	327,346	79,337	22,197
Clare	260,960	65,522	328,632
Cork City	4,593,455	1,761,898	2,826,636
Cork County	2,913,930	384,102	2,493,573
Donegal	797,268	754,856	0
Dublin City	670,496	1,990,878	1,825,182

	2016	2017	2018
Local Authority	Funding Drawn-down€	Funding Drawn-down€	Funding Drawn-down€
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	182,956	0	0
Fingal	983,250	0	1,347,167
Galway City	2,344,707	44,936	0
Galway County	774,437	0	0
Kerry	146,213	311,106	187,165
Kildare	1,224,403	393,189	398,384
Kilkenny	147,093	312,184	289,975
Laois	77,999	0	121,840
Leitrim	173,231	0	0
Limerick City & County	0	0	748,800
Longford	0	0	0
Louth	954,333	65,764	484,910
Mayo	330,567	117,105	477,236
Meath	874,625	113,920	385,242
Monaghan	0	155,359	0
Offaly	301,861	0	0
Roscommon	29,576	444,813	0
Sligo	243,399	0	0
South Dublin	748,330	761,731	0
Tipperary	326,827	282,233	424,998
Waterford City & Co	0	0	236,250
Westmeath	863,517	434,441	54,801
Wexford	206,428	22,082	52,762
Wicklow	1,986,878	0	0
TOTAL	€22,532,835	€8,665,268	€12,942,633

Where funding allocated against the EE Programme was not drawn down directly against this programme, it was in the main expended on the refurbishment of vacant properties, including the energy retrofitting works that are also part of that programme.

Housing Estates

587. Deputy Declan Breathnach asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is no staff member in Louth County Council assigned to deal with taking in charge of estates in County Louth; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that as a consequence there are a number of estates whose applications to be taken in charge are not being dealt with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3730/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001 responsibility for staffing of a local authority and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out its functions is a matter for the relevant Chief Executive.

Residential developments consisting of two or more dwellings that have been granted planning permission under section 34 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, may be eligible (depending on the grant of planning condition) for taking in charge. The taking in charge of residential estates by local authorities is provided for under section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The taking in charge of residential estates is a reserved function of the elected members.

Under Section 180 (1) of the Act, the planning authority is obliged to initiate taking in charge procedures where requested by either the developer or by the majority of owners of the dwellings. However, this is subject to the development being completed to the satisfaction of the authority and in accordance with the permission and any conditions.

The intention of the legislation is that once a residential estate is complete, the planning authority can be requested to take over the roads and footpaths, water services, public lighting and open spaces. However, where work has not been completed to satisfactory standards, there can be a delay in this process as enforcement proceedings including invocation of bonds are progressed.

My Department launched the National Taking-in-Charge Initiative (NTICI) in April 2016 to trial new approaches and working methods in supporting and accelerating overall national and local action on the taking-in-charge process of housing estates, including estates with developer-provided water services infrastructure (DPI). Under the terms of the NTICI, which was underpinned by €10 million in funding, developments subject to valid taking-in-charge applications were eligible for inclusion in the associated call for funding proposals. Ultimately, €7.5 million of the allocated funding was paid to local authorities in respect of 330 developments, containing some 13,400 homes.

Findings and recommendations from the NTICI process were included in a report on the initiative that my Department published in December 2018. The report can be found at the following link -

[Report from NTICI](#)

The publication of the NTICI report is of value to local authorities and other stakeholders in applying the lessons from the pilot authorities, in a more general roll-out of a streamlined approach to taking-in-charge, including through coordination with capital works by Irish Water.

In addition, the National Development Plan includes provision of €31 million for the period 2018-2021 for DPI, demonstrating the Government's commitment to transition from the pilot phase under NTICI to a programme phase.

My Department is finalising plans for the introduction of this programme phase for taking in charge of developer-provided infrastructure and an announcement will be made in this regard shortly. As indicated above, staffing arrangements in relation to the implementation of this programme in individual local authorities is a matter for the Chief Executive.

Housing Adaptation Grant Funding

588. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason for the delay in allocating funding for housing grant aid schemes for Cavan and Monaghan county councils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3735/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

There is no delay in the allocation of funding for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability to Cavan and Monaghan County Councils. Notification of the 2019 funding allocations for these Grants will issue to all local authorities shortly. In the meantime, all local authorities can continue to approve and fund works under the Grants.

For 2019, an increased total of €71.25 million is being provided for these Grants, which is an 8% increase on the funding provided in 2018 and will enable up to 11,800 home adaptations to be undertaken.

Seaweed Harvesting Licences

589. Deputy Tony McLoughlin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 458 of 1 May 2018, when the issue will be resolved; when applicants will be informed about their applications as suggested by him in the briefing note supplied in June 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3736/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): In tandem with my announcement at the Our Ocean Wealth conference, my Department wrote to all applicants for hand harvesting of seaweed clarifying the legal position on appurtenant and profit-à-prendre rights to harvest wild seaweed and the interaction of these rights with the applications received under the Foreshore Act.

My Department outlined that in order to consider an application to harvest wild seaweed, it is now necessary to incorporate into the process a mechanism whereby applicants undertake a search of the Land Registry folios in respect of the area of the foreshore for which they apply to harvest. They will need to identify the folios of all land bordering that part of the foreshore and, with the exception of urban land and housing estates, within one mile of the foreshore in question. It will be necessary to examine all such folios to ascertain if they contain any entries showing a right to take seaweed from that part of the foreshore. Applicants will also need to undertake adequate public consultation to ensure that those with profit-à-prendre are also aware of the application.

My Department is in regular contact with a number of applicants concerned and their representative bodies and when the applicants carry out the necessary searches, their applications can be considered further.

Social and Affordable Housing

590. Deputy Darragh O'Brien asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the cost rental pilot project has gone to tender; when construction is due to commence; the number of units due to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3759/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government is committed to the introduction of a not-for-profit, cost rental sector in Ireland. Together with delivering more affordable and predictable rents, cost rental will make a sustainable impact on national competitiveness and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live and work.

Under the cost rental model, minimising retained earnings, land and other delivery costs, while securing very competitive European Investment Bank (EIB) financing, means that afford-

able rents can be achieved. The final rents, for any given project, will be set after all associated costs are determined, following on from the competitive construction and management tender processes. Cost rental homes will be targeted at households earning low to moderate annual incomes up to a maximum of €50,000 for single applicants and €75,000 for dual applicants.

The Government has made €310m available to local authorities to fund facilitating infrastructure to deliver affordable housing from its sites. The funding is available for cost rental projects and can contribute to reducing costs even further. The terms of any loan funding arrangements put in place for individual projects will be determined on a case by case basis.

Cost rental is new to Ireland and in order to drive delivery, two early mover pilot projects are being advanced, delivering important lessons in terms of cost rental in an Irish setting; one at Enniskerry Road, in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, and one at Emmet Road in Inchicore. It is expected that 50 cost rental units and 105 social homes will be made available on the Enniskerry Road site. It is anticipated that the assessment of tenders will be complete and a contract will be awarded by the end of Q1 2019.

With regard to the Emmet Road site, while this project is at an earlier stage of development, it is envisaged that the final tenure-mix, which will be decided by Dublin City Council, will likely include 140 social housing homes, with the remaining 330 homes predominantly provided under cost rental arrangements. The City Council has appointed a dedicated project manager and a team to drive the project forward and are currently procuring a design for the Urban Design Development Framework Plan which will be completed by end Q1 2019. Thereafter, the Council will procure a multi-disciplinary design team to prepare the project for the planning application stage.

In addition to pre-existing consultative arrangements, the Council is also facilitating a Consultative Forum specifically for this project. The Council has held three information sessions for the public, community and business representatives. The Consultative Forum has met twice and its third meeting, which I will attend, will take place later today. I understand the Consultative Forum plan to establish a number of sub-committees to address issues related to, inter alia, education, social regeneration, community facilities and economic development.

Cost rental will initially be managed on an administrative basis, and my Department is preparing a draft administrative cost rental framework in collaboration with the Housing Agency and the local authorities involved in the pilot projects. The invaluable learning from the above-mentioned projects will inform further cost rental projects to be rolled out across other suitable sites.

My Department is engaging with the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) and the new Land Development Agency (LDA) to examine the optimum funding and delivery options to support cost rental delivery at scale. My Department is also working with the EIB to leverage its advisory and research capacity so that broader international lessons on the operation of cost rental can inform Ireland's approach.

Commercial Rates Data

591. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount collected from commercial rates levied on businesses here by local authorities in each of the years 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the number of businesses levied each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3831/19]

593. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment if a review has been conducted of the economic impact of local authority rates on small and medium businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3833/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 591 and 593 together.

Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation pursuant to the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015. The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority. The annual rate on valuation (ARV), which is applied to the valuation of each property determined by the Valuation Office, to obtain the amount payable in rates, is decided by the elected members of each local authority in the annual budget and its determination is a reserved function. Rates income makes an important contribution to meeting the cost of services provided by local authorities such as roads, public lighting, development control, parks and open spaces.

While no review of the economic impact of rates on small and medium size enterprises has been carried out by my Department, it should be noted that the national average ARV has not changed significantly in recent years. It decreased slightly each year from 2010 to 2015 and has increased slightly each year from 2016 to 2018. In addition, local authorities may offer ratepayers assistance or money-in-kind in order to promote the interests of the local community, which includes the economic and general development of the administrative area concerned. Local authorities also work closely with any ratepayers that may experience difficulty paying rates and facilitate flexible payment options.

The Local Government (Rates) Bill 2018 includes provisions to allow local authorities to introduce rates alleviation schemes to support policy objectives, including, local economic and community plans, development objectives and planning policies. The Bill has been scheduled for second stage in the Dáil on 30/31 January 2019.

My Department does not collate data on the number of properties paying rates in individual local authority areas. As regards the value of rates collected nationally, the latest available audited information relates to 2017. The total value of commercial rates collected, as reported by local authorities in their individual audited financial statements 2011-2017, is set out in the table. It should be noted that the amounts collected may include arrears.

2011€	2012€	2013€	2014€	2015€	2016€	2017€
1,264,838,715	1,274,013,442	1,295,621,403	1,325,186,430	1,344,742,056	1,318,402,246	1,341,822,316

Water Charges Yield

592. Deputy Mattie McGrath asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount collected from water charges levied on businesses here by local authorities in each of the years 2011 to 2018; the number of businesses levied each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3832/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The consolidated local authority Annual Financial Statements compiled by my Department from the audited financial statements published by each local authority provide a summary of major revenue collections, including in respect of commercial water, at Appendix 7. The Annual Financial Statements are available on my Department's website at:

Water Charges Levied. The amounts reported in the consolidated local authority Annual Financial Statements for commercial water revenue for the years 2011 to 2013 are as follows:

Commercial Water Revenue Collected by Local Authorities from 2011-2013

Year	2011	2012	2013
Total Collected	€190,984,225	€180,684,154	€183,753,763

The Annual Financial Statements do not have information on the number of businesses levied each year.

Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels, including the collection of non-domestic revenue.

Irish Water reports non-domestic revenue in its annual financial statements, including revenue from new connections and non-domestic revenue; however, information on the number of businesses levied each year is not included. The amounts reported as non-domestic revenue by Irish Water for 2014-2017 are as follows:

Non-Domestic Revenue Collected by Irish Water from 2014-2017

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total Collected	€248,066,000	€219,872,000	€231,755,000	€261,217,000

Irish Water's annual financial statement for 2018 is not yet published.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Question No. 593 answered with Question No. 591.

Development Contributions

594. Deputy Mattie McGrath asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the most recent details available on the amount of unpaid development levies due to each of the local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3834/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Development contributions are levied as conditions attached to planning permissions and are payable prior to commencement of development or as otherwise agreed by the local authority. Local authorities may facilitate the phased payment of contributions, such as when units are completed or when a stage is reached in the development.

Note 5 of the Annual Financial Statements (AFS) of each local authority shows short term current debtors gross of any bad debt provisions. The bad debt provisions are reported within note 5 and are deducted from gross current debtors but a breakdown of what relates to current development contribution debtors is not included. The Current Development Levy debtor's balances, gross of any provision for bad debts for the financial year ending 31/12/2017, which is the most recent year for which audited figures are available, are set out in the table.

The reporting of long term development contribution debtors and deferred income in respect of development contributions was amended with effect from AFS 2016 so they are no longer shown separately. The rationale for this change was to address an issue of misinterpretation of the data. In this regard, long term development contribution debtors and deferred income, although matching items, had previously been presented in separate disclosure notes,

Questions - Written Answers

leading to a false impression that significant long term development contributions were due to local authorities, whereas these only become due for payment when works actually commence.

Local Authority	Development Levy Debtors 31/12/2017
Carlow County Council	€3,159,011
Cavan County Council	€790,130
Clare County Council	€3,584,612
Cork City Council	€3,107,999
Cork County Council	€10,240,972
Donegal County Council	€574,207
Dublin City Council	€40,196,354
Dun Laoire/Rathdown County Council	€19,649,695
Fingal County Council	€84,395,277
Galway City Council	€850,749
Galway County Council	€1,423,176
Kerry County Council	€2,169,169
Kildare County Council	€6,421,288
Kilkenny County Council	€7,225,494
Laois County Council	€761,787
Leitrim County Council	€526,811
Limerick City & County Council	€4,536,210
Longford County Council	€3,201,685
Louth County Council	€9,791,344
Mayo County Council	€7,506,020
Meath County Council	€25,019,285
Monaghan County Council	€2,352,848
Offaly County Council	€2,322,806
Roscommon County Council	€6,810,737
Sligo County Council	€219,436
South Dublin County Council	€18,780,811
Tipperary County Council	€5,053,614
Waterford City & County Council	€1,537,329
Westmeath County Council	€2,343,702
Wexford County Council	€10,964,226
Wicklow County Council	€7,695,467
Total	€293,212,251

Source: Audited Annual Financial Statements 2017.

Social and Affordable Housing

595. Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the affordable housing scheme as proposed in 2018 will be put in place nationally; the reason for the delay in implementing the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3866/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A multi-stranded approach is being taken to the targeted delivery of affordable housing, in par-

ticular for those households earning up to €50,000 for single income households and €75,000 for dual income households.

As part of that approach, I commenced the relevant provisions of Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 last year to provide a statutory basis for the delivery of affordable housing for purchase; regulations in relation to the scheme will be made shortly. In addition, a new Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan was introduced on 1 February 2018, under which home loans, at affordable, fixed rates over the term of the loan can be made available to credit worthy home purchasers meeting the above income limits.

In order to support local authorities in delivering affordable homes, €310 million will be made available from 2019 until 2021 under the Serviced Site Fund (SSF). The (SSF) will fund facilitating infrastructure, on local authority sites. At a maximum funding rate of €50,000 per affordable home, at least 6,200 will be facilitated in total.

On foot of a first call for proposals which issued to local authorities in Dublin, the Greater Dublin Area, Cork and Galway City, approval issued for ten projects costing €43m, which will support 1,400 affordable homes, in December 2018. Infrastructure works on these projects will begin as soon as possible and delivery of affordable homes are anticipated from early 2020 onwards. Five other projects submitted are still under active consideration and my Department is working with the local authorities concerned to progress them.

A second call for proposals will issue shortly. In order to inform that process all local authorities wishing to be considered for funding have been asked to submit economic assessments of the requirement and potential to deliver affordable homes from their sites.

The Government is also committed to the introduction of a not-for-profit, cost rental sector in Ireland. Together with delivering more affordable and predictable rents, cost rental will make a sustainable impact on national competitiveness and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live and work. It is estimated by the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) that rents of between 15-25% below market are achievable.

There are currently two cost rental projects at Enniskerry Road, in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and St. Michael's Estate, Inchicore, which will deliver 50 and 330 cost rental homes, respectively. The experience on these projects will inform a national cost rental framework under which similar projects will be rolled out on a wider scale. My Department is engaged with the National Development Finance Agency, the European Investment Bank and the LDA to develop the optimum funding and delivery mechanisms to support cost rental delivery at scale in Dublin and other urban areas.

Valuation Office

596. Deputy Eamon Scanlon asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 574 of 19 December 2018, if the Valuation Office is acting to meet international best practice; the reason the methodology it uses to value the ARV of forecourt stations does not take into account the system used in Northern Ireland which is to treat the shop element of the business in the same way as neighbourhood shops are treated; his views on whether this would be a sensible and precedented approach (details supplied); his further views on whether attention should be paid to the level of detail set out in the Northern Ireland practice notes as compared to the recently published Valuation Office practice notes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3868/19]

(Deputy John Paul Phelan): The Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 provide for the valuation of all commercial and industrial property for rating purposes. The Commissioner of Valuation is independent in the performance of his functions under the Acts and the making of valuations for rating is his sole responsibility. I, as Minister, have no function in decisions in this regard.

As the Deputy is aware, a valuation for commercial rates purposes is an estimate of the Net Annual Value (NAV) of a property, at a specified valuation date, on the assumption that the occupier is responsible for the payment of commercial rates and for insuring and maintaining the property. The term “net annual value” has a legal definition and is set out in section 48 of the Valuation Act 2001 as the rent for which, one year with another, the property might, in its actual state, be reasonably expected to let from year to year, on the assumption that the probable average annual cost of repairs, insurance and other expenses (if any) that would be necessary to maintain the property in that state, and all rates and other taxes payable in respect of the property, are borne by the tenant.

I note the Deputy’s comments in relation to the approach adopted in Northern Ireland. However, the approach adopted in any jurisdiction will necessarily reflect the underlying legislation, which differs from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. I understand that the valuation methodology adopted by the Valuation Office for valuing service stations in Ireland is based on an analysis of the market for that class of property in this jurisdiction and in accordance with the provisions of the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015, as they apply here.

Local Authority Housing Data

597. Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of second-hand houses bought by each local authority in each of the years 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3874/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Statistics on the number of social housing properties constructed, purchased and leased by local authorities are published on my Department’s website and are available at the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision.

These statistics are updated on a quarterly basis and data for Q4 2018 is now being validated and will be published as soon as possible, with data for each successive quarter of 2019 made available over the course of the year.

Emergency Accommodation Data

598. Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons accommodated in hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation by each local authority in each of the years 2011 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3875/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes a monthly report on homelessness. The monthly report is based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). The report captures details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities. Official homeless reports

are published on my Department's website on a monthly basis and can be accessed using the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data.

These reports include information broken down by accommodation type at the regional level. Commercial hotels and B&Bs are included within the private emergency accommodation (PEA) category as are other commercially provided emergency accommodation arrangements. Specific figures for hotels or B&B usage are not available in my Department, but certain data in relation to the use of hotels for emergency accommodation in Dublin are available on the Dublin Region Homeless Executive website, www.homelessdublin.ie/info.

Local Authority Housing Data

599. Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of children accommodated by each local authority each year from 2011 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3876/19]

600. Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons on the housing list in each local authority in each of the years 2011 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3877/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 599 and 600 together.

My Department does not hold information on the allocation of social housing supports to households on the waiting list. The allocation of such support is a matter for each local authority in accordance with its allocation scheme made under the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009. Section 22 of the Act requires all local authorities, as a reserved function, to make an allocation scheme determining the order of priority to be accorded in the allocation of dwellings to households qualified for social housing support and to households approved for a transfer, the allocation of which would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the accommodation needs and requirements of the households.

Under the Housing Acts 1966 to 2009, I, as Minister, have no function in relation to the assessment of individual housing applications and the allocation of accommodation to eligible households, which are matters solely for local authorities. It is worth noting that Section 2 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 defines a "household" as "a person who lives alone or 2 or more persons who live together". Children are considered to have a housing need as part of a household.

Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA). The most recently conducted SSHA, carried out in June 2018, details the number of households on all local authority waiting lists as at 11 June 2018 (the count date) and is available on my Department's website at the link. The SSHA report includes breakdowns by each local authority across a range of categories.

Report 2018

www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2018_-_key_findings.pdf.

The SSHA has been conducted on an annual basis since 2016, prior to which it was carried out tri-annually. Results from all available years sought commencing in 2011 are available on

my Department's website at the following links.

Report 2011

www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownLoad%2C27864%2Cen.pdf.

Report 2013

www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownLoad%2C34857%2Cen.pdf.

Report 2016

www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2016.pdf.

Report 2017

www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/sha_summary_2017.pdf.

It is important to note that only the results of the 2013, 2016, 2017 and 2018 summaries are directly comparable with each other. These summaries were carried out using a standardised methodology as specified by the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011. Previous summaries were not carried out under the current standardised assessment regime for social housing support which came into effect on 1 April 2011.

It should also be noted that the SSHA is a point in time exercise and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the list.

My Department is currently working with the Housing Agency on the proposed 2019 summary. I expect the results of that summary to be available early in the final quarter of this year.

Regeneration Projects

601. Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of plans for the regeneration of a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3878/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is providing funding support to Kildare County Council for the remediation works to the location referred to in the question, with the advancement of the works being a matter for the Council itself.

The works are being delivered in 3 phases, the first of which is underway and is anticipated to be finished by Q3 2019. This involves remedial works to 34 homes and a range of other improvements to the area.

Phases 2 and 3 will include further remedial works to existing homes and the construction of new homes. Kildare County Council have been requested by my Department to submit revised proposals for later phases and I understand they are currently working on this.

While I understand that this is a complex project, I look forward to it being successfully advanced so that improved conditions are delivered for the people of the area.

Fire Safety

602. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the outstanding fire safety works being completed at residential complexes nationally; the status of the remedial works; his views on whether there are fire safety concerns for units; if so, the timeframe for making these buildings fire safe; his plans for further legislation or a commission of investigation in respect of dangerous buildings built by developers in the Celtic tiger era; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3902/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In the first instance, I would like to acknowledge the stressful circumstances which the owners and residents of buildings face when defects occur in their homes.

However, in general, building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved: the homeowner, the builder, the developer and/or their respective insurers, structural guarantee or warranty scheme. It is important to note that while my Department has overall responsibility for establishing and maintaining an effective regulatory framework for building standards and building control it has no general statutory role in resolving defects in privately owned buildings, including dwellings, nor does it have a budget for such matters. Accordingly, detailed information in relation to individual residential complexes is not available in my Department.

The aim of the building regulations is to provide for the safety and welfare of people in and about buildings. The building regulations apply to the design and construction of a building or to an extension or material alteration of a building - these regulations are kept under constant review and they set out the minimum performance requirements that a building must achieve. These requirements are set out in 12 parts classified as Parts A to M.

Technical Guidance Documents (TGDs) provide technical guidance on how to comply with the building regulations in practical terms. TGD B contains guidance, compliance with which will, *prima facie*, indicate compliance with Part B. The building regulations are subject to ongoing review in the interests of safety and the well-being of persons in the built environment and to ensure that due regard is taken of changes in construction techniques, technological progress and innovation.

Work has been on-going to review TGD B – Fire Safety (2006) and a new Part B/ TGD B Volume 2 (2017) came into force on 1 July 2017. Volume 2 applies to dwelling houses only. Important revisions in the TGD B Volume 2 include enhanced provision for fire detection and alarm systems in dwelling houses, guidance on fire safety in community dwelling houses, guidance on timber frame construction, including new provisions in respect of timber frame party walls, enhanced provisions in respect of loft conversions, new provisions for galleries in dwelling houses and other general updates. A revised Volume 1, dealing with buildings other than dwellings, is being prepared for public consultation.

In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy in June 2017, and in recognition of fears expressed for fire safety, my Department's National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management was asked to convene a Task Force to lead a re-appraisal of our approach to fire safety in Ireland. In its report, the Task Force acknowledges the importance of fire safety in apartment buildings and makes a number of recommendations in this regard and I have tasked the Directorate's Management Board with implementation of the recommendations within its remit, and oversight of the implementation of other recommendations. The Task Force Report is available on my Department's website at the following link:

The Task Force Report

Additionally, in response to the building failures that have emerged over the last decade, my Department has advanced a robust and focused Building Control Reform Agenda, including:

- Amendments to the Building Control Regulations;
- Establishment of a shared services National Building Control Management Project; and
- The ongoing development of new legislation through the Building Control (Construction Industry Register Ireland) Bill.

These reforms have already brought, and will continue to bring, a new order and discipline to bear on construction projects, creating an enhanced culture of compliance with the Building Regulations.

Commencement of Legislation

603. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 has yet to be commenced; his plans to commence the section; the timelines involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3912/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 29 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 provides for housing authorities to have a written tenancy agreement with their social housing tenants, one which complies with the requirements of Schedule 3 of the Act. Section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 inserts a new section 29A into the 2009 Act, which relates to the revision of tenancy agreements.

While Sections 29 and 29A have not yet been commenced, all housing authorities already require written tenancy agreements in practice and 1980 Regulations provide for minimum requirements for such agreements. I understand that housing authorities have generally found these adequate for their requirements.

I will be giving further consideration to the commencement of these provisions, including possibly amending Section 29 to remove the requirement for a tenancy agreement to be in a form prescribed by the Minister.

Home Loan Scheme

604. Deputy James Lawless asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when further funding for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme will be issued to local authorities, in particular Kildare County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3916/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan launched on 1 February 2018. Prior to its launch, an initial tranche of €200 million of long-term fixed-rate finance was borrowed by the Housing Finance Agency to provide funds for the scheme to local authorities.

When the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan was initially being developed it was estimated

that the drawdown of loans under the scheme would be approximately €200 million over three years. From the data collated on the scheme to date, the RIHL has proven to be more successful than initially anticipated, as a result of which, the scheme would require a further tranche of funds to be borrowed by the HFA in order to enable its continuation.

My Department is currently in discussions with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Finance with regard to an extension of the scheme in this regard. When these discussions are concluded I will be in a position to make an announcement on the matter.

Architects Register

605. Deputy Darragh O'Brien asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has the statutory powers or discretion to grant professional accreditation to an architect who is not registered with an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3927/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As Minister I have no statutory powers or discretion to grant professional accreditation to an architect.

Section 13 of the Building Control Act 2007, provides that the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) is the registration body for the registration of architects in the State. They have sole statutory responsibility for administering the register.

The Act provides for a number of routes to registration as an architect. Section 14 of the Act provides that membership of the registration body (RIAI) is not a prerequisite for registration in the register.

Water Meters Data

606. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the percentage of the public water supply metered on a residential basis in County Cork. [4010/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels, pursuant to Section 7 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 which provided for the transfer to Irish Water of the general water services functions conferred on the county and city councils by the Water Services Act 2007. Section 32 of the 2007 Act sets out responsibilities in respect of general water services functions and includes the installation and maintenance of meters. As Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, I have no direct role in this operational matter.

The Deputy may wish to note that Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Local Authority Housing Data

607. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment the number of houses that will be built by the local authority or its agents in County Cork in 2019. [4011/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

Statistics on the social housing properties constructed, purchased and leased by local authorities, including Cork City and County Councils, are published on an ongoing basis on my Department's website at the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision. These statistics are updated on a quarterly basis. Data for Q4 2018 is now being validated and will be published as soon as possible, with data for each successive quarter of 2019 made available over the course of the year.

A detailed breakdown of the social housing construction programme by local authority area, is set out in the Social Housing Construction Status Report which is published on a quarterly basis. The report covering the period up to end Quarter 3 of 2018 is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-quarter-3-social-housing-construction-report/>. The report covering to end Q4 of 2018 will be published shortly.

The report includes the activity of Cork City and County Councils on the construction of new social housing, including those schemes already on site and under construction, those at the final pre-construction stage and those progressing through the various stages of planning, design and procurement. These schemes also include those underway on the part of Approved Housing Bodies working with the Cork Councils. Taken together, these projects will form the bulk of social housing starts and completions over the course of 2019, with further projects being added to the pipeline on an ongoing basis.

I will be publishing social housing targets for 2019 for all local authorities, including Cork City and County Councils, in the near future and the progress of each authority against these targets will also be published on my Department's website on a quarterly basis. This transparency allows all stakeholders to view the targets and the progress of each local authority in delivering social housing for their areas.

Disability Support Services

608. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons who have a disability accessing homeless services; his plans to publish a national housing strategy for persons with a disability in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4107/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The data on homelessness which is collected by local authorities does not include any information on the numbers of persons with a disability seeking support.

The National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability (NHSPWD) 2011-2016 was published in late 2011 and the associated National Implementation Framework was published in July 2012. These are joint publications by my Department and the Department of Health, which set out the Government's broad framework for the delivery of housing for people with disabilities through mainstream housing policy. They were developed as part of a coherent framework in conjunction with the Government's mental health policy and Congregated Settings Report.

In order to continue to meet the housing needs of people with disabilities, the NHSPWD

has been extended to 2020.

Local Authority Housing Rents

609. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his policy on the removal of local authority rent caps; if there is a correlation between RAS caps and social housing rent caps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4126/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The right of local authorities to set and collect rents on their dwellings is laid down in section 58 of the Housing Act 1966. The making or amending of such schemes is an executive function and is subject to broad principles laid down by my Department in Circular letter HRT 3/2002 of 6 March 2002, which states that rent levels should reflect tenants' ability to pay. Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) tenants are assessed for rent under the relevant local authority differential rent scheme and pay their weekly rent to the authority, in accordance with their income.

Different approaches are taken to rent charging and setting across the country. For example, I understand that a majority of local authorities impose a maximum amount of rent payable under their rent scheme for different property types, while a significant minority do not impose any such maximum rents.

Considerable work has been carried out by my Department in developing a draft national differential rents framework for the purposes of section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009. Such a framework has as its main aim the harmonisation of local authority rents, including a set of standardised income disregards, whilst retaining the general principle of rents related to household income. Under section 31, the making and revocation of a rent scheme would become reserved functions, while the charging of rents would remain an executive function.

This work is now being examined further in the light of the broader commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, to review the disparate systems of differential rent for social housing in place across local authorities. The overall objective is to ensure that housing supports are fair and sustainable and prioritise those on lowest incomes. I expect that the review will be completed in the near future.

Local Authority Housing Data

610. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authority homes that will be targeted for energy retrofitting per year with the roll-out of phase two of the retrofitting programme for social housing stock. [4147/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The budget allocation for social housing energy efficiency works in 2019 is €25 million.

My Department is currently working with the local authorities regarding their work proposals and related funding requirements for 2019, following which allocations will be made. The number of social homes to be targeted in 2019, and for subsequent years, will depend on the work proposals and priorities submitted from the local authorities, and the available funding.

Pyrite Remediation Programme

611. Deputy Lisa Chambers asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the stage 3 application from Mayo County Council for the pilot remediation project in north County Mayo has been received; if not, the reason therefor; the stage the project is at; when it is due to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4158/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I assume the Deputy is referring to a proposed pyrite pilot remediation project in North County Mayo in respect of social housing stock. My Department has received a Stage 4 (post-tender) proposal from Mayo County Council, which is now being examined and a response will issue to the County Council as soon as possible.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme

612. Deputy Jan O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures he is taking to increase awareness of the mortgage to rent scheme among local authority staff, public representatives and persons who remain in mortgage difficulties and who fulfil the criteria to qualify for the scheme, thus allowing them to stay in their own homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4204/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Following a Review of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme, published on 8 February 2017, a range of amendments to the eligibility criteria and administration of the scheme came into effect to enable more properties to qualify and to make the scheme more flexible and accessible to borrowers. The Review, available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/changes-in-mortgage-to-rent-scheme/>, explored the impediments to participation in the scheme and recommended a number of actions to make the scheme work better for borrowers. In addition, new structures and arrangements have been put in place to encourage a greater number of entities to take part in the scheme.

Increasing the visibility and familiarity of the scheme among borrowers is a critical objective. One of the issues affecting the operation of the scheme overall is the lack of borrower engagement with their lenders. Increasing awareness and understanding of the scheme has been a priority and a website - www.mortgagetorent.ie - dedicated to guiding and advising borrowers and those acting on behalf of borrowers has been developed by my Department together with the Housing Agency, with input from the Abhaile Service and the Insolvency Service of Ireland. The website, which went live in June 2018, complements the other improvements that have been made to the scheme following the 2017 Review and is the national portal for information on the MTR scheme.

My Department and the Housing Agency are working with all stakeholders to ensure that the actions set out in the Review are being effectively implemented to benefit a greater number of households. A significant borrower, lender, insolvency practitioner and local authority awareness raising and training programme has been initiated and is ongoing. My Department is continuing to work very closely with the Abhaile Service as well as the Insolvency Service of Ireland and the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) with a particular focus on reaching out to borrowers in arrears of more than 2 years.

The Government's focus is to ensure that as many households as possible remain in their homes and I would encourage borrowers to engage with the Abhaile Service, the national mortgage arrears resolution service, provided free of charge to the borrower. The unique element of Abhaile is that it brings together, for the first time, the full range of supports and services required by borrowers in home mortgage arrears. A dedicated adviser will work with the bor-

rower and their lender to find the best solution for their particular situation. MABS acts as the gateway for the service and can be contacted by telephoning (076)1072000 or by accessing their website at: www.mabs.ie/abhaile.

For those borrowers in danger of losing their home who are ineligible for the MTR scheme but qualify for social housing support, it is recommended that they engage as early as possible with their local authority regarding their long-term housing needs.

Legislative Process

613. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the legislation, including heads of Bills, from his Department that were sent to EU institutions before publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4252/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In the period of the 32nd Dáil, the following legislation would have been seen by the European Commission prior to publication:

- Building Regulations (Part B Amendment) Regulations 2017 (S.I. No. 57 of 2017)
- European Communities (Marine Strategy Framework)(Amendment) Regulations 2017 (S.I. No. 265/2017)
- Building Regulations (Part L Amendment) Regulations 2017 (S.I. No. 538 of 2017)
- European Union (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018 (S.I. No. 296/2018)
- European Union (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Peat Extraction) Regulations 2019 (S.I. No. 4/2019)

In relation to the Miscellaneous Provisions (Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 29 March 2019) Bill 2019, and Brexit Preparedness and Contingency planning more generally, the Government continues to engage with the EU institutions and other Member States to ensure a coordinated approach, where appropriate.

Local Authority Management

614. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 1121 of 15 January 2019, when the terms of office of the chief executive officers commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4314/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The term of office of a Chief Executive of a local authority is the subject of a contract of employment between the individual Chief Executive and the local authority concerned. My Department is not a party to such contracts. The information sought in relation to contract start dates may be available directly from the local authorities concerned.

Building Regulations

615. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if building regulations will ensure that all new houses and apartments being built nationally will be zero carbon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4315/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Energy Performance of Buildings Directive sets requirements at an EU level for Member States to improve the energy performance of buildings and to make an important contribution to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Article 9(1) of the Directive requires Member States to ensure that by 31 December 2020, all new buildings are nearly zero-energy buildings.

The Directive defines a Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB) as a building that has a very high energy performance and that the nearly zero or very low amount of energy required should be covered to a very significant extent by energy from renewable sources, including energy from renewable sources produced on-site or nearby. This definition was incorporated into the Building Regulations in January 2017.

The NZEB performance requirements are based on the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive cost optimal calculations which were issued in 2013 and 2015. Cost-optimal levels are defined as “the energy performance level which leads to the lowest cost during the estimated economic lifecycle”. The NZEB performance for new dwellings represents an improvement in energy and carbon dioxide emissions performance of 70% over 2005 standards and requires renewables on all new dwellings. This is typically equivalent to a Building Energy Rating (BER) of “A2” and is recognised internationally as a very advanced performance requirement. The Part L performance requirements of the Building Regulations have been advanced incrementally since 2007 and the final improvement to move from the current standard of 60% better than 2005 standards or a typical BER of “A3”, to a performance of 70% better than 2005 standards or an “A2” BER, can be more easily achieved as a result of these incremental improvements.

It should be noted that the draft regulations and accompanying technical guidance to implement this have completed public consultation and the regulations are expected to be signed into law shortly. These regulations will also require that where Major Renovations take place which are greater than 25% of the surface area of the dwelling, the dwelling should achieve a cost optimal performance where feasible. This is equivalent to a B2 building energy rating for a typical dwelling.

Home Loan Scheme

616. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the appeals process in place when a person applies for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan and meets the criteria regarding financial income but the original planning permission is outside the criteria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4333/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is designed to enable credit-worthy first-time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range. The scheme is targeted at first-time buyers who have access to an adequate deposit and have the capacity to repay a mortgage, but who are unable to access a mortgage sufficient for them to purchase their first home.

The Housing Agency assesses applications for loans on behalf of the local authorities. However, the final decision on loan approval is a matter for each local authority and its Credit

Committee on a case-by-case basis. Decisions on all housing loan applications must be made in accordance with the Regulations establishing the scheme; the statutory credit policy issued under the Regulations and have regard to the recommendations of the Housing Agency, in order to ensure consistency of treatment for all applicants.

Loan applicants who are dissatisfied with a loan application decision of a local authority Credit Committee may appeal that decision to the local authority. Details of the appeals process can be obtained from the relevant local authority.

The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is only available for financing a Principal Private Residence (PPR) subject to the following criteria:

- For the purpose of purchasing a new, second-hand or self-build property.
- That the gross internal floor area of the property does not exceed 175 square metres.
- The property complies with planning and building regulations.
- The property is located in the Republic of Ireland.

As with the previous local authority house purchase loan offerings, the properties that may be purchased with a Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan must have a gross internal floor area of 175 square metres or less which is equivalent to 1,884 square feet. This property size limit more than adequately provides, in terms of property size, for the range of accommodation needs of first time buyers.

Private Rented Accommodation

617. Deputy Noel Rock asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to add amendments to the Multi-Unit Developments Act 2011 to protect those renting in a development in circumstances (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4334/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 set out the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants in both the private rental sector and the Approved Housing Bodies (AHB) sector. The Acts provide that landlords in the sector must apply to register a tenancy of a dwelling with the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) within one month of the commencement of the tenancy.

The RTB actively pursues landlords for non-registration. Failure of a landlord to register a tenancy with the RTB can result in criminal conviction. If convicted, a landlord may be liable to fines of up to €4,000 and/or six months' imprisonment, along with a daily fine of €500 for a continuing offence. In addition, if the tenancy is not registered, the landlord cannot avail of the dispute resolution services of the RTB should an issue arise with the tenancy.

To pursue non-compliant landlords, the RTB receives information on residential rented dwellings from several sources. Where non-compliance is identified, notice and warning letters are sent to the landlord. If the landlord still fails to register, enforcement action is taken through the courts.

The RTB's register of tenancies is available and searchable by rental dwelling address on the RTB's website at the following link <https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/check/index.html/>.

Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) supported tenancies are agreed between the landlord

and the tenant; the local authority is not a party to the tenancy and has no role in its agreement. However, as with other private rental tenancies, the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended) governs the relationship between landlord and tenant and the length of the tenancy is a matter that must be agreed between the landlord and tenant in that context.

The HAP Shared Service Centre (SSC) provides a highly effective transactional service on behalf of Local Authorities, including data-sharing with the RTB in relation to active HAP tenancies. This enables the RTB to ensure compliance with the national tenancy registration system.

Boat Permits

618. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the procedure to be taken on a matter (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3907/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In relation to the matter raised by the Deputy, I can advise that there is an annual lottery for twenty positions for a twelve month period drawn from a waiting list. This waiting list consists of approx. 750 applicants. The lottery is due to take place in the next few weeks. I have passed the details supplied to local management for the necessary action.

National Parks and Wildlife Service Staff

619. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of staff working in the National Parks and Wildlife Service as of 1 January 2017, 1 January 2018 and 1 January 2019, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3921/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that the number of staff working in the National Parks and Wildlife Service in my Department on the dates in question are as follows:

Date	Headcount	Whole Time Equivalent
1 January 2017	293	275.22
1 January 2018	336	318.30
1 January 2019	327	311.25

I understand that my Department will recruit additional specialist and operational roles for the NPWS in 2019 which will include District Conservation Officers, Wildlife Inspectors, Conservation Rangers and Ecologists.

Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge

620. D'fhiabhráigh Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta an bhféadfad sí cur leis an bhfreagra a fuair mé ón Aire Oideachas agus Scileanna ar an gceist a chuir mé air (sonraí tugtha). [4052/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Tá a bhfuil ráite i bhfreagra an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna ar cheist an Teach-

ta nótáilte.

Mar is eol don Teachta, is í mo Roinnse atá freagrach as comhordú a dhéanamh ar fhorfheidhmiú na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030. Déantar é sin i gcomhar leis na páirtithe leasmhara éagsúla a bhfuil baint acu leis an scéal, lena n-áirítear ach go háirithe na Ranna Rialtais ábhartha - ina measc, an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna.

I gcomhthéacs an chúraim atá sannta do mo Roinnse mar a bhaineann sé comhordú ar chur chun feidhme na Straitéise, chuaigh an Roinn i ndáil comhairle leis na Ranna agus na forais ábhartha eile sular foilsíodh an Plean Gníomhaíochta 2018-2022 i mí Meithimh 2018.

Sa phlean sin ina ndéantar rianú beacht ar cad atá déanta, ar bun agus beartaithe chun tuilleadh cúraim agus dlús a chur le forfheidhmiú na Straitéise, leagtar amach cad go baileach a dhéanfar go ceann cùig bliana ar leas na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta.

Faoi réimse gnímh 1 den phlean, eadhon an tOideachas, leagtar amach ann cad atá beartaithe ag an Roinn Oideachais augs Scileanna a dhéanamh go sonrach (i gcomhar le páirtithe eile de réir mar a bhaineann) chun cúram a dhéanamh de ghnóthaí Gaeilge i gcomhthéacs na freagrachta atá uirthi ina leith, ní amháin mar chuid den chóras oideachais trí chéile ach i gcomhthéacs an dualgais atá uirthi mar a bhaineann sé le forfheidhmiú na Straitéise - a bhfuil freagracht thras-Rannach bainteach léi agus beannacht thras-Rialtais aici.

Ach an oiread le gach Roinn Stáit agus páirtí leasmhar ábhartha eile, tá mo Roinn ag súil go mór le bheith ag leanúint ag obair ar bhonn compháirtíochta leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna ar mhaithe le tuilleadh dul chun cinn a chinntí maidir le cur chun feidhme na mbearta atá sannta sa phlean agus a bhaineann leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna.

Arts Funding

621. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the procedure for applying for national lottery arts grants. [4062/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josephine Madigan): Under section 8 of the National Lottery Act 1986, the proceeds of the National Lottery are paid into the Central Fund of the Exchequer and therefore National Lottery funding is one of the constituents of Exchequer funding. The apportionment of National Lottery funding to various lines of voted expenditure is the responsibility of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The components of my Department's Vote, which are part-funded by proceeds of the National Lottery, are:

- Subhead A.9 An Chomhairle Ealaíon (Arts Council)
- Subhead B.3 Grant for An Chomhairle Oidhreachta (Heritage Council)
- Subhead C.4 Irish Language Support Schemes.

Allocations in respect of these subheads for each year are set out in the Revised Estimates Volumes for the years in question and published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on its website at www.per.ie.

In relation to the application process for Arts Council and Heritage Council Grants which are part funded by the National Lottery, such applications are managed by the Arts Council and the Heritage Council respectively. The Department administers grant applications under Irish

Language Support Schemes and details can be found at the following www.chg.gov.ie/gael-tacht/the-irish-language/language-support-schemes/.

Legislative Process

622. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the legislative measures, including heads of Bills, from her Department which have been sent to EU institutions before their publication for the period of the 32nd Dáil; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4245/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josephine Madigan): I am advised that, during the period of the 32nd Dáil, my Department has not had cause to send any items of primary legislation, including heads of bills, to EU institutions before publication.

For completeness I would advise that my Department has recently sent two Draft Statutory Instruments to the European Commission. These are drafted under the European Communities Act 1972 and are respectively designed to give effect to relevant provisions of:

- Regulation (EU) No 511/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on compliance measures for users from the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization in the Union; and

- Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species.