

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 6, inclusive, answered orally.

Departmental Expenditure

7. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the budget and spending of his Department in expanding the trade in dairy and beef herds internationally since 2010. [3773/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Food Wise 2025, the ten-year strategy for the agrifood sector, underlines the sector's unique and special position within the Irish economy, identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and illustrates the potential for further sustainable development.

The expert committee, that prepared the Food Wise 2025 Strategy, believed that the following projections are achievable by 2025: increasing the value of agrifood exports by 85% to €19 billion; increasing value-added in the sector by 70% to in excess of €13 billion; and increasing the value of primary production by 65% to almost €10 billion. With regard to employment, Food Wise foresees the creation of 23,000 additional jobs in the agrifood sector all along the supply chain from primary production to higher value added product development.

These projections relate primarily to increasing the added-value of agrifood exports.

Market development – developing new markets and growing existing markets, based on market insights – is one of the five themes of Food Wise, along with environmental sustainability, competitiveness, innovation and human capital. Obviously market development and diversification is also a key response to the challenges which Brexit poses for the sector.

In April 2017 I launched a seven point action plan on market access. This is being implemented through a variety of actions, including:

- a market prioritisation exercise and subsequent detailed studies carried out by Bord Bia on behalf of my Department. On meat the five countries selected for detailed study were: Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Mexico & Malaysia; and for dairy: Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia & Vietnam.

- A market access web portal launched in May 2018, and available on my Department's website provides a wide range of valuable information to exporters.

Trying to gain new market access, or enhance and improve existing market access has been a particularly prominent feature of recent Ministerial Trade Missions led by myself and my

colleague Andrew Doyle. Trade missions over the last two years have focused on key growth markets:

- Asia – China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia;
- North America – USA, Mexico and Canada;
- as well as the Gulf States and Turkey.

In 2018 a number of additional markets were opened by my Department including the Chinese beef market, which was successfully opened after ongoing work over a number of years, as well as beef, sheepmeat and poultry markets in Kuwait and Qatar.

Since the Brexit vote in 2016, I have allocated significant additional funding for Bord Bia, as a key part of the Government's efforts to support the sector in responding to Brexit uncertainty. In Estimates 2019, I provided a further allocation of €5.3 million to Bord Bia, bringing its total grant in aid to €46.6 million for 2019. This compares to a grant of €28.9 million in 2014, and represents a 60% increase in funding for marketing and promotion of our food offering over five years. Bord Bia also received approval last year to recruit an additional 32 staff, which will bring total staff numbers to 146 in 2019.

In Budget 2019, I secured €20 million for a new Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot targeted at suckler farmers and specifically aimed at further improving the carbon efficiency of beef production. This Pilot complements the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP), an agri-environmental measure specifically targeted at improving the genetic merit of the suckler herd, which provides Irish beef farmers with some €300 million in funding over the current Rural Development Programme (RDP) period.

All of these efforts are aimed at adding value all along the supply chain, supporting the agrifood sector as the most important indigenous sector, providing employment and supporting communities throughout rural Ireland.

Questions Nos. 8 to 13, inclusive, answered orally.

Fish Landings

14. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the designation of ports in County Donegal to allow fish landings ahead of a potential hard Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5623/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under EU regulations, vessels from a non-EU country may only land fish at a limited number of 'designated' ports. This is to aid control and compliance and to deter illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activity.

There are currently two Irish ports that have been designated for landings by vessels from a third country: Killybegs in Donegal and Castletownbere in Cork.

When the UK formally becomes a third country and the Common Fisheries Policy no longer applies to it, UK registered vessels will be restricted to landing fish at those two ports. The vast majority of current UK fish landings are to those ports.

However, if, as I very much hope will be the case, the Withdrawal Agreement is concluded, a transition period will apply where there will be no change to current practices for Irish or UK

vessels for at least 2 years.

If, in the worst case scenario, no agreement is reached and there is a disorderly Brexit, then the UK will leave on the 29th of March 2019. In that scenario, UK vessels would be restricted to landing in the two designated ports only from that date.

Brexit Staff

15. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of SPS and fisheries control officials who will be operational on 29 March 2019, out of the planned recruitment of 116 staff for SPS and fisheries controls as agreed on 18 September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5725/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is participating very actively in the Whole-of-Government approach to preparedness and contingency planning for Brexit. The Government has already sanctioned in the region of €4m for the commencement of a phased process for the recruitment of additional staff to carry out increased volumes of import controls and export certification arising from Brexit.

These requirements are significant, and arise in relation to the 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. The Department has carried out an extensive analysis exercise, based on examination of trade and container movement data, to establish the potential volumes of controls that will need to be carried out. This exercise has been used to guide our planning in relation to putting in place the staff that will be required.

In general, regarding staffing requirements, my Department will look to use a combination of options including recruitment, redeployment and temporary flexible solutions where appropriate and as necessary. My Department is working with our recruitment partners, the Public Appointments Service to engage Veterinary Inspectors, Portal Inspectors, Plant Health Inspectors and Administrative support staff. Mechanisms to temporarily redeploy experienced people within my Department have also been initiated and the engagement of contracted temporary service arrangements is also being progressed.

The final staffing numbers to be engaged in response to Brexit contingencies will depend on the nature of Brexit and the trading relationship with the UK that ensues. Should a hard Brexit be confirmed as the probable contingency to be addressed, my Department, through the mechanisms I have outlined, will have scope to deploy appropriate levels of resources as may be required. Overall, I remain confident that both the state, and my Department, will be in a position to deliver the services required in terms of both imports and exports at the appropriate time, be that at the end of March or any other point in the future.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

16. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the priorities for the climate change mitigation measures needed in the agriculture sector; the measurable targets for each quarter of 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5485/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is actively engaged as part of the whole of Government approach to transitioning to a

low-carbon, competitive, sustainable and climate resilient economy and society.

The National Mitigation Plan (NMP) has identified a series of mitigation actions and measures for the agriculture and land use sector including forestry including timelines for delivery. These measures not only focus on the mitigation of greenhouse gases and improving resource efficiency but are also aimed at restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to building resilience of agricultural production systems (i.e. adaptation).

The long term vision for the agricultural sector is an approach to carbon neutrality which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production. Our policy approach is based on three principles:

- i. reducing agricultural emissions ;
- ii. increasing carbon sequestration; and
- iii. displacing and substituting fossil fuel and energy intensive materials.

There are a significant number of measures already in place which support these principles. However, I am not complacent on this important issue and my Department continues to review and develop new measures that will realise the ambition for the sector.

An All-of-Government Plan to tackle climate disruption, which my colleague the Minister for Communication, Climate Action and Energy is currently leading on, will build on the National Mitigation Plan and the National Development Plan and identify additional actions so as to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change.

I will continue to work with my government colleagues to ensure the successful delivery of this plan and commit to measures and actions that will support our approach to carbon neutrality without compromising capacity for sustainable food production.

While the mitigation potential for agriculture is limited, agriculture can and must play a key role in contributing to Ireland's climate change and energy targets in the years ahead

Brexit Supports

17. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to improve beef prices and protect the sector from Brexit; the area to target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5445/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My efforts to improve the position of beef farmers and to protect the sector from Brexit have been focused on improving the sector's competitiveness and its ability to diversify markets in order to reduce exposure to the UK market.

The measures I have introduced include a €150m low-cost loan scheme in 2017 to help reduce farm-gate business costs, and a dedicated €50m Brexit package in Budget 2018 which included further additional funding to Bord Bia and Teagasc as well as a contribution to a €300m (joint DAFM/DBEI) "Brexit Loan Scheme", at least 40% of which is available to food businesses. In Budget 2019 I announced a €78m Brexit package for farmers, fishermen, food SMEs and to cover additional costs related to Brexit. My colleague, Minister for Finance Paschal Donohoe, also announced the Future Growth Loan Scheme, which will be rolled out in 2019 and for which I had made provision of €25m in 2018. The scheme will provide long term, unsecured investment finance for farmers and small scale companies in the food and seafood

sectors.

On market and product diversification, the additional funding that I have provided to Bord Bia has been used, inter alia, to provide targeted advice to individual companies as well as to conduct a market prioritisation exercise which is now informing our approach to market diversification activities, including the choice of destinations for Trade Missions.

Trade Missions play an important role in this regard, and I have been very active on this front in recent years as we strive to gain, and then develop, a presence in as many global markets as possible. I have led very successful missions to the Gulf Region, the US, Mexico, Japan and Korea in 2017, and to the US, Canada, China, Indonesia and Malaysia 2018. These missions included participants from across the agrifood sector and featured extensive trade contacts as well as high-level political discussions. These and the other missions that my Department has under consideration for 2019 will serve to enhance and improve our existing levels of market access in these destinations. Indeed, since the UK referendum I have increased Bord Bia's funding by a total of €19.5 million, including a further €5 million allocated in Budget 2019.

Product diversification has also been supported through additional funding of €8.8 million to Teagasc to develop its National Food Innovation Hub, and funding to support investment in the prepared consumer foods sector.

I and my officials have also been working very hard for quite some time to sensitise other Member States and the European Commission to the potentially very severe impacts of Brexit on the Irish beef and other sectors, and to the likelihood of specific supports being required in order to deal with these impacts. The institutions of the European Union are very well aware of the likelihood of a significant impact of a disorderly Brexit on Ireland's economy because this has been part of the discussion from the beginning, and indeed this is explicitly recognised in the Commission's own communication on contingency planning.

Most recently, I held a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Hogan last week to discuss the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit. We discussed the unique exposure of sectors such as the beef sector to the threat of a disorderly Brexit, and the challenges that it could present. I stressed the need to be ready to deploy a range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on farmers and processors, including through traditional market supports and exceptional aid under the CAP's Single Common Market Organisation regulation, and increased flexibility under State Aid regulations. Commissioner Hogan reiterated the EU's readiness to respond and support Ireland, and we will remain in contact on these issues as the situation evolves.

I have also met with the chief executives of all of the major British retailers to impress upon them the commitment of Irish suppliers in continuing to supply the UK market post-Brexit.

I wish to assure the Deputy that the Government remains very focused on supporting the agrifood industry, including the beef industry, through the challenges ahead.

Brexit Preparations

18. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of action being taken to prepare for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5722/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I have been addressing Brexit challenges through a range of Budgetary measures aimed at improving competitiveness, and developing market and product diversification. These measures include a

€150m low-cost loan scheme in 2017 to help reduce farm-gate business costs, a dedicated €50m Brexit package in Budget 2018, and a €78m Brexit package for farmers, fishermen, food SMEs in Budget 2019. My colleague, Minister for Finance Paschal Donohoe, also announced the Future Growth Loan Scheme, which will be rolled out in 2019 and for which I had made provision of €25m in 2018. The scheme will provide long term, unsecured investment finance for farmers and small scale companies in the food and seafood sectors.

On market and product diversification, the additional funding that I have provided to Bord Bia has been used, inter alia, to provide targeted advice to individual companies as well as to conduct a market prioritisation exercise which is now informing our approach to market diversification activities, including the choice of destinations for Trade Missions. Product diversification has also been supported through additional funding of €8.8 million to Teagasc to develop its National Food Innovation Hub, and funding to support investment in the prepared consumer foods sector.

I and my officials have also been working very hard for quite some time to sensitise other Member States and the European Commission to the potentially very severe impacts of Brexit on the Irish agrifood and fisheries sectors, and to the likelihood of specific supports being required in order to deal with these impacts.

Most recently, I held a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Hogan last week to discuss the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit on the Irish agrifood and fisheries sectors. Commissioner Hogan reiterated the EU's readiness to respond and support Ireland, and we will remain in contact on these issues as the situation evolves.

As regards contingency planning, my Department has been actively participating in the Whole-of-Government approach to preparedness and contingency planning. We have fed into the overall Government Contingency Action Plan which was published on 19 December, and we have been working very closely with colleagues in other Departments and agencies to address in particular the requirements that will arise in relation to the implementation at ports and airports of import controls on agrifood products coming from the UK.

Work in this regard has been focused on three key areas, namely, infrastructure, staffing and information technology, and in three key locations, that is Dublin Port, Rosslare Port and Dublin Airport.

Throughout all of 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.

TAMS Funding

19. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to spend the €11.6 million in TAMS approved funding that has lapsed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5707/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There is a budget in place of €395m for the suite of seven measures available under TAMS II for the duration of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. Expenditure to date amounts to over €109m with over €5.6m issuing last December and a further €7.3m issuing in January just gone.

My Department is closely monitoring expenditure, including expired approvals, under the scheme. By the end of 2018 approvals had expired with a grant value of approximately €11.8m - this appears to be the figure referred to in the question raised. However, I should point out that

to date a total of 18,317 approvals have issued with a total estimated grant value of over €276m. All of these cases represent committed expenditure under the TAMS II measure of the RDP. Until such time as issued approvals are acted upon and payment claims submitted or approvals expire the budget for TAMS must include provision for the potential expenditure involved. I have also committed to keeping the scheme open for applications until end-2020 and must retain budget to allow this to happen in the interests of fairness to current and future applicants. It is anticipated that, based on the number of applications and payment claims being received, the full allocation of €395m will be spent over the course of the RDP. It must also be remembered that TAMS is only one scheme under our overall Rural Development Programme which as things stand is projected to overspend by €105m.

I have recently introduced changes to the Scheme, with meal bins now added to the long list of eligible investment items for all sectors under the Scheme and a favourable revision of the penalties applied for the late submission of payment claims. The Scheme also remains open for new applications with the current tranche due to close on 5 April this year. Applications continue to be received and processed under the Scheme with approvals currently issuing to the over 2,000 farmers who submitted applications under the tranche that closed on 7 December 2018. I am pleased to note that the level of applications received shows that there is an increasing level of interest in the Scheme. I would urge all participants who have completed approved works to submit their payment claims immediately to facilitate early payment.

Live Exports

20. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which live exports have performed in 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5720/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Live exports are a critical part of the infrastructure of our livestock industry. They play a significant role in stimulating price competition and provide an alternative market outlet for farmers. My Department facilitates this trade, recognising its critical importance to the agri sector, while ensuring that live animal exports meet the highest welfare standards.

Live exports of cattle increased by 30% over 2017, to 246,000 head. This change was driven by a significant increase in exports to other EU countries. Calf exports increased significantly. In 2017 I reduced the veterinary inspection fee payable on live exports of calves under 3 months of age from €4.80 to €1.20 - this has brought greater equity to the inspection fee regime. Calf exports to Spain increased by 66%, to over 72,500 head in 2018. Exports of Irish calves to Italy and the Netherlands also increased last year, to over 12,500 and 48,500 head, respectively. Calf exports to Belgium and France increased from 4,200 to 13,000 head and from 2,500 to 8,500 head, from 2017 to 2018 respectively. Exports to third countries decreased in 2018 – due in part to currency fluctuations in the Turkish Lira. Nevertheless, nearly 13,000 head of cattle were exported to Turkey last year.

In the first three weeks of this year live exports came to 3,500, up from 1,400 in the same period in 2018. Northern Ireland and Spain have been the largest markets for live exports so far in 2019, with 1,200 and 1,600 head of cattle, respectively.

My Department continues to engage with third countries and to seek out new markets for live exports. New health certs for the export of cattle to Libya were agreed in November 2018, which increase the range of cattle that can be exported there. My Department is engaged with Egypt to secure the finalisation of agreement on three proposed health certs for the export of

fattening, slaughter and breeding cattle.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

21. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if policy on dairy and beef herd growth for export can be compatible with Ireland's plans to become a leader on climate change measures in view of the recent report in a publication (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3308/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Food Wise 2025, the ten-year strategy for the agri-food sector, underlines the sector's unique and special position within the Irish economy, identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and illustrates the potential for further sustainable development.

The expert committee, that prepared the Food Wise 2025 Strategy, believed that the following projections are achievable by 2025: increasing the value of agri-food exports by 85% to €19 billion; increasing value-added in the sector by 70% to in excess of €13 billion; and increasing the value of primary production by 65% to almost €10 billion. With regard to employment, Food Wise foresees the creation of 23,000 additional jobs in the agri-food sector all along the supply chain from primary production to higher value added product development.

These projections relate primarily to increasing the added-value of agri-food exports. Furthermore, the direct payments in Ireland have been decoupled from productions so now the payment is no longer contingent on the number of animals retained.

Ireland has a comparative advantage in grass-based carbon efficient livestock production. The EU Commission JRC report (2010) found that Ireland is the most carbon efficient producer in the EU per unit of dairy production, and the 5th most carbon efficient producer of beef per kg. Government efforts are focused on driving towards even greater carbon efficiency through Origin Green Quality Assurance Schemes, and schemes such as BDGP and BEEP, as well as knowledge transfer.

My Department is pursuing a policy of ensuring that supports to the beef sector explicitly support and encourage suckler farmers to make the best decisions possible to improve both the economic and environmental efficiency of their farming system. The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is improving the environmental sustainability by increasing genetic merit within the suckler beef herd. I recently launched the Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP), a €20 million pilot scheme specifically aimed at further improving the carbon efficiency of beef production from the suckler herd, by measuring the weaning efficiency of suckler cows and calves.

On the dairy side, Dairy Sustainability Ireland (DSI) is a collaborative initiative established to help farmers meet environmental targets, improve profitability and copper fasten Ireland's reputation as a world leader in grass-fed dairy production. This work has in turn contributed to the development of the Agricultural Sustainability Support & Advisory Programme, a collaborative initiative to facilitate improvements in water quality.

While we are making progress, there is no room for complacency – the agri-food sector must continue to make improvements in terms of sustainability and environmental performance. Collaboration, co-operation and collective responsibility are necessary to meet the challenges that are facing us. I am convinced that we must all work together to ensure that the sector continues to play its part in meeting our climate obligations and challenges.

Greyhound Industry

22. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is engaging in Europe-wide discussions on the export and welfare of greyhounds, in particular to countries with little or no welfare standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5486/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The vast majority of dogs that are moved from Ireland go to the UK. Under EU law, dogs moved to another EU country from Ireland must be accompanied by an EU pet passport, be microchipped, and have a valid rabies vaccination.

The welfare of greyhounds is regulated by the Welfare of Greyhounds Act 2011 and the Animal Health and Welfare Act of 2013. The latter applies to all animals, whether kept for commercial, domestic, sport, show or other purposes. It contains robust measures against the ill-treatment of animals.

The Greyhound Racing Bill 2018, when enacted, will add to existing legislation, making the greyhound the most regulated of all canine breeds in Ireland. The Bill ensures that the principles of good governance and regulation are clearly and unambiguously laid down in primary legislation. In broad terms the Bill seeks to address deficiencies in the existing legislation and the governance of Bord na gCon. It will strengthen regulatory controls in the industry, modernise sanctions and improve integrity with a view to building a reputation for exceptional regulation in the sector.

My Department has a close working relationship with animal welfare charities on all aspects of animal welfare. Officials of my Department meet regularly with welfare members of the International Greyhound Forum, which includes the Dogs Trust, the ISPCA and Bord na gCon, to consider issues surrounding the export of greyhounds.

Bord na gCon is the State Body responsible for the governance, regulation and development of the greyhound industry in Ireland. It is opposed to exports of greyhounds to countries that do not meet Ireland's welfare standards. This is a view that I fully endorse.

Common Agricultural Policy Subsidies

23. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a €60,000 ceiling for direct payments under the next CAP in order to safeguard small and medium-sized farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5726/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The new legislative proposals for the Common Agricultural Policy 2021 - 2027 were launched on Friday 1 June 2018 by Commissioner Hogan. The proposals, as drafted, involve significant changes, including in relation to governance, the distribution of direct payments among farmers and the increasing environmental conditionality attaching to such payments. There will be additional discretion for Member States in configuring the measures available, within parameters laid down in the draft proposals. The new proposals must commit to a more significant environmental ambition than the current CAP schemes, including in pillar I.

Significant changes are being proposed in the draft legislation, particularly when it comes to the area of direct payments. The new proposals include a number of measures relating to distribution of payments, including an overall cap of €100,000, degressivity for payments above

€60,000, a complementary redistributive income support and the convergence of payments towards a minimum of 75% of the average payment per hectare nationally.

I have already indicated that I am open to some level of capping. Ireland has already applied the maximum level of degressivity allowable under the current regulations for direct payments over €150,000.

My Department is at present examining these proposals carefully to assess their potential impact on applicants. We need to ensure that any such mechanisms will be simple and straightforward for Member States to administer and that they can be implemented without undue complexity for the farmer.

These are complex proposals. We are in the midst of intensive and challenging negotiations and we still have some way to go before agreement on the proposals will be reached. I will continue to work with the Commission and other Member States to shape these proposals into an effective new CAP.

Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations

24. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his priorities for hill farmers under the new CAP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5624/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In June 2018, the European Commission published the legislative proposals for the CAP post 2020. The proposals as drafted involve changes in a number of areas including governance and distribution of direct payments. These proposals are not yet finalised and are the subject of negotiations in Brussels.

Member States will have to prepare National CAP Strategic Plans setting out their planned interventions for the sector. There has been ongoing consultation with all stakeholders, including representatives of hill farmers, on the proposals and I can assure the Deputy that this will continue as the national CAP Strategic Plan begins to be developed.

A noteworthy feature of the proposals is their emphasis on the role agriculture has to play in helping Member States achieve their environmental and climate change targets. There is an increased environmental ambition for the CAP post 2020.

There are a number of new approaches to addressing environmental issues through the CAP including:-

- The mandatory provision of eco-schemes, as part of the Pillar I direct payments,
- The inclusion of greater environmental conditionality on EU payments with links to requirements such as the Water Framework Directive and proposals for mandatory nutrient management plans.
- 30% of the Rural Development Programme expenditure, excluding payments for areas of natural constraints, must be focused on biodiversity/environment/climate related measures.
- Three of the nine key objectives set for the CAP post 2020 concern the environment.
- An ex ante assessment for the plan must incorporate a strategic environmental assessment.

I believe that protecting the environment and the sustainable development of agriculture go hand in hand. Farmers play a vital role in the provision of public goods and need to be adequately recognised and recompensed for this role. It is important that the overall level of the EU CAP budget is maintained in order to recognise these public goods being delivered from all farmers, including hill farmers.

Brexit Preparations

25. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an application has been submitted to the European Commission to designate Rosslare Europort as a designated border inspection posts in preparation for the possibility of the UK becoming a third country with the EU in 2019 in a no-deal Brexit scenario; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5466/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Officials from my Department are currently working on a submission that will be sent to the European Commission to facilitate the listing of Rosslare Port as a border inspection post in the relevant European legislation. Rosslare Port will be listed for the importation of animal products and live animals.

This submission comes as a result of the work that my Department has been undertaking to assess the infrastructure requirements at ports and airports that handle consignments of plants, animals, plant and animal products from the United Kingdom. This work is part of a co-ordinated Government wide approach involving the Revenue Commissioners, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the Department of Health and the Office of Public Works.

The Commission has requested that this submission be with the relevant officials on or before the 15th of February and my officials are working to this deadline.

Common Agricultural Policy

26. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which he will view the new CAP taking into account climate change obligations of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5626/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The new legislative proposals for the Common Agricultural Policy 2021 - 2027 were launched on Friday 1 June 2018 by Commissioner Hogan. The proposals outline a greater environmental ambition post 2020 and recognise the role the agriculture sector has to play in helping Member States achieve their environmental and climate change targets.

The new CAP reform proposals require Member States to set out their approach on environmental issues in the new CAP Strategic Plans.

There are a number of new approaches to addressing environmental issues through the CAP including:-

- Three of the nine key objectives set for the CAP post 2020 concern the environment.
- An ex ante assessment for the plan must incorporate a strategic environmental assessment.
- The proposals include greater environmental conditionality on EU payments with links

to requirements such as the Water Framework Directive and proposals for mandatory nutrition management plans.

- 40% of the overall CAP budget must contribute to climate mainstreaming.

- Member States must make schemes available as part of the direct payments that provide additional supports for eco schemes which go beyond the increased statutory management requirements and good agricultural and environmental conditions.

- Nationally 30% of the Rural Development Programme expenditure, excluding payments for areas of natural constraints, must be focused on biodiversity/environment/climate related measures.

- Noncompliance with statutory management requirements and standards for good agricultural and environmental conditions of land in the areas of climate and environmental, public health, animal health, plant health and animal welfare will require an administrative penalty.

There are ten Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC's) covering a range of issues including permanent grassland, protection of wetland and peatland, and nutrient management plans. There are sixteen proposed Statutory Management Requirements. These concern compliance with a number of Directives including the Water Framework Directive, the Nitrates Directive and the Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds.

I firmly support the principle that there must be a high level of environmental ambition in the CAP post 2020. I believe that protecting the environment and the sustainable development of agriculture go hand in hand. However it is essential that the new environmental conditionality is implemented effectively, with common standards that are relevant and effective.

The new CAP proposals will be a key support in enhancing the competitiveness of the agri-food sector, achieving more sustainable management of natural resources and ensuring a more balanced development of rural areas. In addition, I believe that farmers play a vital role in the provision of public goods and need to be adequately recognised and recompensed for this role. It is important that the overall level of the budget acknowledges the public goods being delivered from farmers. The negotiations for the CAP post 2020 are still ongoing and I will continue to seek to secure the best possible outcome for the Irish agri-food sector.

Forestry Sector

27. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if national forestry supports are being reviewed in view of concerns in communities in County Leitrim and other areas relating to coniferous clear-fell forests. [5705/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Government policy on forestry is to increase species diversity by means of targeted supports and measures within the nationally funded afforestation programme. The current programme expires at the end of 2020. Publicly funded afforestation has been a central part of Government policy for many years now given the many benefits which forestry presents, not least for our rural economy and for the environment and climate policies.

The supports available were reviewed as part of the Mid-Term Review of the programme, which concluded in 2018. Following the review a 7% increase in grant and 5% increase in premium rates were introduced for broadleaf planting categories. Increased rates for Agro forestry and forestry for fibre categories were also introduced. In addition the minimum mandatory

requirement for broadleaf planting per site was increased from 10% to 15%, with a resultant increase in the percentage planted in 2018 to 27%, up from 21% in 2017. My Department has also introduced the first ever continuous cover forestry scheme in Ireland this month as part of a suite of biodiversity related measures in order to give landowners more options when it comes to felling.

It's worth noting that all forests have an important role in climate action through the removal and storage of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and by supplying sustainable and renewable materials that support the decarbonisation of our economy. Under the Effort Sharing Regulation covering the period 2021 to 2030, Ireland has the ability to account up to 26.8 million tonnes of carbon dioxide removals by the land use sector towards our emission reduction targets. Removals of greenhouse gases by afforested land are forecast to amount to 22 million tonnes of carbon dioxide over this period.

As regards Co. Leitrim, my colleague Minister Andrew Doyle announced a study last week. This evidence-based review will assess the impacts of forestry in the county, both positive and negative and will help to inform both the local community and Government policy on forestry, rural development and land use.

Common Agricultural Policy Subsidies

28. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to ensure that the next round of CAP funding, both EU and Exchequer funding, matches the present round of funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5446/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): At the outset, I would like to point out that in discussing the funding of the Common Agricultural Policy, we should bear in mind that this funding forms part of a broader EU budget which is negotiated by Finance Ministers and then agreed by Heads of State and Government at the European Council.

The European Commission has proposed, as part of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027, that funding for the Common Agricultural Policy should be set at €365 billion. This equates to a cut of approximately 5% to the CAP budget in the next MFF period of 2021 - 2027. I have previously stated that the proposed cut is unacceptable for Ireland.

Negotiations on the MFF proposals have commenced and are running in parallel to the CAP post 2020 negotiations. The European Commission's intention is to reach overall agreement on the MFF before the European Parliamentary elections in 2019.

The MFF is a critical matter for all Member States and its agreement requires unanimity at the EU Council. It is clear that there are divergent views among member states on the appropriate level for the budget. While some Member States (including Ireland) have indicated their willingness to increase their contributions, once they contribute towards areas of added European value, there are others who feel equally strongly that the current proposals, such as they are, are too costly.

The departure of the UK from the EU further compounds the budgetary issue, with some €12 billion per annum in UK nett contributions being removed from the budget post 2020. Against this background, agreeing the MFF will make these negotiations a particularly challenging task.

I have been working to build consensus among my agriculture colleagues in Europe with regard to maintaining the CAP budget. I co-signed a Joint Memorandum in Madrid in May last

year, which calls for the CAP budget to be retained at current levels for the EU 27 post 2020. The memorandum has been supported by up to 20 other EU Agriculture Ministers. We will continue to work together on this issue as the negotiations for the CAP post 2020 and its budgetary allocations progress.

I have also sought to continue this work as part of ongoing bilateral meetings. Since May 2018, my colleague Minister Doyle and I have met initially with the EU Agri Ministers from Germany, France, Belgium, Denmark, Finland and Hungary, inter alia to support a strong CAP Budget after 2020. I have also met with Ministers from the Netherlands, Estonia, Belgium, Poland, Luxembourg, and Austria, and my officials engage regularly with counterparts in other member states on this issue.

Ireland needs to work closely with its EU colleagues to build a consensus around the need to reverse the proposed cuts in CAP. I would like to reassure the deputy that I will continue to do this, and to fight for a strong CAP budget as the negotiations progress.

Live Exports

29. Deputy Peter Burke asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the recent progress in the development of live export markets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5711/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2018 live exports of cattle increased by over 30% to 246,000 head compared to the previous year.

My Department continues to seek out new markets for live exports and to facilitate this trade by reaching agreement on health certification.

In November my Department reached agreement with Libya on a new veterinary health certificate for the export of breeding cattle, and an amended veterinary certificate for the export of fattening and slaughter cattle. Having an agreed health cert for breeding cattle provides much more clarity for exporters, as previously exports of breeding cattle to Libya had to be agreed on a load by load basis. The age of cattle that can be exported to Libya increased, from 24 to 30 months – this increases opportunities for exporters to export a wider range of cattle.

In January, my Department reached agreement with Qatar on a health cert for the export of sheep for slaughter.

I have extended an invitation to my Algerian counterpart to visit Ireland in early 2019. This follows earlier contact with Algeria, to try and reach agreement on revised and separate slaughter, fattening and breeding certs.

In relation to Egypt, the Chief Veterinary Officer recently wrote to his counterpart seeking agreement on three proposed health certificates for the export of fattening, slaughter and breeding cattle.

It may be recalled that in 2017, I reduced the veterinary inspection fee payable on live exports of calves less than three months of age to €1.20 per animal. This brought greater equity in the fees payable for calves, weanlings and adult cattle and gave an important boost to the trade. Since then we have continued to see significant growth in the exports of calves, rising from 102,000 in 2017 to 159,000 in 2018 - an increase of 56%. In the same period the total live exports of cattle increased by over 30% to 246,000 head compared to 2017.

Despite these many positive developments for live export markets, I am also well aware of the challenges faced by the sector, including transport capacity and lairage capacity at Cherbourg. My Department officials visited Cherbourg in September last year to discuss the capacity issue with French officials and local lairage owners. My officials continue to meet with ferry companies to explore new routes to continental Europe or the potential for carrying livestock on existing routes, and to ensure that the greatest facilitation possible is afforded to livestock exporters in the important Spring period. The pending approval of a new ferry will contribute to addressing capacity issues.

Brexit Supports

30. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of food companies that have been sanctioned funding under the Brexit working capital loan scheme; the value of same; when the long-term capital loan scheme announced in budget 2018 for farmers, fishermen and food businesses will open for applications in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5723/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme was developed in cooperation with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), to provide working capital support to enable eligible Irish businesses to implement the necessary changes to address the challenges posed by Brexit. The Scheme opened for applications on 28 March 2018 and it will remain open until 31st March 2020.

It provides for loans of €25,000 to €1,500,000 per eligible enterprise at a maximum interest rate of 4%, ranging from 1 year to 3 years, with unsecured loans up to €500,000. The loans can be used for future working capital requirements or to fund innovation, change or adaptation of the business to mitigate the impact of Brexit.

Applications for eligibility assessment must be made to the SBCI who, on approval, assign an eligibility reference number. This reference number along with the loan application may then be provided to a participating lender.

At 1 February, there were 394 eligibility applications received, of which 350 are approved and 9 are ineligible. The total number of loans progressed to sanction at bank level is 69 to a value of €15.7m, 9 of which relate to food businesses with a total value of €3.9m.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme has been developed by my Department and DBEI in partnership with the Department of Finance, the SBCI and the European Investment Fund (EIF). It will be delivered through participating finance providers and make up to €300 million of investment loans available to eligible Irish businesses, including farmers and the agri-food & seafood sectors. The loans will be competitively priced and will be for terms of 8-10 years and will support strategic long-term investment in a post-Brexit environment.

This is a long-awaited source of finance for young and new entrant farmers, especially the cohort who do not have high levels of security. It will also serve smaller-scale farmers, who often do not have the leverage to negotiate for more favourable terms with their banking institution.

SBCI has just issued an open call inviting banks and other lenders to become lending partners and this call has a closing date of 11 February 2019. SBCI advise that a period of due diligence, which will include the EIF, will follow. I have urged SBCI to operationalise the Scheme as soon as possible. The Scheme will run for three years from its launch date and further an-

nouncements in this regard will be made shortly.

Beef Environmental Efficiency Scheme Pilot

31. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of the beef environmental efficiency pilot; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5713/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I launched the Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot on 30 January. The launch was covered in the agriculture media. Applications for participation in the pilot will be accepted from 4th to 22nd of February.

The Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (**BEEP**) is a targeted support for suckler farmers and is specifically aimed at further improving the economic and environmental efficiency of beef production. This is done by measuring the weaning efficiency of suckler cows. Building on the success of the Beef Data and Genomics Programme, the data collected will also be a valuable addition to Ireland's already impressive cattle breeding database.

The Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot was announced in Budget 2019 as part of the €78m Brexit package for the agri-food industry. As well as clear environmental and climate benefits, the BEEP will provide farm gate investment at a time of market volatility and uncertainty relating to Brexit. I am very conscious that 2018 was a very difficult year for beef farmers, in terms of weather, fodder issues and market volatility. This is the sector most exposed to Brexit, given its reliance on the UK market. The BEEP is designed to provide an injection of investment at a critical time for farmers navigating the challenges ahead, while delivering in real terms on our climate objectives.

The €20 million funding available will allow for payment up to a maximum of €40 per calf, based on costs incurred and income foregone. If the scheme is oversubscribed a linear cut may be applied.

It is a pilot scheme for 2019 only, Exchequer funded and operated under State Aid de minimis provisions.

The pilot has been designed to be as straightforward as possible and to ensure that the majority of the payment can be retained by the farmer.

Application will be open to all beef suckler herdowners. The terms and conditions and information on the process and application procedure are available on my Department's website:

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/beep/>

or from the Beef Schemes section of my Department.

Common Agricultural Policy Subsidies

32. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if indications have been given at recent European Council of Agriculture Ministers meetings and at meetings with the European agriculture Commissioner on the funding level for CAP post-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5622/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The EU proposed CAP budgetary ceilings are a part of the wider proposals on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the European Union for the period 2021-2027. The proposals are ultimately a matter for agreement between Ministers for Finance and Heads of State. The European Commission has proposed, as part of the MFF, that funding for the Common Agricultural Policy should not exceed €365 billion for the period 2021-2027. This equates to a cut of around 5% compared to the current provision. Latest reports are indicating that negotiations on the next MFF will not be finalised until Autumn 2019.

I have been working closely with my European colleagues to build a consensus to reverse the cut to the CAP budget and to maintain support to CAP at the current EU 27 level. In May last year, I, along with my EU Ministerial colleagues from France, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Finland signed a joint Memorandum seeking the retention of the CAP budget at current levels. The Memorandum was presented at the Agri-Fish Council in Luxembourg in June 2018 and up to 20 other EU Ministers have signalled their support to this proposal now. At the Agrifish Council on 16 July 2018 France and Germany presented a joint declaration on the CAP proposals including a joint rejection of the cuts proposed. This paper was supported by other Member states including Croatia, Romania, Spain, Portugal, Slovenia, Belgium and Ireland.

I had a further opportunity to discuss the CAP budget at the recent Agri-Fish Council which took place on the 28 January. I again emphasised the point that we need to ensure an adequate budget for Pillar I and Pillar II. Over the coming months detailed negotiations will continue at all levels across the EU as we work together to shape the final outcome. At the centre of all our considerations will be the need to ensure that CAP Post 2020, properly funded, will continue to support farm families and the rural economy.

I can assure the deputy that I will continue to work to develop a broad consensus on the value of a strong, fit for purpose agriculture sector, and work to reverse the cuts proposed in the draft MFF.

Clean Oceans Initiative

33. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of the clean oceans initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5715/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I launched the Clean Oceans Initiative in January at the fishing port of Union Hall in West Cork. This exciting project aims to tackle the threat of plastic pollution in our marine environment by encouraging Irish trawlers to collect marine litter while at sea. Approximately 80% of marine debris is made up of plastics which do not biodegrade, but rather break up into tiny particulates. This poses a risk to marine wildlife as well as our fish stocks so it is prudent that action is taken to remove as much plastics from the marine environment as possible.

The Clean Oceans Initiative, funded by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, will provide on-board storage facilities and on-shore infrastructure for environmentally friendly disposal of all plastic waste and fishing gear recovered at sea. My ambition is to have all Irish trawlers at every pier and port actively participating in Ireland's first co-ordinated initiative to collect, reduce and reuse marine litter and clean up our marine environment by the end of 2019.

I have tasked Bord Iascaigh Mhara with assembling a collaborative multi-stakeholder team, to focus on solutions for marine litter prevention and removal. BIM will also reach out to the wider coastal community and I look forward to receiving proposals for further innovative solu-

tions for the prevention and removal of marine litter. I have asked BIM to report quarterly on progress on this Initiative and I have been heartened to see how broadly it has been welcomed to date.

Agrifood Sector

34. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he remains satisfied that the agrifood sector is adequately protected against competition from third countries with lower production, processing and hygiene standards in view of the need to ensure the application of EU standards for all imports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5650/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Agri-food products placed on the Single Market must comply with the same EU standards, whether they are produced within the EU itself, or are imported from non-EU countries. The importation of Agri-food products into the European Union is governed by a comprehensive and robust legislative framework laid down at EU level, controlled by Member States in the first instance, and audited by the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (formally the FVO). The legislation includes rules in relation to checks that must be carried out at the borders of the EU to ensure that products being imported into the EU meet EU standards. My Department plays a part in the enforcement of this legislation along with competent authorities in other Member States, in other Irish government departments and state agencies such as the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and the Health Service Executive.

Climate Change Policy

35. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans and the timetable to implement the recommendations of a Teagasc report (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5727/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Teagasc report "An Analysis of Abatement Potential of greenhouse Gas Emissions in Irish Agriculture 2021-2030", published last summer, highlights the potential for GHG abatement to limit the emissions from the sector over the period 2021 to 2030 based on current scientific knowledge against the likely level of future greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions if no action is taken. Effectively this report identifies a toolbox of options to inform the type of abatement measures we need to focus on with a view to achieving the 2030 greenhouse gas emission targets.

My Department and its agencies are currently in the process of assessing the feasibility of the measures identified in this report and to what extent they could be mobilised at farm-level including importantly, how they can contribute to the national inventory on emissions. This assessment will be key to a number of parallel processes including:

- the development of a CAP strategic plan. Higher ambition on environmental and climate action are part of the new CAP, post 2020, and it is proposed that 40% of the overall CAP budget will contribute to climate action. This will require farmers to achieve a higher level of environmental ambition through both mandatory and incentive-based measures.

- the development of a new "All of Government Plan" to tackle climate disruption which is being led by my colleague, Minister Bruton, which is underway.

My Department and I will continue to work alongside Government colleagues to ensure that the sector continues to play its part in tackling the causes of climate change and commits to measures and actions to support our approach to carbon neutrality without compromising capacity for sustainable food production.

Food Industry Development

36. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the efforts he is making to seek new markets in the context of Brexit; the efforts being made by State agencies under his remit to provide support to agrifood business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5714/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the agri-food sector, as evidenced by its placement right at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development over the coming years. Indeed, this is all the more relevant after the UK's decision to leave the EU, which presents significant new challenges for the agri-food sector in particular.

Looking beyond Europe, Food Wise 2025 outlines the huge potential for growth in agri-food exports to new and emerging markets, particularly in Asia, Africa, the Americas and the Gulf region. This is where our efforts will be focused for the foreseeable future, particularly given the need to diversify our markets and to reduce our reliance on traditional destinations such as the UK.

Trade Missions play an important role in this regard, and I have been very active on this front in recent years as we strive to gain, and then develop, a presence in as many global markets as possible. I have led very successful missions to the Gulf Region, the US, Mexico, Japan and Korea in 2017, and to the US, Canada, China, Indonesia and Malaysia 2018. These missions included participants from across the agri-food sector and featured extensive trade contacts as well as high-level political discussions. These and the other missions that my Department has under consideration for the first half of 2019 will serve to enhance and improve our existing levels of market access in these destinations.

At my request, Bord Bia recently completed a market prioritisation exercise that identified opportunities in new and more mature markets, and will provide valuable market intelligence both for industry operators and policy makers.

Since the UK referendum I have increased Bord Bia's funding by a total of €19.5 million, including a further €5 million that has been allocated in Budget 2019. That funding has been put to very good use on initiatives such as its Brexit Barometer, which has been helping companies to assess and improve their preparedness for Brexit, and its Market Prioritisation reports, which are informing its own and my Department's work in relation to market diversification. Bord Bia has also been very active in engaging with companies in relation to issues such as supply chain management, customs processes, customer relationships and market diversification.

In addition, Bord Bia, along with officials from my Department, has been participating in the recent series of public outreach events being co-ordinated by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the banner 'Getting Ireland Brexit Ready'. This information campaign is designed to help businesses and companies understand some of the challenges posed by Brexit and the supports available to them.

I can assure the Deputy that my Department will continue to seek out and identify new mar-

kets, and I am ready to respond as appropriate to any opportunities that may arise.

Labour Court Recommendations

37. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has had discussions with the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection regarding exemptions for stable staff to the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997; his views regarding the impact in the horse racing industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5673/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following the Labour Court ruling regarding exemptions for stable staff to the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997, I was made aware of the deep concern that existed in the horseracing industry arising from this ruling and its potential for significant impact on the sector, particularly for smaller operators.

As part of the legislation governing employment in this area falls within the remit of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I can confirm that I met with my colleague Minister Humphreys in relation to this issue in early 2018. I also raised the matter with Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Minister Doherty.

During these discussion, I outlined the concerns from the horseracing industry and sought a solution which would provide employers with some flexibility in the application of working time rules to staff working in the industry, subject to certain conditions and safeguards designed to ensure that workers are protected.

Following advice from the Attorney General, Minister Doherty signed a statutory instrument on 20 December 2018 which allows the limited derogations that are currently available to the agriculture sector under Working Time Directive and the Organisation of Working Time Act /Regulations to be also available to the horse racing sector.

Public Procurement Contracts

38. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of the tendering process for the recruitment of consultants for the development of the national CAP strategic plan and individual schemes his Department is designing; the budget and terms of reference of each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5708/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the current draft CAP 2021-2027 proposals, each Member State is required to submit a CAP Strategic Plan by the 1st of January 2020. The process of developing the draft CAP Strategic Plan will be a complex one, involving a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, a needs assessment, scheme design, an ex ante evaluation including a Strategic Environmental Assessment, and an Appropriate Assessment. A central element of this process will be on-going and substantive stakeholder and public consultation.

My Department is currently engaged in the tendering process for the appointment of an external provider to conduct an ex-ante evaluation, including a Strategic Environmental Assessment and, if required, an Appropriate Assessment on the draft CSP. The closing date for receipt of tenders was Tuesday 5 February 2019. My Department will now evaluate the tenders received. It is envisaged to have a contract awarded before the end of Quarter 1 of 2019.

Brexit Supports

39. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the supports provided to Bord Bia to assist agrifood businesses to find new markets for their produce in the context of a potentially changed trading environment post-Brexit. [5719/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Bord Bia's work is critical to the success of the growth of our food and drinks exports. Despite the challenges our industry has faced, Irish agri-food exports have shown great resilience and are estimated at €13.6 billion in total in 2018, including €12.1 billion in food and drink exports, which is 64% higher than comparative figures for 2010.

Bord Bia has played a vital role in that export success by enhancing and promoting our focus on quality, innovation and sustainability. The development of the Origin Green programme, providing proof of the sector's sustainability credentials, has played an important part. Bord Bia works closely with my Department and is central to our work of growing and developing new and existing markets, based on consumer insights and market prioritisation. International markets outside the EU now account for almost 30% of our total export value. In 2018, I led trade missions to Turkey, US and Canada, to China, to Malaysia and Indonesia.

As an agency, Bord Bia has played a key role in our Brexit response to date, facilitating conversations at the highest levels with UK retail CEOs, and ensuring that our ongoing commitment to the UK market is fully understood. UK remains by far our most valuable market, for very valid reasons – it is our closest geographical market, with strongly integrated supply chains and a hugely valuable grocery market. We have no intention of stepping back from the UK market.

Bord Bia's Brexit Barometer has been used to identify evolving client priorities and concerns and to further inform Bord Bia's Brexit programmes and supports. As a result of the many findings from the two exercises it carried out in 2017 and 2018, Bord Bia has provided a series of Brexit support programmes focussed on Supply Chains, Customs Requirements regarding Trade, and, Currency Risk for the industry, alongside a customer engagement plan to communicate to key UK stakeholders the preparedness of Irish food and drinks suppliers.

Since the Brexit vote in 2016, I have allocated significant additional tranches of funding for Bord Bia, as a key part of the Government's efforts to support the agrifood sector in responding to Brexit uncertainty.

In September 2017, I announced funding of €6.745 million for Bord Bia to undertake a programme of additional activities, based on Brexit Barometer analysis, to support the food and drink sectors in addressing the market challenges relating to Brexit. The funding was additional to the €1.6 million I provided to Bord Bia in Autumn 2016 for grants to assist food companies highly dependent on the UK market and an additional €2 million allocated to Bord Bia as part of their 2017 Grant for increased expenditure on programmes.

In Budget 2019, I provided a further allocation of €5.3 million to Bord Bia, bringing its total grant in aid to €46.6 million for 2019. This compares to a grant of €28.9 million in 2014, and represents a 60% increase in funding for marketing and promotion of our food sector over five years.

Bord Bia also received approval last year to recruit an additional 32 staff, which will bring total staff numbers to 146 in 2019.

Fisheries Protection

40. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the estimated impact of the decision to protect waters within the six-mile limit; the estimated impact this measure will have for smaller vessels and for sustainability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5716/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The matter the Deputy refers to is my announcement in December, following an extensive public consultation process, that vessels over 18m will be excluded from trawling in inshore waters inside the six nautical mile zone and the baselines from 1 January 2020. Trawling for sprat by vessels over 18m will be phased out by 31 December 2021.

Based on my assessment, I considered that there was a compelling case for excluding trawling by large vessels in coastal waters inside six nautical miles. Ireland's fishing fleet comprises approximately 2,000 vessels but fewer than 200 of these are large trawlers. In environmental terms, large vessels trawling can have a significant impact both on fish stocks and on important coastal marine environments. Excluding trawling by large vessels in coastal waters inside six nautical miles will provide wider ecosystem benefits, including for nursery areas and juvenile fish stocks.

I am also very conscious of the exclusive reliance of small scale and island fishermen on inshore waters and the benefits this change will bring for these fishermen. According to BIM's report, if smaller vessels take up all of the opportunities currently fished by vessels over 18m inside the 6nm zone it would mean an increase of 62% in the value of their landings. While it is unlikely that the volume of landings will simply be transferred from larger vessels to smaller vessels, the percentage gains for individual small vessels in our inshore fishing sector are hugely significant to the coastal communities they come from.

I firmly believe that this will, in the medium term, provide ecosystem and nursery stock benefits for all fishermen. These measures will provide for further sustainable development of the small scale inshore and sea angling sectors, which the Government has committed to in the Programme for a Partnership Government.

Common Agricultural Policy Reform

41. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the outcome of recent discussions at the European Council of Agriculture Ministers and with the European agriculture Commissioner on CAP reform and funding for CAP post-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5621/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The new regulations for the CAP 2021-27 were launched on Friday 1 June 2018 by Commissioner Hogan. The proposals, as drafted, involve significant changes, including in relation to governance, the distribution of direct payments among farmers and the increasing environmental conditionality attaching to such payments.

Consideration of the CAP proposals is ongoing at EU level. Since the legislative proposals were launched in June 2018 a total of 25 Working Group meetings have taken place under the Austrian Presidency. The proposals are also discussed at the Special Committee of Agriculture meetings on a regular basis. In addition, CAP post 2020 is also a standing agenda item at every Agri-Fish Council meeting where I have discussed the CAP proposals extensively with my

Agriculture Ministerial colleagues.

The Romanian Presidency outlined an equally intensive programme of Working Group meetings to discuss specific aspects of the CAP proposals for the duration of their Presidency.

I had a further opportunity to discuss the proposals at the recent Agri-Fish Council on Monday 28 January. Agriculture Ministers exchanged views on the new performance-based delivery model. Discussions focussed in particular on the annual deadline of reporting requirements, and a progressive approach to targets and possible deviations in the first two years of implementation of the new programme. My Ministerial colleagues and I also discussed the agricultural reserve and financial discipline. Also on the CAP proposals, we held an exchange of views on the wine related provisions set out in the common market organisation amended regulations, including the possibility of opening the market to new wine grape varieties. Commissioner Hogan informed delegations about the proposed green architecture. Also during the CAP discussions, a group of Member States, led by the Slovenian delegation, presented a declaration on having appropriate funding for rural development in the next MFF.

The overall level of the CAP budget post 2020 is a key priority for me. Member States are facing a 3.9% cut to Pillar 1 Direct Payments funding, and a 15% cut to Pillar 2 Rural Development funding. This is unacceptable in my view especially in light of the current developing situation surrounding Brexit. The retention of an adequate budget for the CAP post 2020 is a key priority for Ireland. The CAP budget is part of the Multiannual Financial Framework for the EU which is a matter for unanimous agreement by Heads of State and Government.

I have been advocating strongly amongst my agriculture counterparts to maintain a strong CAP budget. I co-signed a Joint Memorandum in Madrid in May last year, which calls for the CAP budget to be retained at current levels for the EU 27 post 2020. The memorandum has been supported by up to 20 other EU Agriculture Ministers.

We will continue to work together on this issue as the negotiations for the CAP post 2020 and its budgetary allocations progress, and I will continue to seek to secure the best possible outcome for the Irish agrifood sector.

Animal Welfare

42. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ensure that the 2015 ruling of the European Court of Justice which ensures the welfare of animals during live export will be met throughout transport to destinations beyond EU borders. [5672/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department implements stringent system of controls on the welfare of animals being exported, in particular through a comprehensive legislative framework relating to the transport of animals by sea (The Carriage of Livestock by Sea Regulations 2016 (S.I. 356 of 2016). Ships must be approved by my Department in advance of exporting cattle from Ireland. Cattle being exported are monitored during the prescribed isolation period by Department Veterinary Inspectors and in some cases by Official Veterinarians from the importing countries. This is in addition to work carried out by Private Veterinary Practitioners who carry out the testing required prior to export to enable certification. Furthermore, animals are inspected and certified by Official Veterinarians from the Department with regard to their health status and fitness for travel.

Both veterinary staff from my Department and private veterinary practitioners have accompanied vessels on a number of sailings and have expressed satisfaction in relation to the

unloading arrangements observed in the third country.

My Department will continue to work closely with other EU Member States and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), with a view to improving animal welfare practices worldwide. For its part Ireland has committed to additional allocation of €75,000 to the OIE in the period 2017-20 to support its activities aimed at enhancing animal welfare worldwide.

Later this month my Department will host a delegation of Turkish officials organised by the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument of the European Commission. The visit will provide an opportunity of sharing experience and knowledge in the spheres of animal health and welfare.

Brexit Preparations

43. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to protect farmers in Border counties from a hard Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5464/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The agrifood sector is of critical importance to the Irish economy, and its regional spread means it underpins the socio-economic development of rural areas in particular. As such, Brexit has the potential to have a very significant impact on farmers and on the agrifood sector throughout Ireland, including farmers in the border counties.

I have been addressing the immediate Brexit challenges through a range of Budgetary measures aimed at improving competitiveness, and developing market and product diversification, in Budgets 2017, 2018 and 2019.

On market and product diversification, the additional funding that I have provided to Bord Bia has been used, inter alia, to provide targeted advice to individual companies as well as to conduct a market prioritisation exercise which is now informing our approach to market diversification activities, including the choice of destinations for Trade Missions. Product diversification has also been supported through additional funding of €8.8 million to Teagasc to develop its National Food Innovation Hub, and funding to support investment in the prepared consumer foods sector.

I and my officials have also been working very hard for quite some time to sensitise other Member States and the European Commission to the potentially very severe impacts of Brexit on the Irish agrifood and fisheries sectors, and to the likelihood of specific supports being required in order to deal with these impacts.

Most recently, I held a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Hogan last week to discuss the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit on the Irish agrifood and fisheries sectors. Commissioner Hogan reiterated the EU's readiness to respond and support Ireland, and we will remain in contact on these issues as the situation evolves.

As regards contingency planning, my Department has been actively participating in the Whole-of-Government approach to preparedness and contingency planning. We have fed into the overall Government Contingency Action Plan which was published on 19 December, and we have been working very closely with colleagues in other Departments and agencies to address in particular the requirements that will arise in relation to the implementation at ports and airports of import controls on agrifood products coming from the UK.

Throughout all of 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.

I wish to assure the Deputy that the Government remains very focused on supporting farmers and the agrifood industry through the challenges ahead, whether they are based in the border region or in any other part of the country.

Brexit Preparations

44. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he has taken to date to safeguard agriculture in the event of a deal or no-deal Brexit scenario; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5709/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I have been addressing the immediate Brexit challenges through a range of Budgetary measures aimed at improving competitiveness, and developing market and product diversification. These measures include a €150m low-cost loan scheme in 2017 to help reduce farm-gate business costs, and a dedicated €50m Brexit package in Budget 2018 which included further additional funding to Bord Bia and Teagasc as well as a contribution to a €300m (joint DAFM/DBEI) “Brexit Loan Scheme”, at least 40% of which is available to food businesses. In Budget 2019 I announced a €78m Brexit package for farmers, fishermen, food SMEs and to cover additional costs related to Brexit. My colleague, Minister for Finance Paschal Donohoe, also announced the Future Growth Loan Scheme, which will be rolled out in 2019 and for which I had made provision of €25m in 2018. The scheme will provide long term, unsecured investment finance for farmers and small scale companies in the food and seafood sectors.

On market and product diversification, the additional funding that I have provided to Bord Bia has been used, inter alia, to provide targeted advice to individual companies as well as to conduct a market prioritisation exercise which is now informing our approach to market diversification activities, including the choice of destinations for Trade Missions. Trade Missions play an important role in this regard, and I have been very active on this front in recent years as we strive to gain, and then develop, a presence in as many global markets as possible. I have led very successful missions to the Gulf Region, the US, Mexico, Japan and Korea in 2017, and to the US, Canada, China, Indonesia and Malaysia 2018. These missions included participants from across the agrifood sector and featured extensive trade contacts as well as high-level political discussions. These and the other missions that my Department has under consideration for 2019 will serve to enhance and improve our existing levels of market access in these destinations. Indeed, since the UK referendum I have increased Bord Bia’s funding by a total of €19.5 million, including a further €5 million allocated in Budget 2019. Product diversification has also been supported through additional funding of €8.8 million to Teagasc to develop its National Food Innovation Hub, and funding to support investment in the prepared consumer foods sector.

I and my officials have also been working very hard for quite some time to sensitise other Member States and the European Commission to the potentially very severe impacts of Brexit on the Irish agrifood and fisheries sectors, and to the likelihood of specific supports being required in order to deal with these impacts.

Most recently, I held a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Hogan last week to discuss the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit on the Irish agrifood and fisheries sectors. Commissioner Hogan reiterated the EU’s readiness to respond and support Ireland, and we will remain in contact on these issues as the situation evolves.

As regards contingency planning, my Department has been actively participating in the Whole-of-Government approach to preparedness and contingency planning. We have fed into the overall Government Contingency Action Plan which was published on 19 December, and we have been working very closely with colleagues in other Departments and agencies to address in particular the requirements that will arise in relation to the implementation at ports and airports of import controls on agrifood products coming from the UK.

These requirements are significant, and arise in relation to the 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.

Work in this regard has been focused on three key areas, namely, infrastructure, staffing and information technology, and in three key locations, that is Dublin Port, Rosslare Port and Dublin Airport.

Throughout all of 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.

Trade Missions

45. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for trade missions for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5712/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agrifood exports is an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the agrifood sector, as evidenced by its placement right at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development over the coming decade. Food Wise 2025 outlines the huge potential for growth in agrifood exports to new and emerging markets, particularly in Asia, Africa, the Americas and the Gulf region. This is where our efforts will be focused for the foreseeable future, particularly given the need to diversify our markets and to reduce our reliance on traditional destinations such as the UK.

Trade Missions play an important role in market development, and I have been very active on this front in recent years as we strive to gain, and then develop, a presence in as many global markets as possible. I have led very successful missions to the Gulf Region, the US, Mexico, Japan and Korea in 2017, and to the US, Canada, China, Indonesia and Malaysia in 2018. These missions included participants from across the agrifood sector and featured extensive trade contacts as well as high-level political discussions.

The destinations for trade missions for 2019 are currently being finalised and I expect to be in a position to announce them shortly.

Brexit Preparations

46. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the work that has been carried out within his Department and at EU level with regard to the impact of Brexit on the breeding bloodstock and equine industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5677/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The current EU rules on the movement of equidae between EU Member States require that the animals being moved are inspected by an official veterinarian and accompanied by a veterinary health

certificate issued under the EU TRACES system and a horse passport issued by an approved horse passport issuing body.

However, these rules also allow Member States which have implemented alternative but equivalent health control systems in their respective territories, to grant one another derogations from the standard movement rules. The derogation provided for under Community rules on the movement of equidae is applicable to movements between EU Member States only. It is not inclusive of movements between the EU and Third Countries.

Currently Ireland is part of a Tripartite Agreement (TPA), along with the UK and France which allows for the movement and trade of horses between the three countries without undergoing veterinary inspections and without health certificates. As the TPA is based on EU legislation on the movement of horses within the EU, the UK cannot be part of the Agreement once it becomes a Third Country.

The current focus of our 'no deal' contingency planning is on the arrangements that will be necessary for the Department to fulfil its legal obligations with respect to import controls on live animals and agri food products as efficiently as possible while also ensuring the minimum possible disruption to trading arrangements.

As part of this planning we are upgrading existing Border Inspection Posts (BIPs) and developing additional BIPs to cater for the increased volume of inspections necessary, including in respect of equines being imported from the UK, and making arrangements to facilitate the certification of horses to the UK as necessary.

Fishery Harbour Centres

47. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his priorities for investment under the fisheries harbours infrastructure programme for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5718/19]

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.

I am happy to advise the Deputy that between the years 2010 to 2018, as part of my Department's Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme, in excess of €96m has been invested in maintenance, development and upgrading works at the six fishery harbour centres. Over the same period, almost €28m has also been made available to assist coastal Local Authorities in the maintenance, repair and development of piers, harbours and slipways in their ownership

On the 27th of January 2019 I announced a €35.7m capital investment package in our six Fishery Harbour Centres and other fisheries related marine infrastructure. This represents an increase of €9.4m on the final expenditure on this programme in 2018.

The continuation of the Dinish quay extension, Castletownbere FHC (€17.5m in 2019), the commencement of the Smooth Point extension phase 2, Killybegs FHC (€4m in 2019), and the Middle Pier berthing face project, Howth FHC (€4.5m in 2019) are the flagship projects for

2019. All three harbours are seeing increasing levels of activity in various sectors including increasing levels of fishing, commercial cargo, leisure and tourism and cruise liner (Killybegs only) activity and the need for additional berthage has been recognised. These projects will deliver 220 metres of much needed additional berthing space in Castletownbere, with 120 metres additional berthing space also being provided in both Howth and Killybegs respectively.

Other projects of note are the breakwater extension at Ros An Mhíl FHC, the remedial & improvement works to the West Wharf (phase 4) at Dunmore East FHC and the water metering project in Dingle FHC. I have allocated €2.48m this year for safety, maintenance and disability access works at the six Fishery Harbour Centres and at North Harbour, Cape Clear.

I am pleased to say that I have also allocated €2m for the purposes of a 2019 Local Authority Harbour Development and Marine Leisure programme to assist coastal Local Authorities in the repair and development of piers, harbours and slipways under their ownership. My Department has recently sought expressions of interest from Local Authorities for potential projects in 2019.

Brexit Preparations

48. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the contingency steps being taken to mitigate the impact a no-deal Brexit on the agriculture sector. [5729/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The agri-food sector is of critical importance to the Irish economy, and its regional spread means it underpins the socio-economic development of rural areas in particular. As such, Brexit has the potential to have a very significant impact on farmers and on the agri-food sector throughout Ireland, and the extent of this potential impact has been highlighted by studies carried out by agencies such as Teagasc, the Department of Finance, the Economic and Social Research Institute, Inter Trade Ireland and Copenhagen Economics.

The most immediate challenge for industry has been to deal with the impact caused by the significant drop in the value of sterling against the euro. A considerable amount of work has also been put into intensifying our market diversification efforts in order to reduce our exposure to the UK market.

I have been addressing these challenges through a range of Budgetary measures aimed at improving competitiveness, and developing market and product diversification. These measures include a €150m low-cost loan scheme in 2017 to help reduce farm-gate business costs, and a dedicated €50m Brexit package in Budget 2018 which included further additional funding to Bord Bia and Teagasc as well as a contribution to a €300m (joint DAFM/DBEI) “Brexit Loan Scheme”, at least 40% of which is available to food businesses. In Budget 2019 I announced a €78m Brexit package for farmers, fishermen, food SMEs and to cover additional costs related to Brexit. My colleague, Minister for Finance Paschal Donohoe, also announced the Future Growth Loan Scheme, which will be rolled out in 2019 and for which I had made provision of €25m in 2018. The scheme will provide long term, unsecured investment finance for farmers and small scale companies in the food and seafood sectors.

On market and product diversification, the additional funding that I have provided to Bord Bia has been used, inter alia, to provide targeted advice to individual companies as well as to conduct a market prioritisation exercise which is now informing our approach to market diversification activities, including the choice of destinations for Trade Missions. Trade Missions play an important role in this regard, and I have been very active on this front in recent years

as we strive to gain, and then develop, a presence in as many global markets as possible. I have led very successful missions to the Gulf Region, the US, Mexico, Japan and Korea in 2017, and to the US, Canada, China, Indonesia and Malaysia 2018. These missions included participants from across the agri-food sector and featured extensive trade contacts as well as high-level political discussions. These and the other missions that my Department has under consideration for 2019 will serve to enhance and improve our existing levels of market access in these destinations. Indeed, since the UK referendum I have increased Bord Bia's funding by a total of €19.5 million, including a further €5 million allocated in Budget 2019

Product diversification has also been supported through additional funding of €8.8 million to Teagasc to develop its National Food Innovation Hub, and funding to support investment in the prepared consumer foods sector.

I and my officials have also been working very hard for quite some time to sensitise other Member States and the European Commission to the potentially very severe impacts of Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors, and to the likelihood of specific supports being required in order to deal with these impacts. The institutions of the European Union are very well aware of the likelihood of a significant impact of a disorderly Brexit on Ireland's economy because this has been part of the discussion from the beginning, and indeed this is explicitly recognised in the Commission's own communication on contingency planning.

Most recently, I held a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Hogan last week to discuss the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors. We discussed the unique exposure of these sectors to the threat of a disorderly Brexit, and the challenges that it could present. I stressed the need to be ready to deploy a range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on farmers and processors, including through traditional market supports and exceptional aid under the CAP's Single Common Market Organisation regulation, and increased flexibility under State Aid regulations. Commissioner Hogan reiterated the EU's readiness to respond and support Ireland, and we will remain in contact on these issues as the situation evolves.

As regards contingency planning, my Department has been actively participating in the Whole-of-Government approach to preparedness and contingency planning. We have fed into the overall Government Contingency Action Plan which was published on 19 December, and we have been working very closely with colleagues in other Departments and agencies to address in particular the requirements that will arise in relation to the implementation at ports and airports of import controls on agri-food products coming from the UK.

These requirements are significant, and arise in relation to the 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.

Work in this regard has been focused on three key areas, namely, infrastructure, staffing and information technology, and in three key locations, that is Dublin Port, Rosslare Port and Dublin Airport.

On infrastructure, we have been engaging very closely with the Office of Public Works, the Department of Transport, the Department of Health and the Revenue Commissioners in relation to the physical facilities that will be required to carry out import controls at the three locations. This work had been proceeding in any event in the context of dealing with the central case scenario, and has been adapted in order to meet the requirements in the event of a disorderly Brexit.

On staffing, the Department is working very effectively with Customs and others to provide the resources needed to apply the necessary controls, and I am confident that the state will be in

a position to apply controls at the appropriate time.

On information technology, my Department has established a project to coordinate the identification and delivery of ICT Infrastructure and systems to support the additional requirements of staff engaged in control processes in Dublin Port, Rosslare and Dublin Airport. The delivery timelines in the event of a disorderly Brexit are extremely challenging, but officials are working with the greatest urgency to ensure that the required ICT services are in place by 29 March 2019.

Throughout all of 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.

Felling Licences

49. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the removal of trees at a location (details supplied); if he will report on the investigation into the removal of those trees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5684/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Forestry in Ireland operates within a legal and regulatory framework. This framework exists to protect our forests and also to ensure that forestry operations and activities are carried out in compliance with the principles of sustainable forest management. In this context, my Department is responsible for the administration, evaluation and processing of felling licence applications as required by the Forestry Acts 1946 and 2014. As such, applications for tree felling licences are carefully assessed by my officials to ensure that the proposed tree felling or thinning is suitable for both the management of the trees on site and the care and protection of the land and surrounding environment.

As regards the case in question, a General Felling Licence was issued under the Forestry Act 1946 on the 7th April 2017 to thin a forest area. This licence conferred on the licensee the right to uproot or cut down of trees in the specified area of land in the ordinary course of thinning, in accordance with the general practice of good forestry.

The felling licence on the site was suspended following receipt of reports from third parties. As there is an on-going review into the circumstances surrounding the felling at the location in question, I am unable to comment further on this individual case. I expect this review to be finalised shortly and my Department will then take appropriate action based on the outcome of that report.

Sugar Industry

50. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps being taken and actions carried out to re-establish a sugar beet industry; and the progress in this regard. [5579/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy will be aware, in 2006 the EU introduced a restructuring mechanism intended to reduce overall production of sugar, acknowledging the then global over supply and resultant low prices being achieved.

Greencore, as the holder of the entire Irish sugar quota at the time, availed itself of this voluntary initiative, ceasing production and dismantling its processing facilities.

As part of the relinquishing of its sugar quota, Ireland secured €353 million as part of the reform package, with some €220 million being distributed to beet growers and a further €6 million to machinery contractors in the sector.

In the intervening years, global production has continued to exceed demand and prices unfortunately remain at historically low levels.

As part of the reform of the CAP, agreement was secured on the abolition of sugar quotas from 30th September 2017. From that date, investors in the European Union, including Ireland are free to invest in sugar producing capacity if they wish.

Since 2006, a number of groups expressed an interest in the redevelopment of the sugar sector, two of whom prepared desktop feasibility studies between 2010 and 2011. In their findings, both proposals sought to develop a new sugar and bio ethanol production facility with capital costs, estimated at the time, of between €250 and €400 million.

More recently, I am aware that in 2018 a group has sought to engage with interested growers in an equity partnership proposal to develop a sugar processing facility in the South-east.

The current “Programme for a Partnership Government” states that “State Bodies will be asked to examine any substantial business plans relating to rebuilding the industry with a view to considering appropriate State supports”.

Acknowledging this, any such business plans would need to be supported by a sufficiently robust business case, having regard to the price of sugar, to attract the substantial funding required from investors for such a new start-up industry.

Brexit Data

51. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the estimated impact a no-deal Brexit will have on the dairy and beef industry here; and the contingencies being put in place in this regard. [5728/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The UK is Ireland’s largest export destination for agri food products, with exports valued at approximately €5.2 billion in 2017. Beef exports from Ireland in 2017 were valued at €2,405m, of which 48 percent (€1,162m) were sent to the UK. Dairy exports from Ireland in 2017 were valued at €4,646m, of which 21 percent (€997m) were sent to the UK. However, certain dairy exports (cheddar & other cheeses for example) rely almost entirely on the UK market.

Under the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Most Favoured Nation (MFN) tariffs and duty rates for certain beef products are equivalent to a 70% tariff rate and for certain dairy products up to the equivalent of a 50% tariff rate

Retention of the UK market for the dairy and beef industry is a key component of the Government’s response to Brexit. In addition, I have introduced a range of measures to help these sectors to deal with the impacts of Brexit -

- In Budget 2017, a farm-gate business costs reduction measure in order to enhance competitiveness, including a €150m low-cost loan scheme;

- In Budget 2018, a €50m, dedicated Brexit package which included a contribution to a €300m (joint DAFM/DBEI) “Brexit Loan Scheme”, at least 40% of which is available to food businesses.

- In Budget 2019, a €78m Brexit package for farmers, fishermen, food SMEs and to cover additional costs related to Brexit.

It is also important to point out that the additional funding that I have provided to Bord Bia since the UK referendum - a total of €19.5 million - is being used, among other things, to provide direct support and advice to individual companies in relation to market diversification and to compile its market prioritisation reports, which are informing its own and my Department's work in this area.

In addition, I have met with the chief executives of all of the major British retailers to impress upon them the commitment of Irish suppliers in continuing to supply the UK market post-Brexit.

More generally, the pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports, including dairy and beef exports, is an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the agri-food sector, as evidenced by its placement right at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development over the coming years.

I and my officials have also been working very hard for quite some time to sensitise other Member States and the European Commission to the potentially very severe impacts of Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors, and to the likelihood of specific supports being required in order to deal with these impacts.

Most recently, I held a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Hogan last week to discuss the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors. Commissioner Hogan reiterated the EU's readiness to respond and support Ireland, and we will remain in contact on these issues as the situation evolves.

Common Agricultural Policy Reform

52. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position with regard to discussions on the next CAP reform and the protection of the CAP budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5721/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The new regulations for the CAP 2021-27 were launched on Friday 1 June 2018 by Commissioner Hogan. The proposals, as drafted, involve significant changes, including in relation to governance, the distribution of direct payments among farmers and the increasing environmental conditionality attaching to such payments. These proposals are complex and we are now in the middle of intensive and challenging negotiations for the next CAP 2021-27.

Consideration of the CAP proposals is ongoing at EU level. Since the legislative proposals were launched in June 2018 a total of 25 Working Group meetings have taken place under the Austrian Presidency. The proposals are also discussed at the Special Committee of Agriculture meetings on a regular basis. In addition, CAP post 2020 is also a standing agenda item at every Agri-Fish Council meeting where I have discussed the CAP proposals extensively with my Agriculture Ministerial colleagues.

The Romanian Presidency has outlined an equally intensive programme of Working Group meetings to discuss specific aspects of the CAP proposals for the duration of their Presidency. I had a further opportunity to discuss the proposals at the recent Agri-Fish Council which took place on Monday 28 January.

The EU proposed CAP budgetary ceilings form part of the wider proposals on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2021-2027. These proposals are ultimately a matter for agreement between Ministers for Finance and Heads of State.

The MFF post 2020 proposals, outline a funding envelope of €365 billion for the Common Agricultural Policy. This represents an approximate cut of 5%, when compared to the current period. This is unacceptable for Ireland.

The MFF proposals also provide for spending in areas such as research, migration and defence, which are priorities for some Member States. The loss of UK contributions to the EU budget add a further complication to these already challenging negotiations.

Throughout these negotiations, achieving Ireland's priorities will be a key issue for the Government. Ireland has stated clearly that it is important that traditional policies with demonstrated added value continue to be properly supported. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is such a policy and a strong budget for the CAP post 2020 remains a key priority for Ireland.

From an agriculture perspective, I have been working closely with EU colleagues to build a consensus around the need to protect the CAP budget in the next MFF. Given that MFF matters are decided by unanimity, it is essential to build alliances around critical goals.

With this in mind, I have had a series of bilateral meetings with EU counterparts, to build support for a strong CAP budget post 2020. Furthermore, In May 2018, I agreed a Memorandum, with five European colleagues, seeking to maintain CAP funding for the 2021 - 27 period at current EU 27 levels. I, along with my Ministerial colleagues from France, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Finland, have signed the Memorandum. Support has grown for this position and up to 20 Member States have now expressed their support for this proposal.

Over the coming months there will be detailed negotiations at all levels across the EU as member states work together to shape the final outcome of both the CAP and the MFF proposals. I can assure the deputy that the need to ensure that the CAP is properly funded, and continues to support farm families and the rural economy, will remain at the very centre of our considerations.

I will continue to work to develop a broad consensus on the need for a strong and fit-for-purpose agriculture sector at the heart of the European Union.

Horse Racing Ireland

53. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he had discussions with an organisation (details supplied) prior to its decision in 2016 to sell broadcast rights to a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52111/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) is a commercial State Body responsible for the overall administration, promotion and development of the horse racing industry.

The question the Deputy has raised is solely an operational matter for HRI, and I had no involvement in the matter.

HRI have informed me that new media rights arrangements represent a positive move for Irish racing and provide guarantees regarding income for racecourses up to 2023 during a time of great uncertainty, not least in the context of Brexit. The broadcasting of Irish racing by the

new service provider commenced on 1 January 2019.

The arrangements were approved by all of the rights holders, which include 26 racecourses and Horse Racing Ireland. The rights were put out to a formal tender process, and the previous provider of direct to home television rights “At The Races” was part of a consortium which bid unsuccessfully for the rights. The successful bidder was a company called Sports Information Services (SIS) with whom Irish racing has had a positive and fruitful business relationship since 1987.

The tender was evaluated comprehensively and the various options were given detailed consideration before the decision was made to proceed with the proposal submitted by Sports Information Services.

On the question of the price of the service, HRI have informed my department that there is a misconception that the previous coverage of Irish racing was free. In fact, access to “At The Races” only came as part of a subscription to SKY television, so it is important to compare like for like.

The price of the new channel will be subject to a number of discounts and special offers which should ensure that it will be available at €12 per month.

At this price, HRI believe that this represents fair value to be able to access live coverage of every horse race run in Ireland in 2019.

Agrifood Sector

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which the agrifood sector continues to seek out new markets for food and food products both within the EU and elsewhere having particular regard to the needs arising from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5649/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2018 my Department continued to open new markets and deepen trade within existing markets for Irish agri-food exporters, the highlight of which was probably the decision of the Chinese authorities to open their market to Irish beef imports by listing a number of approved Irish beef establishments. Other notable achievements were agreements with Qatar and Kuwait which allowed for the importation of Irish beef, sheepmeat and poultry to their markets.

Against the backdrop of EU-agreed trade deals such as those completed with Canada, Japan and Mexico, my Department also continues to prioritise efforts to gain access to new third country markets and, equally importantly, to deepen existing markets for Irish dairy products.

We have also had success with exports to emerging markets. The value of exports to Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Central/South America stood at almost €2.8 billion in 2017. The value of trade to these markets increased by 159% since 2009. These markets now account for over 20% of total agri-food exports.

Growth to emerging markets has been led by Asia, with exports of €1.6 billion in 2017, of which just under €1 billion went to China. Exports to other Asian markets grew by 85% since 2012 to €659 million in 2017. Trade to Africa has also grown to €606 million, while exports to the Middle East have also grown significantly, to reach €370 million.

The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is, of course, an on-

going and central component of the strategic development of the agri-food sector, as evidenced by its placement right at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development over the coming decade. Food Wise 2025 outlines the huge potential for growth in agri-food exports to new and emerging markets, particularly in Asia, Africa, the Americas and the Gulf region. This is where our efforts will be focused for the foreseeable future, particularly given the need to diversify our markets and to reduce our reliance on traditional destinations such as the UK.

Indeed, I have been very active in leading a number of successful Trade Missions to a range of destinations. In the last two years alone, I have led Missions to the Gulf Region, the US, Mexico, Canada, China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Looking for example at my most recent Trade Mission to Indonesia and Malaysia last October, I opened Bord Bia dairy conferences in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, which were focused on raising awareness of Ireland as a location for sustainable dairy production, as well as enhancing the Irish Industry's understanding of the Indonesian and Malaysian market. They were followed by business meetings between Irish dairy companies and potential partners. The conferences hosted 140 Indonesian and Malaysian dairy buyers, importers and foodservice operators.

These were excellent opportunities to bring targeted retail buyers, suppliers and consumers together. Having our own Irish dairy companies there working together to promote Irish dairy in general, as well as their own particular brands, was an excellent chance to showcase the best of Irish dairy, based on our excellent food safety and controls systems, to a wider audience.

My Department will continue to seek out and identify new markets, and I am ready to respond as appropriate to other opportunities that may arise.

Renewable Energy Generation

55. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of plans to create an indigenous supply of biomass to supply material for power generation. [5578/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In line with Government policy my Department is committed to increasing the supply of biomass from Ireland's forests in support of our renewable energy targets. In 2017 the roundwood harvest (including firewood) was 3.54 million cubic metres, the highest level since records began, 42% of which was used for energy purposes. Timber production is set to double to 8 million cubic metres in the years up to 2035 and the majority of this will come from private forests. It is very important that this material is mobilised in order to meet the growing demand for biomass.

In this respect, the successful introduction of Knowledge Transfer Groups in 2018, which give private owners the knowledge to bring their product to market is a significant initiative. This scheme will re-open shortly to new members.

Ongoing support for the production of biomass will continue to be provided under the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 which funds private afforestation and includes a specific "*forestry for fibre*" scheme. My Department provides grant aid for the construction of forest roads which helps in the mobilisation of biomass and also funds a woodland improvement scheme for thinning of broadleaved woodlands, a key source of domestic heating fuel.

We also support the *woodenergy.ie* portal which provides advice on supply chain costings and technologies for forest-based biomass. Another recent development is an on-line All

Roundwood Production Forecast tool. This enables area-based forecasts of roundwood availability and may be accessed via my Department's website.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

56. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on to the report commissioned by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Parliament in 2017 (details supplied); if he has empirical evidence to counter the findings of the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5675/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am aware of this report and my officials have reviewed the findings and the underlying assumptions and methodology.

Different reports use different boundaries for life cycle analyses and hence differing results; life cycle analyses is a complex area of measurement and are useful in determining carbon footprints of animal systems but should not be considered static. Rather, this form of analysis is an instrument to help assist with further improvements in the efficiency of agriculture production systems.

The finding that Ireland emits more greenhouse gas emissions per euro of agricultural output than any other EU member state is based on an accepted OECD indicator at international level to monitor green growth. However, it is important to note that this is not a measure of a typical carbon footprint per unit of agricultural output (per kg meat or milk) nor is it an indicator of climate inefficiency.

Further, the assessment in the referred report excludes Land use change (LULUCF) emissions and removals (CO₂) from cropland and grassland also associated with agricultural activities, only including methane and nitrous oxide. This is in contrast to typical life cycle analysis that includes all emissions including those in the LULUCF category under the Inventory framework.

The European Parliament Report shows that Ireland has gained productivity efficiency with respect to greenhouse gases (GHGs). The FAO has also recognised the efficiency of our temperate grassland based production systems. Evidence of this is further reflected in the EU Joint Research Centre Report (2010) which illustrated that while intensive dairy systems create less methane and nitrous oxide emissions than extensive ones, this is countered by higher emissions from land use and land use change. Lowest emissions are created by extensive grassland systems, such as those in Ireland.

Overall, I believe Ireland is in a good position with regard to utilising the value of life cycle assessments. Under Origin Green programme, over 200,000 carbon audits have been completed on Irish dairy and beef farms since its introduction. Additionally, through the use of the Carbon Navigator, farmers are provided with advice and feedback on practices that effectively reduce the carbon-footprint of farm produce, and improve the economic performance at farm level.

Consultancy Contracts Data

57. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of different information technology consultants providing services to his Department;

the way in which they are sourced; the cost in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5710/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's schemes and services are supported by a wide range of complex interconnected IT systems, the maintenance and development of which is supported by external resources. It is understood that the Deputy's question relates to this support.

Three companies provided such support in 2018 and are continuing to do so today. The three companies were contracted through scheduled open tendering processes. The contracts awarded for a period of 3 years with the possibility of extension for a further year.

The amount paid including VAT in respect of contracts for external support in relation to the support provided in Q4, 2018 relating to systems supporting:

- the Basic Payment Scheme, Greening, Entitlements, National Reserve, Protein Aid Scheme, Young Farmers Scheme and maintenance / redevelopment of the Geospatial Information / Land Parcel Identification System

and the

- Generic Claims Processing System supporting the GLAS schemes, TAMS II, Organic Farmers Schemes, the various KT schemes and GLAS Training schemes

- and the processing of forestry grants and premium applications was €3,075,324.

Costs are associated with the contracts in place and are not associated with individual schemes.

Brexit Supports

58. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has formally made a request to the European Commission under EU regulations further to an announcement (details supplied); if so, when the application was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5724/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The agri-food sector is of critical importance to the Irish economy, and its regional spread means it underpins the socio-economic development of rural areas in particular. As such, Brexit has the potential to have a very significant impact on farmers and on the agri-food sector throughout Ireland.

At this stage, Ireland has not formally notified the Commission that it is seeking emergency aid for the farming sector either through EU Regulation No. 702/2014 – the Agriculture Block Exemption Regulation - or under Article 219 of (EU) Regulation No 1308/2013. However, there are on-going discussions with the Commission regarding the difficulties facing Ireland.

I and my officials have been working very hard for quite some time to sensitise other Member States and the European Commission to the potentially very severe impacts of Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors, and to the likelihood of specific supports being required in order to deal with these impacts. The institutions of the European Union are very well aware of the likelihood of a significant impact of a disorderly Brexit on Ireland's economy because this has been part of the discussion from the beginning, and indeed this is explicitly recognised in the Commission's own communication on contingency planning.

Most recently, I held a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Hogan last week to discuss the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors. We discussed the unique exposure of these sectors to the threat of a disorderly Brexit, and the challenges that it could present. I stressed the need to be ready to deploy a range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on farmers and processors, including through traditional market supports and exceptional aid under the CAP's Single Common Market Organisation regulation, and increased flexibility under State Aid regulations. Commissioner Hogan reiterated the EU's readiness to respond and support Ireland, and we will remain in contact on these issues as the situation evolves.

National Children's Hospital Expenditure

59. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach the date in November 2018 on which his attention was first drawn to the cost overruns in the National Children's Hospital. [5780/19]

The Taoiseach: The first time it was brought to my attention that there would be a cost overrun in the national children's hospital was on 9 November 2018. This was a brief conversation in the context of a wider discussion on health policy. However I was not advised of the full extent of the overrun at that time and I asked the Minister for Health for full information.

Defence Forces Medical Services

60. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a psychiatrist has been appointed to the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5889/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): A psychiatrist has not yet been appointed to the Defence Forces. A direct entrant competition for the position of military psychiatrist that closed on 30th September 2018 yielded no applications. Efforts to secure a locum psychiatrist have also been unsuccessful to date. In an effort to address this I have recently given approval for my Department to conduct a competition for a contracted civilian consultant psychiatrist at pay rates equivalent to those available in the HSE. However it should be noted that there is a nationwide shortage of trained psychiatrists with recruitment issues in a number of sectors of the health service. The difficulty with recruitment for such a position is not unique to the Defence Forces.

Election Monitoring Missions

61. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if a request for reasonable accommodation was considered in the case of a person (details supplied) who applied for the Irish Aid election observation roster; if he is satisfied on the grounds of equality that in the application process and interview process the person was sufficiently accommodated to take into account their specific needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5776/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I refer the Deputy to the response to Parliamentary Questions No. 80 of 30 January 2019 and No. 60 of 23 January 2019 on this matter. No request for a reasonable accommodation was received before the deadline for applications. If such a request had been received, it would

have received full and thorough consideration.

Irish Aid

62. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the organisations that received funding through the main civil society funding schemes administered by Irish Aid in each of the years from 2015 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5782/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Support to civil society organisations is a very important element of the Irish Aid programme, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade recognises the vital contribution that civil society makes in international development cooperation.

Irish Aid funding to civil society organisations supports both long term development projects and programmes, and humanitarian assistance for emergency response and protracted crises.

The main Irish Aid civil society funding schemes are the Programme Grant (PG), Civil Society Fund (CSF), Humanitarian Programme Plan (HPP), and the Emergency Response Fund Scheme (ERFS). The table below lists organisations who have received funding under each of these schemes from 2015 to 2018.

Funding is also provided to civil society organisations through a range of mechanisms including established strategic partnerships with umbrella groups, to missionary organisations through Misean Cara, through the Development Education strategy, support of the Government's overseas Volunteering Initiative and through Embassy-managed programmes and projects.

2015 Organisations	2016 Organisations	2017 Organisations	2018 Organisations
CIVIL SOCIETY FUND			
A Partnership with Africa	A Partnership with Africa	A Partnership with Africa	A Partnership with Africa
Action Lesotho	Action Lesotho	Anti-Slavery International	Aidlink
Bóthar	Anti Slavery International	Bóthar	Anti-Slavery International
Camara	Bóthar	Brighter Communities Worldwide	Brighter Communities World Wide
Camfed International	Camara	Camara	Camfed International
Carter Centre	Camfed International	Camara Education	Carter Centre
Christian Blind Mission	Carter Centre	Camfed International	ChildFund Ireland
Civicus	Christian Blind Mission	Carter Centre	Christian Blind Mission
ECPAT International	Civicus	Christian Blind Mission	ECPAT
Friends in Ireland	ECPAT	Civicus	FIDH
Friends of Londiani	Fields of Life	ECPAT	Fields of Life
Global Witness	Friends in Ireland	Fields of Life	Fields of Life
Health Poverty Action	Friends of Londiani	Friends in Ireland	Global Witness
Irish League of Credit Unions	Habitat for Humanity	Friends of Londiani	Irish Family Planning Association
Irish Rule of Law	Haven	Global Witness	Irish League of Credit Unions
ISHR	Haven	Habitat for Humanity	ISHR

Questions - Written Answers

2015 Organisations	2016 Organisations	2017 Organisations	2018 Organisations
CIVIL SOCIETY FUND			
Martin Ennals Founda- tion	Health Poverty Action	Haven	Martin Ennals Founda- tion
Minority Rights Group	INTO	Health Poverty Action	Meningitis Research Foundation
Nepal Leprosy Trust	Irish Family Planning Association	ICTU	Minority Rights Group
Nurture Africa	Irish Foundation for Co-operative Develop- ment	Irish Family Planning Association	Minority Rights Group
Operation Smile	Irish League of Credit Unions	Irish League of Credit Unions	Nepal Leprosy Trust
Orbis	Irish Rule of Law	ISHR	Nurture Africa
Saferworld	ISHR	Martin Ennals Founda- tion	Nurture Africa
Social and Health Educa- tion Project	Martin Ennals Founda- tion	Meningitis Research Foundation	Orbis
Special Olympics Europe Eurasia	Minority Rights Group	Minority Rights Group	Proudly Made in Africa
Tearfund Ireland	Operation Smile	Nepal Leprosy Trust	Saferworld
UCC	Orbis	Nurture Africa	Serve
UPR Info	Saferworld	Saferworld	Social and Health Educa- tion Project
Proudly Made in Africa	Special Olympics Europe Eurasia	TearFund	SUAS
War on Want Northern Ireland	TearFund Ireland	UPR Info	Tearfund
WaterAid	UCC	Proudly Made in Africa	UCC
	UPR Info		UPR Info
	Proudly Made in Africa		Proudly Made in Africa
	War on Want Northern Ireland		War on Want Northern Ireland
PROGRAMME GRANT			
Action Aid	Action Aid	Action Aid Ireland	Action Aid Ireland
Aidlink	Aidlink	Aidlink	Children in Crossfire
ChildFund Ireland	ChildFund Ireland	ChildFund Ireland	Christian Aid Ireland
Children in Crossfire	Children in Crossfire	Children in Crossfire	Concern
Christian Aid Ireland	Christian Aid Ireland	Christian Aid Ireland	Gorta Self Help Africa
Concern Worldwide	Concern Worldwide	Concern	HelpAge International
Front Line Defenders *	Front Line Defenders *	Gorta Self Help Africa	Oxfam Ireland
Goal **	Goal **	HelpAge International	Plan Ireland
Gorta Self Help Africa	Gorta Self Help Africa	Oxfam Ireland	Sightsavers Ireland
HelpAge International	HelpAge International	Plan Ireland	Trócaire
Oxfam Ireland	Oxfam Ireland	Serve in Solidarity	Vita
Plan Ireland	Plan Ireland	Sightsavers Ireland	World Vision Ireland
Serve in Solidarity	Serve in Solidarity	Trócaire	
Sightsavers Ireland	Sightsavers Ireland	Vita	
Trócaire	Trócaire	World Vision Ireland	
World Vision	World Vision		
HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME PLAN			

2015 Organisations	2016 Organisations	2017 Organisations	2018 Organisations
CIVIL SOCIETY FUND			
Christian Aid Ireland	Christian Aid Ireland	Christian Aid Ireland	Christian Aid Ireland
Concern	Concern	Concern	Concern
Goal **	Goal **	Oxfam Ireland	Oxfam Ireland
MSF Ireland	MSF Ireland	Plan Ireland	Plan Ireland
Oxfam Ireland	Oxfam Ireland	Trócaire	Trócaire
Plan Ireland	Plan Ireland	World Vision Ireland	World Vision Ireland
Trócaire	Trócaire		
World Vision Ireland	World Vision Ireland		
EMERGENCY RE- SPONSE FUND SCHEME			
Christian Aid Ireland	Christian Aid Ireland	Christian Aid Ireland	Christian Aid Ireland
Concern	Concern	Concern	Concern
Goal **	Goal **	Oxfam Ireland	Oxfam Ireland
MSF Ireland	MSF Ireland	Plan Ireland	Plan Ireland
Oxfam Ireland	Oxfam Ireland	Trocaire	Trocaire
Plan Ireland	Plan Ireland	World Vision Ireland	World Vision Ireland
Trocaire	Trocaire		
World Vision Ireland	World Vision Ireland		

*Front Line Defenders were funded through a Strategic Partnership in 2017 and 2018.

**Goal were funded through a Strategic Partnership in 2017 and 2018.

UN Funding

63. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to provide funding in 2019 to the United Nations Population Fund supplies (details supplied) in view of the global contraceptive funding gap, Ireland’s commitment to the 2030 agenda and the sustainable development goal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5821/19]

64. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount he plans to allocate in core funding to the United Nations Population Fund in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5822/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 63 and 64 together.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is a long standing supporter of UNFPA. We provide non-earmarked core funding to the agency on an annual basis and intend to continue this in 2019.

In 2018, my Department provided €3,500,000 to UNFPA, an increase of €700,000 on our 2017 core contribution. As the Tánaiste outlined in his speech at the launch of the UNFPA’s State of the World Population Report in October, Ireland is proud to be a consistent supporter of UNFPA. Since 2006 we have provided funding of around €55 million to the Population Fund, the majority of which is core funding. Ireland values the critical work of UNFPA and is committed to core funding on the principle that this allows the agency to set their priorities and plan according to need which is, we believe, critical to the on-the-ground delivery of results.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is not currently providing funding to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Supplies Thematic Programme and no decision to fund this specific programme in 2019 has been taken to date.

The Government is committed to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030. My Department is working to ensure that our international development assistance supports the achievement of the SDGs in developing countries. Ireland's international development programme has always been focused on the need to protect the most vulnerable in society, and through for example our core support to UNFPA, contribute to the SDGs' transformative ambition of 'Leave No One Behind' and in particular to reach the furthest behind first. Reaching them and delivering responsive supports and services is essential for creating inclusive societies and achieving sustainable development.

International Election Monitoring

65. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which the public competition for election observers and the specific subject of disability will be in line with the Civil Service public equality duty; if requests for appeal on the grounds of disability will be independently considered; the arrangements in place for election observer appeals; the arrangements made for disabled applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5857/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I refer the Deputy to the responses to previous Parliamentary Questions No. 60 and 61 of 23 January 2019. In line with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, in the event of any candidate with a disability requesting a reasonable accommodation at the time of application, such a request would have been given full and thorough consideration. No request for reasonable accommodation was received by the application deadline.

In the interest of fairness, an appeal mechanism was available. A number of prospective volunteers submitted an appeal. The Appeals Panel has yet to finish its deliberations. In the interest of fairness to all candidates, the Appeals Panel cannot consider new information which was not provided at the time of application.

Brexit Issues

66. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has discussed the possibility of the loss of human rights for citizens in Northern Ireland if there is a no-deal Brexit with his British counterpart or the leader of the DUP; and when they last spoke regarding Brexit. [5678/19]

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.

Throughout the negotiations, this Government stressed the necessity of protecting the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts, and ensuring that there will be no hard border on the island of Ireland under any circumstances. The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland is an integral part of the Agreement on the Withdrawal of the UK from the EU, and addresses the fundamental rights and citizenship provisions of the Good Friday Agreement.

The Commission Task Force conducted the negotiations with the UK on the Withdrawal Agreement. Throughout this process, I engaged actively with each of my British Government counterparts to underline the Government's concerns about the impact of Brexit on the island of Ireland and the imperative of protecting the Good Friday Agreement and the achievements of the Peace Process, and I continue to do so. 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.

I also speak regularly with the leaders of each of the political parties in Northern Ireland on the European Union's endeavours to ensure the protection of the Good Friday Agreement throughout the Article 50 negotiations and ratification process. I held discussions most recently on this with each of the party leaders, including Arlene Foster, in Belfast on 10 January where I reiterated its vital importance.

Throughout the negotiations between the UK and the EU Task Force, I and my officials were in frequent communication with Michel Barnier and his team, as well as with the other EU27 Member States. In my contacts with EU partners, Member States and institutions, they showed, and continue to show unwavering solidarity on the backstop, for which I am extremely grateful.

A no deal Brexit is the worst possible outcome and would not be in the interests of the UK, Ireland or the EU. That is why the Government's focus remains on securing the deal that has been reached. The Government remains 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 Withdrawal Agreement protects the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts, and the gains of the Peace Process. Importantly, nothing in the Agreement will prejudice the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and the principle of consent as set out in the Good Friday Agreement. It also protects the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement on rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity and confirms that Irish citizens in Northern Ireland will continue to enjoy rights as EU citizens. It provides for a period of transition, which can be extended, in which preparations can be made for the future relationship between the EU and the UK. The European Council has made clear that it stands by the Withdrawal Agreement and that it is not for renegotiation.

Under any scenario for the UK's exit from the European Union, the obligations and commitments of the Irish and British Governments under the Good Friday Agreement remain and the Government will continue to work with the British Government as co-guarantor to secure the full implementation of the Agreement and the effective operation of all of its institutions.

Tax Collection

67. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance the number of businesses that qualify for the deferred payments scheme; the length of time it takes to process an application for the scheme; if the Revenue Commissioners will be obliged to allow the scheme apply to all traders following the withdrawal of the UK from the EU; if the Revenue Commissioners have increased the number of employees in the deferred scheme section to deal the increased demand on this section; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5881/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There are currently 768 individual trad-

ers authorised for the deferred payment scheme. In addition, the Deputy should note that a number of deferred payment authorisations are held by customs clearance agents who can offer this facility to their clients when completing import formalities on their behalf.

The application process requires a trader to firstly be approved for a Comprehensive Guarantee in accordance with the EU Customs legislation namely the Union Customs Code. This is applied for through the EU Customs Decisions System which can be accessed online by any trader with a valid Revenue Online Service (ROS) Certificate and an Economic Operators' Registration and Identification (EORI) number. One of the conditions of the Comprehensive Guarantee is a requirement to have security in place to cover potential or existing customs and VAT debt.

Revenue advise me that each trader is responsible for making arrangements with their own financial institution to ensure that the necessary security and banking structures are in place. Revenue have no control over that procedure or the time that it takes. However, once this security is in place, the formalities associated with granting a deferred payment authorisation would normally be completed within two weeks. Full details of the application process are available on www.revenue.ie.

I am further advised that the current staff resources are sufficient to deal with the work involved and that the matter is under constant review, particularly in light of Brexit.

Tax Credits

68. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost in tax revenue foregone for all capital allowances to private health facilities in each of the years since 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5940/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is assumed that the Deputy is referring to capital allowances in respect of qualifying private hospitals.

I am advised by Revenue that information in respect of the tax cost in respect of this property based tax relief can be found for the years 2011 to 2016 on the Revenue website at

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/property-reliefs.aspx>.

The cost for 2017 will be published during 2019 when all returns for that year have been analysed.

Tax Code

69. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance if persons on temporary contracts will now pay PAYE income tax on a week 1 basis under the new tax arrangement introduced in 2019 by the Revenue Commissioners; the negative short-term tax implications this could have for persons with irregular work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5777/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The new administrative arrangements for PAYE (PAYE Modernisation) started on 1 January this year. These new arrangements do not affect the way income tax and other statutory deductions are calculated under the PAYE system, but do change the way employers report payroll information to Revenue. In most cases the new real-time reporting arrangements have seamlessly integrated into employer's payroll systems

without any impact on employees.

For the Deputy's general information, the PAYE system does not treat people on temporary contracts any differently to those on full time or permanent contracts. As such, employers are obliged to notify Revenue where an employee has started or has ceased working for them, regardless of the employment status involved. This ensures that employees gain the full benefit of their tax credit and rate band entitlements each time they are paid. For example, where Revenue is notified of the cessation of an employment, the person's tax credit and rate band entitlements are automatically transferred to any other active employment that s/he may have.

The application of the 'Week 1' basis of deduction only occurs in limited circumstances, for example where there is a lack of information about previous employments or where application of the cumulative basis would create significant hardship for the employee. Under PAYE Modernisation, employers are required to report the pay and tax details of their employees every time they run a payroll, which means the individual records should always be up to date. Consequently, it is expected that people in irregular employment should pay the proper amount of tax at each pay date and that the application of the 'Week 1' basis of deduction should only occur in limited circumstances.

Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman

70. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if, in the event of new evidence in the case of persons (details supplied), a further review of their case can be undertaken by the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman with a view to addressing the most recently emerged issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5846/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Firstly, I must point out that the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman (FSPO) is independent in the performance of his statutory functions. I have no role in the day to day workings of the office or in the decisions which he takes.

One of the main roles of the Ombudsman is to investigate, mediate and adjudicate complaints about the conduct of financial or pension service providers. The FSPO was established to provide an alternative to the Courts for consumers who have unresolved disputes with a financial or pension service provider and all investigations by the Ombudsman are free of charge to the consumer. Subject only to an appeal to the High Court, a finding of the Ombudsman in respect of a complaint is legally binding on all parties

The FSPO has advised me that the services provided by him are confidential in nature, and it would not be appropriate for him to confirm or deny the existence of a complaint, nor would it be appropriate to comment on any individual case.

On the issue more generally the FSPO provides a dedicated information service, which handles both phone and email enquiries. This service provides assistance on how to access the FSPO's services, to initiate a complaint or discuss a complaint. The Deputy may wish to suggest that the complainant contact the Office of the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman to discuss their case with a member of staff.

Office of Public Works Properties

71. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

if permits or permissions are required to be sought for an activity (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5854/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The car-park at Grianan Fort, Co. Donegal is not in the ownership of the Office of Public Works, although the keyholding is managed by the OPW-employed caretaker locally.

Any queries regarding the use of the carpark should be directed to Donegal County Council which may have licensing or other permission requirements.

Public Sector Staff Retirements

72. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the public servants being referred to in section 3A(6) of the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018; if employees in the education sector who have reached 65 years of age between 1 September and 25 December 2018 can benefit from the new extended retirement age of 70 years of age under the Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5908/19]

73. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to amend the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 to extend coverage of the Act to include the public servants who were forced to retire between 6 December 2017 and the commencement of the Act due to reaching 65 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5909/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 and 73 together.

The Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 provides for an increase to age 70 in the compulsory retirement age of most public servants recruited before 1 April 2004. The public servants covered by the new Act are termed “relevant public servants” and that term is defined in Section 2 of the Act. Only those public servants, including those employed in the education sector, who have not retired prior to the enactment of the legislation (26 December 2018) can avail of the provisions of the Act.

I have no plans to amend the recently enacted legislation.

Departmental Staff Grievance Procedures

74. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if constructive criticism by an employee in the public sector, which is in the interest of addressing failures within a public sector workplace, is viewed in the same manner as a whistleblower; the action an employee can take if their concerns are dealt with in a persecutory manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5812/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 5(3) of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 provides for a broadly based set of relevant wrongdoings that workers in the public or private sector may report which qualify for the protections of the Act. These are: that an offence has been, is being or is likely to be committed; that a person has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation, other than one arising under the worker’s contract of employment or other contract whereby the worker undertakes to do or perform personally any work or services; that a miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur; that the health or safety of any individual has been, is being or

is likely to be endangered; that the environment has been, is being or is likely to be damaged; that an unlawful or otherwise improper use of funds or resources of a public body, or of other public money, has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur; that an act or omission by or on behalf of a public body is oppressive, discriminatory or grossly negligent or constitutes gross mismanagement; and that information tending to show any matter falling within any of the above categories has been, is being or is likely to be concealed or destroyed.

It is not necessary for a worker to explicitly state that they are making a protected disclosure when they make a disclosure which they believe to come within the relevant wrongdoings outlined above. If it is unclear whether the matter qualifies as a protected disclosure, the employer should treat it as such until they are satisfied that it does not so qualify. In any event, providing that the worker discloses information relating to wrongdoing in an appropriate manner, and based on a reasonable belief, no question of penalisation should arise. Furthermore, section 5 of the Act provides that in proceedings involving an issue as to whether a disclosure is a protected disclosure it shall be presumed, until the contrary is proved, that it is.

The Act provides for a number of remedies for workers who believe that they have suffered penalisation as a result of making a protected disclosure. Those remedies apply to workers in both the public and private sectors. Workers who are direct employees are provided with access to the normal industrial dispute mechanisms of the State, including the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court, and the compensation payable under those mechanisms is increased in respect of persons penalised for having made a protected disclosure. An employee dismissed for having made a protected disclosure can claim unfair dismissal, regardless of their length of service, and may also make a claim for interim relief to the Circuit Court pending final determination of their case. The Act also provides a right of action in tort for a person who has suffered detriment as a result of a protected disclosure, and immunity from civil liability other than in defamation actions.

Civil Service Code of Conduct

75. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date from which the present Civil Service code dates; his views on whether such codes require updating every few years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5813/19]

76. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of codes of ethics within the Civil Service; the status of same in the context of the Civil Service codes; if there can be conflicts between membership professional codes of ethics and the civil service codes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5814/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 75 and 76 together.

Section 10 (3) of the Standards in Public Office Act 2001 (the Act) provides that the Minister shall from time to time draw up codes of conduct for the guidance of persons who hold or occupy directorships or positions of employment in public bodies. A revised Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour (the Code) was published by the Standards in Public Office Commission in September 2008. This Code, which applies to all civil servants, is an important element of the overall framework within which civil servants are expected to work. It sets out the standards required of civil servants in the discharge of their duties.

The Public Sector Standards Bill 2015 (the Bill) is a key consideration in terms of updating this current Code. This Bill provides for a Public Sector Standards Commissioner to replace

the current Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPOC). Section 30 of the Bill provides that the Commissioner shall draw up and issue a model code of conduct for the guidance of public officials with regard to compliance with the provisions of the Bill. This model code must have regard to the general principles on standards of integrity contained in section 10 of the Bill. Furthermore, the Commissioner must promote, through training, education and research, and guidelines issued for the purpose by the Commissioner, the highest standards of conduct and integrity among public officials, and, in particular, regarding the prevention of situations in which conflicts of interest could arise in relation to their duties.

Under the Bill, public bodies may adopt their own codes to meet particular requirements while having regard to the principles and standards in the model code. Sectorial codes will be drawn up by particular bodies (e.g. for the Civil Service by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform). The Commissioner may advise as to whether amendments to any such code are required.

So once enacted, this Bill will allow my Department to review the current Code in the context of the Commissioners model code and revise it as required. Further information on the current position regarding the Bill is at APPENDIX 1.

The Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour is a document that reflects the standards required of civil servants in the performance of their official duties. There are also various circulars relating to the terms and conditions of employment of civil servants.

Currently, the ethics obligations of civil servants, including the provision of ethics returns, is dealt with under the Ethics in Public Office Act 1995 and the Standards in Public Office Act 2001 (the Ethics Acts).

It would seem unlikely that there would be conflicts between membership professional codes of ethics and the current Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour. However, should issues arise, there is provision in the Code (para. 3.2) for staff to obtain clarification on any aspect of the Code. In addition, under section 10(12) of the Act the SIPOC can give advice on the Code in particular circumstances.

APPENDIX 1

The Public Sector Standards Bill is currently making its way through the legislative process in the Dáil. It commenced Committee Stage on the 6th of April 2017, where sections 1 to 42 of the 66 sections in the Bill were agreed. Much work has been completed since the Bill was considered in Committee, including work specifically requested by the Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach (FPER) Committee, prior to the re-commencement of Committee Stage. This includes:

- Briefing for all Members of the Oireachtas in relation to the Bill;
- Discussions with T.D.s from other Political Parties in order to seek some cross-party consensus for the Bill. This included a meeting with Deputy Jonathan O'Brien from Sinn Féin in November 2017;
- A meeting with Local Authority Representative Groups following their appearance before the FPER Committee;
- A meeting with the CCMA; and

The development of Report Stage amendments for the Bill which have been approved by Government, in order to resolve and address various issues that have been raised on foot of the

consultations, meetings and briefings described above.

My Department is currently awaiting a re-commencement date for Committee Stage of the Bill.

Public Sector Staff Retirements

77. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 105 of 30 January 2019, if the rules surrounding compulsory retirement outlined apply to employees of semi-State companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5877/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my reply to PQ 4008/19 on the 29 January 2019.

Cross-Border Projects

78. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the schemes and projects on a cross-Border basis that will be funded in 2019; if he is satisfied with the structures in place to ensure the continuation of cross-Border development in conjunction with the relevant authorities in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2978/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware of the important contribution that the EU-funded North South programmes, PEACE and INTERREG, make to building peace and social and economic cohesion in the border region of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The current 2014-2020 PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes will invest over half a billion euro in the region and are progressing well.

The two programmes are managed by the Special EU Programmes Body, a North South implementation body established under the Good Friday Agreement. My Department is joint sponsor Department for the SEUPB, together with the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland, while various sectorial Departments, north and south, act as accountable Departments for PEACE and INTERREG funding.

The INTERREG VA Programme, which totals €282 million, is now 97% committed, with funding approved for 32 projects under the themes of research and innovation, environment, sustainable transport, and health and social care. Activity will be delivered across all themes in 2019.

The PEACE IV Programme has a total value of €270 million and has now reached 99% commitment, with 95 projects approved for funding. Projects under the themes of Shared Education, Children and Young People, Shared Spaces and Services, and Building Positive Relations, including operations supported under Local Authority Peace Action Plans, will all be active in 2019.

The Irish Government has been clear and consistent in its commitment to the successful implementation of the current PEACE and INTERREG programmes and to a successor programme post-2020.

The draft Withdrawal Agreement will enable the current programmes to be completed without interruption or amendment. In the event of no agreement, the European Commission has

brought forward a proposal, which I welcome, that will enable the two programmes to continue on the basis of the current management structures. This proposal is progressing through the legislative process at a European level with a view to it being entering into force by 29 March 2019.

I also welcome the Commission's proposal for a special new PEACE PLUS programme to build on and continue the work of both PEACE and INTERREG post-2020.

DEIS Eligibility

79. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter regarding a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5789/19]

80. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter regarding a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5788/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 79 and 80 together.

As the Deputy is aware, 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 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>

Some schools, including the one referred to by the Deputy, availed of a verification process which was provided for under DEIS Plan 2017. The verification process involved checking the school's data as used in the Identification process, in terms of the quality and accuracy of the data supplied and the match rate to CSO small area. This process confirmed no change in the level of disadvantage identified for this school and correspondence was issued in September 2017 notifying them of the outcome.

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 disadvan-

tage 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.

Schools Building Projects

81. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide a new school for Meakstown, Dublin 11; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5793/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level. For school planning purposes Meakstown is located in the Finglas East_Ballymun_Dublin 11 school planning area.

Major new residential developments in a school planning area have the potential to alter demand in that area. In that regard, as part of the demographic exercises, my Department engages with each of the local authorities to obtain the up-to-date data on significant new residential development in each area. This is necessary to ensure that schools infrastructure planning is keeping pace with demographic changes as there is a constantly evolving picture with planned new residential development, including additional residential developments arising from the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF).

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

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

As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2018, the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next 4 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.

In addition to the new schools announced, there may be a need for further school accommodation in other areas in the future which can be addressed through either planned capacity increases in existing schools or additional accommodation or extensions to existing schools. Approximately 40% of extra school places are delivered by extending existing schools.

While the announcement did not include a new school for the Finglas East_Ballymun_Dublin 11 school planning area, the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular will have regard for the increased roll-out of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040. It is open to an individual school to apply for accommodation under the additional accommodation scheme if the school does not have sufficient capacity to meet

school places.

Autism Support Services

82. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be made available for autism units in Dublin 12; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5830/19]

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.

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.

Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available by county on the NCSE website at www.ncse.ie

From time to time, the NCSE identifies local areas where additional special class provision is required. In those circumstances, SENOs work with the schools and families concerned to resolve the issues involved.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 will assist in addressing this issue where the NCSE is of the opinion that there is insufficient education provision for children with special educational needs in an area.

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.

Special Classes can be established within a schools existing accommodation. In such circumstances the school can apply to the Department for capital funding to reconfigure existing spaces within the school building to accommodate the class and/or to construct additional accommodation for special needs purposes should the school's existing accommodation not be capable of hosting special classes.

In the case of all new schools, it is general practice to include a Special Education Needs Base (SEN Base) in the accommodation brief for new school buildings, unless local circumstances indicate that it will not be required. Typically, a two classroom SEN Base is provided in new primary schools and a two or four classroom SEN Base is provided in new post primary schools.

All school capital projects that have been approved by my Department under the Additional

Accommodation Scheme, including special needs accommodation, may be viewed on my Department's website, www.education.ie and this is updated regularly.

As the Deputy's question relates to a particular area I have arranged for the question to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

My Department will continue to support the NCSE in opening ASD special classes in areas where there is an identified need.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

83. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the July provision is not available to the majority of children with Down's syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5847/19]

84. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views regarding teachers that do not provide critical individual education plans for children with Down's syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5848/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 83 and 84 together.

My Department has very significantly increased the number of special education teachers provided to schools since 2011.

More than €1.75 billion, almost 19% of the overall spend in the sector, is dedicated to special education.

The additional provision which has been made in recent years includes an increase of 37% in the number of special education teachers allocated to schools, from 9,9740 in 2011, to over 13,300 at present.

Children can receive additional teaching support based on their learning needs, rather than on a diagnosis of disability. Parents of children who have Down syndrome have certainty that their children can receive as much additional teaching support as required in school, taking account of school based assessments of their learning needs.

There is no constraint on the amount of additional teaching time that may be allocated to pupils with Down syndrome, based on their diagnosis, or because they may previously have been in the mild general learning difficulty category.

With the increase in the allocation of special education teaching in schools, my Department has also ensured there is provision for planning and co-ordination.

DES Circulars 0013 and 0014/2017 note that provision is made within the total allocation of special education teachers to schools for planning and co-ordination activities to ensure the most effective use of the special educational needs hours provided to schools, for children with special educational needs, including children with Down syndrome.

Schools have a legal duty to provide an appropriate education to all students, including young people with special educational needs, and need to plan to ensure this happens.

Guidelines for schools on educational planning and monitoring of outcomes through the Student Support File, are contained in the Guidelines for Primary and Post primary Schools:

Supporting Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools.

Planning is a normal part of a teacher's work and planning tools, like the student support file, have been created as a resource to help schools provide for their students.

It is the view of the Department that planning for the provision of education in schools should include planning for the provision of additional teaching support for pupils in schools, for which coordination and planning time is acknowledged in the allocation.

This would represent a continuation of the good practice that is occurring in the majority of schools.

My Department's July Provision Grant Scheme provides funding for an extended school year for students with severe or profound intellectual disabilities and students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

The scheme was developed to reduce potential regression in learning associated with these specific categories of special education needs over the summer holidays. The scheme does not make provision for children with other categories of Special Education Needs.

The National Council for Special Education's Policy Advice on Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders was published in July 2016.

The NCSE review found that in general parents value July provision because it provides daytime respite for families and a structured day for students.

However, the NCSE review found a number of problems with the scheme as currently organised.

These include concerns that the scheme may be inequitable because it is not provided to all students with complex special educational needs.

The Council recommended that the relevant Government Departments consider how an equitable national day activity scheme could be developed for all students with complex special educational needs.

The proposed scheme would provide a structured, safe, social environment for all students with complex special educational needs, which might include some children with Down syndrome.

The Department of Education and Skills has convened an Implementation Group with representatives of the NCSE, NEPS, the Inspectorate and representatives from other relevant Departments and agencies to ensure that the Report's recommendations are fully and appropriately considered.

There are no plans to change the July provision scheme coverage until this work is complete.

Special Educational Needs Staff

85. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the changes planned for the delivery of resource hours to primary schools; when changes are expected to be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5849/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools set

out the details of the model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

Details of the allocations which will be due to be made for schools for the 2019/20 school year will be advised to schools in the coming weeks.

School Services Staff

86. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding caretakers and cleaners at schools becoming direct employees of his Department; if investigations into same have been carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5856/19]

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 Caretakers 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 on this matter as evidenced by the Chairman's Note discussions.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

87. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary and secondary schools in counties Laois and Offaly with ASD units. [5858/19]

88. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to increase

the number of ASD units at primary and second-level in counties Laois and Offaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5859/19]

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

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.

There are 25 special classes attached to mainstream schools in Co. Laois. Of these, 4 are ASD early intervention classes, 17 are primary ASD classes and 3 are post primary ASD classes. The number of ASD special classes in Co. Laois has increased from 4 in 2011/2012 to 24 in 2018/2019.

There are 64 special classes attached to mainstream schools in Co. Offaly. Of these, 10 are ASD early intervention classes, 29 are primary ASD classes and 9 are post primary ASD classes. The number of ASD special classes in Co. Offaly has increased from 12 in 2011/2012 to 48 in 2018/2019.

Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available by county on the NCSE website at www.ncse.ie

From time to time, the NCSE identifies local areas where additional special class provision is required. In those circumstances, SENOs work with the schools and families concerned to resolve the issues involved.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 will assist in addressing this issue where the NCSE is of the opinion that there is insufficient education provision for children with special educational needs in an area.

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.

Special Classes can be established within a schools existing accommodation. In such circumstances the school can apply to the Department for capital funding to re-configure existing spaces within the school building to accommodate the class and/or to construct additional accommodation for special needs purposes should the school's existing accommodation not be capable of hosting special classes.

In the case of all new schools, it is general practice to include a Special Education Needs Base (SEN Base) in the accommodation brief for new school buildings, unless local circumstances indicate that it will not be required. Typically, a two classroom SEN Base is provided in new primary schools and a two or four classroom SEN Base is provided in new post primary schools.

All school capital projects that have been approved by my Department under the Additional Accommodation Scheme, including special needs accommodation, may be viewed on my De-

partment's website, *www.education.ie* and this is updated regularly.

As the Deputy's question relates to a particular area I have arranged for the question to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

Schools Site Acquisitions

89. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to buy or rent a building (details supplied) which is being converted to provide accommodation for a temporary primary school. [5887/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Government announced plans in April 2018 for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022), including a new 16 classroom school to be established in September 2019 to serve the Goatstown_Stillorgan_DLR school planning area.

The Department is currently examining all potential suitable site options to serve the relevant area and in the interim the school will be established in Sept 2019 in suitable interim accommodation pending delivery of its permanent school building. The Department has applied for planning permission to Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council to use a building (on a rental basis) on Ballymoss Road, Sandyford Business Park as the interim location for the school.

Special Educational Needs Staff

90. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the location a person (details supplied) can apply for vacant positions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5888/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The recruitment and appointment of Special Needs Assistants is a matter for the individual school authority. Department's Circulars 34/2018 and 21/2011 and Appendix H of the Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015-2019 sets out the current minimum educational requirements for appointment as a Special Needs Assistant (SNA).

People appointed to SNA posts are required to have:

1. A FETAC level 3 major qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications, OR
2. A minimum of three grade Ds in the Junior Certificate, OR
3. Equivalent

The above are the minimum qualifications required for appointment as a SNA. The actual requirements for a post will vary depending on the specific needs of the children and the school to which the SNA is to be appointed. When recruiting an SNA school authorities must list in the advertisement any specific competencies and/ or requirements to meet the special educational needs of the pupil(s).

All standard SNA vacancies and cover SNA vacancies of 24 weeks or more must be advertised on one of the following websites as soon as practicable.

SNA vacancies may also be advertised locally as required / deemed necessary. This will en-

able SNAs who are being made redundant to know what SNA vacancies are available.

List of Websites:

www.educationposts.ie

www.staffroom.ie

www.educationcareers.ie

www.educatetogether.ie

www.jobsireland.ie

Any Education and Training Board websites

These Circulars can be accessed on the Department's website at *www.education.ie*.

Technological Universities

91. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if powers or duties under the Technological Universities Act 2018 have been delegated. [5932/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): No power or duty conferred on the Minister for Education and Skills by or under the Technological Universities Act 2018 has been delegated to a Minister of State.

National Children's Hospital Expenditure

92. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department is required to contribute to the cost overruns on the National Children's Hospital. [5934/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): No final decisions have yet been made on how the additional funding requirement in 2019 is to be met. I understand the Minister for Finance and PER will be bringing his proposals in this regard to Government next week.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which Garda vetting has been completed in respect of candidates who have applied for recent posts in the Prison Service and An Garda Síochána; the degree to which approval is forthcoming, pending or refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5783/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Under Section 26 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 it is the function of the Garda Commissioner to carry on and manage and control generally the administration and business of the Garda Síochána, including by arranging for the recruitment, training and appointment of its members and civilian staff. The allocation of resources including recruitment and training of Garda members is a matter for the Garda Commissioner. National recruitment campaigns for new recruits to An Garda Síochána are generally conducted by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) with the initial recruitment stages being managed by PAS and the latter stages (vetting, physical competency test, medical)

being managed by the Garda Commissioner.

Similarly, given the level of responsibility in prison officer positions, it is necessary for checks to be carried out by An Garda Síochána on persons considered for this employment. These checks can take time to complete for a variety of reasons, some of which may be outside of the control of the Garda Authorities, depending on the circumstances of the individual case. However, I am assured that every effort is made to expedite this process to the greatest extent possible.

This is carried out as part of the recruitment process which is managed by the Public Appointment Service in conjunction with the Irish Prison Service.

Any candidates seeking an update on the status of their applications should contact the Public Appointments Service or An Garda Síochána/the Irish Prison Service as appropriate.

International Conventions

94. **Deputy Frances Fitzgerald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the outstanding issues concerning the ratification of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women; and the timeframe for ratification in this regard. [5797/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ratifying the Istanbul Convention is a Government priority and is included in the Programme for Government as a significant legal instrument in the fight against domestic and sexual violence.

At the time of signing of the Istanbul Convention, the Government approved an Action Plan to enable Ireland to ratify the Convention. The Action Plan contained 18 different administrative and legislative actions required by the Istanbul Convention. Most of the legislative requirements were met in the Domestic Violence Act 2018, the Criminal Justice (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 and the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017.

The Criminal Law (Extraterritorial Jurisdiction) Bill 2018 is the final legislative action to be enacted to allow for ratification. This legislation is required to establish extraterritorial jurisdiction over Convention offences committed abroad by Irish citizens and residents.

On 30 January 2019, the Criminal Law (Extraterritorial Bill) 2018 completed all stages in the Seanad. The Bill will now progress to second stage in the Dáil on Tuesday 12 February. It is expected that the Bill will be enacted in quarter one, 2019.

This is a very short but important Bill, that once enacted, will allow Ireland to ratify the Istanbul Convention shortly thereafter.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems

95. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications received in 2017 and 2018 by county for the community CCTV scheme in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5832/19]

96. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications granted in 2017 and 2018 by county for the community CCTV scheme in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5833/19]

97. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of funding issued to communities for the community CCTV scheme by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5834/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 95 to 97, inclusive, together.

The Deputy will be aware that CCTV systems installed for the purposes of crime prevention and as aids to policing in areas to which the general public routinely have access, such as town centres, fall into two distinct but complementary categories, namely Garda CCTV systems and community-based CCTV systems. Neither may be established without the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner, among other requirements.

Community based CCTV is governed by section 38(3)(c) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and the Garda Síochána (CCTV) Order 2006 (SI No 289 of 2006). This legal framework requires that any proposed community CCTV scheme must:

- be approved by the local Joint Policing Committee,
- have the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner, and
- have the prior support of the relevant local authority, which must also act as data controller.

This is the legal basis for all community CCTV schemes, regardless of how they are funded.

As the Deputy is aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government commits to supporting investment in CCTV systems. In furtherance of this commitment, a grant-aid scheme to assist groups in the establishment of community-based CCTV systems in their local areas is being administered by my Department. Eligible groups, including community groups and local authorities, can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum total of €40,000.

There have to date been 28 applications to the scheme. 20 applications have been approved, involving approved grants totalling more than €500,000. A further 5 applications to the scheme are being assessed and considered. The remaining 3 applications have been returned to the applicants concerned to enable them to supply the information necessary to qualify for grant aid.

As information requested by the Deputy, the following table sets out the breakdown by county of the applications approved for funding to date and the level of funding for which approval has been granted.

County	Number of Approved Schemes	Amount of Grant Aid Approved	Year
Leitrim	1	€40,000	2018
Limerick	14	€334,573	2018
Sligo	1	€8,835	2018
Wexford	3	€77,915	2018
Wicklow	1	€40,000	2018

I am keen to ensure that all interested groups, in both rural and urban areas, have the opportunity to take advantage of the availability of the grant aid scheme. If the Deputy is aware of groups wishing to avail of the scheme, full details of the grant aid package are available to download from my Department's website - www.justice.ie and support and guidance is available to help interested groups to apply for this funding through a dedicated email address communitycctv@justice.ie

Garda National Immigration Bureau

98. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 142 of 26 September 2018, 420 of 6 November 2018 and 162 of 28 November 2018, if he will address issues raised in correspondence (details supplied) concerning the INIS online appointment system for registrations; the action he will take to address these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5835/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As outlined in responses to previous parliamentary questions, the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department became aware in September 2018 of customers experiencing difficulties booking registration appointments. Some of these difficulties had arisen because third party agents had been able to secure multiple appointments through the use of automatic software.

A set of software fixes was introduced in mid-September 2018 to prevent this abuse of the system. As far as can be determined, this software update has been successful in preventing the block booking of appointments by third party agents. The system is being regularly monitored in this regard. INIS is aware that some third party agents continue to book individual appointments with information supplied to them by customers. INIS strongly advises our customers not to provide sensitive personal data to these unregulated agents.

I am also advised that INIS is currently developing a replacement online appointments system which will be operational later this year, and which is being designed to prevent the block-booking of appointments. This new system will also assist in streamlining and improving the current online booking process. As part of the INIS Service Improvement Plan 2018-2020, a number of other options are also being considered with a view to improving customer service and efficiency as well as meeting the growing demand for registration in Ireland.

Proposed Legislation

99. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if legislative changes are proposed in respect of inheritance legislation with particular reference to minimising the opportunities for misrepresentation to the detriment of family members; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5903/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Part VII of the Succession Act 1965 sets out the legal requirements for the making of a valid will. These are as follows:

- it must be in writing;
- the testator must be over 18 years of age (the testator may be under 18 if he or she is or has been married);
- the testator must be of sound mind;
- the testator must sign or mark the will in the presence of two witnesses;
- the two witnesses must sign the will in the testator's presence;
- the witnesses cannot be beneficiaries of the will;
- the witnesses must see the testator sign the will;

- the signature of the testator must be at the end of the will.

These statutory provisions, as interpreted by the courts in relevant case law, provide robust safeguards in relation to the validity of wills.

I should add that it is, of course, possible for a person to challenge a will on the grounds of either the diminished capacity of a testator to make a valid will, or the testator's ability freely to make decisions in disposing of their property by will.

When determining whether or not a testator had the capacity to make a will, courts will generally consider whether he or she understood the nature of the act of making a will and its effect, and whether the testator understood the extent of the property of which he or she was disposing.

Where undue influence is alleged, succession law places the onus of proving such undue influence on the person alleging it. In order to succeed, the court must be satisfied that:

- (a) the person alleged to exert the influence had the power or opportunity to do so;
- (b) undue influence was in fact exerted; and
- (c) the will was the product of influence.

While I have no current plans to amend legislation in this area, the operation of the law in this area is kept under review in my Department.

Garda Resources

100. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the level of Garda resources in County Kildare; his plans for further recruitment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5905/19]

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 front-line 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 Kildare.

The Garda strength of the Kildare Division from 2009 to 31 December 2018 as provided by the Garda Commissioner is available on my Department's website through the following link.

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

http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures

Health and Safety Regulations

101. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress to date in rectifying deficiencies in the ESB safety procedures identified by the Health and Safety Authority; the timeline for the completion of corrective action; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5820/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have been informed by the Health and Safety Authority that the Authority has acknowledged the concerns raised by a company in relation to practices at the ESB. The Authority has advised me that it has engaged extensively with both Parties on the matter and is satisfied with progress to date. It will continue to engage with the Parties involved to ensure that all matters are adequately addressed.

I would point out, however, that Authority has an independent Statutory role in relation to the investigation of complaints. I have no role in relation to such investigations nor in the rectification of matters arising from complaints to the Health and Safety Authority.

Industrial Development

102. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when a company (details supplied) will be open for business in Newcastlewest, County Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5844/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ortec Inc. announced its intention to establish a European headquarters, manufacturing and operations centre in Newcastle West in 2016. The company – a biomaterial and polymer technology firm which serves the life sciences industry – has indicated that this project will help create up to 110 skilled engineering and science jobs in the region over the next several years.

IDA Ireland continues to work closely with the firm, both locally in Ireland and in the US, in support of this investment. I understand that the company remains fully committed to the project, with progress expected early this year.

Work Permits Eligibility

103. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if barbers can be removed from the list of ineligible categories under the work permit scheme in

view of the fact that there is a significant shortage of barbers nationwide; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5850/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Where specific skills prove difficult to source within the State and wider EEA, an employment permit may be sought by an employer to hire a non-EEA national subject to the Employment Permits Acts and Regulations. The employment permits system is managed in part through the operation of the Highly Skilled Eligible Occupations List (HSEOL) and Ineligible Categories of Employment List (ICEL) for the purposes of granting an employment permit

Changes to access to the Irish labour market for specific occupations via the employment permits system are made on the basis of research undertaken by the Expert Group of Future Skills Needs, the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (Solas) and, coordinated by the National Skills Council, the annual National Skills Bulletin and the annual Vacancy Overview Report in tandem with a public consultation process.

A review of the lists of occupations for employment permits is currently being finalised with a further review to take place in the second half of the year. Barbers are currently included on the Ineligible Categories of Employment List (ICEL). In order to remove a skill from this list, there would need to be a clear demonstration that recruitment difficulties are solely due to shortages across the EEA and not to other factors such as salary and/or employment conditions. Organisations in the sector would need to provide the necessary data to substantiate their claims. A detailed evidence-based case for removal of barbers from the ineligible list, based on this detailed data would then need to be put forward, to my Department for review and consideration by a standing Interdepartmental Group.

Ticket Touting

104. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of proposed legislation to tackle ticket touting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5904/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): On 24 July 2018, I secured Government approval for its support for the Private Members' Bill, Prohibition of Above-cost Ticket Touting Bill 2017, introduced by Deputies Noel Rock and Stephen Donnelly and for the taking of the Second and subsequent Stages of the Bill in Government time.

The Government also approved the drafting of certain amendments to the Bill and noted my intention to propose changes to it at Committee or Report Stage. In December 2018, officials of my Department submitted a number of amendments to the Bill to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel and are currently engaging with Parliamentary Counsel on those amendments.

On 31 January 2019, the Bill had its second reading in Dáil Éireann in Government time. The debate on the Bill was adjourned and a date has yet to be scheduled for its resumption. I am awaiting the advice of the Office of the Attorney General as to whether there is a requirement to submit the Bill and any proposed amendments to the European Commission under Directive (EU) 2015/1535 on the procedure for the provision of information relating to technical regulations and the rules for information society services.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

105. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the assistance available to a person (details supplied) to provide support to maintain their mobility and independence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5778/19]

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.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

106. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will address matters (details supplied) regarding services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5785/19]

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 Appointments Status

107. **Deputy John Brassil** 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. [5787/19]

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.

Medicinal Products

108. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date towards the introduction of a national biosimilars strategy; if it will be drafted and implemented; the timeframe for each step; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5796/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department and the HSE are engaging in a number of initiatives which will endeavour to lead to better access to medicines for patients, value for the taxpayer and the cost-effective provision of medicines in Ireland.

A public consultation on a National Biosimilar Medicines Policy was undertaken by my Department in 2017. The responses to that consultation and other possible policy levers are being considered by my Department with a view to developing a National Biosimilar Medicines Policy which will require the involvement of stakeholders from across the health service. I expect that my Department will make progress in this regard in 2019. At an operational level, the HSE's Acute Hospitals Drugs Management Programme has a biosimilar strategy in place since 2017 which is making considerable progress using a collaborative approach with hospital pharmacists and clinical teams to bring about changes in prescribing practice. In that respect, hospitals are working towards a targeted minimum prescribing rate for biosimilars of 50%.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

109. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a motorised buggy; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [5810/19]

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.

Wards of Court

110. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients in Tullamore hospital in each of the years 2010 to 2018 that have been made wards of court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5823/19]

111. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in counties Laois and Offaly for which the HSE has applied for wardship in each of the years 2010 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5824/19]

112. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in County Offaly who are wards of court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5825/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 110 to 112, inclusive, together.

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

Wards of Court

113. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the number of wards of court in nursing homes within the catchment area of Tullamore hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5826/19]

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.

General Practitioner Services Provision

114. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners providing a medical service to Birr community unit; if the unit has a consultant geriatrician available to it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5827/19]

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 Appointments Status

115. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of an orthodontic appointment for a person (details supplied). [5842/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been re-

ferred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Drug Rehabilitation Clinics

116. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if an organisation (details supplied) receives funding for rehabilitation services from the HSE. [5843/19]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Payments

117. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health when a fair deal scheme payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5845/19]

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 Appointments Status

118. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); if they will be placed on a cancellation list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5851/19]

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.

Disabilities Assessments

119. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) in County Cork will have their assessment of need carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5855/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Govern-

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

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

HSE Agency Staff Data

120. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of agency nurses recruited to fill vacancies at Portlaoise hospital in 2018. [5860/19]

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

HSE Agency Staff Data

121. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of agency nurses recruited to fill vacancies at the Midlands Regional Hospital, Tullamore in 2018. [5861/19]

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

HSE Agency Staff Expenditure

122. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent on agency nurses at Portlaoise hospital in 2018. [5862/19]

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

HSE Agency Staff Expenditure

123. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent on agency nurses at the Midlands Regional Hospital, Tullamore in 2018. [5863/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

124. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of outpatients awaiting orthopaedic treatment at the Midlands Regional Hospital, Tullamore. [5864/19]

125. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of outpatients awaiting

orthopaedic treatment at Portlaoise hospital. [5865/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 124 and 125 together.

I am conscious that waiting times are often unacceptably long and of the burden that this places on patients and their families. In this regard, I am committed to improving waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures.

I hope to publish the joint Department of Health, Health Service Executive (HSE) and National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) Scheduled Care Access Plan 2019 shortly. This will set out commitments aimed at improving access for patients waiting for hospital operations or procedures, as well as patients waiting for a first Outpatient appointment.

A key element of this Plan is the stabilisation of the Outpatient Waiting List which remains a significant challenge. The HSE, in line with the National Service Plan 2019 will provide 3.3 million outpatient appointments, more than 1 million of which will be first outpatient appointments.

In 2019, the HSE will focus in particular on specialties with a high volume of referrals and large proportions of long-waiting patients. In addition, the NTPF, with an increased allocation of €75 million in 2019, will fund an additional 40,000 first outpatient appointments through weekend and out of hour's clinics and 'see and treat' clinics.

The NTPF will deliver this additional activity in the health service by working with hospital groups and individual hospitals as well as private health providers to maximise the number of patients treated in both a public and private capacity. I would strongly encourage all hospitals, including Midlands Regional Hospital Portlaoise and Midlands Regional Hospital, Tullamore, to collaborate with the NTPF to identify waiting list initiatives.

The latest Published NTPF Waiting list figures are available at: <https://www.ntpf.ie/home/nwld.htm>

The data requested by the Deputy is set out below:

Midlands Regional Hospital Tullamore – Orthopaedic Outpatient Waiting List

0-3 mths	3-6 mths	6-9 mths	9-12 mths	12-15 mths	15-18 mths	18-21 mths	21-24 mths	24-36 mths	Total
910	697	494	297	172	111	110	77	156	3024

There is only 1 patient on the Orthopaedic Outpatient Waiting List at Midlands Regional Hospital Portlaoise.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

126. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the shortage of nurses at hospitals in Tullamore and Portlaoise. [5866/19]

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

Hospital Services

127. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the reason new beds announced in the winter plan have not been opened at the Midlands Regional Hospital, Tullamore. [5867/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As Minister for Health, I recognise that hospitals are increasingly operating at or above capacity, with year-round demand pressures that are further challenged over the winter months. It is against this background that the Health Service Capacity Review 2018 recommended an increase in acute hospitals beds of over 2,600 by 2031 to support the projected increase in demand for services in the years ahead.

Increasing capacity is therefore a priority for the Government. Over the past 12 months, an additional 240 beds have been opened.

The HSE's National Service Plan for 2019 provides for a comprehensive capacity programme for 2019. The main elements of the programme are:

- 78 additional beds are scheduled to come on stream in 2019, including the 40-bed modular build in South Tipperary General Hospital and the 30-bed ward in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda, 4 HDU beds in the Mater Hospital and 4 HDU beds in Cork University Hospital;

- 75 acute beds and 70 community beds are scheduled to come on stream in early 2019, as part of the Winter Plan 2018/19;

- Preparation of 202 beds, of which 16 are critical care, during 2019, with a view to bringing this extra capacity into operation in the first quarter of 2020.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Winter Plan came into effect on 1 December 2018 and will continue until 31 March 2019.

Of the 75 acute beds to be opened as part of the Winter Plan 2018/19, the HSE have confirmed that 40 beds have been opened to date and the remainder, including the 6 beds in Tullamore Regional Hospital are due to come on stream by the end of quarter 1 2019 as initially planned.

Home Care Packages Data

128. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in County Laois on waiting lists for home help hours and home care packages. [5868/19]

129. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in County Offaly on waiting lists for home help hours and home care packages. [5869/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 128 and 129 together.

As these are 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

130. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health if an ESG will be carried out on a minor following a referral from CAMHS. [5871/19]

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 Staff Data

131. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses on extended leave in the HSE by month in 2018; if each post empty due to leave is covered; and if not, the percentage of posts that were fully covered in each month in 2018. [5873/19]

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

HSE Staff Data

132. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of psychologists on extended leave in the HSE by month in 2018; if each post empty due to leave is covered; and if not, the percentage of posts that were fully covered in each month in 2018. [5874/19]

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.

Occupational Therapy Staff

133. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of occupational therapists on extended leave in the HSE by month in 2018; if each post empty due to leave is covered; and if not, the percentage of posts that were fully covered in each month in 2018. [5875/19]

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

HSE Staff Data

134. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of physical therapists on extended leave in the HSE by month in 2018; if each post empty due to leave is covered; and if not, the percentage of posts that were fully covered in each month in 2018. [5876/19]

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

Vaccination Programme

135. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied with the differing public health standards here in contrast to Northern Ireland (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5890/19]

136. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the reason his Department is unwilling to adopt a new procurement approach to ensure that persons are optimally protected

from the most potent influenza viruses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5891/19]

137. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the reason his Department will not procure a quadrivalent vaccination for the forthcoming winter influenza season (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5892/19]

138. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his views on the World Health Organization published recommended composition of influenza virus vaccines for use in the 2019 to 2020 northern hemisphere influenza season (details supplied); if he will direct the HSE to follow this guidance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5893/19]

139. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his views on the rise in hospitalisations and deaths from the 2018 to 2019 influenza season; his plans to make a provision to prevent the same occurrence during the 2019 to 2020 season; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5894/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 135 to 139, inclusive, together.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) organises consultations twice annually with an advisory group of experts to analyse influenza virus surveillance data generated by the WHO Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System, and issues recommendations on the composition of the influenza vaccines for the following influenza season. Influenza vaccine is most effective when circulating viruses are well-matched with viruses contained in vaccines due to their constant evolving nature. These recommendations are used by national vaccine regulatory agencies and pharmaceutical companies to develop, produce and license influenza vaccines.

The influenza vaccine purchased by HSE is based on WHO advice on the composition of influenza virus vaccines for use in the northern hemisphere influenza season. The WHO issued its advice on 22 February 2018, recommending that quadrivalent vaccines for use in the 2018/19 northern hemisphere influenza season contain the following:

- an A/Michigan/45/2015 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Singapore/INFIMH-16-0019/2016 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Colorado/06/2017-like virus (B/Victoria/2/87 lineage); and
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus (B/Yamagata/16/88 lineage).

It also recommended that the influenza B virus component of trivalent vaccines for use in the 2018/19 northern hemisphere influenza season be a B/Colorado/06/2017-like virus of the B/Victoria/2/87-lineage. The trivalent vaccine used in Ireland is the most widely used influenza vaccine in Europe and is providing good protection against the influenza A strain viruses that are circulating this season as the majority of hospitalisations are associated with influenza A.

The WHO will shortly be holding a consultation and information meeting in Beijing, China on the composition of influenza virus vaccines for use in the 2019/20 northern hemisphere influenza season between the 18 to 20 February. After this meeting the WHO will announce its recommendation for the composition of influenza virus vaccines for use in the 2019/20 northern hemisphere influenza season for both quadrivalent and trivalent vaccines. The Flu vaccine purchased by HSE will be based on this advice.

The HSE National Immunisation Office and HSE Procurement are responsible for the purchase of influenza vaccine. To ensure adequate vaccine supply, this tender process must be

completed 9 months in advance of the first delivery into Ireland by the end of August as it takes about 6 months to manufacture sufficient vaccine quantity for each season. It is intended that a quadrivalent vaccine will be used for 2019/20 and a procurement process through the HSE is currently underway. The composition of the vaccine will be based on the advices of the WHO for the 2019/20 northern hemisphere influenza season which is due to be announced in a few weeks' time.

The seasonal influenza vaccine is recommended for the following at risk groups:

- persons who are 65 years of age and over;
- pregnant women;
- persons who have a long-term health condition;
- persons who work in healthcare;
- carers;
- persons living in a nursing home or other long-term care facility; and
- persons who are in regular contact with pigs, poultry or water fowl.

As of 27 January 2019 (week 4) there were 1,066 confirmed influenza related hospitalised cases compared to 1,825 for the same time period last year. The number of confirmed deaths for week 4, 2019 is 25 compared to 112 for the same time period last year.

The 2017/18 influenza season was a severe season with a high impact placed on the Irish health system. During the 2017/18 influenza season, 255 influenza related cases were reported as having died, the highest number of influenza deaths recorded in any season. The total number of confirmed influenza cases hospitalised during the 2017/18 influenza season was 4,713 which exceeded all previous seasons on record since surveillance began in 2000.

Vaccination still remains the most effective means of preventing infection caused by seasonal influenza viruses and can reduce severe disease that can lead to hospitalisation and even death.

The HSE reviews and updates its influenza plans annually, including its communication strategy, taking into account the lessons learned from previous years, with a view to targeting key groups in order to create the greatest impact in terms of people receiving the influenza vaccine.

Hospitals Capital Programme

140. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if there will be a delay in the provision of capital funding to Cavan General Hospital for the purpose of upgrading wards in view of the significant cost overruns in the National Children's Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5910/19]

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 and beyond 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. Once the HSE has finalised its Capital Plan for 2019, it will then be submitted to me for consideration.

Home Care Packages Provision

141. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to put funding in place for home care packages in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5911/19]

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 Appointments Status

142. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5933/19]

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 Appointments Status

143. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if an operation will be expedited for a person (details supplied) in UHK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5937/19]

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.

Medical Card Applications

144. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the reason the primary care reimbursement service has changed the way in which it receives emailed medical card applications by reducing the file size, thereby ensuring it does not receive email medical card applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5948/19]

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

HSE Waiting Lists

145. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in each LHO area awaiting a podiatry appointment in primary care at the end of 2018 or the latest date available; and the number waiting 0 to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [5963/19]

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.

HSE Waiting Lists

146. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in each LHO area awaiting an ophthalmology appointment in primary care at the end of 2018 or the latest date available; and the number waiting 0 to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks. [5964/19]

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.

HSE Waiting Lists

147. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in each LHO area awaiting an audiology appointment in primary care at the end of 2018 or the latest date available; and the number waiting 0 to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [5965/19]

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.

HSE Waiting Lists

148. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in each LHO area awaiting a dietetics appointment in primary care at the end of 2018 or the latest date available; and the number waiting 0 to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [5966/19]

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.

HSE Waiting Lists

149. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in each LHO area awaiting an oral health appointment in primary care at the end of 2018 or the latest date available; and the number waiting 0 to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [5967/19]

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.

HSE Waiting Lists

150. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in each LHO area awaiting a psychology appointment in primary care at the end of 2018 or the latest date available; and the number waiting 0 to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [5968/19]

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.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

151. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2018 area of natural constraints payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5770/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): On 17th October 2018 my Department received a letter from the solicitor acting for the deceased in this case. This letter confirmed the date of death and quoted the herd number of the deceased. On foot of this correspondence my Department issued a letter to the solicitor on 26th October 2018. This letter set out details of the schemes in which the deceased had participated and advised on the procedure for transferring these schemes, the herd number and the payment entitlements held by the deceased. The letter also advised details of outstanding payments and the testamentary documents required in order to facilitate payment of these monies.

My Department has received no further correspondence in relation to this case since issuing the letter on 26th October. No testamentary documents have been submitted to my Department in order to facilitate the transfer of schemes and payment of outstanding monies. My Department has now re-issued the letter of 26th October to the solicitor representing the deceased. The Inheritance Enquiry Unit of my Department is available to provide any assistance that may

be required.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

152. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if forestry parcels on a basic payment application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reinstated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5772/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2018 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) was received from the person named on 2nd May 2018.

As indicated, the named forestry parcels were not included in the application. They were later added by way of a BPS amendment form. A review of this case has been completed and the parcels have been added to the application.

A supplementary payment will issue in the near future to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Coillte Teoranta Governance

153. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the bodies, public or private, responsible for providing certification to Coillte to permit it to trade in timber; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5779/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The management of the forest estate and operational matters such as certification are a matter for, and the responsibility of, Coillte as a commercial State Body.

I have accordingly referred the Deputy's question to Coillte and have requested that a response issue to directly to you.

Fishing Industry

154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which fish processing facilities remain adequate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5915/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are currently 201 approved land-based seafood processors in Ireland which are, in the main, located in and around our fishing ports. The scale of operation of the processors varies from micro enterprises to medium sized enterprises and large enterprises.

A range of supports are available to seafood processors under my Department's €238 million European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme (EMFF) 2014-20. An enterprise may, subject to the size of its operation, apply for capital investment supports to its local Fisheries Local Action Group or to Bord Iascaigh Mhara as appropriate. In addition, further EMFF supports are available to processing enterprises under the EMFF Seafood Innovation and Business Planning Scheme for innovation, new product development and business planning, while supports for market research and route to market structures are available under the EMFF

Seafood Scaling and New Market Development Scheme, jointly implemented by Bord Iascaigh Mhara and Bord Bia.

Food Industry Development

155. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he continues to encourage new markets for food and food products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5916/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Irish meat, dairy and food products have a highly rated and hard earned reputation in terms of quality, safety, animal welfare and sustainability all over the world. My officials continue to work towards opening and enhancing access to as many markets as possible. This is a key part of our response to the challenges and uncertainty posed by Brexit, and is in line with the market development theme of the Food Wise 2025 strategy and the 7 Point Action Plan on market access that I launched in April 2017.

The long-term fundamentals of the global dairy and meat markets are strong, with growing global demand projected from fast developing countries with increasing middle classes and more westernised diets. Whilst significant challenges have continued throughout recent years, in particular price volatility in the dairy sector, there is confidence that the Irish food industry is well placed to gain from the opportunity presented by expanding global demand, underpinned by the success of our efforts and those of the Irish food industry.

The opening of the Chinese beef market to six Irish beef establishments in 2018 was a notable success, following several years of effort. My officials are in the process of trying to get additional establishments approved by the Chinese authorities. In 2018 markets for Irish beef, sheepmeat and poultry were also opened in Kuwait and Qatar.

Enhanced market access for Irish dairy was secured with a number of destination markets in 2017 and 2018. Agreement with third country competent authorities was reached resulting in renegotiated bilateral certification requirements for various dairy product categories, including with Japan and Mexico.

The role of my Department is to open up markets for the industry and it is then up to the industry with the support of my Department and Bord Bia, to avail of these opportunities. However, the actual levels of exports will depend on a range of factors, including as global supply and demand dynamics, currency fluctuations and individual customer requirements.

Agrifood Sector

156. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which efforts are being made to ensure the delivery of quality agrifoods throughout the globe in the event of having to bypass the UK in the aftermath of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5917/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The agrifood sector is of critical importance to the Irish economy, and its regional spread means it underpins the socio-economic development of rural areas in particular. As such, Brexit has the potential to have a very significant impact on farmers and on the agrifood sector throughout Ireland, and the extent of this potential impact has been highlighted by studies carried out by agencies such

as Teagasc, the Department of Finance, the Economic and Social Research Institute, Inter Trade Ireland and Copenhagen Economics.

In the event that there is disruption to Irish exports moving through the UK, I am informed that the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has engaged with the shipping industry and has been advised that there is sufficient capacity within the industry should exporters using the UK wish to divert.

A considerable amount of work has also been put into intensifying our market diversification efforts in order to reduce our exposure to the UK market.

For example, the additional funding that I have provided to Bord Bia has been used, inter alia, to provide targeted advice to individual companies as well as to conduct a market prioritisation exercise which is now informing our approach to market diversification activities, including the choice of destinations for Trade Missions. Trade Missions play an important role in this regard, and I have been very active on this front in recent years as we strive to gain, and then develop, a presence in as many global markets as possible. I have led very successful missions to the Gulf Region, the US, Mexico, Japan and Korea in 2017, and to the US, Canada, China, Indonesia and Malaysia 2018. These missions included participants from across the agrifood sector and featured extensive trade contacts as well as high-level political discussions. These and the other missions that my Department has under consideration for 2019 will serve to enhance and improve our existing levels of market access in these destinations. Indeed, since the UK referendum I have increased Bord Bia's funding by a total of €19.5 million, including a further €5 million allocated in Budget 2019.

Product diversification has also been supported through additional funding of €8.8 million to Teagasc to develop its National Food Innovation Hub, and funding to support investment in the prepared consumer foods sector.

My Department is also taking other direct, practical actions to support the sector's market diversification efforts, for example through a seven-point Market Access Plan, which includes the allocation of more departmental resources to market access work, an online portal through which essential information across a wide range of markets can be centrally accessed. Such actions will continue to ensure delivery of high quality Irish agrifoods throughout the globe.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he can encourage mitigation action in respect of greenhouse gases with the minimum impact on agriculture production; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5918/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There is a continued focus in my Department on mitigation measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with minimum impact on agriculture production. The long-term policy vision for the agricultural sector is an approach to carbon neutrality which does not compromise the capacity for sustainable food production as referred to in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015.

In the agriculture sector we have focussed strongly on improving the efficiency of Irish farming which is key to reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. There is clear recognition in Food Wise 2025 that the continued growth of the sector must be on the basis of sustainable intensification. I firmly believe that we can contribute to GHG mitigation objectives while safe

guarding our food production by continuing to make improvements in areas such as:

- Animal breeding strategies
- Grassland management
- Nutrient management
- Animal health and welfare
- Feeding strategies that maximise the efficiency of our grass based production system.

My Department and its Agencies are actively involved with the farming sector and continue to invest heavily in a number of schemes and measures to help farmers reduce their carbon footprint while also enhancing output. Such schemes include the Green Low Carbon Agri Environment Scheme (GLAS) programme and which specifically include actions to support climate mitigation; the Beef Data Genomics Programme, which actively supports breeding improvements in our national Suckler Herd and the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes which provides Capital grants for technology and capital investment generating greater efficiency. As an example of my continued focus on encouraging mitigation action at farm level I have recently launched a Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot scheme that builds on the success of the Beef Data and Genomics Programme with a funding provision of €20m in 2019.

Innovation and technology will also play an increasing role in supporting the sector to deliver on the sustainability agenda; we are already seeing how technology is being used for calculating the carbon footprint of farms and in other areas such as grass measurement.

We are continuously looking ahead; increased environmental ambition will be a key element of CAP Post 2020. As we look towards defining the measures and targets under the new CAP regime the recently published Teagasc report “An Analysis of Abatement Potential of Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Irish Agriculture 2021-2030” is key to informing the type of abatement measures we need to focus on with a view to achieving the 2030 targets.

Agrifood Sector

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which the market for venison remains viable nationally and abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5919/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Deer farming in Ireland is an alternative enterprise which is dependent on the dynamics of supply and demand which affect all agricultural production systems. In 1996 there were approximately 500 deer farms with 20,000 deer in Ireland, but numbers have declined sharply since that time.

Today there are only a small number of farmers in Ireland actively supplying deer for meat production, which cater primarily to specialised niche markets. The sector is reliant upon producers and companies ensuring that a market exists for their product, an objective which Bord Bia assists in by identifying and developing potential market outlets.

There was some recent growth in the Irish market during 2016 for example with around 764 deer slaughtered for this market, but this declined to 271 deer for 2017, and only 185 for 2018.

Growth in the past was achieved as a result of improved distribution for game meats, especially in supermarkets. Game and exotic meats historically occupy a premium, niche segment

of the meat market. Whilst there are opportunities to compete with the larger premium segment of the red meat/poultry categories, it is important to note that demand is seasonal, with the greatest concentration of retail shelf space dedicated to game in the Winter/Christmas period.

My Department has approved one factory for the slaughter of deer in Ireland, and two game handling plants. There may also be outlets for processing of venison in Local Authority approved plants, but this would be a matter for the Local Authority concerned.

Dairy Sector

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the future of the dairy industry, notwithstanding Brexit, and in view of the need for diversification into new product areas in order to broaden market opportunities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5920/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2017, Ireland exported dairy products, including dairy powders to 147 countries totalling over €4.6 billion worth of produce, an increase of over 17% compared to 2016, representing high-quality value-added produce. CSO estimates of dairy exports in the January-November 2018 period (latest available) show that they increased by 2.8% in volume compared to 2017.

Irish dairy products have a highly rated and hard earned reputation in terms of quality, safety and sustainability, and this gives them a competitive edge in markets over the world.

The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish dairy exports is of course an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the dairy sector, as evidenced by the objectives set out for the industry in Food Wise 2025. Food Wise 2025 outlines the potential for growth in dairy exports to new and emerging markets, particularly in Asia, Africa, the Americas and the Gulf region.

The long-term fundamentals of the global dairy market are strong, with growing global demand projected from fast developing countries with increasing middle classes and more westernised diets. Whilst significant challenges have continued throughout recent years, in particular price volatility, there is confidence that the Irish and EU dairy sector is well placed to gain from the opportunity presented by expanding global demand.

Both business and retail customers for Irish dairy products will continue to demand that the Irish dairy industry operates to the highest standards of food safety, environmental sustainability and animal welfare. In addition to the high standards by which Irish dairy farmers operate, we need to credibly verify these standards to the satisfaction of our international customers. Programmes such as Origin Green and the Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme, the Dairy Sustainability Ireland Initiative as well as environmental schemes under the Rural Development Programme demonstrate our collective commitment to environmental sustainability.

My Department and I, in conjunction with other stakeholders, including the Irish dairy companies and agencies such as Bord Bia, will continue to play a key role in building the market opportunities for Irish dairy, for example through trade missions, inward and outward technical visits and inspections, and other trade facilitation and promotional activities.

Tillage Sector

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

the extent to which profitability in the cereal industry remains positive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5921/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Tillage is an integral component of our Agrifood industry, making a significant contribution to overall agricultural output. Crops including horticulture, contribute approximately €700m annually to agricultural output at farm gate prices.

The cereals sector is a major contributor of high quality grain to the feed industry, provides grain for the food and drinks industry and a key source of seed production. Cereals are therefore a significant stakeholder in our agrifood industry from a supply/food safety and sustainability viewpoint and an efficient and viable tillage sector in Ireland is vital.

I acknowledge that cereal production has experienced difficult challenges in recent times. In relation to cereal markets, Ireland accounts for approximately 1% of EU production, however grain prices are affected by global market price shifts and particularly events such as last summer's drought. It is not possible to predict the price of grain for the 2019 harvest at this early stage.

My Department continues to provide significant supports to the sector. In 2017, I introduced the €150m Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme including the tillage and horticulture sectors. As a further support, the Tillage Capital Investment Scheme under TAMS II covers specific areas of investment with over €7.3 million distributed to tillage farmers to date. Early last year I announced that the EU Protein Aid Scheme was extended for 2018, resulting in over €2.8m being paid to growers to date.

In August 2018 I announced a €2.75 million fodder production incentive measure for tillage farmers to encourage growers to participate in the fodder market. I am pleased to say that there was very positive engagement from growers with over 19,600ha of catch crops grown.

My Department also provides a high quality official crop seed certification scheme to the industry, in addition to an extensive national crop variety evaluation programme, which provides invaluable information to growers on the latest varieties available.

The agrifood sector is exploring the development of novel markets for cereal products seeking to improve competitiveness and sustainability with Irish malting barley demand increasing with growth in demand for Irish whiskey.

I am committed to this important sector which plays a key role in the development of the wider agrifood industry.

Artisan Food Sector

161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which opportunities continue to exist for the artisan food sector; the degree to which the industry has grown over the past five years; his expectations for the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5922/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Artisan and speciality food businesses can have a significant impact on local rural economies and their importance is acknowledged in the Food Wise 2025 strategy. Growth prospects for the sector are positive overall, driven by increased consumer interest in the provenance of food, environmental concerns, health and a desire to support the local economy.

The Small Business food sector is segmented into Artisan, Established, Startups and In-Growth types. Approximately 500 food companies with a turnover of €100,000 to €3.5m are registered with Bord Bia for supports and services. These owner managed businesses produce high-end products with a strong focus on the domestic market.

A range of supports for this particular sector are available from my Department and relevant State agencies, including Bord Bia, Teagasc and Local Enterprise Offices, including marketing assistance, specialised training, capacity building and promotion supports.

Earlier this year, my colleague Minister Ring and I launched the 'LEADER Food Initiative' for the artisan/small food and beverage businesses, which provides for funding of up to €15 million up to 2020, from my Department, through the Rural Development Programme (RDP). This funding is being delivered using the LEADER methodology. It supports new and existing artisan, micro and small food producers to address emerging challenges through investment in areas such as capital equipment, market development, competitiveness and innovation.

Fishing Industry

162. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which fishing remains a viable option for fishing dependent families nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5923/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) provides the framework for the long term conservation and sustainability of fish stocks around our shores and is designed to ensure the long term sustainability of fishing in Ireland and throughout EU waters. The CFP utilises the best scientific advice as a key determinant in setting annual fishing quotas. Key features of this policy include setting Total Allowable Catches (TACs) and quotas to deliver maximum sustainable yield (MSY) by 2015, where possible, and in all cases by 2020 as well as a discards ban (Landing Obligation) to be phased in over the period 2015 to 2019.

Setting fishing levels on the basis of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) is an essential aspect of the policy. Fishing opportunities are agreed on an annual basis at the EU Fisheries Council of Ministers on the basis of a proposal produced by the European Commission that is informed by the best available scientific advice. The Common Fisheries Policy specifically calls for the progressive restoration and maintenance of populations of fish stocks above biomass levels capable of producing MSY. To achieve this, the FMSY exploitation rate shall be achieved for all stocks by 2020 at the latest. This should ultimately lead to healthy fish stocks, higher quotas for both Irish and EU fishermen and lead to more sustainable fishing patterns.

Scientific information on the state of the fisheries exploited by the Irish fleet is compiled by the Marine Institute and is published in the Stock Book each year. The most recent Stock Book, 2018, contains 74 stocks that are subject to the scientific advice of the Marine Institute. From the 74 stocks, 32 are assessed as being sustainably fished in 2018. This number has grown every year since 2013. This in turn leads to the number of stocks being over fished declining from 22 in 2014 to 16 in 2018.

The 2018 December Fisheries Council, at which quotas for 2019 were agreed showed a rebuilding of many stocks. I was pleased that the scientific advice supported large increases in a number of stocks of importance such as Haddock (+20%), Hake (+28%) and Megrims (+47%) in the Celtic Sea. The overall increase of 30% in whitefish quota will provide improved fishing opportunities for whitefish fishermen all around our coasts. This shows that the many years of

intensive, industry led conservation measures are paying off.

At the same time that the sustainability of our fish stocks is improving year on year, we are facing considerable uncertainty for our fishing industry arising from Brexit. Like all sectors a 'no deal outcome would be the worst possible result for fisheries but I remain optimistic, while preparing for all eventualities, that such an outcome can be averted.

Provided we can successfully navigate the potential difficulties arising from Brexit, in co-operation with our EU27 partners, I am confident that we will be able to ensure the continued economic viability of our fishing fleet and fish processors, thereby supporting the families and communities that depend on a vibrant fishing industry.

Agricultural Production Costs

163. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which the costs of farm inputs such as fertilisers are monitored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5924/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department continually monitors the cost of farm production inputs using data available from national and international sources. Official statistics on farm inputs are compiled by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and these are available in various publications and on their website.

My Department's Annual Review and Outlook collates a range of available farm data, including the costs of farm inputs, and the most recent publication showed a decrease in the price of fertiliser in 2017 compared with 2016 figures. Farm output, input costs and margins also receive detailed examination each year by Teagasc in their Annual Review and Outlook.

In December 2018 the CSO released its Advance Estimate of Output, Input and Income in Agriculture for 2018. Total intermediate consumption in agriculture was up by 11.2% in 2018 versus 2017, increasing from €5,252.7m to €5,842.4m. A price increase combined with a volume increase of 7.3% resulted in an overall increase in expenditure on fertilisers in 2018, by €59.7m to €572.7m.

In addition, the CSO issue monthly Agricultural Price Indices outlining the changes in output and input indices for a range of agricultural products. Their January release covering the period up to November 2018 indicated that the index of agricultural inputs increased by 6.7% over the previous year, with fertilisers increasing by 9.9% on November 2017 prices.

Food Safety Standards Regulation

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the reliability of labelling and traceability structures throughout the food industry, with particular reference to imports from third countries; the average number of checks or tests carried out in 2018; the way in which this compares with previous years; the number of cases detected which indicate a failure to meet the required standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5925/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Food products placed on the marketplace are covered by a range of legislation designed to ensure that products supplied to consumers are of the highest safety standards. My Department plays a part in the enforcement of this legislation along with other Government departments and State

Agencies such as the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and the Health Service Executive. The FSAI is the body responsible for enforcement of regulations governing traceability, labelling and provision of food information to customers. Regulation (EC) No. 178 of 2002 sets out the general principles and requirements of EU food law.

The import of products of animal origin from third countries is governed by a comprehensive and robust legislative framework laid down at EU level, controlled by Member States in the first instance, and audited by the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Food Safety, to ensure compliance with all of the relevant food safety standards. The legislation imposes health and supervisory requirements designed to ensure that imported products meet standards equivalent to those required for production and trade between Member States. Border Inspection Posts are operated by my Department. Import control procedures on products of animal and fish origin are highly prescriptive and strictly audited by the Directorate to ensure compliance. Inspection reports are published on the Directorate General for Health and Food Safety's website.

My Department also has a permanent veterinary presence at all of its approved slaughter plants. Controls at plants only engaged in secondary processing are carried out at a frequency based on an annual risk assessment. An annual audit of imported products is carried out in each Department-approved plant, including checks on physical identity, labelling and documentary checks.

Extra veterinary checks are carried out on selected consignments of foods imported into DAFM-approved establishments from other EU Member States or from Third Countries outside the EU. These checks include, physical checks of product condition, checks of accompanying documentation and checks of labelling and health markings.

I am satisfied that the controls and checks in place and enforced by my Department which included 186 annual meat labelling audits and 149 traceability audits in 2018, ensure that Irish consumers are protected and correctly informed when they purchase and consume food products.

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) has service contracts in place with the official agencies performing official controls, to verify compliance with the extensive requirements of food labelling legislation, in these establishments. The FSAI reports in detail on the number of inspections and checks carried out, and non-compliance findings.

Food Prices

165. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of the finalisation of the unfair trading practices directive at EU level; his plans to transpose the directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5926/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The European Parliament and the Council reached a final agreement, ad referendum, on the text of a Directive, which was presented to the Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA) on 14th January, in relation to Unfair Trading Practices in business-to-business relationships in the food supply chain.

Currently, Member States are being asked to review the text one final time, in order to provide linguistic comments only. The next meeting will take place in Brussels on 19th February 2019, after which, a final text will be produced and presented by the Presidency to the SCA for approval. It will then be presented to the European Parliament to be agreed in Plenary session.

Once approved by the European Parliament, the Directive must be transposed into national legislation by Member States within 24 months.

My colleague the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation and I have agreed to establish a joint Working Group to progress the transposition of the Directive, having regard to implications for the existing Grocery Goods Undertakings Regulations 2016, which fall under the remit of her Department.

Food Industry Development

166. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the objectives of the recently launched organic food strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5927/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Strategy for the development of the Organic Food Sector which was launched by my colleague Minister of State Andrew Doyle recognises the opportunities that exist for the Irish Organic Food Sector and provides clear direction for the development of the Sector up to 2025. It aligns the strategic growth plans of the Organic Sector with the broader Foodwise 2025 Strategy for Irish food and drink.

The overall strategic objective is to develop a consumer led viable Organic Food Sector in Ireland enhancing the sustainability credentials of Irish food which will produce a wide range of organic products to meet increasing domestic and export market opportunities. To this end, this Strategy sets measurable strategic objectives for each sub-sector and incorporates actions considered essential to further support the industry's development and achieve growth targets.

A public consultation process provided an opportunity for all interested parties to contribute to the development of the new strategic plan. The public consultation process combined with an Organic Processing Survey ensured that stakeholders had their views considered, before the finalisation of the Strategy.

Minister of State Doyle is currently in the process of establishing an Implementation Group to ensure we deliver on the actions within the new Strategy. It is anticipated that this group, which will comprise of organic sector stakeholders, will hold an initial meeting in the very near future to drive this Strategy and ensure that the Irish Organic Food Sector realises its full potential in the coming years.

Data Protection

167. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which a person (details supplied) obtained a private telephone number; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5928/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) is committed to the protection of all personal data under its control and is cognisant of the obligations placed on it, not only by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) but also the 2018 Data Protection Act and the Law Enforcement Directive. My Department has a dedicated Data Protection Unit in place since November 2015, which has been promoting Data Protection and GDPR awareness since its inception. This Unit actively informs all staff of their obligations under GDPR, utilising our

internal communications systems, circulating easy read guides, FAQs, updates via email, poster campaigns, targeted Data Protection seminars and training courses.

My Department is aware equally of its responsibilities arising from the Animal Health and Welfare legislation.

The person named was recently the subject of a regulatory herd test under the Animal Health and Welfare (Bovine Tuberculosis) Regulation SI 58/2015. The results of this test meant that it was necessary for my Department to withdraw the freedom to trade status from the herd of the person named. A Department official in seeking to contact the person named to inform him of this finding, identified that the number recorded on the Department's Corporate Customer System was no longer in use by the person named. Disease control is a paramount responsibility of Department veterinary officials and therefore the official concerned deemed it essential, in this instance, to obtain the most up to date contact details of the person named to ensure the prevention of any unnecessary spread of disease.

The official, mindful of data protection requirements, ensured that no personal data passed from my Department to the third party from whom the number was obtained. Advice sought from the Irish Data Protection Commission confirmed this was acceptable in the circumstances as set out above. The details were used only in this instance.

The Data Protection Officer of my department has written to the named person, outlining the steps taken by the Department official in this incident and informing the person named that it would be advisable for him to update his contact information with my Department.

Forestry Sector

168. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason carbon credits from tree plantations are being taken from persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5936/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol and related EU legislation, Ireland is obliged to report and account greenhouse gas changes in our forests. The State is operating in the same manner as other EU Member States in this regard.

Forest related projects in Ireland cannot be used to generate credits within the EU Emissions Trading Scheme, the regulatory carbon market in the European Union. Farmers that are interested in planting trees can receive a grant and annual premium under the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's Forestry Programme, one of the goals of which is to increase the long term storage of carbon in our forests and wood products. The benefits of planting for individual farmers are enjoyed through the generous grants and premium available, as well as from the value of the crop, which are tax free.

Departmental Staff Data

169. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there are climate change experts in his Department. [5682/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department currently has a total of 69 staff assigned to climate and related energy policy functions, across eight separate divisions. This staff complement has significant

experience in developing and implementing climate and energy policy at international, EU, national, regional and local levels. In addition to its own staff, the Department also has access to scientific and technical advice in agencies under its aegis to assist it in delivering the Government's climate policy objectives. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the competent authority in Ireland for the preparation and annual publication of official inventories and projections of greenhouse gas emissions, and for reporting this data to the European Union and to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Oireachtas receives a summary of the most recent inventory and projections prepared by the EPA each year in the Annual Transition Statement, which I am required to prepare and submit in accordance with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015.

The EPA also provides a range of expert scientific and technical advice on climate change to the Government. The EPA supports the Department in representing Ireland at relevant meetings of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The EPA also undertakes a number of climate-related research and awareness activities, including the provision of support for the delivery of activities under the National Dialogue on Climate Action. The EPA also produces, in accordance with its statutory mandate, a quadrennial State of the Environment Report which provides an integrated assessment of the overall quality of Ireland's environment, the pressures being placed on it and the societal responses to current and emerging environmental issues. The last such report was published in 2016, includes a specific focus on climate change, and is available from the EPA's website.

The Department is also supported in the delivery of its policy objectives for the decarbonisation of the energy sector by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). In addition to the delivery of a range of programmes and schemes on behalf of the Department, the functions of SEAI include the preparation of national energy statistics and projections. SEAI also undertakes national energy modelling functions, informed inter alia by data collected from the various schemes and programmes that it administers.

SEAI had a total of 91 staff as at the end of December 2018. EPA had a total of 410 staff at that time. While it is difficult to fully disaggregate the number of EPA staff working on climate issues, the EPA estimate this at 32.

The work of both EPA and SEAI inform, in turn, the wider work of the Technical Research and Modelling (TRAM) Group, which provides the overall framework for the provision of technical capacity to Government Departments for climate action policy development and implementation.

TRAM was established on foot of a Government Decision in 2015 and its membership comprises technical experts from relevant Government Departments and Agencies. In addition, representatives of externally contracted bodies providing modelling and analytical support may participate in TRAM meetings. To date, these services have been provided by ESRI, UCC, UCD and EnvEcon. TRAM is chaired at Assistant Secretary level in my Department and reports to the Climate Action High Level Steering Group, which is chaired at ministerial level.

TRAM performs a number of functions in support of climate, air and energy policy development processes for this Department and for a number of other Government Departments and Agencies:

- implementation of a rolling work programme of technical analysis and research required, inter alia, in order to further the process of identifying the most cost effective transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy in the context of climate, air and energy policy;
- provision of a clearing house for the development of climate, air and energy policy in other

related technical areas such as the EU ETS, air quality, and the application of fiscal instruments;

- acting as a focal point for technical information flow between relevant Government Departments and Agencies on issues of a technical and economic nature; and
- providing a resource for the engagement of the necessary external expertise to undertake the modelling, analysis and research required.

The climate-related work of the Department is also supported by the climate information platform, Climate Ireland, which comprises a website www.climateireland.ie and other resources to assist with climate adaptation planning in Ireland. Climate Ireland was originally developed under the EPA research programme on Climate Change and the EPA currently manages the operational platform with expert support from six staff members in the Centre for Marine and Renewable Energy (MaREI), based in UCC. The platform provides decision makers with a one stop repository of climate specific information, data and knowledge to support planning for the impacts and consequences of climate change and supports the Department through their work with the key sectors in preparing sectorial adaptation plans as required under the National Adaptation Framework. The Climate Ireland team also play a pivotal role in helping to build capacity and knowledge of climate related matters across all the sectors including Local Government and it is fully intended that Climate Ireland will continue to function as a long-term operational support for climate action in Ireland.

Litter Pollution

170. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to allocate additional funding to Limerick City and County Council to tackle litter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5818/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Littering is first and foremost a matter of individual responsibility and compliance with the law. The primary remit of my Department in relation to littering is to provide the legislative framework, which is then managed and enforced principally by the Local Authorities. The latest figures available from my Department’s National Litter Pollution Monitoring System, a system designed to monitor the extent, severity and composition of litter nationally, demonstrate that the litter situation is generally continuing to improve across the country. It is vital that communities, businesses and Local Authorities in towns all across Ireland, work together to manage waste properly and to combat litter.

In recognition of the challenges presented by littering, my Department encourages a multi-faceted approach, incorporating public awareness and education as well as effective enforcement. In this context, my Department supports a number of national anti-litter initiatives including the Anti-Litter Awareness Grant Scheme, the National Spring Clean, the Projected Uplands and Rural Environments (PURE) Project, the Green Schools Programme, the Irish Business Against Litter (IBAL) Anti-Litter League, as well as negotiated agreements with the banking and chewing gum industries.

The Department funds these initiatives through the Environment Fund, for which the 2019 allocations are currently under consideration. These initiatives empower those in our communities to tackle the challenges littering creates across our country.

Waste Management

171. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of the collection of the farm plastics collection levy; the amount collected; the reason only one organisation receives the full levy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5872/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the Waste Management (Farm Plastics) Regulations, 2001, all companies that place farm film products on the Irish market are obliged to either: 1. operate a deposit and refund scheme, collect, or arrange to collect, free of charge the farm plastics from their customers and register and report to their Local Authority; or,

2. participate in an approved farm plastics recycling scheme.

There are currently no producers of farm films and plastics registered with Local Authorities.

Irish Farm Film Producers Group (IFFPG) is approved by me to operate a compliance scheme for the recovery of farm plastics waste. IFFPG is a not for profit body, which is primarily funded by its producer membership.

IFFPG collected a total of 26,739 tonnes of farm plastics waste (silage wrap and sheeting wastes) in 2017 and their members paid a recycling levy of €110 per tonne for farm plastics that they placed on the market in Ireland.

EU Directives

172. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he or his predecessor supported the 90% separate collection target by 2025 for plastic beverage bottles contained in Article 9 of the single-use plastics directive at European Council meetings. [5879/19]

173. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amendments tabled at European Council meetings on the proposal for a directive on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment regarding Article 9 of the single-use plastics directive. [5880/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 172 and 173 together.

Ireland has fully supported the ambition of the Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment from the outset, including the 90% collection target contained in Article 9. Ireland tabled no amendments to Article 9 of the Proposal for a Directive.

Statutory Instruments

174. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the assessment carried out before signing SI No. 4 of 2019 European Union (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Peat Extraction) Regulations 2019, of the impact of the regulations on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from peatlands in line with the national peatlands strategy. [5883/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The government are committed to making Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. Transitioning to low carbon fuel sources is crucial to achieving that ambition. These new Peat Regulations will ensure that, for the first time, all commercial peat extraction in sites over 30 hectares will now be subject to licensing by the EPA, which will include a mandatory Environmental Impact Assessment.

Under the old rules, EPA licensing was only required for peat extraction on sites of larger than 50 hectares. Sites that were under 50 hectares were subject to a different regime i.e. planning permission through the local authority and an environmental impact assessment carried out where required, rather than a mandatory requirement as provided for under the new EPA licensing regime.

Because of the EPA's new role as the single licensing authority for all sites over 30 hectares, it is no longer necessary for local authorities to have a role through the planning system.

The EPA has built up significant expertise in this area and will be well placed to act as the single authority overseeing environmental impact assessment and licensing of these sites.

The publication of these regulations will meet the requirements of Action 19 of the National Peatlands Strategy published in 2016 which stated that: The existing legal framework relating to the regulation of peat extraction in terms of planning, environmental protection and habitats protection will be reviewed, and recommendations developed to bring about a clearer, proportionate and enforceable system of regulation that also ensures compliance with appropriate EU environmental legislation and to ensure best practice in peat extraction operations. As also stated in this Strategy, research on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from peatlands is on-going.

The publication of these Regulations do not alter Bord na Móna's plans to wind down the production of peat over the next decade in line with their recently launched "Brown to Green" strategy.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

175. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from peatlands he anticipates over the lifetime of the national mitigation plan, the national energy and climate plan and the all-of-government plan on climate disruption. [5884/19]

176. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the data available on the marginal abatement costs of reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from peatlands; and the volume of emission reductions possible at each cost level. [5885/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175 and 176 together.

The government are committed to making Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. I am currently developing an all of government plan, with actions across all areas such as heat, electricity, transport and agriculture according to strict timelines.

Transitioning to low carbon fuel sources is crucial to achieving our ambition.

The EPA reports projected emissions and removals from Land Use, Land-Use Change and

Forestry as required under the EU Monitoring Mechanism Regulation on the basis of forecasted activity data (land use statistics) - see here:

<http://cdr.eionet.europa.eu/ie/eu/mmr/>.

The forecasted land use statistics for wetlands take into account the National Peatlands Strategy.

The EPA does not publish land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) emissions projections in its annual projections report as these sources are not currently in the scope in Ireland's non-ETS targets for 2020 under the EU Effort Sharing Decision.

The EPA expects to update the scope of its national emissions projections reporting in future as LULUCF emissions come in scope for compliance with national non-ETS targets under the EU Effort Sharing Regulation for 2021-2030, with the wetlands category to be subject to mandatory reporting and accounting from 2026. In preparation for this, the EPA is currently scoping the development of a national land-use map so as to derive a more accurate picture of both the extent and management of wetlands and the implications of future mandatory reporting of emissions and removals from wetlands in the context of Ireland's EU obligations.

Future reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from wetlands and the volume of emission reductions will depend on the actions outlined in the all of government plan which is still being developed. As such, this information is not currently available but will be reported in the usual way by the EPA.

Better Energy Homes Scheme Administration

177. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps which can be taken to assist a business (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5949/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Better Energy Homes Scheme is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on behalf of my Department. As Minister I have no function in relation to registration of Contractors. SEAI administers and maintains a list of contractors who are registered to undertake works under the Better Energy Homes Scheme. Each registered contractor is required to undertake all works for which grant support is payable in accordance with the technical specifications of the scheme, demonstrate their tax compliance and insurance cover and cooperate with the scheme's Quality Assurance (QA) programme.

The terms and conditions of the Better Energy Homes Scheme are in place to ensure the transparent administration of public monies. Achieving this requires that the processes and systems are clear and efficient and operate in a manner which is fair to all parties. SEAI has a responsibility to apply a prudent, practical and appropriate approach to the governance of the disbursement of the public funds. SEAI must also ensure that Contractors adhere to, and fully comply with the Code of Practice which can be found on their website www.seai.ie/resources/publications/Code-of-practice-technical-Specification.pdf. Details on the SEAI's disciplinary procedure and appeals process is also available on their website: www.seai.ie/resources/publications/Better-Energy-Homes-QADP.pdf.

Better Energy Homes Scheme Eligibility

178. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a review (details supplied) has taken place; if so, the decision in this regard; and if not, when the review will take place. [5961/19]

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.

Motor Insurance Coverage

179. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the rationale for the green card for cross-Border workers that the insurance industry proposes issuing in the context of a no-deal Brexit; the reason he is of the view that this is either necessary or welcome; the locations such a device is needed by Irish workers and motorists that have to drive outside the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5795/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Green Card is issued within the 48 countries covered by the Council of (Motor Insurance) Bureaux, and is a document whose production may be required to prove that insurance cover is in place for vehicles travelling between these countries, where alternative legislative provisions are not in place.

All EU Member States are party to this system, but the EU does not require production of a Green Card when travelling between Member States. However, the default position is that Green Cards are required for vehicles entering the EU from Third Countries, unless the EU Commission declares otherwise.

If the UK were to exit the EU without a deal, the default position would be that Green Cards

would be required for EU-registered vehicles entering the UK and for UK-registered vehicles entering the EU. While the Government remains of the view that the best and only way to ensure an orderly withdrawal of the UK from the EU - including avoiding the necessity for Green Cards - is the ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement reached between the EU and the UK, the Government recognises that it is prudent to plan for the possibility of a 'no deal' exit.

The motor insurance industry is therefore behaving prudently in being prepared for the possibility that Green Cards will be required, even though this is not a desirable outcome. In line with the current expected Brexit date of 29th March 2019, insurers and insurance brokers have indicated that they will begin issuing Green Cards to policyholders from March if no agreement has been reached between the UK and the EU on Brexit or the process has not been further delayed. At that point anyone who plans on driving their Irish registered vehicle in Northern Ireland or Britain should contact their insurer or insurance broker one month in advance of their expected travel date to ensure they receive their Green Card in sufficient time.

Taxi Regulations

180. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address issues in the taxi industry regarding individual owners of taxis who cannot sell or lease their licence out to a car which is not in their ownership (details supplied). [5929/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the *Taxi Regulation Act 2013*.

At present, the transfer of SPSV licences is prohibited under section 14(1) of the 2013 Act which was commenced with effect from 6 April 2014. However, in the case of the death of a licence holder, section 15 of the same Act applies special provisions. In such circumstances, a SPSV licence may continue to be operated by a person who was nominated by the licence holder in advance of his or her death.

While I have no plans at present to adjust these provisions, the NTA is currently conducting a review of the SPSV sector which may help to inform future policy direction in this regard.

Given the role of the NTA as regulator, and in the context of its current review of SPSV policy, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Cycling Policy

181. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to promote cycling as a transport option in order to reduce carbon emissions from transport; the cost-benefit analysis undertaken with regard to increasing investment in cycling infrastructure; if cycling rather than driving reduces carbon emissions; if cycling facilities have a better cost-benefit to communities than driving infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5794/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I can assure the Deputy that I am acutely aware of the importance of investing in improved cycling infrastructure and the benefits which can accrue from such investment in terms of increasing modal shift, alleviating congestion, lowering transport-related carbon emissions and, indeed, contributing toward

the improved health of citizens generally.

Project Ireland 2040 provides an indicative allocation of €8.6 billion toward National Strategic Outcome 4: Sustainable Mobility and outlines our intention to, among other things, deliver a comprehensive cycling and walking network in all our major cities.

Delivery of this network will be assisted through the funding to be provided over the period 2018 to 2021 which is summarised below:

- €110 million specifically dedicated to cycling and walking infrastructure in our major urban areas;
- €135 million for sustainable urban transport measures;
- €750 million approximately towards the BusConnects programme in Dublin which will include the delivery of around 200 kilometres of segregated cycling lanes, where possible; and
- €53 million to support the development of new Greenways.

In addition to the above, Government has also made additional money available for cycling projects through both the Urban and Rural Regeneration and Development Funds which form part of Project Ireland 2040.

Expenditure of public money is of course subject to the requirements of the Public Spending Code which sets out the appraisals required dependent upon the level of expenditure envisaged in the case of individual projects.

The measures I have outlined above, form part of our transition to a low-carbon and climate resilient society as outlined in National Strategic Outcome 8 of Project Ireland 2040. It goes without saying that cycling as a mode of transport is environmentally friendly and increasing its mode share is of course an ambition of Government and in that regard I welcome the increasing popularity of cycling as a mode of transport.

I am delighted to say that the increased levels of funding Government is making available in 2019 will facilitate the commencement of construction of a number of significant cycling projects in both the Greater Dublin Area and beyond, which will be of great benefit to all once completed and will encourage more people to choose cycling as their preferred mode of transport.

Taxi Regulations

182. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 236 of 30 January 2019, his plans to introduce a service (details supplied) in either rural or urban areas in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5815/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy refers to a specific company, which is licensed as a dispatch operator in Ireland.

In Ireland, carrying passengers in a car for a payment is regulated under the Taxi Regulation Act 2013 . That Act provides for regulating the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry including taxis, hackneys and other similar activities. The Act requires the holding of an SPSV licence for the vehicle and also one for the driver, in order to carry passengers for hire or reward. The regulatory regime places no quantitative restriction on the number of licences in place.

The regulatory regime requires drivers to be Garda vetted, to have demonstrated knowledge both of industry standards and of the areas in which they will be working, to have a vehicle meets specific safety standards, to have appropriate insurance in place, and to operate to an appropriate standard of service, within a pricing system.

The focus of the regulatory regime is to protect the consumer and to help personal safety. These are important objectives and central to how the SPSV industry is operated and regulated. Within this context, there is also a need to evolve and be open to new technologies and innovation. In this regard, there is now widespread use of technology in the SPSV industry, and such innovations are of benefit to both consumers and operators.

As regards the rural areas, the Deputy will be aware that the NTA has responsibility for providing integrated local and rural transport. This includes responsibility for the Rural Transport Programme which now operates under the “Local Link” brand. The number of services has been expanded in recent years and spending on the programme has increased substantially also. In recent months, the NTA has been conducting a pilot scheme to test evening and night-time services as part of the Rural Transport Programme. This pilot was recently extended and future arrangements will be informed by an evaluation of its experience.

Road Improvement Schemes

183. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be made available to local councils to improve road conditions and road safety outside schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5829/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities’ own resources supplemented by State road grants, where applicable. Arising from the arrangements in place in relation to Local Property Tax receipts the four Dublin Councils became self funding for regional and local roads under the main road grant categories with effect from 2015.

Where local authorities are eligible for grants, the Department invites applications each year from local authorities for safety improvement schemes. Under this programme it is open to local authorities to seek funding for works which can assist in reducing vehicle speeds and improve road safety. Funding can also be sought under the Specific and Strategic Grant Programmes for larger scale safety projects and it is also open to local authorities to use Discretionary Grant funds for safety measures.

As regards schools located on national roads, as Minister I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. My Department allocates the national capital roads programme budget to Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) to manage and deliver (in accordance with the Roads Acts 1993-2015) the planning, design, and construction of all national roads developments, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have, therefore, referred the question to TII for a direct reply to you in relation to national roads. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Cycling Policy

184. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has met with councillors (details supplied) to discuss the issue of cycling safety and infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5831/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): On 24 July 2018 I issued a full and comprehensive reply to Dublin City Council regarding cycling investment and cycling projects in the City following on from a Motion passed by the Council at its meeting on 14 May 2018. Notwithstanding the reply, Dublin City Council wish to have a meeting with me to discuss the issue raised in the Motion which I will consider in due course.

Rail Network Expansion

185. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans regarding extension of the short hop zone to Drogheda, County Louth, on the northern railway line in view of the fact that the National Development Plan 2018 to 2027 investment in the DART expansion programme has made provision for extending the metropolitan DART network for the greater Dublin area as far as Drogheda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5836/19]

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.

Public Transport Provision

186. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if an application to the NTA by an organisation (details supplied) will be approved. [5878/19]

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. It also has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme which now operates under the Local Link brand.

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.

Driver Test

187. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a driver test will be expedited in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5912/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The driving test service is run by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) and my Department has no input into the scheduling of appointments. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Railway Stations

188. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding a train station (details supplied) in County Dublin; if Irish Rail plans to close this station; if so, the reason therefore; the reason no advance notice has been given to train users; the facilities which will be made available to train users using the station if it is closed; if safety concerns and the needs of older persons and persons with special needs has been taken into account; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5969/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Detention Centres Staff

189. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of assaults on staff recorded at Oberstown Children Detention Campus in 2018; and the number of those assaults classified as serious assaults. [5837/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Oberstown Children Detention Campus has advised me that in 2018, there were 25 incidents related to assaults on staff. 18 of the 25 incidents resulted in no days lost from work and 7 of the 25 incidents resulted in lost days from work. While serious assault is not defined by Oberstown, I am advised that the 7 incidents resulting in lost days from work could be considered as serious assaults.

Detention Centres Staff

190. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of times staff members at Oberstown Children Detention Campus were threatened with weapons in each month of 2018. [5838/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Oberstown Children Detention Campus has advised me that in 2018, there were 103 incidents of injuries to staff. Staff members were threatened with a weapon in 6 of these incident as outlined in the following table:

Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	1

Detention Centres Staff

191. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of

staff at Oberstown Children Detention Campus on sick leave at the end 2018. [5839/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Oberstown Children Detention Campus has advised me that at 31 December 2018, there were 24 staff members on sick leave, 2 of whom were on sick leave related to an injury.

Childcare Costs

192. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the measures she is taking to reduce the cost of childcare, particularly in the Dublin area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5840/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In recent years, I have secured significantly increased investment in key early learning and care (ELC) and school age childcare (SAC) areas. The measures announced as part of Budget 2018 formed part of a trend in continued growth in early years investment.

The increase in supports I announced in April 2017 represented a major step towards accessible, affordable and quality ELC and SAC after decades of neglect and under-investment by successive Governments. These increases reflect my ambition to support quality ELC and SAC services with appropriately supported staff.

These increases were considerable, up to 50% in the targeted subsidies, which significantly decreases the amount of payment required of low income families or parents in education or training.

As part of the Government policy to make ELC and SAC more affordable, I introduced a universal childcare subvention payment, in September 2017, of up to €20 per week (up to €1,040 per annum) for families using eligible ELC providers for the care of children aged from 6 months to the first eligible point of entry of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme.

These changes are waypoints towards our goal to deliver genuine affordable, accessible, quality ELC and SAC. My Department is also progressing with the wider Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) Project.

The ACS is a radical new approach to how we deliver accessible, affordable, high quality ELC and SAC to families in Ireland. The scheme will open to applications in October 2019, with payments flowing from November 2019. Its launch will mark a milestone in our quest to transform Ireland's ELC and SAC system from one of the most expensive in the world into one of the best. When introduced, it 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 ELC and SAC for lone parents, to 11th position. In the last 4 years, the DCYA has increased funding for ELC and SAC by 117%. This has doubled the number of children accessing subsidies. Under the ACS, all families with a net annual income of up to €60,000 will be able to claim income-based subsidies, an increase of 26% to the original threshold. The scheme's lower income thresholds have also been adjusted, meaning that maximum subsidy rates will now be paid to all families with a net annual income of up to €26,000 (the previous proposed threshold stood at €22,700). The increase in the lower threshold is important in terms of benefitting the people at the lower end of the income spectrum, by 'poverty proofing' the scheme by ensuring that families at or below the

relative income poverty line will benefit from the very highest subsidy rates under the scheme. For those above the net income threshold of €60,000, but with a child under 3 in regulated childcare, the scheme will continue to make up to €1,040 per annum available. These increased thresholds will mean that thousands more families will benefit from the new Affordable Childcare Scheme once launched at the end of 2019 and will see their childcare costs tangibly reduce.

The recently launched Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, First 5, identifies an action to develop and introduce a new funding model for early learning and care to support improved quality of provision, whilst also improving affordability for parents.

As part of the development of a new funding model for Early Learning and Care, mechanisms to control fees charged to parents will be explored.

This new approach will complement the Affordable Childcare Scheme, launching in October 2019, to subsidise the cost of provision for parents and the universal pre-school programme (ECCE) which provides for a fully funded provision for 15 hours per week for children in the two years before they begin primary school.

Early Childhood Care and Education

193. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding an additional pre-school year for a child. [5895/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): It should be noted that the Early Childhood Care and Education programme (ECCE) is a two year pre-school programme. There is no routine provision for a third year which may not be in the best interests of a child and may lead to breaching the statutory school starting age.

Overage exemptions were introduced at the onset of the ECCE programme in 2010. At that time ECCE operated for a 38 week period, or one programme year. For some children with special/additional needs, attending preschool five days a week was not feasible so, therefore, an allowance was made. Their ECCE place was split over two years, e.g. a child may have availed of three days ECCE provision in year one and two days in year two. In order to facilitate this, in the cases where the child would have been overage for ECCE in the latter year, an overage exemption was granted.

It is important to note that this provision of an overage exemption by my Department for the ECCE programme was never intended as a mechanism to delay a child's entry to primary education or to address any issue of non-availability of a school place. In the past, the operation of the system of overage exemption has caused confusion where some parents and providers have incorrectly believed that an overage exemption approval from the DCYA represented a derogation from age requirements attaching to the statutory requirement that a child attend primary school before the age of 6 years.

The overage exemption process has recently been the subject of a consultation process and a report was produced by the National Disability Authority (NDA). Officials from my Department are now considering policy options following on from this report. The new policy will consider the future of the system of exemptions and how best to support parents and children in the important transition from pre-school to primary school. It is worth stressing that the only rationale underpinning these considerations is what is in the best interests of the child. There are no funding or other considerations whatsoever. I would also note that research shows broad agreement that it is in the best interest of the child to start school with their peers.

As regards the specific case you have raised, I would stress that each application for an exemption is considered on its own merits and never in the context of the outcome of any other case.

In this instance, the application was declined on the basis that the full two year ECCE entitlement had already been availed of and with regard to the fact that the child named would be over age 6 years starting school. A key finding of the NDA report, which will be published in the near future, is that generally it is in children's best interest to enrol in primary school with their peers and to transition to becoming a teenager with their peers.

The report also seeks to ensure that schools offer all the assistance necessary to meet the child's needs, with the assistance of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). We will be happy to assist the family, if requested, to make contact with the NCSE to ensure that adequate preparations are in place for the child to start school in September 2019. The family should make immediate contact with their local school to make sure it has appropriate arrangements in place to support this child from September 2019.

Departmental Programmes

194. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which the various programmes operated by his Department can be accessed by community and rural groups throughout north County Kildare; the extent to which applications have been facilitated in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5906/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department funds a range of programmes and schemes that provide financial assistance and other supports to eligible community and rural groups throughout the country, including in north Kildare. These schemes provide much needed funding, support and assistance to communities at local level.

These include the LEADER programmes; the Community Enhancement Programme, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme; the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP); the Town and Village Renewal Scheme; and the Community Services Programme.

All schemes delivered by my Department are open to applications from eligible parties during the relevant application timeframes set for each scheme/programme.

Full details of how to register or apply for assistance under these schemes and any eligibility criteria associated with each scheme, can be obtained online at my Department's website. This online information contains more details on all various funding programmes and schemes administered through my Department.

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

195. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when he plans to make an allocation for the local improvement scheme for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5907/19]

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. 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 and I reintroduced the LIS in September 2017 and allocated a total of €17.4 million to Local Authorities for LIS roads that year.

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 Department's Vote for 2019. Details regarding the 2019 Local Improvement Scheme will be available shortly.

JobPath Programme

196. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if funding for the safe pass is provided for under the JobPath scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5784/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Job-seekers engaged with the JobPath service receive intensive individual support to help overcome barriers to employment and to find jobs. Each person is assigned a personal advisor who assesses their skills, experience, challenges and work goals and agrees a personal progression plan (PPP) 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, provided 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. Both JobPath providers have their own discretionary funds available to pay for these training courses (including Safe Pass). Some of these courses are provided in-house while others are provided by external specialist training providers.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Pensions Data

197. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to introduce a pension traceability system to ensure that on retirement persons are able to benefit from different pension schemes they paid into over the course of their working life; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5790/19]

198. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated amount of private pension funds that remain unclaimed for a variety of reasons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5791/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 197 and 198 together.

My Department has arrangements in place to assist with member tracing. Where the administrator of a pension scheme or a life company is unable to trace a member using their own resources they can use my Department's host mailing service. Following discussions between

my Department, the Pensions Authority and the Irish Association of Pension Funds, a revised protocol was put in place in October 2013. The protocol sets out the Department's requirements for organisations using the host mailing service. The pension provider must have made an unsuccessful attempt to contact the scheme member. The Department will forward letters to the last known address of the member based on its records if this address differs from that which the pension provider has.

From 2013 (relating to the 2012 tax year), P35 returns from employers are collecting the Pensions Authority reference number of any scheme operated by the employer to which the employees contribute. The collection of this data will, in time, facilitate a linkage of an employee's PPSN with the reference number(s) of the scheme of which they were a member.

There is currently no tracking service in Ireland that will allow deferred scheme members to trace their pension entitlements. Such a system is likely to be costly to establish. My Department's meetings with industry have indicated that in many cases they can find owners of funds through their own searches or by utilising the Department's host mailing system. As such, they may be reluctant to take on the costs of providing information and maintaining data in a tracking service at this stage.

My Department does not collect data on the value of unclaimed private pension funds.

I hope that this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

199. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if rent supplement is being issued to recipients at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5792/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Rent supplement continues its vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting approximately 23,300 recipients for which the Government has provided €132.4 million for 2019.

The Department can confirm that rent allowance is being paid to a number of residents, in appropriate accommodation, in the Seaside Caravan Park, Camp. In the case of private rented accommodation, tenancy arrangements involve a contract between the landlord and the tenant. The Department has no contractual relationship with the landlord and tenant behaviour is a matter for the landlord in the first instance. There are a number of avenues open to landlords in such cases, including the mediation service for landlords and tenants operated by the Private Residential Tenancies Board and/or recourse to the Garda Síochána and/or the Courts in relation to the enforcement of the law in dealing with anti-social or criminal behaviour.

Under the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 tenants are obliged not to behave within a dwelling, or in the vicinity of it, in a way that is anti-social. Landlords are obliged to enforce the tenant's obligations, and may seek termination of a tenancy due to a tenant's antisocial behaviour.

The Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 provides the Department with the authority to refuse, suspend or terminate payment of a rent supplement in the case of a person who has been required to deliver up possession of a dwelling provided by a housing authority or an approved body where the reasons for that requirement include anti-social behaviour or the interests of good estate management.

The strategic goal of returning rent supplement to its original purpose; that of a short-term income support, has been primarily facilitated by the introduction of the HAP. The “Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness (July 2016), reiterated in the “Housing First National Implementation Plan 2018-2021” (September 2018), is to provide 87,000 flexible housing supports through the HAP and Rental Accommodation Scheme between 2016 and 2021. As part of this commitment will be the transfer of those out of rent supplement with long term housing needs to HAP with a targeted completion date of these transfers by the end of 2020. For 2019, HAP’s transfer activity is expected to yield a closing rent supplement base of approximately 15,000 rent supplement customers at year end.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Invalidity Pension Applications

200. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for an invalidity pension by a person (details supplied) will be updated. [5816/19]

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 06 December 2018. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 21 February 2019. Arrears due from 06 December 2018 to 20 February 2019 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue as soon as possible. The lady in question was notified of this decision on 04 February 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason an application for a back to education allowance was refused in the case of a person (details supplied); if the case will be reviewed with a view to granting the application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5882/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned made an application for the Back to Education Allowance (BTE) which was refused by a Deciding Officer based on the recommendations of a Case Officer. The reasons for refusal were detailed in a letter which was issued to the person concerned on 2nd October 2018.

The person concerned had this decision reviewed by another officer in the Intreo Centre. The outcome of the review established no grounds to change the recommendation. As the person concerned is a full-time student and doesn’t satisfy the criteria to receive a Jobseekers payment, the claim was closed on the 16th October 2018 and no further payments issued.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Eligibility

202. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if consideration will be given to change the rules or providing another payment that

would apply when a child is still in hospital regarding the domiciliary care allowance when granted in cases of sick children in hospital and the current stipulation that the payment can only commence once the child has been discharged home (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5898/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) is an allowance payable in respect of children with a severe disability, who require care and attention substantially in excess of that required by other children their age without their disability. It is payable on the basis that the child is receiving the additional care in their own home. As a result, DCA is not payable while the child is resident in a hospital.

Children who meet the qualifying conditions for the scheme, in regard to having a disability and requiring substantial extra care, can have their application approved, with payment commencing when they leave hospital and return home.

Any parent experiencing difficulty meeting the additional expense arising from having a child in hospital may qualify for a payment under the Departments means tested exceptional needs payment scheme. In such circumstances the parent should contact their local Intreo centre.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social and Affordable Housing

203. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the regulations for the new affordable housing scheme will be enacted; and the way in which the scheme will work. [5781/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The relevant provisions of Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009 have been commenced. It provides a statutory basis for the delivery of affordable housing for purchase by local authorities. Part 5 contains significant detail on the procedures and operation of the new Affordable Purchase Scheme.

The primary legislation will be supported by associated regulations, which are currently at the final legal drafting stage, following extensive consultation between my Department, the Housing Agency and local authorities. The regulations, once finalised shortly, together with guidance, will be issued to local authorities.

The Scheme is based on local authorities providing, directly or indirectly, below market price housing. The local authority takes a charge against the property equal to the discount provided. The Act provides for a charge up to a maximum of 40% of the market value. The charge is fully repayable at re-sale or at the end of the charge period. Repayments will be paid into a centralised Affordable Housing Fund which will administered by the Housing Finance Agency.

Housing Regeneration

204. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the full costs of a project (details supplied) in Dublin 22; and his plans for the future of the scheme. [5817/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The Abhaile Project was the winner of the Rebuilding Ireland Homes for Smart Ageing Universal Design Challenge in June 2017. It involved the development of an innovative new model to support older homeowners to reconfigure their family-sized homes by creating an independent living area suitable for the older homeowner, eliminating the need to use the stairs, and creating a rental home upstairs. The application of the model to individual properties, and the associated costs, are a matter for the project promoters/homeowners concerned.

My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health, will launch the ‘Housing Options for Our Ageing Population’ policy statement shortly. The policy statement will be informed by the key objectives underpinning it as expressed in the Programme for a Partnership Government and Pillar 2 of Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. As part of this policy the potential of targeted schemes, including those of a similar type to the Abhaile project, to meet differing housing needs will be examined.

Departmental Websites

205. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to publish circulars issued on the website circulars.gov.ie; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5828/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

I understand that the circulars.gov.ie website was established in 2011 by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), primarily to house circulars issued by that Department and by the Department of Finance. Over time, other Departments have requested access to upload certain circulars to the website.

My Department already uses a variety of media to support the dissemination of circulars, including emailing directly to relevant contacts and posting to the Department’s website. In relation to the local government sector and state bodies under the aegis of my Department, an extranet facility known as ‘eCirculars’ is also used to disseminate relevant circulars. While I have no plans at present to also publish circulars on circulars.gov.ie, I will keep the matter under review.

Local Authority Housing Data

206. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the BER ratings of the local authority stock in the 31 local authorities nationally in tabular form. [5852/19]

207. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount it costs to upgrade the BER rating of local authority homes in tabular form (details supplied). [5853/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 206 and 207 together.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is the statutory agency responsible for the implementation and management of the Building Energy Rating (BER) Scheme, in accordance with Ireland’s obligations under the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive. These regulations require every new building to have a BER Certificate since 1 January 2007. In ad-

dition, any existing dwelling, offered for sale or letting on or after 1 January 2009, also requires a BER certificate.

Information and statistics in relation to the administration of the BER scheme are available on the SEAI website at

<https://www.seai.ie/resources/publications/Domestic-BER-Statistics.pdf>.

The SEAI also provide BER statistics to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) which, in turn, publishes comprehensive quarterly bulletins which provide a detailed breakdown of BER ratings. This information is available on the CSO website at

<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/environmentstatistics/domesticbuildingenergyratings/>.

My Department does not collate data on BER statistics or collect BER data in relation to social housing homes. However all dwellings, including social housing, must comply with building regulations. Current regulations require a typical dwelling to have a BER of A3 and 98% of all new dwellings are, indeed, built to this standard.

The Nearly Zero Energy Building (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. 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.

Local authorities are currently undertaking an ambitious programme of insulation retrofitting, with the support of my Department, on the least energy efficient social housing homes. Funding of some €128.7 million has been provided from 2013 to end-2018 to improve energy efficiency and comfort levels in over 68,000 local authority homes, benefitting those at risk of fuel poverty and making a significant contribution to Ireland's carbon emissions reduction targets and energy reduction targets for 2020.

The insulation retrofitting programme is being implemented in a number of phases. Phase 1 commenced in 2013 and focused on providing attic/roof insulation and the less intrusive cavity wall insulation in all relevant properties. Phase 2 of the retrofitting programme focuses on the external fabric upgrade of those social housing homes with solid/hollow block wall construction.

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.

Local Authority Staff Recruitment

208. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when permission will be granted to Galway County Council to appoint a permanent chief executive; the reason for the delay in sanctioning same in view of the fact it is many years since

the council had a permanent chief executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5900/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): An initial legislative provision to enable the administrative integration of Galway City and County Councils, as a precursor to full integration of the two local authorities, was included in the Local Government Bill 2018 but was not approved as the Bill passed through both Houses of the Oireachtas. Accordingly, drafting of the further Bill, which would have provided for the full integration of the two local authorities, is not planned to be advanced in 2019.

In 2014, the then Minister appointed a Temporary Chief Executive for Galway County Council until a permanent appointment was made. This took account of the ongoing local government reform programme. Following the outcome of the legislative process in relation to the Local Government Bill 2018, as outlined above, my Department is reviewing the position in relation to the filling of the post of Chief Executive of Galway County Council on a substantive basis.

Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General

209. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of his engagements with the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General in the context of audits, inspections and or financial examinations; if he has given further consideration to include an organisation (details supplied) as a body that will be subject to scrutiny by the office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5902/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is considering the issues involved in providing a potential role for the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) in relation to Irish Water, which is a subsidiary of the company referred to by the Deputy. This is a complex matter, having regard to the provisions of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993, Irish Water's governing legislation, including the Water Services Acts and its Constitution, and Irish Water's current position as a subsidiary within the Ervia Group, and also the decision by Government in July 2018 that Irish Water will be separated from the Ervia Group to become a stand-alone, publicly owned, commercial, regulated utility during 2023. Legal advice from the Office of the Attorney General was sought on the matter.

My Department has engaged with the Office of the C&AG, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and NewERA on the various issues and in consideration of the legal advice. This work is ongoing and I hope to chart a way forward shortly.

Irish Water

210. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position in respect of a company (details supplied); the status of the contract extension; if there are plans to retender for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5930/19]

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. Procurement of external resources or service providers is an operational matter for Irish Water. Accordingly, the con-

tract referred to is a matter for Irish Water and I have no function in relation to it.

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.

Local Authority Housing Data

211. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authority housing units completed by local authorities in each of the years 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and the number completed by each local authority. [5935/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since mid 2016, my Department has published detailed statistics regarding the provision of social housing across all local authorities, under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan.

Data is published on a quarterly basis and provides detail on the wide range of initiatives being progressed across the five pillars of the action plan, including county by county breakdown of homes completed by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies under the various schemes. Further information on the progress being made on housing provision, up to end Q3 2018, can be found on my Department's website at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision.

A Social Housing Construction Project Status Report is also published on a Quarterly basis and the report up to end Q3 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/>.

Updated data to end Q4 2018 is currently being compiled and will be published shortly.

Arts Centres

212. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the shortfall of €1.6 million in funding required for the commencement of building works in respect of a community arts centre in Tullamore, County Offaly, will be allocated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5870/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In 2007, a capital grant of €2 million was approved in principle for the Tullamore Arts Centre.

Officials in my Department have informed Offaly County Council that the expiry date of this grant has been extended to December 2020, and at present the Council is working with my Department to progress this project.

Similar to all capital grants, the funding is conditional on compliance with the specific terms and conditions which relate to it and is also subject to the Public Spending Code and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circular 13/2014.

Commemorative Events

213. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the role of her Department in the planning for State commemorations from 2019 to 2023. [5376/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): As the Minister with responsibility for leading the Decade of Centenaries commemorative programme, my priority is to ensure that the Government's approach to the remembrance of the significant historical events and related themes of the period from 1919 to 1923 is appropriate, measured, respectful, inclusive and sensitive to the different perspectives that exist on the events of this period.

The commemorative centenaries programme for 2019 and the years out to 2023 will be based on a four strand approach comprising:

- A State Ceremonial Strand which will comprise a limited number of symbolic acts of national commemoration focusing on themes of remembrance and reconciliation and on the commemoration of all of those who lost their lives during this period.

- An Historical Strand which will comprise a diverse range of activities designed to encourage authentic historical enquiry about this period and promote the use of primary archival sources. Initiatives will be developed in collaboration with State partners, National Cultural Institutions, institutions of learning and other stakeholders.

- A Community Strand, which will involve a collaborative approach – similar to that adopted for the 1916 centenary commemorations – between the State, local authority network and community organisations, including in Northern Ireland where appropriate.

- The Creative Imagination Strand, which will continue to encourage artistic and creative expression in remembrance of the significant historical events of the period from 1919 to 1923 and all of those who lost their lives.

The State commemoration programme for 2019 commenced with engagement by my Department on the marking of the centenary of the Soloheadbeg Ambush of 21 January 1919. Tipperary County Council supported a community-led commemoration on Sunday, 20th January, as part of a broader commemorative programme across the county to mark the centenary of the Independence Struggle. My Department collaborated with the local authority to support these plans, in accordance with the most recent guidance of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations.

I also approved a grant allocation of €10,000 to assist the local authority in supporting the local commemorative committee and wider community in developing their plans, in recognition of the significance of the Soloheadbeg Ambush as the generally accepted first action in the War of Independence.

Significantly, on the same day of the Soloheadbeg ambush, Dáil Éireann was convened for the first time and a centenary commemoration of this milestone in the formation of the State was led by The Houses of the Oireachtas with the delivery of a diverse and inclusive public engagement programme which can be accessed at www.dail100.ie.