

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 11, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Probation and Welfare Service Data**

12. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons in probation services linked in with a probation officer; if sufficient community services are available; and if there are enough places for voluntary supervision. [11721/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, the Probation Service is an agency of my Department working to reduce offending, create safer communities and fewer victims through offender rehabilitation informed by evidence-based practice. It has a staff of about 400, located in over 35 community-based offices in every county and in every prison. The Service’s budget for 2019 is €47.814m, an increase of €1.569m since 2017. I am informed that, on 1 March 2019, the Service’s caseload comprised 10,174 offenders, of whom 8,670 were in the community and 1,504 were in custody.

The primary function of the Service is to supervise offenders by order of the courts. Offenders placed under supervision by the courts are assigned a Probation Officer who conducts a detailed assessment and works with the offender to address the underlying issues related to their offending. Supervision is done in a structured, evidence-based manner, built around a comprehensive case-management plan addressing the factors that have contributed to offending behaviour.

The Probation Service also has responsibility for the supervision and management of community service orders, whereby convicted offenders are sentenced to between 40 and 240 hours unpaid work as an alternative to a custodial prison sentence. I am advised by the Probation Service that, in all cases where the Court imposes a Community Service Order, its objective is to implement the Order as soon as possible. Some delay may occur on occasion, but I am informed that the Service proactively manages its resources to ensure it is responsive to the needs of the Court.

Following a recommendation of the Strategic Review of Penal Policy, the Probation Service developed an integrated model of community service which combines the unpaid work element of community service with a developmental/rehabilitative element aimed at addressing an offender’s identified risks and needs in order to promote desistance from crime. The Service commenced national roll out of this new model on a pilot basis in late 2017. This new model remains under ongoing review by the Probation Service with formal evaluation scheduled for 2019.

Voluntary supervision arises in a small number of cases where an offender consents to be supervised by the Probation Service. Examples of voluntary supervision may include providing support in exceptional circumstances on a voluntary basis to an offender leaving custody who is deemed at high risk of reoffending and/or harm, but who has not been subject to a court order. The Service has also in the past at the request of other jurisdictions provided supervision of offenders on a voluntary/non-statutory basis. The Service has limited scope for undertaking such voluntary supervision of offenders or former offenders, as its key role is to supervise offenders following a direction of the courts under the relevant legal provisions.

### **Garda Deployment**

13. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new recruits allocated and transfers in of existing gardaí in the past four years to each of the Cork Garda divisions; the number of transfers out and retirements out of each Cork Garda division in the period; if population growth has been factored into the allocation process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12002/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Firstly I would like to reiterate for the House that with regard to the deployment of Garda resources, including personnel, to specific areas, the Deputy will appreciate that this is solely the responsibility of the Garda Commissioner and his management team.

I am advised by the Commissioner that the distribution of Garda resources is constantly monitored and a distribution model is used that takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and overall policing needs at local level. It is then a matter for the Divisional Chief Superintendent to determine the optimum distribution of duties among the personnel available, having regard to the profile of the area and its specific needs. This applies equally in both rural and urban areas.

I would emphasise that it is not appropriate to simply determine the allocation of Garda resources on the basis of population size alone, as it fails to take account of, among other things, the fact that crime levels and types can vary significantly in communities of similar population size.

I am advised by the Commissioner that the information requested by the Deputy regarding the number of Gardaí that have transferred out of the Divisions in question, is not readily available and would require a disproportionate amount of Garda resources to compile. However, there is a general policy within An Garda Síochána not to transfer a Garda from a Division without the provision of a replacement. I am informed by the Commissioner that the number of Garda who retired on a voluntary, compulsory or a cost neutral early retirement basis in the Cork Divisions during the years 2015- 2018 and up to 7 March, 2019 was 96. I have provided for the record a detailed breakdown of this figure by Division as requested by the Deputy.

I am pleased to note, as advised by the Commissioner that the strength of the Cork Divisions as of 31 January the latest date for which figures are currently available was 1344, an increase of 10% since 31 Dec 2015.

When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Units, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,600 recruits have

attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, some 128 of whom have been assigned to the Cork Divisions.

I am further informed that it is the Commissioner's intention to recruit a total of 600 trainee Gardaí in 2019 and 600 Garda civilian Staff. The recruitment of these additional Garda staff will allow the Commissioner to redeploy a further 500 fully trained Gardaí from administrative duties to frontline duties for which they are trained. 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.

The Commissioner has publicly spoken about issues like protecting our most vulnerable and he has highlighted that his priority is a policing model that will provide the best outcomes for communities.

Furthermore, the Commissioner has been provided with an additional €100 million in 2019 bringing his total budget to almost €1.8 billion. This substantial investment will allow the accelerated recruitment programme to continue in tandem with the deployment of new and leading edge technology to support our front line Gardaí in carrying out their work of delivering a visible, effective and responsive police service to communities across all Garda Divisions, including the Cork Divisions in 2019 and future years.

#### **Retirements from An Garda Síochána 2015-2019 by Cork Division**

	Cork City	Cork North	Cork West	Total
Year				
2015	17	6	4	27
2016	7	6	4	17
2017	12	3	8	23
2018	12	6	3	21
2019	5	1	2	8
Total	53	22	21	96

\* includes retirements, on a voluntary, compulsory or a cost neutral early retirement basis

#### **Road Traffic Accidents Data**

14. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of road traffic collisions involving heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the number which resulted in a fatality, serious injury and fatality of the driver of the vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6261/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As I have previously advised the Deputy, I understand that An Garda Síochána does not record road traffic statistics in a way that easily allows for the disaggregation of data in the manner you have requested; that is by vehicle type.

However, the Deputy may be aware of the Road Safety Authority's annual Road Collision Factbooks, which provide detailed statistics in relation to collisions on our roads. The most recent factbook, covering 2015, was published on the RSA's website in December 2018.

This factbook shows that, in 2015, 106 public service vehicles and 915 goods vehicles were involved in fatal and/or injury collisions. The report also provides similar figures on drivers of

such vehicles. In 2015, there were no fatalities of public service vehicle drivers, however, there were 17 injuries. For goods vehicle drivers, there were six fatalities and 317 injuries.

I have been informed by the Road Safety Authority that their intent is to publish the 2016 Road Collision Factbook in the first half of this year.

I do want to take the opportunity to address road safety more generally. In 2018, we witnessed the lowest number of road traffic fatalities on record (148), and while every single fatality on our roads is one too many, I was greatly encouraged by this downward trend. However, I am very concerned at the marked rise in road traffic fatalities in the year so far, particularly in view of the proactive efforts being made by the key stakeholder agencies to make our roads safer.

Last week, An Garda Síochána publicly reiterated its continuing enforcement focus on the lifesaver offences of speeding, seatbelts, mobile phones and driving under the influence of alcohol and other drugs. It was shocking to read that 1 out of every 3 victims in fatal vehicle accidents had no safety belt on at the time of the collision, and, unfortunately, this trend seems to be continuing into 2019.

This stark statistic underscores the need for drivers, and passengers, to ensure that all safety precautions have been taken, especially when it comes to seat belts. Finally, I would like to echo the comments made last week by the Chief Superintendent of the Garda National Roads Policing Bureau, when he said that “safety belts are proven life savers and must be worn every journey, every time”.

### **Protected Disclosures Data**

15. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the work of the panel of barristers examining protected disclosures within An Garda Síochána; the number and names of counsel employed to date on the panel in tabular form; the fees paid to counsel to date; if he is satisfied with the work of the panel to date; if he has had discussions with the Garda Commissioner about same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11995/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** To begin, I believe it is important to clarify that the review panel to which the Deputy is referring was established in order to assess disclosures made to me, in my capacity as Minister for Justice and Equality, by members or former members of An Garda Síochána. It is not intended that disclosures made directly to An Garda Síochána fall under this review as, given the stringent nature of the rules covering the protection of a discloser’s identity under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014, I would not be privy to any such disclosures. That is not to say, however, that the allegations under consideration have not been made to other parties; they may have been as is a discloser’s right.

The Protected Disclosures Act allows members of An Garda Síochána to make a protected disclosure to one or more of a number of persons, including to the Minister of the day. Since 2014, my Department has received 24 letters from current or former members or employees of An Garda Síochána in relation to matters which might be regarded as a protected disclosure.

Following consultation with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Attorney General, a panel of counsel was established in order to provide independent advice to my Department on how each case should be treated. Five nominated counsel were assigned to the panel and to date I have received advices on six referred cases. In order to ensure an independent assessment of these matters, counsel have been instructed to assess all relevant

documentation relating to the allegations and to make whatever recommendations they see fit.

The Deputy will appreciate that, by their very nature, this correspondence may involve varying degrees of complexity and careful consideration of each is of the utmost importance. However, I am anxious that there will be no unnecessary delays in carrying out the assessment and following through on any recommended actions. Officials from my Department are currently reviewing the advices received on the cases that have been completed and are preparing submissions recommending appropriate action for me to take. In the interests of protecting the independence of this process, it is not intended to identify the counsel undertaking this work, at this time. Equally, as the Deputy will understand, I am not permitted to discuss the content of any allegations made in protected disclosures with the Garda Commissioner, or any third party, without the express consent of the discloser themselves. Obviously, if counsel recommend that the allegations be made known to the Commissioner so he may take appropriate action, they may well be referred to him following the receipt of the discloser's approval for doing so.

With regard to the fee structure put in place for this review process, as part of the sanction provided by DPER, it was agreed that the maximum amount to be paid per case reviewed was €1,000 excluding VAT with a graded scale up to that maximum. Fees are only to be paid to counsel following the completion of their assessment reports.

### **Garda Stations**

16. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the efforts of the Office of Public Works regarding the proposed new Garda station at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10617/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation of €1.76 billion for 2019. These resources are being provided in support of the Government's commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

Very significant capital investment is also being made, including investment of €342 million in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021; and investment of €46 million in the Garda Fleet over the same period.

In terms of investment in the Garda estate, the Office of Public Works has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation, and works in relation to Garda accommodation are progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW).

The Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 is an ambitious 5-year programme based on agreed Garda priorities, which continues to benefit over 30 locations around the country, underpinned by significant Exchequer funding across the Garda and OPW votes. In addition to that programme, other major works to the Garda estate which are ongoing include the pilot Garda station reopening project, the development of a new facility at Military Road and the major refurbishment of Fitzgibbon Street station.

I would emphasise that the clear goal of this investment is to address deficiencies in the Garda estate and provide fit-for-purpose facilities for Garda members and staff, as well as the public interacting with them. And there has been some good progress in relation to the Garda estate in recent times, including in particular the completion and entry into operational use in 2018 of 3 new Divisional and Regional Headquarters in Wexford, Galway and Kevin Street

(Dublin), which collectively required funding of over €100 million.

In relation to Macroom, I can inform the Deputy that the Public Private Partnership arrangement included in the Building and Refurbishment Programme is intended to deliver new stations in Macroom, Clonmel and Sligo as well as a new custody suite at the Garda Station located on Anglesea Street Cork.

Site acquisition for this PPP bundle has been complex and has taken longer than originally envisaged. I have been informed by the OPW and the Garda authorities that the OPW acquired sites for the development of the new stations in Macroom and Sligo in 2015 and 2018 respectively. I am pleased to say that I am informed by the OPW that all difficulties in relation to completion of the acquisition of the site in Clonmel were recently resolved and that that transfer is now also agreed. It was necessary to secure all three sites before the PPP could proceed to the next stage.

The development of PPP projects is progressed under the auspices of the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) and my Department and the Garda authorities are working to progress this matter, with the input and assistance of the NDFA. My Department is also engaging with the OPW in relation to the assistance that it may be able to provide to the process, including direct engagement on the matter between the Secretary General of my Department and the Chair of the OPW.

The establishment of PPP projects can be complex and it is vital to get the projects right at the planning and design stage. I can assure the Deputy that delivery of the new Garda stations in Sligo, Clonmel and Macroom through this PPP arrangement is being pursued as a priority.

### **Prisoner Welfare**

17. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prisoners who died in prisons since 2011 to date; if he is satisfied that the Irish Prison Service is adequately funded to deal with prisoner welfare; if he is satisfied that the best international practice is in place in prisons here to assist prisoners with mental health difficulties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11993/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed that 67 prisoners have died in prisons in the period from 2011 to 7 March 2019. All such deaths are the subject of a Garda investigation, an investigation by the Inspector of Prisons, and an inquest held in a Coroner's Court to determine the cause of death.

I understand that the circumstances of each death in custody and incident of self-harm are also examined by a multidisciplinary suicide and harm prevention group in each prison, chaired by the Governor. Their objective is to identify and implement measures that may reduce the risk of deaths in the future.

In addition, the National Suicide and Harm Prevention Steering Group, chaired by the Director General, reviews the reports by the Inspector of Prisons and makes recommendations that are reviewed by Prison Governors and the local suicide and harm prevention groups. This allows findings and recommendations to be applied across the prison estate.

A general review of healthcare in the prisons is being progressed and is overseen by a Working Group involving officials from my Department, the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive. This arose from a report of the Inspector of Prisons entitled 'Healthcare in Irish Prisons' in 2016.

The Irish Prison Service works collaboratively with the HSE to provide effective care for the prison population. However, the provision of appropriate mental health services to those in custody is a major challenge.

Mental health services are provided to the Dublin and Portlaoise prisons by the Health Service Executive through the National Forensic Mental Health Service (NFMHS). The HSE also provides psychiatric services for the Limerick, Cork and Castlerea prisons. I am glad to say that the HSE has confirmed approval for the appointment of a consultant-led team in these prisons to provide forensic psychiatric in-reach services. The IPS are currently engaging with the HSE with a view to expediting these appointments.

The Irish Prison Service has access to a limited number of places in the Central Mental Hospital for prisoners who require urgent residential treatment. I am informed that on average 25 prisoners can be awaiting transfer to the Central Mental Hospital. This is of ongoing serious concern but it is anticipated that the opening of the new CMH in 2020 will help to improve capacity issues for prisoners in need of in-patient psychiatric treatment.

I am informed that two dedicated areas have been established within the prisons for the provision of high support to vulnerable prisoners with mental illness; D2 wing in Cloverhill Prison (for remand prisoners), and the High Support Unit in Mountjoy (for sentenced prisoners). Both units provide a dedicated area within the prison where mentally ill and vulnerable prisoners, who present with a risk of harm to self or to others are closely monitored in a safer environment.

A psychiatric in-reach and Court Liaison Service is available at Cloverhill Prison. This diversion service ensures, as far as possible, that those people presenting before the courts, or indeed at an earlier stage of the criminal justice system, are referred and treated appropriately. This has resulted in approximately 130 prisoners being diverted to community services annually.

The IPS Psychology Service, as part of the multidisciplinary team, plays a key role in the provision of mental health services for people in custody and is being expanded in order to better meet the mental health needs of prisoners.

The Service has also developed a bespoke mental health training programme, which is currently being delivered to all staff. Since September 2016, over 1,500 staff have been trained and the programme continues to be rolled out to remaining staff. In addition, all persons in custody have access to the Samaritans Listeners Scheme.

As can be seen, the Prison Service takes this issue seriously and has a range of measures in place designed to prevent, in so far as possible, deaths in custody. However, given the number of vulnerable prisoners in custody, it remains a matter of significant concern to me and I have raised it with the Director General who assures me that all necessary steps will be taken to ensure the full and timely implementation of recommendations made by the Inspector of Prisons into deaths in custody.

I am further advised by the Director General that the matter of monitoring of prisoners on special observation, which is a concern that the Inspector of Prisons has raised in successive reports, is being addressed through the implementation of a range of new policies and procedures. The roll out of the new measures will be supported by a communication strategy to ensure the full awareness of staff of their obligations in this regard and the disciplinary sanctions which will apply where the appropriate policies and procedures are not properly adhered to.

18. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has received reports and statistical analysis of the number of crimes in which a knife was the primary weapon used. [11980/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistics agency, is responsible for the publication of recorded crime statistics.

While the statistical information being sought by the Deputy is not currently being published by the CSO, I can advise the Deputy that my Department received a report from An Garda Síochána in relation to knife seizures, which indicates year on year increases in the numbers of knives seized by An Garda Síochána, with 1,200 seized in 2016, 1,600 seized in 2017 and almost 2,000 seized last year.

My Department wrote to the Garda authorities in February 2019 to seek an update on the recent work of An Garda Síochána in tackling knife-related crime, and the progress being made by Gardaí to improve the quality of knife crime statistics recorded on the PULSE system. When a response is received, and has been fully considered by my Department, I hope to be able to provide the Deputy with an update.

I will contact the Deputy again when an update has been received from the Garda authorities.

### **Garda Civilian Staff Data**

19. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of civilian staff employed by An Garda Síochána; and the percentage of the overall An Garda Síochána staff attributable to overall numbers. [12005/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that as of 31 January 2019, there were approximately 2,530 civilian staff employed by An Garda Síochána, undertaking a range of administrative and technical duties in the organisation. As of the same date, the total Garda strength was approximately 14,000. In this regard civilian staff now account for approximately 15% of the overall Garda workforce.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Government's vision is for a Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 to include 15,000 Garda members and 4,000 Garda Staff. The projected 4,000 Garda Staff represents a medium-term target of 20% of the Garda full-time workforce comprised of civilians. This target will be achieved through a twin-track approach of firstly, a "civilian by default" policy in relation to the filling of all new posts other than operational policing posts and for non-operational policing posts that become vacant and, secondly, the redeployment of Gardaí to policing roles where their skills can be used to best effect, with the backfilling of these roles by suitably qualified civilians, where necessary.

Progress is being made in relation to civilianisation. Since the beginning of 2017 approximately 350 new civilian posts have been sanctioned by the Policing Authority with the consent of my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The bulk of these were to address critical skills gaps and capacity issues with a proportion sanctioned to make a start on the redeployment of Gardaí to policing duties.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that as of 31 December 2018, approximately 260 Gardaí have been redeployed to operational policing duties. I further welcome the Garda Commissioner's decision to recruit a net 600 Garda staff in 2019. The recruitment of these additional

Garda staff will allow the Commissioner to redeploy a further 500 Gardaí from administrative duties to visible frontline policing duties in 2019.

This approach to continued and increased recruitment of civilian personnel is very much in line with the Report of the Commission for the Future of Policing in Ireland. This Report was approved by Government in December. Civilianisation and redeployment are among the key projects being progressed in 2019 in the Implementation Plan published by Government in December - 'A Policing Service for the Future' - and I am confident the full realisation of these projects will deliver a better policing service to the public.

### **Direct Provision System**

20. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps being taken to ensure that residents in direct provision centres are being advised of their right to vote in local elections in May 2019; and the way in which contact with candidates will be facilitated in order that residents can engage fully with the democratic process. [11877/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Department of Justice and Equality, through the Reception & Integration Agency (RIA), has always facilitated and encouraged the registration of and voting by protection applicants in local elections. Residents are advised what type of elections they can vote in and how they may register with the relevant local authority so that they may vote in elections as appropriate.

The office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration within my Department has supported a number of events focused on encouraging political participation of migrants in local politics. Two of these events were held in Dublin and Cork in 2018. It is hoped another event will be held in Galway before the local election in May. My colleague, Minister of State Stanton, has been particularly active in promoting migrant engagement in politics.

Multi-lingual material has been developed for Voter registration information and for local and European election. This information is accessible and available on the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government website

RIA is currently revising the general policy in relation to local elections. This is in line with actions in the Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020 which focus on efforts to ensure that the political system becomes more representative of the broader population. The revised policy will be issued to all centres before the end of March 2019.

Given the particular nature of the accommodation provided in centres, there are a number of factors that limit unrestricted access by candidates to the private living quarters of residents. These include the communal nature of the accommodation system and the many practical and logistical difficulties that would arise for centre managers in providing unsupervised access in circumstances where families and children live together.

The general policy ensures that there are no restrictions placed on residents' voting rights, or on their rights to access whatever information that candidates wish to convey to them, or on any rights to meet with candidates in the public areas of centres. It also ensures privacy in the residential units and the on-going protection of children in the centre.

There is an opportunity for the Friends of the Centre group at each centre to provide information to residents on how to register to vote and on the importance of local government within the political structure of the State. The Friends of the Centre groups can also raise awareness in an informal way about the importance of voting.

## Garda Deployment

21. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in County Donegal in each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11971/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Firstly I would like to reiterate for the house that with regard to the deployment of Garda resources, including personnel, to specific areas, the Deputy will appreciate that this is solely the responsibility of the Garda Commissioner and his management team. The Commissioner has publicly spoken about issues like protecting our most vulnerable and he has highlighted that his priority is a policing model that will provide the best outcomes for communities.

The distribution of Garda resources is constantly monitored and a distribution model is used that takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and overall policing needs at local level. It is then a matter for the Divisional Chief Superintendent to determine the optimum distribution of duties among the personnel available to him or her having regard to the profile of the area and its specific needs. This applies equally in both rural and urban areas.

I would emphasise that it is not appropriate to simply determine the allocation of Garda resources on the basis of any single metric, such as population, as that would fail to take account of, among other things, the fact that crime levels and types can vary significantly in communities of similar population size.

I am informed by the Commissioner that on 31 January 2019, the latest date for which figures are readily available, the strength of the Donegal Division was 409. There are also 13 Garda Reserves and 38 Civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Units, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,600 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I was pleased to attend the attestation ceremony last Friday where over 200 probationer Gardaí attested, of whom 15 members will be allocated to the Donegal Division.

I am further informed that it is the Commissioner's intention to recruit a total of 600 trainee Gardaí in 2019 along with a net 600 Garda staff. The recruitment of these additional Garda staff will allow the Commissioner to redeploy this year a further 500 fully trained Gardaí from administrative duties to the frontline duties for which they are trained. 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.

Furthermore, the Commissioner has been provided with an additional €100 million in 2019 bringing his total budget to almost €1.8 billion. This substantial investment will allow the accelerated recruitment programme to continue in tandem with the deployment of new and leading edge technology to support our front line Gardaí in carrying out their work of delivering a visible, effective and responsive police service to communities across all Garda Divisions, including the Donegal Division in 2019 and future years.

The following table sets out the strength of the Donegal Division from 2009 to 31 January 2019, the latest date for which figures are currently available.

Strength of the Donegal Division 2009 to 2019\*

Year	Total
2009	468
2010	466
2011	444
2012	427
2013	409
2014	397
2015	392
2016	382
2017	386
2018	404
2019	409

\*As of 31 January 2019

### **Brexit Preparations**

22. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress being made in respect of providing additional gardaí to the Border area; and if it is confirmed that 600 gardaí will be deployed to the Border region. [11979/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** In common with all Government Departments and State Agencies, An Garda Síochána has been preparing for Brexit and there is ongoing engagement between senior Garda management and my Department in this regard. Preparation has had a wide-ranging focus on operational requirements, including personnel, infrastructure and technology. I know the Commissioner is committed to ensuring the organisation can deal with any policing challenges arising from Brexit though clearly the circumstances which may arise are dependant on the political settlement.

The Government's policy is that there will be no hard border on the island and there are no plans for such. However, policing in the border region has always presented particular challenges and this can be expected to increase in the context of Brexit. It is also the case that violent dissident republic groups continue to seek to frustrate counter-terrorism efforts and organised criminals seek to exploit the two jurisdictions in order to try to evade detection.

The 2018 Cross-Border Threat Assessment prepared jointly by An Garda Síochána and the PSNI estimated that some 43 per cent of organised crime gangs in Northern Ireland have a cross-border dimension. Likewise, mobile organised crime groups, responsible for multiple instances of domestic burglary, operate on an all-island basis. There are increasing instances of borderless crimes such as cyber fraud and international terrorism.

The success of cross border policing actions is grounded in the recognition that the best means of combatting the threat to our communities is to maintain and enhance the excellent levels of cooperation between law enforcement agencies north and south of the border. The Gardaí and PSNI, along with other agencies, have worked together closely for many years and enjoy an excellent working relationship and co-operation at all levels.

The Fresh Start Agreement recognised this and led to the establishment of Joint Agency Investigation Teams which have had considerable success in combatting this type of crime. I understand this is also the context for the Commissioner's operational decision to establish an additional Armed Support Unit in Cavan.

Garda ASUs provide a rapid armed response capacity and capability on a Regional basis. Members of the ASUs are highly trained and equipped with a variety of non-lethal and lethal weapons and perform high visibility armed checkpoints and patrols throughout their respective Regions. In the Northern Region ASUs are currently based in Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal and Dundalk, Co. Louth.

Garda deployments in all areas of the country including those along the Border have benefited from increased recruitment in recent years. I am advised by the Commissioner that the strength of the Northern Region as on 31 January, the latest date for which figures are currently available, was 1,406 Gardaí. There are 59 Garda Reserves and 144 Garda civilian staff attached to the Northern Region. An additional 49 Gardaí were assigned to the region with effect from last Friday.

The increased resources coming on stream have also provided the capacity to expand the specialist bureaus including the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, all of which are particularly active in the Northern Region in addition to the Armed Support Units.

The ongoing recruitment will provide the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí to deliver a visible, effective and responsive policing service. These requirements will be kept under ongoing review by Garda management with a view to addressing any policing requirements for the Border region which may arise depending upon the outcome of the Brexit negotiations. In the event that a “no deal” Brexit gives rise to additional requirements in border areas, further resources can and will be provided through redeployment.

I want to assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána has the full support of the Government in dealing with the implications of Brexit and will provide the necessary resources to keep our people and our communities safe.

### **Gambling Legislation**

23. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 was last reviewed in view of the increase in gaming arcades; the locations where Part III of the Act is in force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11661/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can inform the Deputy that over the past three years, my colleague Minister of State Stanton who has special responsibility in this area, has led an intensive review of the 1956 Gaming and Lotteries Act. We hope to publish the Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill early in the current Oireachtas session. This will be an interim reform measure, pending the bringing forward of comprehensive gambling control legislation.

The amendments proposed under the Bill address certain deficiencies with regard to the conduct of activities regulated under the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956, and provide for the modernisation of that Act by way of, among other matters, arrangements for the better promotion of lotteries, updating certain stake and prize limits and standardising the minimum gambling age at 18.

Neither I nor Minister of State Stanton have any functions under Part III the 1956 Act for the licensing of gaming machines. The Deputy may wish to direct his question on location of gaming arcades under Part III to local authorities and the Revenue Commissioners.

With regard to proposals for the comprehensive reform of our gambling licensing and regulatory legislation, the Deputy will be aware that Minister of State Stanton has chaired an Inter-Departmental Working Group on Gambling, established as a result of the Government Decision of 10 January 2018 to review the 2013 General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill and all relevant developments since.

The Group comprised all relevant stakeholder Departments and the Office of the Attorney General and met on six occasions between February 2018 and January 2019.

The Group's Report is currently being finalised will be submitted to Government for consideration shortly.

The primary objective of the modernisation of gambling legislation must be to ensure the proper licensing and regulation of the many varied forms of gambling now available in the State.

A modern and effectively regulated gambling environment will ensure, to the greatest extent possible, that gambling will be an entertaining activity for the majority of those who take part in it. We will ensure that there will be enhanced consumer protection for players, effective protection for younger persons under 18 years of age and that we limit, as far as we can, the harmful effects on those who may be susceptible to addictive behaviour.

### **Protected Disclosures**

24. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the deliberations of the panel of barristers he has convened in respect of protected disclosures from current and former gardaí; and if he is satisfied with the manner in which protected disclosures are being handled by An Garda Síochána. [11955/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, the Protected Disclosures Act allows members of An Garda Síochána to make a protected disclosure to one or more of a number of persons, including to the Minister of the day.

Since 2014, my Department has received 24 letters from current or former members or employees of An Garda Síochána in relation to matters which might be regarded as a protected disclosure.

Following consultation with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Attorney General, a panel of counsel was established in order to provide independent legal advice to my Department on how each case should be treated. Five nominated counsel were assigned to the panel and to date I have received advices on six referred cases. In order to ensure an independent assessment of these matters, counsel have been instructed to assess all relevant documentation relating to the allegations and to make whatever recommendations they see fit.

The Deputy will appreciate that, by their very nature, this correspondence may involve varying degrees of complexity and careful consideration of each is of the utmost importance. However, I am anxious that there will be no unnecessary delays in carrying out the assessment and following through on any recommended actions. Officials from my Department are currently reviewing the advices received on the cases that have been completed and are preparing submissions recommending appropriate action for me to take.

With regard to the manner in which the Gardaí handle protected disclosures, An Garda Síochána have published a Protected Disclosures Policy and all Garda members and civilians

have been informed of this policy. A Protected Disclosures Manager was appointed. An Garda Síochána works with Transparency International Ireland and other external providers to create an environment to ensure that whistleblowers are properly protected and supported. Transparency's "Integrity at Work" pledge was signed by the Garda Commissioner in 2017. The Garda Síochána Code of Ethics includes very strong commitments for each individual member in relation to 'Speaking Up and Reporting Wrongdoing'.

As the Deputy is aware, in 2016 the then Minister requested the Policing Authority to examine and report on the policies and procedures in place in An Garda Síochána to deal with whistle-blowers and whistleblowing. The Authority was also asked to make any recommendations that it considered appropriate in order to ensure that the policies and procedures in place are appropriate and can provide assurance that whistle-blowers can make complaints or allegations in a safe environment where their complaints or allegations are properly investigated. The Policing Authority completed its review and reported in November, 2016. The Report was laid before both Houses in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005.

As I advised the Deputy previously on this matter, An Garda Síochána has provided assurances to my Department that it has consistently, and without exception, encouraged its staff, sworn and unsworn, to disclose any and all wrongdoing.

The Protected Disclosure Policy of An Garda Síochána aims to:

- Encourage workers to feel confident and safe about raising concerns of relevant wrongdoings;
- Provide avenues for workers to make disclosures about relevant wrongdoings; and
- Reassure workers that they will be protected from penalisation, or any threat of penalisation, for making a disclosure in accordance with An Garda Síochána's Protected Disclosure Policy, which is available on the Garda website.

Garda Authorities have previously committed to ensuring that anyone who brings forward issues or concerns will be listened to and supported whilst also ensuring that the identity of any worker making a protected disclosure in accordance with this policy is protected, save in accordance with Section 16(2) of the Protected Disclosure Act, 2014 which provides exceptions in clearly defined circumstances. These commitments have included that the focus of this process will be on the wrongdoing rather than the person making the disclosure.

Based on the foregoing, I am satisfied that the comprehensive actions taken by this Government to support and protect those, including staff of An Garda Síochána, who make protected disclosures are having a real and positive impact, and will continue to do so into the future.

### **Victim Support Services**

**25. Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position with regard to the release of information pertinent to cases of familicide by organisations with relevant knowledge; if a review will be conducted of barriers to provide information for families of victims of familicide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11960/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, I have instructed my officials to draft terms of reference for a study about how best to support families in the most caring and effective way in the aftermath of murder-suicides and this work is at an advanced stage.

In such tragic circumstances, I fully acknowledge that one of the supports that can be provided to remaining family members is the provision of timely information on the facts and development of a case, insofar as that is desired by the family. As the Deputy is aware, this is one of the primary roles of the Garda Family Liaison Officers, who are appointed to families in these cases but there are necessary limitations that apply to the disclosure of legally privileged information. While I do not wish to preempt the finalisation of terms of reference, I expect that the proposed study will include an examination of the role of the liaison officers, how that has evolved since the enactment of the Victims of Crime Act 2017 and how to deal with disseminating information while adhering to any limitations which may apply.

I intend to consult relevant parties, including my Government colleagues and relevant experts, before finalising the terms of reference. I will examine any recommendations made, including any legislative change that might be proposed.

### **Brexit Preparations**

26. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the need to provide additional staffing resources to the Border region in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11997/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** In common with all Government Departments and State Agencies, An Garda Síochána has been preparing for Brexit and there is ongoing engagement between senior Garda management and my Department in this regard. Preparation has had a wide-ranging focus on operational requirements, including personnel, infrastructure and technology. I know the Commissioner is committed to ensuring the organisation can deal with any policing challenges arising from Brexit though clearly the circumstances which may arise are dependant on the political settlement.

As the Deputy is well aware, the Government's policy is that there will be no hard border on the island and there are no plans for such. However, as he is also aware, policing in the border region has always presented particular challenges and this can be expected to increase in the context of Brexit. It is also the case that violent dissident republic groups continue to seek to frustrate counter-terrorism efforts and organised criminals seek to exploit the two jurisdictions in order to try to evade detection.

The 2018 Cross-Border Threat Assessment prepared jointly by An Garda Síochána and the PSNI estimated that some 43 per cent of organised crime gangs in Northern Ireland have a cross-border dimension. Likewise, mobile organised crime groups, responsible for multiple instances of domestic burglary, operate on an all-island basis. There are increasing instances of borderless crimes such as cyber fraud and international terrorism.

The success of cross border policing actions is grounded in the recognition that the best means of combatting the threat to our communities is to maintain and enhance the excellent levels of cooperation between law enforcement agencies north and south of the border. The Gardaí and PSNI, along with other agencies, have worked together closely for many years and enjoy an excellent working relationship and co-operation at all levels.

The Fresh Start Agreement recognised this and led to the establishment of Joint Agency Investigation Teams which have had considerable success in combatting this type of crime. I understand this is also the context for the Commissioner's operational decision to establish an additional Armed Support Unit in Cavan.

Garda ASUs provide a rapid armed response capacity and capability on a Regional basis.

Members of the ASUs are highly trained and equipped with a variety of non-lethal and lethal weapons and perform high visibility armed checkpoints and patrols throughout their respective Regions. In the Northern Region ASUs are currently based in Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal and Dundalk, Co. Louth.

Garda deployments in all areas of the country including those along the Border have benefited from increased recruitment in recent years. I am advised by the Commissioner that the strength of the Northern Region as on 31 January, the latest date for which figures are currently available, was 1,406 Gardaí. There are 59 Garda Reserves and 144 Garda civilian staff attached to the Northern Region. An additional 49 Gardaí were assigned to the region with effect from last Friday.

The increased resources coming on stream have also provided the capacity to expand the specialist bureaus including the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, all of which are particularly active in the Northern Region in addition to the Armed Support Units.

The ongoing recruitment will provide the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí to deliver a visible, effective and responsive policing service. These requirements will be kept under ongoing review by Garda management with a view to addressing any policing requirements for the Border region which may arise depending upon the outcome of the Brexit negotiations. In the event that a “no deal” Brexit gives rise to additional requirements in border areas, further resources can and will be provided through redeployment.

I want to assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána has the full support of the Government in dealing with the implications of Brexit and will provide the necessary resources to keep our people and our communities safe.

### **Court Poor Box**

27. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the operation of the court poor box is to continue for the foreseeable future. [11981/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, in February 2014 the Government approved the drafting of a Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill to replace the Probation of Offenders Act 1907 with modern provisions dealing with community sanctions and the role of the Probation Service in the criminal justice system. The Bill is currently being drafted by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. It is intended that the legislation will abolish the court poor box and replace it with a statutory Reparation Fund to provide for a fair, equitable and transparent system of reparation that will apply only to minor offences dealt with by the District Court. The new Reparation Fund will be used to provide additional funding for services for victims of crime and compensation payments payable by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal. The legislation will clearly provide that the Reparation Fund may not be used for any purpose other than the provision of compensation, reparation and assistance for victims of crime.

The replacement of the court poor box by a statutory Reparation Fund was recommended by the Law Reform Commission in its 2005 report *The Court Poor Box: Probation of Offenders*.

The court poor box will continue to operate while the Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill is being prepared. Once the Bill has passed through the Houses it is envisioned that the court poor box system will be replaced with the Reparation Fund I have described.

## Victim Support Services

28. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the degree to which he has examined the situation experienced by families suffering in the aftermath of familicide with particular reference to the need to ensure that an early warning system can be provided in which families may be briefed in situations in which a risk might exist; if consideration can also be given to legislating to prevent perpetrators from benefitting as a result of homicide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11805/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, I have instructed my officials to draft terms of reference for a study about how best to support families in the most caring and effective way in the aftermath of murder-suicides and this work is at an advanced stage.

In such tragic circumstances, I fully acknowledge that one of the supports that can be provided to remaining family members is the provision of timely information on the facts and development of a case, insofar as that is desired by the family. As the Deputy is aware, this is one of the primary roles of the Garda Family Liaison Officers, who are appointed to families in these cases but there are necessary limitations that apply to the disclosure of legally privileged information. While I do not wish to preempt the finalisation of terms of reference, I expect that the proposed study will include an examination of the role of the liaison officers, how that has evolved since the enactment of the Victims of Crime Act 2017 and how to deal with disseminating information while adhering to any limitations which may apply.

I intend to consult relevant parties, including my Government colleagues and relevant experts, before finalising the terms of reference. I will examine any recommendations made, including any legislative change that might be proposed.

The Deputy asks about the possibility of an early warning system to alert families of risk of murder-suicide. I would not wish to raise any false expectations in this regard. Many of those who complete murder-suicides have not been assessed as posing any risk to themselves or their families by police, medical or caring professionals. There are a small number of such horrific and appalling crimes but given the issues involved it would likely be very difficult if not impossible to establish an early warning system.

I want to acknowledge the work of Deputy O’Callaghan who published a Private Members’ Bill – the Civil Liability (Amendment) (Prevention of Benefits from Homicide) Bill. The Government did not oppose the Private Members Bill at its Second Stage debate, but indicated that it would be tabling amendments to the Bill at Committee Stage. The Bill will be considered shortly by the Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality and I hope to be in a position to finalise the required amendments to that Bill as soon as possible.

## Crime Levels

29. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the recent incidents of burglaries and thefts in Cork city over the Christmas 2018 period; his plans to address same; and if additional resources, both personnel and equipment, will be provided to areas (details supplied). [11874/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that I previously responded to a question which he submitted in January, which raised the issue of burglaries and thefts in Cork city over the Christmas period.

I can assure the Deputy that local Garda management in the Cork region keep all new and emerging crime trends under constant review to ensure best use is made of Garda resources. Gardaí in Cork are determined to act against all forms of criminal activity and will work with communities to prevent and detect crime.

Togher and Anglesea Street Districts form part of the Cork City Division and as of 31 January 2019 there were 703 Garda members assigned to Cork City Division. There are also 38 Garda Reserves and 80 Garda staff attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

I understand that the crime statistics for Q4 of 2018, which will include the Christmas period, will be published by the CSO in the coming weeks. These will be scrutinised by my Department, and other stakeholders upon publication. To be of assistance to the Deputy, I will request the CSO to make the new crime statistics for the Cork region available to him when they are released.

As the Deputy will be aware, last year the number of Gardaí reached over 14000 for the first time since 2011. The Government has further increased the budget for An Garda Síochána to €1.76 billion in 2019 and the Commissioner plans to recruit a total of 600 trainee Gardaí and 600 Garda Civilian Staff. This will facilitate the redeployment of a further 500 fully trained Gardaí from administrative duties to the frontline policing for which they were trained.

This on-going recruitment is providing the resources needed to deliver a visible effective and responsive policing service to communities across all Garda Divisions, including Cork City.

### **Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal Data**

30. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of cases and applications on hand at the end of each of the years 2015 to 2018 with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal; the average time to have a claim settled; the actions he plans to reduce the number of cases on hand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11660/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal administers the Scheme of Compensation for Personal Injuries Criminally Inflicted (General Scheme). Under the terms of the Scheme, the Tribunal is entirely independent in the matter of the individual decisions on applications for compensation and I as Minister have no role in the matter.

The number of applications received in each of the years in question is outlined in the following table.

Year	Number of Applications Received
2015	217
2016	209
2017	189
2018	174

Applications to the Tribunal are processed with a minimum of formality compared to court proceedings where compensation is sought under the Civil Liability Acts. Tribunal Members when making their decisions must be satisfied that all supporting documentation has been pro-

vided by the applicant and is in order. In some cases there can be delays pending the availability of all required documentation and some cases are complex in terms of medical conditions. For example, in the case of serious injury to the victim, it can take a considerable amount of time (in some cases a number of years) before their treating consultant is in a position to give a final prognosis. The absence of such information can sometimes lead to delays in bringing cases to finalisation. For the reasons outlined, it is not possible to provide the Deputy with the average time taken to bring a claim to finalisation.

Because of the manner in which cases are recorded, in particular applications which are received but not actively pursued by the applicant, it is not possible to provide the number of active cases on hand. I can inform the Deputy that I have requested an assessment of the caseload of the Tribunal. When this exercise has been completed, I will contact the Deputy directly.

In view of the length of time since the Scheme was last revised, my Department has submitted a request for a review of the Scheme to the Law Reform Commission (LRC) for consideration in the context of its Programme of Law Reform.

### **Community Alert Programme**

31. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to concerns from community text alert groups about a new centralised system for telephone calls to Garda stations in the eastern region; the actions that will be taken to protect the community text alert service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11894/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Text Alert Scheme, which was developed with the support of Muintir na Tíre, Neighbourhood Watch and the Irish Farmers Association, was introduced in September 2013. The scheme provides an additional and effective method for Gardaí to distribute crime prevention information and advice. I understand that there are in the region of 200,000 text messages sent to Text Alert groups registered under the scheme each month and the Garda authorities indicate that Text Alert continues to be a highly effective crime prevention initiative.

In addition to the Text Alert scheme, I should also mention that, for many years, my Department has supported community crime prevention by providing funding for the Community Alert Programme, which is operated by Muintir na Tíre in partnership with the Garda authorities.

With respect to the specific issue raised by the Deputy concerning a new centralised system for phone calls to Garda stations in the eastern region, I have brought his concerns to the attention of the Garda authorities and have sought a report on the matter. I will contact him again when the report is to hand.

### **Organised Crime**

32. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which he remains satisfied with the adequacy of resources available to An Garda Síochána to assist in the fight against organised crime; the extent to which adequate intelligence remains at the disposal of An Garda Síochána; if particular issues have arisen that may require further attention in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11806/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Tackling organised crime

activity and those involved in it is an ongoing priority for the Government and An Garda Síochána and the necessary resources will continue to be made available to address this issue.

An Garda Síochána is tackling organised criminal activity through a range of targeted measures designed to disrupt and dismantle the operations of criminal organisations. These measures include utilising, to the greatest extent possible, advanced analytical and intelligence methodologies.

The tackling of organised criminality is achieved through the use of focused intelligence-led operations by Garda specialist units, including the Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, the National Economic Crime Bureau and the National Bureau of Criminal Investigations. When required, support from the Security and Intelligence Section is also available. These specialist units also work closely with the Criminal Assets Bureau in targeting criminality.

Multi-disciplinary approaches are used by An Garda Síochána to ensure the activities of individuals and groups involved in criminal enterprise are effectively targeted. Such approaches also include the use of money-laundering legislation and the powers available to the Criminal Assets Bureau under the proceeds of crime legislation.

Garda operational responses to gang-related crime in Dublin are coordinated under Operation Hybrid. As of 13 January 2019, there have been 86 arrests in relation to gang-related killings and 3 persons convicted of murder with life sentences imposed. In addition, 290 searches have been undertaken, 37 firearms have been seized and over 17,000 lines of enquiry conducted. In excess of 73,000 high visibility checkpoints have been implemented with significant support from Armed Support Units and a significant amount of CCTV footage, mobile phone traffic, and forensic evidence is also being examined. Operation Hybrid is reviewed on a weekly basis to maintain optimal impact.

A number of arrests were made in the UK recently on foot of investigations, supported by An Garda Síochána, into the supply of drugs and firearms in Ireland and the UK. There were also a number of significant drug seizures made by An Garda Síochána in recent weeks.

I am assured by the Garda authorities that the international frameworks for cooperation in criminal matters are being utilised. An Garda Síochána also maintains close liaison with a range of other law enforcement agencies internationally and the work of Garda liaison officers who are permanently based in other jurisdictions and in international bodies such as Interpol and Europol, greatly facilitate the prompt exchange of information and intelligence on criminal activity.

The manner in which the resources of An Garda Síochána are deployed, including personnel, is solely a matter for the Garda Commissioner and his management team and I, as Minister, have no direct role in this regard. However, I am informed by the Commissioner that the additional resources coming on stream have enabled him to assign extra resources to the specialist units, including the Armed Support Unit, Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, and the Criminal Assets Bureau.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 2,400 Garda recruits have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, including 800 new Garda during 2018.

A total budget of €1.76 billion has been provided to An Garda Síochána in 2019, an increase of over €100 million on the 2018 allocation. This includes provision for the recruitment of up to 800 Gardaí this year. The Commissioner plans to recruit a total of 600 trainee Gardaí and 600 Garda Civilian Staff in 2019. The recruitment of the additional civilian staff will allow the

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Commissioner to redeploy a further 500 fully trained Gardaí in 2019 from administrative duties to the frontline policing duties for which they were trained.

The Garda Commissioner has confirmed that the Government's commitment to increase the overall strength of An Garda Síochána to 15,000 Garda members will be achieved by the target date of 2021.

### **Prison Staff**

33. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the destinations of prison officers to be recruited in 2019; the number required to replace retired officers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11963/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that they expect to recruit in excess of 200 Recruit Prison Officers in 2019. The assignments of these Recruit Prison Officers are based on the requirements at each prison and are predominantly to the Dublin Region.

The recruitment of Recruit Prison Officers by the Irish Prison Service has been ongoing since 2017 and has regard to such factors as service needs and retirement levels. The known retirements for all prison grades as of 7 March 2019 is 50 which includes 14 compulsory retirements. It should be noted that 383 prison grade staff will be eligible to retire but are not required to do so in 2019.

### **Direct Provision System**

34. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the recent alleged arson attacks on possible sites for direct provision and asylum seekers; if he has discussed the matter with the Garda Commissioner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11994/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** As the Deputy is aware, I have strongly condemned the arson attacks on possible sites for direct provision centres which have damaged property and could have led to injury or loss of life for residents and staff.

Following the recent fires in Moville, Co. Donegal and Rooskey, Co. Leitrim, officials from the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) have been liaising with all current centre managers asking them to review their security arrangements. It is important to note that accommodation centres, once they are open, enjoy good relations with local communities and local community groups and historically, the security risk to these centres are minimal.

However, RIA is also liaising directly with An Garda Síochána on a national basis to discuss potential security risks to accommodation centres and how these risks should be addressed.

### **Garda Deployment**

35. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of community gardaí who were and are assigned to Swords Garda station in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[12004/19]

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

Swords Garda Station forms part of the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) North Division. The Garda strength of the DMR North from 2009 to 31 January 2019 as provided by the Garda Commissioner is available on my Department's website through the following links.

[www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_31\\_January\\_2018.xlsx/Files/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_31\\_January\\_2018.xlsx](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_31_January_2018.xlsx/Files/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_31_January_2018.xlsx).

Community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána as it recognises that every community, either urban or rural, has its own concerns and expectations. The role of a community Garda is not a specialist role in An Garda Síochána; rather it is the case that all Gardaí have a role to play in community policing in carrying out their duties. The official categorisation of Community Garda simply refers to those who are exclusively assigned to building relationships with local communities and civil society including giving talks to schools, community groups and others. It is a matter for the Divisional Chief Superintendent to determine the optimum distribution of duties among the personnel available to him or her having regard to the profile of the area and its specific needs.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the Community Garda Strength in Swords Garda station in each of the years from 2014 to 31 January 2019, the latest date for which figures are currently available, as supplied by the Garda Commissioner are as set out in the table.

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the following link: [www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An\\_Garda\\_Siochana\\_facts\\_and\\_figures](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures).

**Garda Strength Presented - Community Gardaí - Total**

Station	Swords	
Year	Community Gardaí	Total
2014	10	70
2015	9	65
2016	10	72
2017	10	68
2018	10	79
2019*	10	80

\*As of 31 January 2019

**Total:** means all those Gardaí at a station all of whom have community policing as an inherent part of their role.

**Community Gardaí:** are those with the official categorisation and are exclusively assigned to building relationships with local communities including giving talks to schools, community groups and others.

## Prisoner Data

36. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a report will be commissioned on the extent to which persons with a care history are represented within the prison population. [11961/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed that the Irish Prison Service (IPS) does not currently record information in relation to specific instances of time spent in the care of the State for persons in prison custody. However there is evidence available internationally that children in care are much more likely to be cautioned or convicted of a criminal offence. It is undoubtedly the case that many offenders have experienced significant disadvantage and trauma. I am informed that a number of services are in place to seek to address these needs while the person is in custody.

For example, I am advised that the IPS Psychology Service provides a number of interventions, both in a group and on an individual basis, which support individuals who have had adverse childhood experiences, including having been placed in care. These include a Comprehensive Resource Model group programme which is a trauma-specific, recovery-based therapy. It also involves other therapies which address cognitive, affective and behavioural instability that often results from adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). These include Mentalisation therapy, Dialectical Behaviour therapy, Cognitive Behaviour therapy and Schema therapy.

I am also advised by the Irish Prison Service that during the course of clinical and therapeutic interventions with individual prisoners, their personal background, including any experiences in the care of the State, may be discussed as part of that engagement with a professional service. However, any personal history information is only recorded as part of confidential case notes and is not currently collated for any statistical purposes.

As the Deputy may be aware, my Department’s Data and Research Strategy 2018-2020 was launched in July 2018. This Strategy aims to facilitate better collaboration and information sharing between the Department and its agencies and stakeholders in order to ensure better provision of data, information, analysis, evaluation and research. A Research Advisory Group, including external experts, has put in place a clear process for prioritising research projects for funding and a plan including internal and external research collaborations is currently being progressed.

## Crime Prevention

37. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has considered the installation of CCTV cameras at motorway junctions to help act against rural crime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12008/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation of €1.76 billion for 2019. These resources are being provided in support of the Government’s commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

As the Deputy will appreciate, in accordance with Section 26 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. Further, the allocation of Garda resources is a matter for the Commissioner, in light of the availability of resources and identified operational

demands. As Minister, I have no direct role in that matter. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure their optimum use.

The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to supporting investment in CCTV systems at key locations along the road network and in urban centres. This commitment is being progressed in a number of ways, including in particular through the community CCTV grant-aid scheme administered by my Department.

I would recall 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 fall into two distinct but complementary categories, namely Garda CCTV systems and community-based CCTV systems. Neither may be established without authorisation by the Garda Commissioner, among other requirements.

Garda CCTV systems are established and maintained in areas or at locations decided upon by the Garda authorities.

Community based CCTV schemes are 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.

A grant aid scheme is being administered by my Department to support local communities meeting the statutory requirements for community based CCTV and who wish to install systems in their localities, including access roads to their localities where necessary and appropriate. Eligible community groups can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum grant of €40,000. Full details of the grant aid package are available to download from my Department's website - [www.justice.ie](http://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](mailto:communitycctv@justice.ie). I encourage any interested groups to make contact with my officials for further assistance.

More generally, the Deputy will be aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government also recognises that Gardaí must have the modern technology and resources necessary to detect and investigate crimes, and to prevent loss and harm to citizens and their property on a 24/7 basis.

In support of this commitment, €342 million is being invested in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021 to enable An Garda Síochána to utilise appropriate technologies in delivering professional policing and security services for the community. A significant capital investment is also being made in the Garda fleet, amounting to €46 million between 2016 and 2021, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

For example and as the Deputy may be aware, Automatic Number Plate Recognition

(ANPR) technology is fitted in a number of official Garda vehicles which are allocated around the country and used on a daily basis to assist in the prevention and detection of crime, particularly on our roads network.

The 2019 capital allocation for Garda ICT amounts to more than €61million and the allocation to the Garda fleet this year is a total of €10 million. The distribution of these resources, including the ICT projects and programmes to be prioritised and the allocation of Garda vehicles across the Divisions throughout 2019 are a matter for the Garda authorities.

### **Asylum Seeker Accommodation**

38. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for upgrading refugee centres nationally. [12007/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** The improvements to living conditions for applicants for international protection have been significant over recent years. These include the implementation of self- or communal catering arrangements in a number of accommodation centres. As a result of this initiative, approximately 2,000 residents in nine centres have now moved to the independent living model. In parallel with the delivery of these changes, a number of other accommodation centres are providing self-catering facilities with fresh food provided by either the contractor or the resident themselves. As a result a total over 2,900 residents in the centres are no longer under the Direct Provision model as originally developed and further progress is being made in this area.

In addition, there have been significant improvements to recreation opportunities. Friends of the Centre groups have been established in each centre. This initiative aims to bring residents, community and voluntary groups together with a view to increasing integration opportunities and providing for the development of greater community linkages with the residents and the centre.

Following the McMahon Report, a Standards Advisory Group was set up in 2017. The work of this group is to build on the recommendations of that Report and to develop a set of standards for accommodation provided for those people seeking the protection of the State. The Standards will meet those set out in the Recast Reception Conditions Directive and under EASO Guidance on Reception Conditions. Operational standards and indicators will take due cognisance of the responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by policies and plans as defined by the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

In order to meet needs in the longer term, and improve the quality of the accommodation, the Department has recently commenced a public procurement exercise under which public tenders for the provision of accommodation and ancillary services to persons in the protection process, by way of the independent living model, will be advertised. This process is scheduled to continue throughout 2019 and is due for completion in 2020. This will be delivered via a series of regional competitions to cover the entire State. Under this competition, all successful bids must provide residents with the option of preparing their own meals as part of their proposal.

### **Garda Information and Communications Technology**

39. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has discussed the provision of additional information technology resources for An Garda Síochána

with the Garda Commissioner and Policing Authority in view of recent reports on deficiencies in the Garda PULSE information technology system revealed by the recent Garda internal review into diversion programme referrals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11461/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Programme for a Partnership Government recognises that Gardaí must have the modern technology and resources necessary to detect and investigate crimes, and to prevent loss and harm to citizens and their property on a 24/7 basis. The key importance of ICT is also recognised in the report of the Commission on the future of Policing in Ireland and forms an important part of its Implementation Plan - A Policing Service for the Future.

The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation of €1.76 billion for 2019. These resources are being provided in support of the Government's commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

Specifically in relation to ICT, €342 million is being invested in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021 to enable An Garda Síochána to utilise appropriate technologies in delivering professional policing and security services for the community.

As the Deputy will appreciate, in accordance with Section 26 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. Further, decisions in relation to the allocation and management of Garda equipment and resources, including ICT, are a matter for the Commissioner, in light of identified operational demands. As Minister, I have no direct role in that matter. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure their optimum use.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that Garda ICT is currently engaging with the Garda Youth Diversion Office in relation to the revised operating procedures and accompanying software solutions required arising from the recommendations of the recent Garda Youth Referral Review.

The Deputy may also wish to be aware that the Garda authorities indicate that among the significant ICT projects underway, a new Investigations Management System is currently being developed. On roll-out this year, it will allow for the management of activities completed as part of an investigation, maintain a full history of the chain of events in an investigation and manage the information gathered and decisions/actions taken. It will also integrate closely with the new document and content management system, the new Property and Exhibits Management System, and other Garda IT systems, such as PULSE.

Additional resources for ICT, over and above the total allocation of €342 million between 2016-2021, including the allocation of over €61 million for Garda ICT in 2019, have not been requested by the Garda authorities in order to respond to matters raised in the Garda report referred to by the Deputy.

## **Garda Deployment**

40. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in each Garda station in the Dublin northern and western divisions as of 1 January 2019; and the number of new recruits assigned to each division since recruitment resumed in 2014.

[12003/19]

**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 am advised by the Commissioner that the Garda strength of the D.M.R. North Division and the D.M.R. West Division on 31 January 2019 the latest date for which figures are readily available was 714 and 707 respectively. There are also 40 Garda Reserves and 53 Garda civilian staff attached to the D.M.R. North Division and there are 26 Garda Reserves and 62 Garda civilian staff attached to the D.M.R. West Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,600 Garda recruits have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, including 200 trainees who passed out from the college just last week.

The Government has increased the budget for An Garda Síochána to €1.76 billion for 2019, which includes provision for the recruitment of up to 800 Gardaí this year. The Commissioner has now informed me that he plans to recruit a total of 600 trainee Gardaí in 2019 and 600 Garda Civilian Staff. This Garda Staff recruitment will allow the Commissioner to redeploy a further 500 fully trained Gardaí from administrative duties to frontline policing in 2019.

I believe that the injection of this large number of experienced officers into the field, along with the new recruits, will be really beneficial in terms of protecting communities. This and on-going recruitment will clearly provide the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí to deliver a visible effective and responsive policing service to communities across all Garda Divisions including the D.M.R. North Division and the D.M.R. West Division.

The Garda strength of the D.M.R. North Division and the D.M.R. West Division from 2009 to 31 January 2019 as provided by the Garda Commissioner is available on my Department's website through the following link.

[www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_31\\_January\\_2019.xlsx/Files/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_31\\_January\\_2019.xlsx](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_31_January_2019.xlsx/Files/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_31_January_2019.xlsx).

The information regarding new recruits as provided by the Garda Commissioner, is also available on my Department's website via the following link.

[www.justice.ie/en/JELR/008\\_Allocation\\_of\\_Probationer\\_Gardaí\\_by\\_Division\\_and\\_Station\\_2014\\_to\\_January\\_2019.xlsx/Files/008\\_Allocation\\_of\\_Probationer\\_Gardaí\\_by\\_Division\\_and\\_Station\\_2014\\_to\\_January\\_2019.xlsx](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/008_Allocation_of_Probationer_Gardaí_by_Division_and_Station_2014_to_January_2019.xlsx/Files/008_Allocation_of_Probationer_Gardaí_by_Division_and_Station_2014_to_January_2019.xlsx).

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the following link: [www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An\\_Garda\\_Siochana\\_facts\\_and\\_figures](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures).

## **Visa Data**

41. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of spouses and-or family members of international nurses working here awaiting visas; the range of waiting times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12000/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it is not possible to extract the particular profession of the applicants' sponsor from the on-line visa application system and, therefore, the specific information requested is not available.

However, I understand such applications from family members of 'critical skills permit' holders, including nurses, are generally made under the 'join family' visa category. Decisions regarding the grant or refusal of 'join family' visas are made in a number of INIS Visa Offices overseas, the INIS Visa Office in Dublin, and at Embassies of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade which process certain visa applications under delegated sanction from my Department. These applications are processed on a priority basis and are, generally, processed within approximately two weeks of the applicant submitting the 'join family' visa application to the relevant Visa Office or Embassy.

The processing time at each office and location worldwide is determined by a number of factors such as the volume and complexity of applications, the completeness and sufficiency of information or documentation provided by the applicant, whether further investigation is required or not, individual circumstances, peak application periods, seasonal factors, and the resources available. While every effort is made to process applications as quickly as possible, processing times inevitably vary as a result.

More generally, a number of measures have been put in place to deal with the increased demand for visas to come to Ireland. This has included the assignment of additional staff to help process applications, and the streamlining of visa processes where possible.

The central concern in deciding on visa applications, as with all visa services worldwide, is to strike an appropriate balance between protecting the country's vital national interests by maintaining an effective immigration regime while at the same time facilitating travel for those who meet the criteria. Each visa application is therefore decided on its own merits taking all factors into account.

In addition, the Minister for Business Enterprise and Innovation and I announced last week that spouses and partners of Critical Skills Employment Permit holders (including certain nursing and midwifery professionals) will now be able to access the Irish labour market without the need to obtain an employment permit. I am confident this very positive change to the immigration regime will further streamline existing processes, offer greater clarity to employers and applicants making it more attractive for attracting international talent to Ireland.

## **Northern Ireland**

42. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the engagement he has had with his counterpart in the UK in respect of the threat of violence from so-called dissident groups. [11978/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that the primary security threat to the State is from republican paramilitary groups; the so-called

‘dissident’ groups. While they have become somewhat factionalised over time, they still present a real and persistent threat.

The shared assessment of the threat in Northern Ireland is that it remains ‘Severe’ (that is to say, a terrorist attack is highly likely). The dissident paramilitary groups continue to focus their efforts primarily on targeting members of the security forces in Northern Ireland, as evidenced tragically in recent years by the murders of NI Prison Officers Alan Black and Adrian Ismay, and a number of attempts to murder PSNI constables, including in July in Derry when a number of shots were fired at the PSNI.

The Gardaí maintain a high level of on-going, close co-operation with their counterparts in Northern Ireland and in Britain in responding to this threat. This operational relationship is absolutely central to bearing down on and disrupting the activities of these groups and, therefore, to maintaining security on the island.

The shared security threat and the response of the two Governments has been a key part of my engagement with my colleagues in the Government of the United Kingdom and was a major issue of discussion at the two meetings of the British Irish Intergovernmental Conference on 25 July 2018 in London and on 2 November 2018 in Dublin. The Tánaiste and I represent the Irish Government at these meetings while the British Government is represented by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, David Lidington MP, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley MP. In addition, I have made a point of engaging with the Home Secretary on our mutual security interests. Since the appointment of the current Home Secretary, Sajid Javid MP, in April 2018 I have met with him in London on 25 July 2018, in Luxembourg on 12 October 2018 and most recently in my office in Dublin on 12 February 2019.

Just yesterday, I spoke to the Home Secretary with regard to matters relating to the investigation into the incendiary devices which were posted to addresses in the United Kingdom last week. I expressed my utter condemnation of those who carried out this act and reaffirmed to the Home Secretary our deep commitment to continuing the close working relationship that we have with our colleagues in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom.

### **Magdalen Laundries Report**

43. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications in respect of an award under the terms of the addendum to the Magdalen restorative justice ex gratia scheme; the number of persons granted an award; the number of persons awaiting a decision in respect of their application; the reason therefor; the number of persons considered ineligible for an award; the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12001/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Government is committed to complying with all of the recommendations of the Ombudsman in relation to the operation of Magdalen Restorative Justice Ex Gratia Scheme. My officials have been in ongoing contact with the Ombudsman’s Office as we go about implementing his recommendations.

In relation to the Ombudsman’s principal recommendation that the Scheme should be applied to women who worked in the laundry of one of the 12 ‘Magdalen’ Institutions and who were resident in one of 14 adjoining institutions, the Addendum to the terms of the scheme giving effect to this recommendation is published on the Department’s website - [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie).

To date there have been 97 applications under the terms of this Addendum. These comprise 52 applications refused under the original scheme and who may now be eligible, and a

further 45 new applications.

Of these 97 applications, 22 are completed as follows:

- 7 awards have been made.

- 4 offers are under consideration by successful applicants.

- 1 applicant has withdrawn from the scheme.

- 1 applicant who previously received an award under the Scheme has been informed that she is not eligible to a further payment under the terms of the Addendum.

- On the basis of information supplied, 9 applications are not considered eligible for the scheme. The applicants have been given an opportunity to provide further information to support an application under the scheme.

Of the remaining 75 applications, 60 are being processed and 15 have not yet completed relevant forms and reminders have issued. In respect of the 60 applications being processed, 51 have outstanding queries with religious institutions, other bodies or with the applicants themselves. Overall, 11 applicants have been called for interview.

The process of making a provisional assessment as to whether an applicant comes within the scope of the scheme is made based on the records of the institutions concerned (where these are available) and any other relevant records or statements. This may include the applicant's testimony and in some cases testimony from other persons.

Where it is necessary to interview an applicant the process is solely for her benefit. Its purpose is to facilitate a fair assessment of her claim where there is insufficient or conflicting documentation available. Each application is assessed individually on its merits and a decision is made as to whether on the balance of probabilities the applicant comes within the scope of the scheme. As the Deputy will appreciate the steps in the process can vary depending on the circumstances of each individual case.

In both the case of a provisional assessment offer being made or the applicant being informed that they are not eligible under the scheme, a review process is available to the applicant and details of this are provided to each applicant.

Finally, I am anxious that all applications are dealt with as quickly as possible.

### **International Conventions**

44. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, known as the Lanzarote Convention, is to be ratified in view of the fact that Ireland is an outlier among European states in its failure to ratify the convention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11878/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy may recall that I recently outlined the position in relation to ratification of two important Council of Europe Conventions, including the Lanzarote Convention, when the matter was raised under topical issues on 16 January. At that time I updated the House on the significant progress made in the ratification process within the term of this Administration, particularly through the introduction of legislation to give effect to the key criminal law provisions of this Convention.

The work to ratify the Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, also known as the Lanzarote Convention, is at an advanced stage. I want to assure the Deputy that Ireland's laws are fully in line with the Convention. This was largely achieved by the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, which was a ground-breaking piece of legislation. It brought in a new offence of accessing child pornography online. It also criminalised grooming behaviour, such as communicating with a child online for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Even prior to this Act, our legislation on child pornography included images of a person generated or modified by computer-graphics. This legislation ensures the State's compliance with criminal law provisions in the Lanzarote Convention.

In relation to other elements of the Convention, my Department has carried out a detailed review of compliance, in consultation with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and other relevant stakeholders, such as the Garda Síochána and Health Service Executive. Information was sought regarding the child protection, prevention and victim support aspects of the Convention. This concerns the operational, rather than legislative aspects of the Convention. While the Department now has most of the information required for ratification, some stakeholder work is still required to ensure that Ireland is fully compliant in all areas of the Convention. Once that work has been completed, and the Office of the Attorney General has been consulted, steps towards formal ratification can be taken.

### **Refugee Resettlement Programme**

45. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for a hotel (details supplied) to remain serving as a refugee centre. [12006/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** Following the completion of the assessment of tenders received following a public procurement process, the Department of Justice & Equality has formed a framework for centres within a 40km radius of Newbridge to provide accommodation and ancillary services for persons seeking protection through the international protection process. The Hazel Hotel was one of the bids submitted and placed on this framework.

Successful bidders placed on the framework must commence a mobilisation period to carry out all works required to deliver on their proposals. It is a condition of the tender that all residents will be able to cook meals of their own choice and that families will have access to designated living areas where they can carry out normal family activities outside of their bedrooms.

Contracts will be commenced on completion of the mobilisation works. Contracts are for an initial 2 year period with two potential extensions of one year each.

I am pleased that the Hazel Hotel has been successful in being placed on the framework and following the completion of the mobilisation works, residents will enjoy greater autonomy and independence in the centre. As with other contracts under these frameworks, the Hazel Hotel will provide services for a minimum of two years.

### **Judicial Appointments**

46. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his role in the appointment of the Master of the High Court. [7982/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The office of Master

of the High Court was established under section 3 of the Court Officers Act 1926 which provided that the Master of the High Court shall be appointed by the Executive Council and shall hold office at the pleasure of the Executive Council.

The appointment of the Master of the High Court is done by Government. In relation to the current serving Master, his appointment followed an open competition and Mr. Edmund Honohan was appointed by Government Decision SO5055E of 8 May 2001 with effect from 14 May 2001.

### **Northern Ireland**

47. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the recent letter bomb sent to London from an address in Dublin; and if he has spoken to his UK counterpart about same. [11934/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The discovery in the UK last week of a number of suspicious postal packages containing small incendiary devices is a matter of serious concern. This appalling act has been widely condemned and is a reminder of the need for constant vigilance in tackling terrorism and protecting peace on these islands.

The Garda authorities are in close and continuous contact with their UK counterparts in relation to the ongoing investigations and security matters generally. I can assure the Deputy that robust response and prevention capabilities are in place and close liaison continues daily between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces with their international counterparts to identify and manage threats.

Likewise, maintaining excellent cooperation at both political and official level is a priority for Ireland. I have spoken to the UK Home Secretary about the current investigation and reaffirmed to him Ireland's deep commitment to working together with the UK to maintain the safety and security of all our people and to bring the perpetrators of such acts to justice.

### **Northern Ireland**

48. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Taoiseach if the issue of a referendum on a united Ireland or a Border poll is included on the national risk register; if the risk committee that prepared this register examined this issue; if so, the assessment and determination; the reason this issue is or is not included on the risk register; and if a Department supplied information in respect of including this issue to those involved in drawing up the national risk register. [11717/19]

**The Taoiseach:** Issues in relation to Northern Ireland are considered as part of the annual National Risk Assessment. Although a border poll would not be regarded as a risk, and the very important and sensitive policy issues related to it would not be dealt with in the Risk Assessment process, the question of relationships on the island of Ireland, and between the two islands, are always considered as part of the annual National Risk Assessment. The National Risk Assessment was one of the first official acknowledgements of the risks posed by a potential Brexit including associated risks for Northern Ireland.

Since the National Risk Assessment was first introduced, these issues have featured prominently, and been supported by accompanying text, in the published annual Report as follows:

National Risk Assessment	Relevant Risk:
2014	Geopolitical: ‘Uncertainty over UK’s relationship with the EU and enhanced devolution within the UK’ Geopolitical: ‘Terrorist incidents and Armed Conflict’
2015	Geopolitical: ‘Uncertainty over UK’s relationship with EU’ Geopolitical: ‘Devolution and related political developments in the UK’ Geopolitical: ‘Terrorist incidents and Armed Conflict’
2016	Overview: ‘Possible Effects of Brexit’ Geopolitical: ‘Brexit/Uncertainty over UK’s relationship with EU’ Geopolitical: ‘Northern Ireland and Devolution in the UK’ Geopolitical: ‘Terrorist Incidents and Armed Conflicts’ Economic Risks: ‘Trading Relations with the UK’
2017	Geopolitical: ‘Departure of the UK from the EU’ Geopolitical: ‘Instability in Northern Ireland and changes to constitutional makeup of the UK’ Economic Risk: ‘Impact of Brexit on vulnerable sectors of economy’ Social Risk: ‘Migration and integration’
2018	Geopolitical: ‘Departure of the UK from the EU’ Geopolitical: ‘Instability in Northern Ireland’ Economic Risk: ‘Impact of Brexit on vulnerable sectors of economy’ Social Risk: ‘Migration and integration’

Work has now commenced on the 2019 Report, but is at an early stage. There will be extensive consultation and stakeholder engagement throughout its development, with the Draft Report published for a 4 week public consultation period in April, and an Open Policy Forum will also be held in May. A significant volume and range of risks, including in relation to Northern Ireland, will therefore be discussed and considered over the coming months, before the final National Risk Assessment Report for 2019 is published by July.

### Defence Forces Parades

49. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his attention has been drawn to the fact that members of the Reserve Defence Force in some counties are being prevented from and not authorised to participate in St. Patrick’s Day parades; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11469/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** All requests for Reserve Defence Force participation in St. Patrick’s Day parades are considered by my Department.

The Military Authorities accede to the requests made to my Department for Defence Forces participation in St. Patrick’s Day ceremonial events, based on Units’ ability to commit resources within means and capabilities. Despite the vast majority of requests being granted, unfortu-

nately there are some which cannot be resourced.

### **Defence Forces Medicinal Products**

50. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his attention has been drawn to comments by the chief medical officer of the Defence Forces (details supplied); and if soldiers have been disciplined for falsely claiming to be sick from taking Lariam in view of those comments. [11543/19]

51. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his attention has been drawn to comments by the chief medical officer of the Defence Forces (details supplied); and if a complaint has been made to An Garda Síochána regarding outside groups encouraging soldiers to make fraudulent claims to be suffering side effects from Lariam in view of those comments. [11544/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 50 and 51 together.

It would be inappropriate to comment on individual medical matters. There is litigation pending before the Courts which is being managed by the State Claims Agency on behalf of the Minister for Defence, taken by current and former members of the Defence Forces in relation to allegations of personal injury due to their consumption of Lariam. It would therefore be inappropriate to comment further.

### **Defence Forces Remuneration**

52. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the estimated cost of backdating claims for Army Rangers, chefs, accountants and recruits to the dates recommended by adjudicators in each case. [11879/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** There are a number of outstanding Adjudication findings across the Public Service which cannot be implemented at this time having regard to the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009-2015.

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

The Official side had discussions with PDFORRA on the process, under the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme. Pursuant to these discussions the High Court has granted PDFORRA leave to seek Judicial Review.

As this matter is currently the subject of High Court proceedings, it would not be appropriate for me to comment at this time.

### **Capital Expenditure Programme**

53. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 109 of 5 March 2019, the breakdown of the expenditure on capability

development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11959/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The 2019 Vote 36 (Defence) provision of €70m for Capability Development, is part of the allocation of €541m to Defence under the National Development Plan for the period 2018 – 2022. This investment will allow the Defence Organisation to undertake a programme of sustained equipment replacement for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, as identified and prioritised in the White Paper.

The following major priority projects are being progressed in 2019:

- Mid-life upgrade of the Mowag Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) fleet (estimated spend in 2019 - €15m);
- Procurement of Fixed Wing Utility aircraft (Pilatus) as replacement for Cessna aircraft (estimated spend in 2019 - €19m);
- Procurement of replacements for the two CASA 235 Maritime Patrol aircraft (Contract not finalised);
- Commencement of the mid-life refit programme of the Naval Service vessels LÉ Niamh and LÉ Róisín (estimated cost of the mid life refit programme is some €20m with part of this incurred in 2019) and ongoing planning for the acquisition of a multi-role vessel.

In addition, during 2019, investment will continue on various other equipment renewal and replacement programmes, including force protection, weapons and ammunition systems.

The major capital projects are multi annual and expenditure timeframes are dependent on the achievement of certain milestones. I am satisfied that the allocation for Capability Development for Vote 36 (Defence) in 2019, as part of the investment in Defence under the National Development Plan, will allow the Defence Organisation to continue a programme of sustained equipment replacement across the Defence Forces as identified and prioritised in the White Paper and ensure that the Defence Forces have the capabilities necessary to deliver on all the roles assigned by Government.

### Naval Service Vessels

54. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding the mid-life refit of the LÉ Róisín. [12048/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The P50 class of vessels in the Naval Service ship flotilla were built in Appledore Shipyard in the UK. LÉ Róisín (P51) was commissioned in 1999, with LÉ Niamh (P52) commissioned in 2001.

Along with the rest of the Naval Service fleet, both of these vessels undertake a variety of functions in the maritime domain in accordance with the role assigned to the Naval Service by Government. This encompasses the provision of support to other Government Departments and Agencies such the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, An Garda Síochána, the Revenue Commissioners and the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority. All Naval Service vessels are multi-tasked in the sense that, in addition to their fishery protection role, they also undertake general surveillance, security, pollution monitoring, and search and rescue in support to the Irish Coast Guard, amongst other duties while on patrol. These activities assist in detecting and preventing emergency situations throughout Ireland’s maritime jurisdiction. In addition to performing assigned tasks in Irish waters, both LÉ Róisín and LÉ Niamh have been deployed

to the Mediterranean in recent years as part of Operations Pontus and Sophia.

The service life of an Irish Naval Service ship is determined by the level of operational activity, but usually is around 30 years. It is, however, normal practice in a ship's life to carry out a mid-life refurbishment / extension programme so as to extend the useful life of a ship to thirty (or more) years.

The P50 class vessels, 20 and 18 years old this year, now fall into the category of ship requiring a mid-life refurbishment / extension programme. Due to their age profile, much of the auxiliary equipment onboard is coming to the end of its useful life or is becoming obsolete and requires to be replaced in a structured manner.

In this regard the Naval Service have, along with my Department, been planning for a Mid-Life Extension Programme for this class of vessels. This planned programme of works will ensure that both vessels will maintain their operational capabilities and reliabilities. Works are due to commence this month on LÉ Róisín.

### **Defence Forces Review**

55. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to conduct an independent external review of the Defence Forces human resources management in view of the retention crisis in the organisation. [12147/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I am satisfied that there is in place a suite of measures that provides a satisfactory framework within which matters relating to Human Resources in the Defence Forces can be addressed as needs arise.

The Government tasked the Public Pay Commission with examining challenges relating to recruitment and retention in the Defence Sector in more detail. The Public Service Pay Commission has commenced this work and I await the outcomes of their findings.

The White Paper on Defence sets the defence policy agenda over a ten year period. It includes a broad programme of human resources development for which work is already underway on many projects.

In addition to the above, I meet with senior civil and military management on a frequent basis to discuss all matters relating to the Defence Forces.

There are currently no plans in place to conduct an independent external review.

### **Defence Forces Pensions**

56. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a person (details supplied) is entitled to a combined pension for service with a number of defence-related bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12312/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The pension entitlements of former members of the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) are governed by the Defence Forces Pensions Schemes. In general, the minimum service required by a non-commissioned officer or private of the PDF who enlisted prior to 1 April 2004, to qualify for a pension is 21 years, or 12 years if discharged on medical grounds. I am advised that the individual in this case was discharged from the Defence Forces in 1994, at his own request, after 13 years'

service. As he had less than the required minimum service, he was not eligible for a pension under the rules of the Schemes. He was however paid a 'short service' gratuity, in accordance with the relevant rules.

Service in the FCA (Reserve Defence Force) prior to 1974 is not reckonable for pension purposes. After 1974 there is provision for service on full-time security duties in the FCA to be reckoned for pension purposes, subject to fulfilling certain conditions.

In relation to the request to amalgamate service in the PDF with service in the Department of Justice and Equality the position is that there is a Public Sector Transfer Network of which both this Department and the Department of Justice and Equality are members. This Network allows for the transfer of service for pension purposes, subject to certain conditions.

My Department has been in contact with the Department of Justice and Equality regarding the case of the individual referred to. Unfortunately, based on the preliminary information obtained to date, it would appear that this case does not satisfy the required conditions. My Department is however examining all matters, including the possibility of full time service in the FCA, in more detail and will be writing to the individual concerned in the near future to set out the position.

### **Brexit Expenditure**

57. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the funding expended by his Department in promoting and hosting all Getting Ireland Brexit Ready events to date; the costs associated with advertising, design work, photography, event staging and venue hire, print and online media advertising and public relations in tabular form; the budget allocated in his Department for the Getting Ireland Brexit Ready events with respect to promotional activities in 2018 and 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12420/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Since my appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in June 2017, I have overseen and co-ordinated a sustained intensification of Brexit preparedness. As part of these efforts, the Government has organised "Getting Ireland Brexit Ready" public information events around Ireland to inform and advise about Brexit preparedness and the range of support measures and resources that the Government has put in place.

These events brought together over a dozen Agencies and their parent Departments – the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport - under one roof to inform and advise both citizens and businesses.

The events also attracted significant domestic and international (in particular UK) media coverage which afforded an opportunity to highlight Ireland's overall approach and specific concerns in relation to Brexit.

The Getting Ireland Brexit Ready events in question took place in Cork on 5 October, Galway on 12 October, Monaghan on 19 October, Dublin on 25 October, Limerick on 23 November and Letterkenny on 30 November. Having participated at each event, I am pleased to confirm that they attracted very strong participation by a combined total of approximately 2,500 attendees.

The positive impact of the Getting Ireland Brexit Ready events and the Government's ongo-

ing public information activities in relation to Brexit preparedness is reflected in an increase in the uptake of the many Brexit Business supports that are offered by State Agencies. For example, over 4,000 companies have availed of the Enterprise Ireland Brexit Scorecard facility as a first step in developing their Brexit plan. Similarly, over 1,000 SMEs have directly engaged with the InterTradeIreland Brexit Advisory Service so far in 2019; this is in addition to the 4,175 engagements in 2018.

Other Brexit preparedness-related public information activities and events continue to be organised by Government Departments and State Agencies across Ireland. Since September 2018 there have been over 80 such events across 20 counties. Relevant details on these activities and events and on Brexit preparedness more generally can be found via the [gov.ie/brexit](http://gov.ie/brexit) website.

To coincide with the ‘Getting Ireland Brexit Ready’ events held to date, there was also a sustained public information campaign which ran on radio, in print media, online and via social media channels. This campaign ensured that citizens and businesses were informed of the measures available to them.

In organising each event, every effort was made to ensure that costs were kept to the necessary minimum and that they achieved the best value for money. Costs that have arisen directly in connection with the Getting Ireland Brexit Ready events held so far and costs for the accompanying public information campaign activities for which invoices/confirmed costings have been received are as follows:

Item	Totals
Venue Hire, Catering & Related	€69,242.84
Event Staging / Audio-Visual Equipment (OPW)	€101,595.73
Event Materials / Signage / Badging	€22,964.30
Photography / Video / Podcast	€17,252.85
Advertising & Design	€294,859.18
Other	€2,086.47
<b>Total</b>	<b>€508,001.37</b>

### Northern Ireland

58. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken to a family (details supplied) since a British Supreme Court ruling. [11930/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Government has noted the important judgment of the UK Supreme Court in the Finucane case on 27 February last, including the declaration that an investigation compliant with Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights has not been held into the murder of Pat Finucane.

The Finucane family and the British Government will wish to consider this judgment in full. The Government is also examining the judgment closely.

The Taoiseach and I were pleased to meet with the Finucane family in recent months to confirm the Government’s ongoing support for their search for truth and justice. My Department remains in ongoing contact with the family at this time.

The Taoiseach confirmed on 27 February that the Government’s position remains that an

independent public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane should be established, in line with the political commitments made by the British and Irish Governments at Weston Park in 2001. The Government has made this position consistently clear to the British Government, and will continue to do so.

I met with the UK Minister for the Cabinet Office, David Lidington MP, in Dublin on 28 February and, as part of our discussions, I raised the UK Supreme Court judgment the previous day and the Government's position that an independent public inquiry is required in the Finucane case. I also raised the matter in my meeting with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley MP in London on 6 March. The Government's position will also be reaffirmed to the British Government in writing, taking account of the UK Supreme Court judgment and declaration in the Finucane case.

The case of Pat Finucane is being discussed today by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in Strasbourg, under the McKerr group of cases which concern the effectiveness of investigations into Troubles-related deaths in Northern Ireland and the UK's obligations under the European Convention of Human Rights. The Irish national statement will reaffirm the Government's support for a re-opening of supervision by the Committee of Ministers in the Finucane case in accordance with the request of the applicant, Geraldine Finucane. The Irish statement will also re-affirm the Government's position that a public inquiry into the case should be established, consistent with the commitment made in this respect by the British Government under the Weston Park Agreement of 2001.

My thoughts are with Geraldine Finucane and her family who have had to campaign unceasingly over the last 30 years, simply seeking to establish the full facts behind the loss of their loved one. The efforts of the Finucane family, pursued with courage, dignity and resilience, are replicated in different ways by many other families across all sections of the community, North and South, East and West, who continue to seek truth and justice following the loss of their loved ones in the dark years of the Troubles.

The legacy of the past still needs to be fully addressed, and this must be done in a way that meets commitments made to all victims and survivors, including by implementing the Stormont House Agreement and by honouring the commitments made at Weston Park nearly 18 years ago.

The Government will continue to engage with the British Government to seek progress with outstanding commitments and issues, to comprehensively address the legacy of the past and meet the needs and expectations of victims and survivors.

### **Election Monitoring Missions**

59. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if information on a series of matters (details supplied) regarding the types of person on the 2019 election observation roster will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12555/19]

64. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will address a matter regarding the election observation roster (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11704/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 59 and 64 together.

The Department maintains and administers a roster of suitably skilled individuals who are available to participate in election observation missions organised, mostly, by the EU and OSCE. A new roster was set up in January further to a Call for Volunteers which issued in July 2018.

Members of the roster are expected to be of good character. Prior to their circulation regarding election observation missions, those who have been shortlisted for roster membership are subject to security vetting in conjunction with the National Vetting Bureau. That vetting process is ongoing.

Roster members who participate in election observation missions are expected to behave professionally and impartially and to demonstrate sound judgement. Members of the roster are volunteers; the restrictions placed on civil servants in relation to political activity do not apply to volunteer roster members (unless of course the individual concerned also happens to be a civil servant). It is to be expected, and indeed welcomed, that a roster formed in a plural society would contain a broad range of opinion, consistent with Ireland's international obligations on freedom of expression.

### **Middle East Issues**

60. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recently published UN report that indicated the actions by Israeli authorities in respect of protests in Gaza may amount to war crimes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11593/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** In response to the violent incidents in Gaza last summer, I called for an independent investigation of these tragic events. Ireland subsequently supported moves at the United Nations Human Rights Council to establish an independent Commission of Inquiry into the events. I therefore welcome the fact that the Commission has now published its Report.

The Commission has clearly carried out its task in a careful and professional manner, and I commend them for their work. It is regrettable that the Israeli authorities decided not to cooperate with the Commission in any way, including refusing allowing the Commission members to enter Gaza. All Governments should cooperate with relevant HRC processes.

Their Report makes for sombre and deeply disturbing reading. While there is clearly a dispute over the events in Gaza last summer, leading to some element of genuine uncertainty about some specific events, I believe the Commission Report provides a reasonably authoritative account and analysis of what happened. Over a prolonged period of some months of demonstrations near the border fence, Israeli army sharpshooters shot over 6,000 people, killing 183 of them. While the majority were shot in the legs, suggesting some attempt to use non-lethal force, many suffered life-changing injuries, including loss of limbs. Some persons were shot close to or at the border fence, but many were some hundreds of metres inside Gaza, and some were up to a kilometre from the fence. Victims included women, children, and identifiable medical workers and journalists.

The Report suggests that Israeli authorities had reason to be concerned at a possible mass incursion into Israel, and to prepare for it, but also that this did not occur. Only a small fraction of the demonstrators were engaged in any such action. Very many of those shot were demonstrably not posing any serious threat when they were shot.

The Report instances some cases of violence on the part of some demonstrators, mostly

stone throwing and the floating of incendiary devices into Israel, where they started fires in crops and property.

The Report concludes that, in relation to the use of force by Israeli forces under various headings, in at least some cases there are grounds to consider that war crimes may have been committed, in that the use of lethal force was not justified under international law. This would be a question for a court to decide.

The Commission Report therefore confirms the view I expressed in the Dáil on behalf of the Government last summer. I noted that international law allows the use of potentially lethal force by security forces only as a last resort, and when faced with immediate and serious threat. I said it was clear that these limits had not been respected, and that the actions of some demonstrators in no way justified such a violent response. I summed up that “Israel is entitled to defend itself, but it is not entitled to do this.” It is no satisfaction to me that the Commission Report now backs up that view.

The Report will now be considered by the UN Human Rights Council.

### **Middle East Issues**

61. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to reports of Israeli authorities withholding Palestinian tax revenue, which would be considered a violation of the Oslo Accords; his views on such matters; if this matter has been raised at EU level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11594/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** On 17 February 2019, the Government of Israel decided unilaterally to withhold the equivalent of 123 million euro in Palestinian tax revenue transfers. This decision is a result of legislation adopted by the Knesset last year that instructs the Government to withhold money equivalent to what the Palestinian Authority pays to Palestinians convicted by Israeli courts of involvement in terrorism or other security-related offences, and to their families.

I also understand that the Palestinian leadership has in response decided to reject all clearance revenue in protest at the funding cut, which no doubt will have repercussions for the Palestinian people who depend on the PA to deliver basic services such as healthcare and access to education.

I am acutely concerned about the worsening financial situation of the PA. Thankfully the impact of its budget shortfall last year was somewhat mitigated by donor aid. This economic insecurity is expected to increase this year, and as we have seen in 2018, the same scale of financial aid by large donors is by no means guaranteed. The financial stability of the PA is inextricably linked to the security of both the Palestinians and the Israelis. I believe that the EU is right to urge the Palestinian Authority to review how it operates its system of payments. However, as I have said before in this House and elsewhere, unilateral moves, such as withholding a huge proportion of the revenue collected on the Palestinian Authority’s behalf, seriously undermine the chances for a just and lasting peace.

These are very serious developments that put at risk the financial stability of the Palestinian Authority and ultimately the security of both Israelis and Palestinians alike. EU Heads of Mission in Ramallah, including the Irish representative to the Palestinian Authority, met with senior figures from the Palestinian Authority to discuss this decision.

I reiterate the EU’s call for Israel to honour its obligations under the Oslo Accords, with due

regard to the Paris Economic Protocol, which administers the economic and financial relations between Israel and the PA.

I can assure the Deputy that these concerns about the repercussions of this move on the peace process will be raised with Israeli interlocutors.

### Passport Applications Data

62. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of persons from Great Britain and Northern Ireland who have applied for an Irish passport in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11595/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Passport Service receives applications through a range of channels, including the online passport application service. The following figures reflect the numbers received through all channels in the years requested.

Year	Applications from Great Britain	Applications from Northern Ireland
2012	45,646	41,124
2013	42,441	44,122
2014	43,449	48,475
2015	47,603	54,026
2016	67,376	68,270
2017	83,115	83,363
2018	98,544	84,855
2019*	28,958	34,669

Figures include applications for both passport books and passport cards.

Please note that any application that requires further documents or clarification may be assigned a later date of registration when the new documents are received. Registration figures are therefore adjusted accordingly and, if such an adjustment takes place at the end of a calendar year, can result in an application being re-assigned to the subsequent year. This explanation will account for variations between the figures provided here and elsewhere, for example, in the response given to PQ 48253/18 which gave the figure of 85,180 applications received from Northern Ireland, as of 31 October 2018.

\*Figures are from 1 January to 28 February 2019.

### Passport Applications Data

63. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the target and actual turnaround time, respectively, for receipt of a passport across all the passport services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11596/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The following table summarises the turnaround times for the Passport Service's main application channels. Turnaround times for individual missions outside Ireland and the UK are omitted as

these will vary for each individual mission and are dependent on local postal services.

Type of Passport Application	Target turnaround time	Average turnaround time
Online passport renewal service	10 working days	10 working days
An Post Passport Express renewal application	15 working days	15 working days
An Post Passport Express first time application & application to replace lost/stolen/damaged passport	20 working days	16 working days
Northern Ireland Passport Express renewal applications	15 working days	14 working days
Northern Ireland Passport Express first time application & application to replace lost/stolen/damaged passport	25 working days	29 working days
London Passport Office renewal application	20 working days	23 working days
London Passport Office first time application & application to replace lost/stolen/damaged passport	30 working days	49 working days
Great Britain Passport Express	15 working days	14 working days

*Question No. 64 answered with Question No. 59.*

### Legislative Measures

65. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to update the Passports Act 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11729/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** There are no immediate plans to make further amendments the Passports Act, 2008 as amended (“the Act”).

The Act is up to-date and reflects any recent legislative changes that impact on the issuance of passports to Irish citizens.

My Department will continue to keep the legislation under review.

### Northern Ireland

66. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the issue of a referendum on a united Ireland or a Border poll is included on the risk register of his Department; if the risk committee of his Department examined this issue; if so, the assess-

ment and determination; the reason this issue is or is not included on the risk register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11752/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The risk management process within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade involves as a matter of course consideration of risks in relation to the political situation in Northern Ireland and the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts.

The Department's risk management process is outlined in its Risk Management Policy, which is guided by the Risk Management Guidance provided by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Risks facing the Department are identified both at Management Board level and by each business unit and these risks are subsequently interrogated by a Risk Management Committee, the Chief Risk Officer and the Management Board.

The risk management process within the Department is an important management tool which is part of the deliberative process of the organisation and informs, on an ongoing basis, senior management decision making.

In relation to the possibility of a referendum on a united Ireland or a border poll, the principle of consent and the possibility of change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland are fundamental elements of the Good Friday Agreement, endorsed by the people of this island North and South.

The Department would note that the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements is a priority for it, and for the Government as a whole. The approach of the Government in relation to Irish unity is of course guided by Article 3 of the Constitution, as amended by the people in 1998.

The holding of a referendum in this jurisdiction is connected with the calling of a border poll, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, in Northern Ireland. While the decision to hold such a poll in Northern Ireland rests with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Government does not believe it likely at present that such a border poll in the near future would result in a decision on the part of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland in favour of constitutional change.

In the event of a future referendum within the consent provisions of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government would make all necessary preparations in accordance with the terms of the Constitution and the principles and procedures of the Agreement.

## **Human Rights**

67. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which he advocated for the strengthening of corporate accountability and increased regulation of the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises to ensure the prevention of land and human rights violations in developing countries; if he has referred to the recent report by a charity (details supplied) calling for this approach; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11842/19]

69. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the UN guiding principles on human rights impact assessments for economic reform policies, which are being debated at the UN Human Rights Council; and his plans for

rolling out such principles when adopted. [11948/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 67 and 69 together.

In November 2017, my Department launched the National Plan on Business and Human Rights 2017 -2020 to give effect to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The Plan is a whole of Government initiative which has been developed with the support and cooperation of a number of Government Departments and State Agencies. Its aim is to promote responsible business practices at home and overseas by all Irish business enterprises in line with Ireland's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights globally. The Plan is directed at Government and State agencies, Irish companies operating at home and overseas, and multinational enterprises operating in Ireland.

My Department has established the Business and Human Rights Implementation Group to oversee implementation of the National Plan over the next three years. Its membership consists of representatives from civil society, the business community, Government and an independent Chairperson. The first meeting of the Implementation Group took place on 16 January 2019 and it is being tasked with taking forward delivery of key action points under each of the three pillars of the UN Guiding Principles, i.e. the State duty to protect, corporate responsibility to respect and access to remedy. The next meeting of the Group is due to take place in April.

To aid the work of the Implementation Group, my Department commissioned a baseline assessment of the current legislative and regulatory framework for business and human rights in Ireland from an independent consultant. This assessment identifies key issues for Ireland in a number of areas including worker's rights, anti-corruption, equality, anti-trafficking, data protection, environment, non-financial reporting, procurement and supply chain. It also assess Ireland's international commitments in the area of business and human rights. The report makes a number of recommendations which may help guide the work of the Group when implementing the National Plan on Business and Human Rights. The baseline assessment is currently being finalised and will shortly be uploaded to my Department's website.

Ireland consistently advocates for the right of civil society actors and human rights defenders to operate in a free and safe environment without fear of reprisal. Ireland played a key role in the drafting of EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, adopted during our EU Presidency in 2004. Ireland is also a co-sponsor of the annual Human Rights Defenders resolution at the UN Human Rights Council and continues to use the Universal Periodic Review process as an opportunity to make recommendations to states on the matter.

Ireland is open to looking at options for progress on a legally binding Treaty, which we believe should treat all economic operators in a non-discriminatory manner and should therefore cover companies engaged in purely domestic operations as well as transnational corporations.

We would wish to see essential human rights principles reflected in any possible instrument, which should reaffirm the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights and stress the primary responsibility of States under existing human rights obligations to protect against human rights violations.

Ultimately, if it is to achieve its objectives, any legally binding instrument should enjoy broad support among UN Member States to ensure its effectiveness as well as international coherence in the framework of business and human rights. We would like to see any new initiative build on, rather than duplicate, existing measures such as the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy. Above all we believe that it should be rooted in the UN Guiding

Principles. In this regard, we are of the view that the appropriate place for the discussion of any new initiatives is the annual UN Forum on Business and Human Rights, which was established in 2011 by the Human Rights Council to serve as a global platform to discuss trends and challenges in the implementation of the Guiding Principles.

### **Election Monitoring Missions**

68. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the recently issued appeals terms of reference would apply to a person (details supplied); if the independent appeals panel will review non-redacted versions of all appeals materials, including all attachments submitted by the person; if a disability professional will be assigned as part of this review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11910/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** I refer the Deputy to the response to Parliamentary Questions 115, 117, 119 and 126 of 5 March 2019. A detailed Information Note on the operation of the election observation roster, and its mustering, has been made available to the Oireachtas’ Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence and accompanies this response. Detailed information on the roster selection process has also been provided in the responses to a series of Parliamentary Questions in January, February and March.

The terms of reference established for the appeals process applied in this, and in all other appeal cases. The appeals panel considered each case within its terms of reference. The appeals panel consisted of two members only; the same two individuals reviewed all cases.

Full consideration was given to the person’s application and their request for an appeal. The record of the determination of the Appeals Panel issued to the person on 4 March 2019, as was the case with every other appellant. The appeals process has now closed.

[<a href="/debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/FA42DD8B654C3CF4802583BC004423C9/\$File/ATTUAIUM.pdf?openelement">Election-briefing note</a>]

*Question No. 69 answered with Question No. 67.*

### **Diplomatic Representation**

70. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will be prioritising visits to affected communities in Colombia in view of the new embassy in place in Bogota and his commitment to human rights defenders and the peace process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12143/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** As the Deputy mentioned, Ireland has long been a committed supporter of the peace process in Colombia, with a particular focus on the protection of human rights and human rights defenders. Ireland has committed more than €10 million in funding to Colombia since 2007 to prevent conflict, build peace, protect human rights and support the livelihoods of rural populations, including women.

Ireland was a founding member of the EU Trust Fund for Colombia, and continues to provide funding to the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia, in their work to support the implementation of the peace accords.

We have also facilitated lesson sharing programmes between Ireland and Colombia, based on our own experience of peace building. As we know well in Ireland, the signing of a peace agreement only marks the beginning of a process. We understand the slow and painstaking work that goes into building trust between communities to enable reconciliation and to develop a culture of trust. We have had many dark moments and setbacks, and we understand that peace building is the work of generations.

Ireland's new Embassy in Bogotá has just recently opened, with Ambassador Alison Milton presenting her credentials last month. This, combined with the opening last year of the first resident Embassy of Colombia in Dublin, marks a tangible strengthening of relations between our two countries, and will greatly enhance our ability to engage on issues on the ground.

One such important area of engagement is with those local communities and groups that have been most impacted by the armed conflict. Officials at our Embassy in Bogotá have already met with a number of civil society and multilateral organisations, including those working with conflict-affected and rural communities, indigenous and women's groups. My officials engage regularly with the EU delegation and other embassies in Bogotá on these issues.

Having a permanent diplomatic presence on the ground will also further enable us to monitor the status of the peace accords closely and to fulfil our commitment to the Government and people of Colombia.

Ireland remains committed to supporting the full implementation of the peace accords in Colombia to ensure a more peaceful future for all Colombians. We have stressed our continued support for the peace process to the Government of President Iván Duque, including when the Taoiseach met President Duque en marge of the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2018.

I look forward to continuing to work with the Government of Colombia and with our EU partners to ensure a coordinated and effective approach that best supports the peace process. I can assure the Deputy of our continued commitment the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Colombians.

### **Climate Change Policy**

71. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 111 of 5 March 2019, the number of grants made versus loans, that is, quantity and monetary value regarding loans; the amount of interest applied; and the main receivers of the climate finance. [12163/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** Addressing climate change is one of the biggest challenges of our generation. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is helping to address the most pressing climate change challenges through its international development policy and programming.

Ireland's international climate finance is provided to partner countries in grant form only. The Irish Government does not issue climate finance through loans.

The main receivers of Ireland's climate finance are Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States - countries and regions most affected by climate change and which need urgent support to address the impacts of climate change.

Ireland's new policy for international development, A Better World, launched by the Tao-

iseach, Tánaiste and Minister of State for the Diaspora and International Development on 28th February maintains a strong focus on addressing climate change. Given the urgency of the issue and in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals the new policy commits us to increase our funding and engagement with those most affected by the impact of climate change.

### **Election Monitoring Missions**

72. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 81 of 6 March 2019, if additional concerns (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12353/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** I refer the Deputy to the responses to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 115, 117, 119 and 126 of 5 March 2019. A detailed note on the operation of the roster, and its mustering, has been made available to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence, and is available at the following link:

[[Election-briefing note](/debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/FA42DD8B654C3CF4802583BC004423C9/$File/ATTUAIUM.pdf?openelement)].

### **Foreign Conflicts**

73. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the suppression of protests in Sudan by the government of President Al-Bashir; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12354/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** I am deeply concerned about the violence which has accompanied recent protests in Sudan, including credible reports of multiple deaths.

Demonstrations, triggered by spiralling costs of living, began in the city of Atbara in the north east of the country on 19 December last year, quickly spreading to other towns and cities across the country. While initially the protests were against the worsening economic situation, they soon developed into calls for President Omar al-Bashir's resignation.

In reaction to the protests, schools have been closed and a state of emergency declared in some regions. Sudanese police have used tear gas and live ammunition in an attempt to disperse crowds. It is reported that over 1,000 people have been arrested across the country since protests began and that more than 50 have been killed. The use of live fire and arbitrary detention cannot be justified.

Ireland fully supports the 28 February 2019 statement by the EU High Representative expressing concern at the situation in Sudan which underlined the importance of an environment for political dialogue and the exercise of the legitimate right to express differing views. Such an environment would be essential if the national consensus needed to find sustainable responses to Sudan's deep political and economic crisis is to be built. In addition, Ireland also fully supports the EU statement of 11 January 2019 which calls on the Government of Sudan to release all journalists, members of the opposition, human rights defenders and other protesters arbitrarily detained, and to guarantee the independence of the Investigation Committee, under the Chairmanship of the Sudanese Director of Public Prosecutions, tasked with the investigation of abuses.

The Embassy of Ireland in Nairobi, which is accredited to Sudan, continues to monitor the situation closely in cooperation with the Delegation of the European Union in Khartoum.

In addition to the current unrest, Sudan continues to suffer from a range of humanitarian crises, driven by protracted conflicts, inequality and climate change. These feed into the popular disaffection leading to protests. This humanitarian situation has been further exacerbated by the economic crisis in 2018, leading to severe levels of food insecurity and malnutrition across the country. More than 1.8 million people are internally displaced and Sudan hosts a further 1.2 million refugees that have fled conflict in neighbouring countries, the majority of whom rely on humanitarian aid for their survival. As a result, an estimated 5.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Sudan this year, including 2.6 million children. Ireland is responding to these crises, with almost €26 million in direct humanitarian assistance to Sudan through our UN, NGO and Red Cross partners since 2012.

### **Northern Ireland**

74. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his meeting in the Irish Embassy in London with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Ms Karen Bradley; the issues that were discussed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12355/19]

76. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he discussed the comments made by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Ms Karen Bradley, in the House of Commons on 6 March 2019 regarding those who were killed by members of the British Army in Northern Ireland during the Troubles during his meeting with her that evening; the response he received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12357/19]

77. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he spoke with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Ms Karen Bradley, on 6 March 2019 regarding the outstanding commitments between the Irish and British Governments relating to outstanding legacy issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12358/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 74, 76 and 77 together.

I met with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley, at the Embassy of Ireland in London, on 6 March. Our meeting focussed on Troubles legacy issues.

I made clear to the Secretary of State the Government's deep concern at the statement she had made earlier that day, regarding deaths caused by British soldiers and police during the Troubles, which had caused intense hurt and distress to families who lost loved ones in dreadful circumstances.

I underlined the need to investigate fully all Troubles related deaths, implement the Stormont House Agreement legacy framework, and honour the commitment under the 2001 Weston Park Agreement for a public inquiry in the Pat Finucane case.

I reiterated to the Secretary of State the Government's position that there must be effective investigations into all deaths during the Troubles, regardless of the perpetrator. I underlined that there are no amnesties from prosecution provided for in the Good Friday Agreement or any subsequent Agreements, including the Stormont House Agreement, and that the Government has been clear that it would not support any proposal to introduce such a measure, for state or non-state actors.

I also emphasised the imperative of moving ahead with legislation to establish the Stormont House Agreement legacy bodies, including to provide an effective system for investigation of outstanding legacy cases in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State acknowledged the deeply-felt concern her comments caused, and stated that this was not intended. Secretary of State Bradley also confirmed the British Government's continuing support for the Stormont House Agreement and its intention to progress the necessary implementing legislation. She also affirmed that all Troubles-related deaths must be effectively investigated in accordance with the law, whatever the circumstances and whoever the perpetrators.

The Secretary of State's subsequent statement on 7 March which apologised for the offence and hurt caused by her statement to families who lost loved ones is important. It is also important that the Secretary of State publicly confirmed that what she had said was wrong, that "where there is any evidence of wrongdoing this should be pursued without fear of favour whoever the perpetrators might be", and that this is and will remain the basis of the British Government's approach to dealing with legacy issues.

The Government will continue to engage with the British Government to seek the establishment of the Stormont House Agreement legacy institutions, in order to meet the legitimate needs and expectations of victims and survivors, for whom delivery of a comprehensive legacy framework is long overdue.

### **Official Engagements**

75. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the dinner he attended in the Irish Embassy in London on 6 March 2019; the guests who attended; the issues that were discussed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12356/19]

78. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he discussed the report by the head of the civil service in Northern Ireland regarding the impact of a no-deal Brexit on Northern Ireland at the dinner on 6 March 2019 in the Irish Embassy in London; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12359/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 75 and 78 together.

On Wednesday 6th December, I welcomed the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall to a special dinner at the Embassy of Ireland in London, hosted by Ambassador Adrian O'Neill. The dinner marked the start of the St. Patrick's Day programme in Britain and celebrated the close ties and enduring friendship between our two countries.

We were joined by approximately 90 guests from across the worlds of politics, culture, business, media and the Irish community in order to mark the vibrant and positive bilateral connections we enjoy together.

During his speech at the dinner, Prince Charles reiterated his and the Duchess' commitment to developing the relationship and the bonds between our two countries, saying

"We are friends, we are partners and we are the closest of near neighbours, bound together by everything that we have in common – and by just how far we have come together."

In my own remarks, I spoke of “the extraordinarily vibrant and overwhelmingly positive connections that we now enjoy together - of culture and art, of economics and commerce, of friendship and family.”

The dinner was obviously a social event and not a forum for discussion of policy issues. Therefore, I did not specifically discuss or address the recent letter from the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) to political parties in Northern Ireland on the grave economic implications of Brexit in a no deal scenario. Although I did have a separate meeting with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at the Embassy following the dinner, this focused on legacy issues.

The letter from the Head of the NICS follows on the UK Government’s paper of 26 February which notes that the cumulative impact from a ‘no deal’ scenario is expected to be more severe in Northern Ireland than in Great Britain, and to last longer. The letter sets out the work which the Northern Ireland Departments have been doing across a range of sectors in advance of the UK leaving the EU and amplifies the UK Government assessment. It notes that, despite the considerable amount of mitigation work that has been undertaken to date across Departments, Northern Ireland will face considerable and unavoidable residual risks, notably on the local economy in ways that cannot be mitigated.

I share the letter’s assessment, including its stark warning about the changes to everyday life, potential border frictions, and the potential for profound and long lasting impact on society. I have repeatedly discussed my concerns around the impact of Brexit on Northern Ireland with my British counterparts. I can assure the Deputy that the imperative of avoiding that scenario will continue to inform the Government’s approach. Indeed from the outset, I have highlighted the socio-economic risks which Brexit poses for Northern Ireland as well as for the wider political situation there. I have repeatedly stated that a no deal Brexit is in no one’s interests, least of all for the people of Northern Ireland who, as the report and letter confirm, will be most affected. Those risks only serve to further highlight the absolute need to agree the Withdrawal Agreement and the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland.

*Questions Nos. 76 and 77 answered with Question No. 74.*

*Question No. 78 answered with Question No. 75.*

## **Northern Ireland**

79. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has discussed with the British Foreign Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland the way in which the victims of terrorism in Northern Ireland who still live there or here and in the UK are actually supported; the groups which receive funding to provide supports; the way in which this differs in each jurisdiction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12361/19]

82. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he or his officials have met with the Minister for Health and his officials to discuss the way in which victims of terrorism who live here could receive specific supports, in particular counselling, from the health service; if they receive support in accessing health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12365/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 79 and 82 together.

I understand that these Questions refer to victims of violence during the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

The Government's position is that there is no hierarchy of victims, whether killed or injured during the conflict in Northern Ireland by the actions of paramilitaries or by state forces. This is also the official position of the British Government and is provided for in UK statute.

The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to building on the progress made to establish the comprehensive institutional framework for dealing with the past that is provided for under the 2014 Stormont House Agreement, maintaining the needs of the victims and survivors at the core of our approach.

I have engaged extensively with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and with the leaders of the political parties in Northern Ireland to seek the full implementation of the comprehensive legacy framework of the Stormont House Agreement. This Agreement provides for the establishment of a number of legacy institutions, including the Independent Commission on Information Retrieval and Oral History Archive, which would be accessible to people in Northern Ireland, in this jurisdiction, and in Britain.

The Stormont House Agreement also includes provisions in respect of services for victims in Northern Ireland which are for implementation by the Executive. The Agreement in addition expressly affirms that the needs of victims who do not live in Northern Ireland should be recognised.

Consistent with this, the Programme for Government commits to continuing support for victims' groups and to promote reconciliation among communities on both sides of the border, which were particularly affected by the Troubles, through the Government's Reconciliation Fund and through Ministerial engagement with representatives of different community traditions.

The Reconciliation Fund is open to applications from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community groups, and voluntary organisations, to support reconciliation and to create better understanding between people and traditions on the island of Ireland and between Ireland and Britain. Groups who work with and support victims of the Troubles have made successful applications for support under the Reconciliation Fund. A list of grants awarded is published on my Department's website after each funding round. Reflecting our ongoing deep commitment to supporting the work of reconciliation on this island, the Government has provided for a substantial increase of €1m for the Reconciliation Fund, bringing the total budget to €3.7m with effect from January 2019.

The Government also contributes significantly to the EU PEACE IV programme (2014 - 2020), and which includes a specific action on Victims and Survivors. This action is delivered by the Victims and Survivors Service in Northern Ireland which provides funding supports to organisations to employ Health and Wellbeing Case Managers, Health and Wellbeing Caseworkers, Advocacy Case Managers and Advocacy Caseworkers for victims and survivors irrespective of their place of residence.

A Remembrance Commission was established in 2003 and operated a Scheme of Acknowledgement, Remembrance and Assistance for Victims of the Troubles in this jurisdiction. The Commission's term of appointment formally came to an end on 31 October 2008 and the Commission disbursed over €6.5m to victims and their families in this time. On the conclusion of the Commission's term of appointment, the then Minister for Justice and Equality made special arrangements to ensure that victims resident in the jurisdiction who require ongoing medical treatment for injuries sustained in bombings and other incidents arising from the Troubles may

have these costs reimbursed through the Victims of Crime Office of the Department of Justice and Equality.

Access to medical services in this jurisdiction, including access to counselling, is a matter for the HSE and my colleague, the Minister for Health. I have not had specific discussions with the Minister in this regard; however, I am ready to do so if there are specific suggestions to consider.

As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, I have valued the opportunity to meet with victims' families and with survivors of Troubles-related attacks, North and South on the island of Ireland and in Britain, to hear their views, experiences and concerns. As the Government continues work to implement the legacy framework of the Stormont House Agreement, we will maintain our ongoing engagement with victims groups, to take account of their views and maintain their needs at the core of our approach.

### **Northern Ireland**

80. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he or his Department officials have met with a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12362/19]

81. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which his Department can facilitate requests from various groups such as a group (details supplied) to assist them with reaching out to victims and all their families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12364/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 80 and 81 together.

I have not personally met with the South East Fermanagh Foundation (SEFF). My Department regularly engages on my behalf with SEFF, which provides access to well-being and advocacy services for a significant number of victims' families and survivors of Troubles-related attacks both in Northern Ireland and in this jurisdiction.

In recent years, my Department's engagement with SEFF has included attendance at SEFF's annual conference and visits to the group's centre in Fermanagh. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has facilitated SEFF in organising events in this jurisdiction to engage with victims families and survivors here, most recently in July last year, as part of SEFF's advocacy engagement on the UK government's public consultation on draft legislation to establish the legacy institutions provided for under the 2014 Stormont House Agreement. SEFF successfully applied for funding under my Department's Reconciliation Fund in 2015. My Department will continue this constructive engagement with SEFF in the period ahead.

The Government also contributes significantly to the EU PEACE IV programme (2014-2020), and which includes a specific action on Victims and Survivors. This action is delivered by the Victims and Survivors Service in Northern Ireland which provides funding supports to organisations - including SEFF - to employ Health and Wellbeing Case Managers, Health and Wellbeing Caseworkers, Advocacy Case Managers and Advocacy Caseworkers for victims and survivors irrespective of their place of residence.

This engagement and funding support from the Government is part of our commitment, set out in the Programme for Partnership Government, to continue support for victims' groups and to promote reconciliation among communities on both sides of the border, which were

particularly affected by the Troubles. This support is also channelled through the Government's Reconciliation Fund and through Ministerial engagement with representatives of different community traditions.

As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, I have valued the opportunity to meet with victims' families and with survivors of Troubles-related attacks, North and South on the island of Ireland and in Britain, to hear their views, experiences and concerns.

Consistent with our commitments in the Programme for Partnership Government, as the Government continues work to implement the legacy framework of the Stormont House Agreement to address the legacy of the past, we will maintain our engagement with victims groups as well as victims' families and survivors, to take account of their views and maintain their needs at the core of our approach.

*Question No. 82 answered with Question No. 79.*

### **Brexit Issues**

83. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has received an update on the meetings that the British Attorney General has been having with EU officials on the withdrawal treaty and the backstop in particular. [11928/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I spoke with Michel Barnier over the weekend, during his visit to Dublin. I also remain in contact with my UK counterparts, and spoke with David Lidington during my visit to London late last week.

There have been an intensive series of meeting between the EU and the UK over the past few weeks, including between the British Attorney General, Geoffrey Cox, the UK Brexit Secretary, Stephen Barclay, and the EU Chief Brexit Negotiator Michel Barnier. The Commission has been working with the UK to agree language with a view towards the meaningful vote in Westminster, without reopening or contradicting the Withdrawal Agreement, including the backstop.

On 11 May Prime Minister May and President Juncker agreed a package of measures comprising of an "Instrument relating to the Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community" and a "Joint Statement supplementing the Political Declaration setting out the framework for the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland." There was constant contact between our team and the Commission's team over the last number of days as these documents were being developed. The Taoiseach also spoke by phone with President Juncker before the package was agreed with Prime Minister May.

These documents are complementary to the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration and aim to provide an additional layer of interpretation, clarification and elaboration to the United Kingdom. They provide the legal assurances sought by the UK on the temporary nature of the backstop, as well as additions to the political declaration on the future relationship setting clearly our commitment to finding alternative arrangements to the backstop.

The Government welcomes this agreement, and is prepared to back this package of measures in the interests of securing an overall deal. As we have said all along, the backstop is an insurance policy. We have no intention of wishing to trap the UK into an arrangement against its will. The Withdrawal Agreement and the backstop does not do this, but does provide the guar-

antees that a hard border will be avoided and that the Good Friday Agreement is fully protected.

The EU is fully committed to exploring alternative arrangements so that the backstop is never used, or would only apply temporarily if it ever needs to be used. The agreed package makes clear that work on these alternative arrangements will begin as soon as the Withdrawal Agreement is signed.

This has not been an easy process and compromise has been shown on both sides. We hope that with these further assurances the House of Commons will approve the Withdrawal Agreement. This is the best and only way to ensure an orderly withdrawal that fully protects the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process.

### **Brexit Issues**

84. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Finance if a response will issue to a query (details supplied) regarding a no-deal Brexit. [11897/19]

112. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance if cars will be tariff free in the event of a no-deal Brexit (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11895/19]

113. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding vehicles (details supplied) in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11896/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 84, 112 and 113 together.

I am advised by Revenue that they have had extensive engagement with businesses and trade representative bodies throughout the State over the last number of months to assist them in their preparations for Brexit.

I am advised by Revenue that, subject to documentary evidence, a car dealer who has new vehicles in stock that were imported through the UK, which were pre-registered with VRT quotations and are in the State before 29 March, will not be subject to differing rules on tariffs, VAT or VRT.

If a car dealer sells vehicles that are manufactured and invoiced from Italy but are transported to Ireland via the UK, Revenue have advised that these are EU goods which may be transported directly to Ireland via direct shipping routes or alternatively may be transported through the UK under the control of a customs procedure called the Customs Transit procedure.

EU goods moving under the Customs Transit procedure, from one Member State to another, through a third country, are treated as EU goods upon re-entry to the EU and therefore incur no additional import duties or taxes upon arrival into the State.

I am advised by Revenue that new and used vehicles and/or parts imported from the UK post-Brexit, having been manufactured in the UK, would be subject to Common Customs Tariffs (CCT) in the event of the UK leaving the EU without an agreement. A complete description of the item being imported would be required in order to give a full customs tariff classification, this is particularly important for the importation of car parts and accessories. In the case of new or used vehicles imported from a third country, customs duty is chargeable at importation in the normal way, unless the trader has been authorised by Revenue for the deferral of taxes and

duties.

Full details of the customs procedures are available on Revenue's dedicated Brexit website [www.revenue.ie/brexit](http://www.revenue.ie/brexit). If further information is required in relation to customs procedures, these can be addressed to [brexitqueries@revenue.ie](mailto:brexitqueries@revenue.ie).

In relation to VAT, vehicles that are acquired from Italy and transited through the United Kingdom will be subject to the current VAT rules. Vehicles imported from the UK will be subject to VAT at the point of importation.

In order to alleviate the cash flow burden on Irish businesses post Brexit, I have legislated for postponed accounting for import VAT. Under this system, importers will not pay import VAT at the point of entry but will instead account for import VAT through their VAT return, so that it is reclaimed at the same time that it is declared - a straightforward simultaneous in/out accounting transaction, without the need to pay the import VAT at the point of entry to the State. Use of postponed accounting will be optional and will be available to all traders in Ireland who trade with operators in countries outside of the European Union for a time after Brexit, after which continuation of the facility will be subject to conditions, to be set by the Revenue Commissioners at a later date.

### **Insurance Coverage**

85. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to insurance companies increasing premiums or not covering persons who are renting rooms to students as part of the rent-a-room relief tax credit; his views on same; if insurance companies will be contacted on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12233/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies as to the pricing level or terms or conditions that they should apply in respect of particular categories of policyholders.

It is my understanding that insurers use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer insurance cover and what terms to apply. My understanding also is that insurance companies do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices and availability of cover varies across the market. In addition, insurance companies will price in accordance with their own past claims experience. Notwithstanding the above, my officials contacted Insurance Ireland on foot of the Deputy's query to understand more about the process. Insurance Ireland advised that generally the key factor that insurers consider in terms of the scenarios outlined in the Deputy's question is if the home owner is permanently occupying the premises as their main residence. There was no indication from the companies surveyed that cover was not available to home owners who sought to take advantage of the rent-a room scheme.

Finally, Insurance Ireland operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. Insurance Ireland can be

contacted at [feedback@insuranceireland.eu](mailto:feedback@insuranceireland.eu) or 01-6761914.

## **Mortgage Lending**

86. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the rules the Central Bank has in place on promotional and other material relating to mortgage offers; if the Central Bank has power to instruct that such material be changed; the number of instances in which such material was submitted to the Central Bank with regard to cashback offers; the number of instances in which the Central Bank instructed that such material be altered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11492/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Following a public consultation process, the Central Bank introduced enhanced mortgage switching and transparency rules to the Consumer Protection Code 2012 (the Code) by means of the Addendum which became effective from 1 January 2019:

([www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/regulation/consumer-protection/other-codes-of-conduct/addendum-to-consumer-protection-code-2012---june-2018.pdf?sfvrsn=4](http://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/regulation/consumer-protection/other-codes-of-conduct/addendum-to-consumer-protection-code-2012---june-2018.pdf?sfvrsn=4)).

As a result of the enhanced mortgage switching measures, an existing provision in the Code which required that information be provided to the consumer where a regulated entity offered an incentive on an existing mortgage holder, has now been extended to apply to all mortgages i.e. for existing, new and switching mortgage holders. This is to ensure that personal consumers have sufficient clarity about the precise nature and scale of the benefit of an incentive to them, including the potential impact of an associated incentive on the cost of their mortgage. This rule in the Code requires lenders to provide consumers with information needed by them to consider the incentive offered. This information must:

- quantify the implications for the consumer of availing of the incentive including an indicative cost comparison of the total cost of the existing mortgage if they do not avail of the incentive and the total cost of the mortgage if they avail of the incentive;
- clearly set out the length of time during which the incentive will be available;
- clearly set out any assumptions used, which must be reasonable and justifiable;
- set out the advantages and disadvantages to the personal consumer of availing of the incentive;
- include other key information which the personal consumer should have available to them when considering the incentive; and
- include a statement that the personal consumer may wish to seek independent advice prior to availing of the incentive.

In relation to the advertising of mortgage products, including incentives, the Code already contains an extensive suite of advertising rules with which regulated firms must comply. These include requirements that the design, presentation and content of all advertisements must be clear, fair, accurate and not misleading, and must not seek to influence a consumer's attitude to the product of the entity by ambiguity, exaggeration or omission. Key information must be prominent and not obscured or disguised in any way.

The Central Bank undertook a review of mortgage related advertising in 2018, with a focus on cash back incentives, to assess whether or not lenders were advertising mortgages with

cashback offers in a clear and unambiguous way. The Bank advises that 183 advertisements were reviewed for compliance with the advertising requirements in the Code and the European Union (Consumer Mortgage Credit Agreements) Regulations 2016. In some cases, the same advertisement may have appeared across all formats of advertising reviewed (e.g. print, on-line, outdoor advertising etc).

As a result of the review, the Central Bank advised that it instructed lenders to withdraw or amend c.75% of the advertisements reviewed. In summary, it was found that:

(a) key information and qualifying criteria was not always included in the main body of the advertisements, or indeed in the small print (e.g. whether a current account with the lender was required in order to qualify);

(b) the content of some webpages was not accurate and/or up to date; and

(c) the content of some of the advertisements was unclear (e.g. how the cash back incentive was calculated).

### **Financial Services Sector**

87. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the car finance model being investigated by the Financial Conduct Authority in the UK in which credit brokers are paid commission based on interest charged exists here; if the Central Bank has views on this model; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11493/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that the majority of hire purchase agreements, such as PCPs, are provided to consumers through credit intermediaries. Under the Consumer Credit Act 1995, credit intermediaries are authorised by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) and the CCPC advises that, when performing intermediary functions, credit intermediaries are required to disclose certain information in writing to the consumer including that the intermediary receives a commission, payment or consideration of any kind from an undertaking for arranging any such financial accommodation.

While intermediaries are frequently involved in the process, hire purchase agreements are ultimately provided by hire purchase providers and these providers are the entity which is the “owner” of the good let to the consumer under the hire purchase agreement. While hire-purchase providers themselves are not required to obtain authorisation from the Central Bank (or the CCPC) for the provision of hire-purchase agreements, nevertheless this is an activity which is subject to statutory control and which contains important consumer protections. For example, Parts II and VI of the Consumer Credit Act (both of which fall within Central Bank designated provisions of the Act) provide that important information be disclosed in advertisements for hire purchase agreements and also in the agreements as entered into by consumers. This includes information on the cash price of the good, as well as the APR and hire purchase price. My officials have checked with both the CCPC and the Central Bank and neither entity has seen any evidence of the practices in the UK as referred to in the question operating in Ireland. Also the Bank has indicated that no specific issue in relation to the provision of hire purchase agreements or their associated commission arrangements arose during the consultation process on Intermediary Inducements (CP 116).

As the Deputy will be aware, more generally I asked Mr. Michael Tutty to conduct a review of the PCP market and regulatory structure and his report was published by my Department last November. That report found that there was currently no evidence of consumer detriment

arising from PCPs but nevertheless it set out a number of recommendations to help avoid possible problems arising in the future. I have previously indicated that I broadly accept the recommendations and conclusions of the Tutty report. Nevertheless, in line with some of the report's recommendations my Department is currently consulting the Office of the Attorney General on some specific issues raised in the report, and when a response is to hand my Department will further engage with the Central Bank, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the CCPC on this matter.

### **Insurance Costs**

88. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when the next quarterly update from the cost of insurance working group will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11505/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy is aware, the Cost of Insurance Working Group is chaired by the Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Mr. Michael D'Arcy T.D., and has produced two primary reports, the 2017 Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance ("Motor Report") and the 2018 Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance ("EL/PL Report"). Work has been ongoing on the implementation of the recommendations from these two Reports by the relevant Government Departments and Agencies and there is a commitment that the Working Group will prepare regular updates on its progress.

The eighth such Progress Update was published on my Department's website on Monday 4 March. The latest Progress Update concentrated in particular on outlining the definitive position in relation to all of the 33 recommendations from the Motor Report, as the last of the deadlines within its Action Plan passed at the end of 2018. 29 of these recommendations have either been completed, are categorised as "ongoing" and in respect of which work is continuing, or have been concluded in so far as the direct involvement of the CIWG is concerned.

In respect of the EL/PL Report, 24 out of the total of 26 action points which were due for completion during 2018 overall have been accomplished.

This Progress Update also included an additional section providing the up-to-date status in respect of relevant recommendations from the two reports issued by the Personal Injuries Commission (PIC).

Finally, the Deputy should be assured that Minister of State D'Arcy and the Working Group will continue to push for the completion of all outstanding recommendations and action points, as well as seeking to put into place the relevant measures proposed by the PIC.

### **Personal Injury Claims**

89. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to regulate claims harvesting companies in the area of personal injuries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11527/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Allegations of companies engaging in what has been termed as 'claims harvesting' practices were brought up during the Cost of Insurance Working Group's consultation process, as well as through representations and Parliamentary Questions submitted by, for instance, the Alliance for Insurance Reform and the Deputy

himself previously.

The Department's Insurance Policy section has undertaken research in respect of Claims Management Companies (CMCs), including engagements with relevant parties, most particularly the Law Society of Ireland and the Claims Management Regulation Unit, the UK body set up within the Ministry of Justice to regulate CMCs there. Following this examination, I do not believe there is a compelling argument at present for putting in place a regulatory regime for CMCs in Ireland for a number of reasons, which are set out below.

Firstly, and most importantly, there does not appear to be a sufficient number of CMCs operating in the Irish market to justify the establishment of a specific regulator. The Department has been advised by those with a level of expertise in this area that the number of active 'claims harvesting' websites operating in Ireland has significantly reduced from approximately 60 in 2016 to around half-a-dozen more recently. The Department has also been advised that between about 23 and 40 websites have been taken down directly as a result of the Law Society's work in this area, at least two as a result of Orders from the President of the High Court following arduous and complex investigations.

Secondly, it would appear that many of the websites which are operating in Ireland may not actually be located within the jurisdiction nor within other EU countries. I understand that this factor increases the levels of complexity of investigations, as it can be particularly difficult to establish who the owners of the relevant websites are. My view, and that of the Department, is that in such circumstances it would be just as problematic for a specially appointed supervisor to determine basic facts such as ownership. Therefore, from a cost benefit perspective, it is difficult to justify incurring significant costs to establish such a role.

Thirdly, we have stringent rules in relation to how solicitors can operate in relation to advertising and generating business. In particular,

- the Solicitors (Advertising) Regulations 2002 prohibits solicitors' advertisements offering inducements to make personal injuries claims, and

- Section 62 of the Solicitors Act 1954 prohibits solicitors from rewarding or agreeing to reward unqualified persons for the introduction of legal business, i.e., payment of a referral fee.

This is in contrast to the situation in the UK for example. The Irish rules are significant deterrents and are actively enforced by the Law Society.

Fourthly, it is our view that the setting up of a supervisor would afford CMCs a level of legitimacy and recognition which is certainly currently absent in Ireland. It would appear based on my officials' conversations with the UK authorities that the referral fee ban has been widely circumvented there to at least some degree without the relevant entities losing their authorisation. This would appear to show that the tolerance level for referral fees is far higher in the UK than it is here. This is reflected in the fact that CMCs are seen as legitimate businesses in the UK and much of the regulatory work which the supervisor undertakes is related to matters of consumer protection, consumer awareness and ensuring adherence to applicable rules, rather than seeking to eliminate what we would consider as 'claims harvesting'-type activity.

The UK supervisor also seeks to ensure adherence to relevant advertising regulations, but again the regulations in this country appear to be far more stringent, with, for example, a 'no win, no fee' policy being openly advertised on the main authorised Personal Injury CMC websites in the UK. As you are aware, such advertising is prohibited in this country.

My view is that the existing solicitor regulations have helped prevent the type of situation currently pertaining in the UK from evolving to anywhere near the same extent here.

In conclusion therefore, at this point in time, I do not believe a compelling case for regulation can be made from a cost benefit analysis perspective. It should be noted that under section 218 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015, when commenced, such advertising will no longer be regulated by the legal professional bodies as happens at present but by the Legal Services Regulatory Authority. Specifically, section 218(d)(vi) of the 2015 Act allows for the restriction of any advertisement which, in the opinion of the Authority, “expressly or impliedly solicits, encourages or offers any inducement to any person or group or class of persons to make claims for personal injuries or seek legal services in connection with such claims.” The Authority will be undertaking consultations for the making of regulations for the advertising of legal services by legal practitioners, whether solicitors or barristers, under section 218 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015. The Legal Services Regulatory Authority is expected to take over this responsibility in July 2019.

I will, of course, keep the situation under review, and my officials will continue to monitor the prevalence or otherwise of this issue. In addition, I would suggest that if anyone is of the view that particular solicitor firms are using such claim harvesting websites, they should report the matter to the Law Society/ Legal Services Regulatory Authority for investigation.

### **Revenue Commissioners**

90. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the Revenue Commissioners will not accept correspondence from agricultural colleges (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11537/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that, in relation to tax reliefs for ‘young trained farmers’, different verification procedures may be applied depending on whether the particular course is a course approved by Teagasc, with qualifications awarded by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland, or a course with qualifications awarded directly by third-level institutions.

The appropriate verification treatment to be applied depends on the facts and circumstances of each case. In the case of qualifications awarded by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland, the usual position is that a letter issued to a young farmer by a college contains details about course completion and results but also indicates that the attainment of the required qualification depends on external verification by Teagasc still to be carried out and that a certificate will be provided following this verification. Such a letter would not be accepted by Revenue as evidence of a young farmer having attained the qualification as the required verification had not been carried out.

The ‘details supplied’ in relation to this case do not contain sufficient information to allow Revenue to give a definitive view on the matter. If there is an actual case involved, the Deputy might provide more detailed information as follows:

- the name of the young farmer,
- the name of the course and college involved,
- the date of the Teagasc external verification (if relevant),
- the date of the award of the qualification/receipt of the certificate, and
- whether or not the farmland has been transferred to the young farmer and, if so, the date of execution of the deed of transfer.

Alternatively, the Deputy, or the farmer involved if this concerns an actual case, might wish to contact Revenue directly to discuss the matter. In this regard, contact should be made with Imelda Scally in Revenue's National Stamp Duty Office at 01-8589324 or [iscally@revenue.ie](mailto:iscally@revenue.ie).

### **Tax Code**

91. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue generated by the sugar sweetened drinks tax since its introduction; if he will provide a revised estimate of the revenue raised from the tax in a full year and a projection for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11546/19]

92. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance the number of products that have been affected by the imposition of a calcium threshold on products exempt from the sugar sweetened drinks tax; if the imposition of the threshold has brought these products within the scope of the tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11547/19]

93. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance the consideration which has been given to extending the sugar sweetened drinks tax to products within the CN2202 category in which sugar has been added; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11548/19]

94. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance the status of an evaluation that has taken place of the sugar sweetened drinks tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11549/19]

95. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance the research which has been undertaken on evidence based fiscal measures to support healthy eating and lifestyles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11550/19]

96. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance the review of evidence which has taken place for fiscal measures on products that are high in fat, sugar and salt to reduce their consumption; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11551/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 91 to 96, inclusive, together.

Sugar Sweetened Drinks Tax (SSDT) was introduced on 1 May 2018 and applies when sugar sweetened drinks are first supplied in the State. SSDT applies on a volumetric basis at one of two rates, dependent on the total sugar content of the 'ready to consume' form of the sugar sweetened drink: €16.26 per hectolitre on drinks with a total sugar content of at least five and less than eight grams per 100 millilitres and €24.39 per hectolitre on drinks with a total sugar content of eight grams or more per 100 millilitres.

Revenue has advised that SSDT yield for 2018 totalled €16.51m and that at the end of February 2019 SSDT yield for 2019 totalled €6.5m. The SSDT yield estimate for 2019 is €35m.

In response to Ireland's formal notification of the tax, the European Commission confirmed that the measures did not constitute a State aid under EU rules. This decision was given on the basis that Ireland had committed to extend the scope of the tax to certain drinks, within CN Code heading 2202, that do not meet specific health benefit criteria, defined as containing at least 119 milligrams of calcium per 100 millilitres.

In order to meet this commitment, SSDT legislation was amended in Finance Act 2018 to bring defined categories of drinks that do not contain at least 119 milligrams of calcium per

100 millilitres within scope of SSdT. The legislative amendments, which came into effect on 1 January 2019, impacted on sugar sweetened plant protein drinks and drinks containing milk fats, that fall within CN Code heading 2202. These drinks, that were previously excluded from taxation, are subject to SSdT if they have a total sugar content of 5 grams or more per 100 millilitres and do not carry nutritional information indicating a calcium content of at least 119 milligrams per 100 millilitres.

The types of drinks within CN Code heading 2202 that were impacted by the legislative changes are those covered by five specific subheadings;

a) Plant protein drinks such as those based on soya, nuts, cereals and seeds (covered by CN Code subheadings 2202 99 11, 2202 99 15);

b) Drinks containing milk fats (covered by CN Code subheadings 2202 99 91, 2202 99 95 and 2202 99 99)

Information is not available on the number of products affected by the imposition of a calcium threshold and I am advised that Revenue does not maintain a list of products that are liable to SSdT.

The commencement of the SSdT on 1 May last was in line with one of the recommendations in the National Obesity Policy and Action Plan. It represents a positive step in our national policy to deal with the problem of obesity. Work is underway on the development of an evaluation framework for this tax in conjunction with the Department of Health.

The question of considering further fiscal measures similar to the SSdT is being kept under review in conjunction with the Dept of Health and the National Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group. We are in the early implementation phase of the SSdT and the priority of my Department is to ensure that this is a success rather than to plan for the introduction of any new taxes with a similar purpose.

### **VAT Rate Application**

97. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance the work being undertaken in respect of addressing anomalies in food and drink VAT rates as part of deliberations on upcoming changes to VAT law at EU level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11554/19]

98. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider the inclusion of a nutrient profiling model to identify unhealthy food products as part of the applicability of VAT on food and drink; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11555/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 97 and 98 together.

VAT is governed by the EU VAT Directive, with which Irish VAT law must comply. The VAT treatment of food and drink in Ireland is varied and has developed over time. Most basic foods apply at the zero rate under an historical derogation from the normal VAT rules. Catered food primarily applies at the 13.5% reduced rate, including hot beverages. Most drinks apply at the standard VAT rate, including alcohol, soft drinks, bottled water and fruit juices.

VAT rates are reviewed annually in the context of the Budget and Finance Bill cycle. However, any changes to VAT rating are restricted by EU VAT rules. If the VAT rate on food or drink that currently applies at the zero rate were to be increased, it would not be possible to return that

food or drink to the zero rate at a later date. In addition, it is not possible to apply the zero rate to any new food or drink that has not applied at that rate on and from 1 January 1991.

The European Commission published a proposal in January 2018 which aims to simplify VAT rating, allowing Member States greater freedom in setting VAT rates. The proposal has not yet progressed at EU Council. It is expected that discussions on the proposal will be robust and will provide for an opportunity to undertake a fuller examination of the VAT rates in general, including those applicable to food and drink.

Separate from the EU policy on VAT rating, one of the main principles of EU VAT law is fiscal neutrality, which provides that different VAT rates cannot apply to goods that are considered the same. For example, it is not possible to apply different VAT rates to restaurant services based on the nutritional value of the food being served.

EU VAT rules also dictate that a Member State can only apply a limited number of VAT rates, which would similarly be the case under the Commission's revised system. As such, any determination in respect of categories of foods would have to be limited to the available number of VAT rates, while also considering any additional complexity and administrative burden that could be generated, both for business and tax administrations.

### **Tax Code**

**99. Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to increase the threshold band of inheritance tax payable for nieces and nephews in view of the high rate of tax that they are liable to pay on current thresholds; if investigations have been carried out on the implications of potential amendments to the thresholds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11575/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy is aware, there are, in all, three separate lifetime CAT Group thresholds based on the relationship of the beneficiary to the disponer.

I would say that there has been changes to the three thresholds in recent times. In Budget 2017, the Group A threshold which generally applies to gifts to or inheritances by children, adopted children and some foster children, was increased from €280,000 to €310,000 and in Budget 2019 was increased to €320,000. The Group B threshold, which generally applies to gifts to or inheritances by nephews, nieces, brothers, sisters and which is the subject of the Deputy's question, was increased in Budget 2017 from €30,150 to €32,000. In addition the Category C threshold which applies to all other categories was increased from €15,075 to €16,250. These changes have been introduced where resources allow and in the light of competing priorities.

I would add that in relation to the threshold for nieces/nephews (Group B), there is a specific relief from CAT available in certain circumstances, known as the CAT favourite niece or nephew relief. This applies to the inheritance of business or agricultural property where certain conditions are met. Where the niece or nephew has worked substantially on a full-time basis for 5 years prior to inheritance, they are entitled to the Group A tax-free threshold of €320,000 when calculating their CAT liability for the inheritance, rather than the Group B threshold (currently €32,500). In order to qualify for this relief, the nephew/niece must work for the disponer for a minimum number of hours per week (either 15 or 24, depending on the size of the business/farm).

The aim of this relief is to target nieces/nephews who have placed their labour and expertise at the disposal of the disponer for an ongoing period, to the benefit of the business. This relief

applies to all businesses, including farming.

Consideration of possible changes to CAT rates and thresholds, including in respect of inheritances or gifts to nephews and nieces generally takes place as part of the annual Budget and Finance Bill process.

### **Motor Insurance Data**

100. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount paid by policy holders by way of insurance premiums in each of the years since 2010 in respect of class 1 business motor insurance in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11637/19]

101. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount paid by policy holders by way of insurance premiums in each of the years since 2010 in respect of class 2 business motor insurance in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11638/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 100 and 101 together.

As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. My Department does not collect the type of information being sought by the Deputy. As the day to day supervision of insurance undertakings is a matter for the Central Bank of Ireland, my officials consulted with the Central Bank in respect of the information sought and it has confirmed that it does not collect this information either.

I would note that initially at least this type of information will not be collected by the National Claims Information Database as its focus in the first instance will be on private motor insurance claims. However, I recognise that there is a view from some stakeholders that it would be desirable to expand its scope to other lines of business, such as commercial motor insurance. For this reason, the Central Bank (National Claims Information Database) Act 2018 facilitates the expansion at a later stage should it be considered feasible.

I understand that Insurance Ireland publishes some information in relation to the gross written premium for commercial motor insurance, however this is not split into class 1 and class 2. In that regard, I understand, from the 2016 Insurance Factfile that €444.6 million was the gross written premium for commercial motor insurance. This represents approximately 26% of the overall gross written premium for motor insurance. The corresponding gross written premium figures for private motor insurance were €1.2 billion, which represents 74% of the overall gross written premium. The Deputy will be able to find similar information for years prior to this in previous year's Insurance Factfiles on Insurance Ireland's website.

### **Motor Insurance Data**

102. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount paid by policy holders by way of insurance premiums in each of the years since 2010 in respect of motor insurance for returning emigrants in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11639/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. My Department does not collect the type of information being sought by the Deputy. As the day to day supervision of insurance undertakings is a matter for the Central Bank of Ireland, my officials

consulted with the Bank in respect of the information sought and it has confirmed that it does not collect this information either.

With regard to the cost of insurance for returning emigrants, it is important to note that neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies as to the pricing level or terms or conditions that they should apply in respect of particular categories of drivers or vehicles.

Notwithstanding this, the difficulties faced by returning emigrants in respect of motor insurance was recognised by the Cost of Insurance Working Group's Motor report. In this regard, the Deputy may be aware that in fulfilment of one of the Working Group's recommendations, a protocol was agreed between Insurance Ireland and the Department of Finance under which insurance companies committed to accepting the driving experience returning emigrants gained while abroad, when the driver has had previous driving experience in Ireland.

The guiding principle of the protocol is to ensure that a returning emigrant is not treated differently to any other driver, subject to verification of their continued driving experience and the normal acceptance criteria of the company. Thus, a returning emigrant will not be disadvantaged from spending that time abroad. Furthermore, under the protocol, insurance companies will not distinguish between countries on the basis of which side of the road driving takes place therein.

The Minister for the Diaspora and International Development, Mr Ciarán Cannon TD, has undertaken some further work in this area, through the Interdepartmental Committee on the Irish Abroad. This has included highlighting each individual motor insurance operator's overall policy in respect of returning emigrants. The insurers which responded positively in relation to providing cover for this category are listed on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website. These insurers have also indicated that they do, in one way or another, take into account claims-free driving experience earned abroad.

It is important to highlight that if a returning emigrant believes that they have received a high quote due to an insurance provider not accepting driving experience gained while abroad, they should contact the free Insurance Information Service operated by Insurance Ireland, which can be accessed at [feedback@insuranceireland.eu](mailto:feedback@insuranceireland.eu) or 01-6761820.

Finally, I remain of the view that the continued implementation of all the recommendations from the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance – in addition to those in the CIWG's Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance and the two reports of the Personal Injuries Commission – should achieve the objectives of delivering fairer premiums for consumers and a more stable and competitive insurance market.

In this regard, it should be noted that the CSO CPI statistics indicate that pricing in the private motor insurance market has stabilised over the last year or two and I welcome the direction of travel which this index has displayed since it peaked in July 2016.

### **Motor Insurance Data**

103. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount paid by policy

holders by way of insurance premiums in each of the years since 2010 in respect of motor insurance for cars that are ten years or older in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11640/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. My Department does not collect the type of information being sought by the Deputy. As the day to day supervision of insurance undertakings is a matter for the Central Bank of Ireland, my officials have consulted with the Central Bank in respect of the information sought and it has confirmed that it does not collect this information either.

With regard to the cost of insurance for cars over 10 years old, it is important to note that neither I, nor the Central Bank of Ireland, can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies as to the pricing level or terms or conditions that they should apply in respect of particular categories of vehicles.

Notwithstanding this, my officials engaged with Insurance Ireland in order to get a greater sense of this specific issue and, as a follow-up exercise, Minister of State D'Arcy held a series of meetings with the Chief Executives of the major motor insurers. At those meetings, insurers pointed out that in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply, they will, aside from the age of the vehicle, use a combination of other rating factors, which include the age of the driver, the type of vehicle, the relevant individual claims record and driving experience, the number of drivers, and how the car is used. In addition to the above factors, they indicated that they will price in accordance with their own overall past claims experience and in this regard, almost all insurers stated that their data indicates a notable deterioration in the levels of claims associated with vehicles once a certain age threshold is reached.

However, I also understand from the above engagement that it would appear there has been positive movement in respect of the acceptance criteria and the vehicle age threshold levels used by some providers in recent times, particularly at broker level and in respect of renewals. This is an issue which my officials will continue to monitor.

It is important to highlight that if a person is having difficulty securing a quotation or believes that they have received a high quotation as a result of having a car older than 10 years old, they should contact the free Insurance Information Service operated by Insurance Ireland, which can be accessed at [feedback@insuranceireland.eu](mailto:feedback@insuranceireland.eu) or 01-6761820.

Finally, I am hopeful that the continued implementation of all the recommendations from the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance – in addition to those in the CIWG's Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance and the two reports of the Personal Injuries Commission – should achieve the objectives of delivering fairer premiums for consumers and a more stable and competitive insurance market.

### **Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears**

104. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if banks are required to offer customers in mortgage distress the option of applying for the mortgage to rent scheme; and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [11668/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by the Central Bank of Ireland that within the remit of their responsibilities for safeguarding stability and protecting consumers, its approach to mortgage arrears resolution is focused on ensuring the fair treatment of borrowers through a strong consumer protection framework and ensuring that lenders have appropriate arrears resolution strategies and operations in place.

The Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) forms part of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Framework. It is a statutory Code first introduced by the Central Bank in February 2009, with the current CCMA becoming effective from 1 July 2013. The CCMA provides a strong consumer protection framework, aimed specifically at the process to be followed by relevant firms, to ensure borrowers in arrears or pre-arrears in respect of a mortgage loan secured on a primary residence are treated in a timely, transparent and fair manner.

Banks, retail credit firms and credit servicing firms are all required to comply with the CCMA. The overriding objective of the CCMA is to ensure the fair and transparent treatment of consumers in mortgage arrears or pre-arrears, and that due regard is had to the fact that each case of mortgage arrears is unique and needs to be considered on its own merits. The CCMA recognises that it is in the interests of borrowers and regulated firms to address financial difficulties as speedily, effectively and sympathetically as circumstances allow. It sets out the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP), a four-step process that regulated entities must follow:

- Step 1: Communicate with borrower;
- Step 2: Gather financial information;
- Step 3: Assess the borrower's circumstances; and
- Step 4: Propose a resolution

Each regulated entity must consider the borrower's situation in the context of the solutions that they offer, which may differ from firm to firm. The CCMA does not prescribe the solution which must be offered and lenders are not required to offer a particular solution to a borrower.

The CCMA also provides that a lender must prepare and make available to borrowers, an information booklet providing details of its MARP, which must include an explanation of all ARAs available from that lender and any other options offered by the lender (other than alternative repayment arrangements), such as mortgage to rent, voluntary surrender, voluntary sale, and trading down, and a statement that the availability of these options are subject to an individual assessment of each case and meeting the lender's (or a third party's) criteria.

The CCMA also sets out a procedure that lenders must follow where the following circumstances arise:

- where a lender classified a borrower as not co-operating (provision 29), or
- where a lender concludes that an alternative repayment arrangement is unlikely to be appropriate (provision 45), or
- where a borrower is not willing to enter into an alternative repayment arrangement offered by the lender (provision 47)

Again, the procedure to be followed by the lender in any of these circumstances is that it must inform the borrower on paper or another durable medium of other options available to the

borrower, such as mortgage to rent, voluntary surrender, trading down, or voluntary sale, and the implications of these for the borrower and the borrower's mortgage loan account.

### **EU Budget Contribution**

105. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the EU contributions to be made by Ireland in each of the next five years; the estimated figure if the contributions were based on best forecasts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11678/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** For the years 2020 to 2023, as part of Budget 2019, my Department has forecasted contributions of €2.9bn, €3.1bn, €3.2bn and €3.4bn respectively. Further to this, for the year 2024, my Department has forecasted a contribution of €3.5bn. As part of the Stability Programme Update, these forecasts will be updated in the coming weeks. However, it is worth noting that these forecasts are contingent on a number of variables, including updated GNI forecasts, the size of the overall EU budget for the year and other EU budget operational developments. As a result, all forecasts will be monitored and updated on an ongoing basis.

It should be noted that forecasts for the years 2021 onwards are based on the Commission's proposal for the next MFF which allows for Brexit with Own Resources based on the remaining 27 Member States only. Under the Withdrawal Agreement between the EU and UK, the UK had agreed to continue to pay into the EU budget for the remaining years of the current MFF, as if it was still a member. If adopted this would result in no additional impact on Ireland's contributions or receipts up to the end of the current MFF in 2020.

### **Insurance Compensation Fund**

106. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when persons (details supplied) will receive the remaining 35% of their entitlements following the collapse of a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11701/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Setanta Insurance ("Setanta") was placed into liquidation by the Malta Financial Services Authority on 30 April 2014. As it was a Maltese incorporated company, the liquidation is being carried out under Maltese law.

The Deputy will be aware that the Insurance (Amendment) Act 2018 (Act 21 of 2018) was enacted in July 2018. The Act inter alia provides for revised arrangements for the on-going administration of the Insurance Compensation Fund ("ICF"), including for the relevant applications to the President of the High Court. The most recent tranche of payments to Setanta claimants took place in late November 2018.

To date, 670 personal injury claimants have been compensated in full. The liquidator of Setanta has informed me that since the last application was submitted, a further 125 personal injury claimants have now been agreed and these will be included in the next submission to the Fund bringing the total number of personal injury claimants who have agreed settlements to 795. There are a further 411 personal injury claimants who have yet to settle their claims. The latest information from the liquidator estimates that the total value of the next tranche will be approximately €7 million.

Currently, no date has yet been fixed for the presentation of the next tranche of payments to the High Court. However, my officials have confirmed with the State Claims Agency that the

preparatory work is ongoing with a view to arranging a court date later this month which will allow payments to issue by early April.

While I cannot comment on individual cases, the State Claims Agency has also advised that, to their knowledge, any claimant who was due the residual/balancing 35% of their Setanta settlement was included in the last application to the ICF and the relevant cheques issued late last year. Any person expecting such a payment but who hasn't received it should make contact with their own solicitor to establish why they haven't received the payment. If their solicitor similarly hasn't received the payment, he/she should contact the solicitor firm that represented Setanta on the claim.

Finally, it should be noted that the process of settling claims is still ongoing and is subject in some cases to court procedures. The liquidator of Setanta estimates that the process of settling the vast majority of these outstanding claims should be completed by end-2019.

### **EU Directives**

107. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a derogation in the proposed transposition process of IORP II for small single member pension schemes as was provided in the previous directive on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11769/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Finance, my Department's role in relation to pensions policy primarily relates to the use of tax policy to incentivise retirement savings. In addition, I have responsibility for overall macroeconomic policy and fiscal sustainability. I think it's important to point out that individuals are incentivised to save for retirement through tax policy measures. The Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides that the investment income and gains of pension schemes and pension saving arrangements, approved by the Revenue Commissioners, are generally exempt from taxation while they remain in the scheme or arrangement. This tax exempt treatment of investment growth together with the exemption from tax on ongoing contributions paid into pension funds are intended to encourage individuals to provide themselves with an adequate income in retirement.

In relation to the transposition of the Directive (EU) 2016/2341, on the activities and supervision of institutions for occupational retirement provision (IORPs), also known as IORP II, the Deputy is probably aware that this matter is a policy matter for the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and her Department.

Many of the provisions being implemented by IORP II will support positive reform of the Irish occupational pension sector with aims to ensure good governance, the provision of information to scheme members and the transparency and safety of occupational retirement provision. Given the level of incentives available and the importance of individuals having sufficient savings to adequately provide for their retirement, I believe it's imperative that all pension schemes are subject to sound protections for pensions and consumers, to ensure that money saved for pension purposes is properly protected.

I am aware on implementation of IORP II, that single member schemes, including Small Self-Administered Pension Schemes (SSAPS), previously outside of the scope of the investment and borrowing IORP I provisions, will be subject to IORP II provisions. I have been informed by DEASP that the application of the Directive is not retrospective, but prospective, so those changes will not affect existing investments and borrowings by schemes. However, from transposition onwards, single member schemes will no longer be permitted to enter into new

borrowing agreements, except for short term and liquidity purposes, and all future investments will have to be carried out in accordance with the Directive rules.

Finally, I am supportive of the principle of improved regulation and consumer protection for pension savers as reflected in IORP II. Also, given that the State incentivises pension savings, I believe it is appropriate that limits are placed on the nature and riskiness of assets held by pension savers.

### **Home Loan Scheme**

108. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the views of the Central Bank on potentially expanding the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; if he requested the Central Bank to provide a formal opinion on the scheme; if so, the details of the opinion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11790/19]

116. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has been in contact with the Central Bank about a review of the funding and-or the interest rate of the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12331/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 108 and 116 together.

I understand the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is presently carrying out an internal review of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme. As part of this review there are discussions ongoing between the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform, and Finance.

To inform this review, the Central Bank will prepare a paper for the Financial Stability Group (FSG) to examine the financial stability and macro-prudential impacts of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme, including the potential impact on the residential property market of an extension to the scheme and the non-application of the Central Bank’s Loan-to-Income ratio for mortgage lending.

This paper will be presented to a future meeting of the FSG, which meets on a bi-monthly basis.

The Financial Stability Group (FSG) is a forum for senior officials from the Department of Finance, the Central Bank of Ireland, and the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) to discuss economic and financial system policies which have repercussions for financial stability

The role and responsibilities of the FSG reflect its overall objective to support optimal financial stability arrangements that allow:

- open discussion, based on effective sharing of information
- coordination of financial sector policies that could affect financial stability
- the assessment of risks, and the putting in place of appropriate contingency plans.

### **Revenue Commissioners Resources**

109. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if funding will be provided for the

purchase of an additional mobile X-ray scanner for the Revenue Commissioners; and the additional equipment that has been provided to the Revenue Commissioners customs service in 2018 and to date in 2019. [11811/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that it currently has three mobile x-ray scanners, a ‘backscatter van’ scanner, and a specialist vehicle that contains both x-ray and radiation detection technology. All of the scanners are mobile and can be deployed to both frontier and internal operations. The ‘backscatter van’ scanner is Revenue’s most recent acquisition and became operational in December 2018. The cost of the scanner was part funded by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).

Revenue has also advised me that it continuously reviews its overall detection capability having regard to evolving risk, developments in technology and the obsolescence of existing equipment. On the basis of its most recent review, Revenue is satisfied that the level of resources currently available is fully sufficient.

### Ministerial Meetings

110. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to have a bilateral meeting with his Italian counterpart, Mr. Giovanni Tria. [11812/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I regularly meet with my Italian colleague, Minister Tria, at Eurogroup and ECOFIN Council meetings. The next meetings will be held on 11 and 12 March, in Brussels, while an informal meeting of Economic and Financial Affairs Ministers is scheduled for 5-6 April, in Bucharest.

At present, there are no arrangements in place for a bilateral meeting with Minister Tria.

### Public Interest Directors Data

111. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the banks in which he or the State has a share holding; the role of public interest directors who can be appointed by him in respect of the banks; the details of the public interest directors on the boards of each of these banks; the date the last public interest director was a member of the board; the names of the directors; the date they completed their term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11865/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, in 2016 the Government announced it would cease the appointment of new public interest directors, PIDS, in the banks in which the State holds a shareholding and reform the process by which State nominees were appointed to the board of the banks.

The date of appointment and date of resignation/cessation of office for each of the public interest directors appointed at AIB, BOI and PTSB are as follows:

Bank	Appointed	Resignation/cessation
Allied Irish Banks		
Michael Somers *	January 2010	December 2017
Dick Spring	January 2009	December 2014
Declan Collier	January 2009	June 2012

Bank of Ireland		
Tom Considine	January 09	December 2017
Joe Walsh**	January 09	November 2014
Permanent TSB		
Margaret Hayes	December 2008	May 2013
Ray McSharry	December 2008	May 2013

\* *Dr Michael Somers was a Government Nominee (not a Public Interest Director) appointed to the AIB board on 14 January 2010 under the terms of the NPRFC's Preference Share investment of €3.5bn in AIB of May 2009*

\*\**Joe Walsh ceased to be a director following his death in November 2014.*

Future appointments will be made on foot of my rights as shareholder in each of the banks and not using the powers contained in the Credit Institutions Financial Support (CIFS) Act as was the case with public interest directors. Pursuant to these rights I, as Minister for Finance, can appoint up to two directors to the boards of both AIB and PTSB and one director to the board of Bank of Ireland.

My Department and the Public Appointment Service, PAS, established a transparent process to identify appropriately skilled candidates for nomination to the three banks in which the State holds a shareholding. This includes the establishment of assessment panels to review, assess, interview and compile a list of suitable applicants following which a preferred candidate(s) will be selected by myself, as Minister for Finance. This preferred candidate would then be proposed as the Ministerial nominee to the relevant bank, who in turn will conduct the required governance and submit the candidate for SSM approval in line with their regulatory requirements. The entire process takes over 6 months to conclude.

In 2018 separate processes began in AIB, PTSB and BOI to appoint new state nominated directors under the updated process. In regards to AIB the preferred candidates have been proposed to the bank and are currently undergoing the standard fitness and probity assessments by the regulators. The processes at PTSB and BOI are ongoing.

It is important to note that any company director, regardless of whether or not they are a State nominated director, is subject to the requirements of company law to act in what he or she believes to be the interests of the company to which they are appointed. These are the director's fiduciary duties which are owed to the company rather than to the appointing shareholder. However under the Companies Act 2014 (as amended) there is a provision allowing a nominee director to have regard to the interests of the appointing shareholder.

I would also note that the new appointment procedure for bank directors needs to have due regard to the distinct differences which exist relative to appointments to State boards. These include the requirements of the SSM 'Fitness and Probity' regime and the requirement to have a broad set of expertise relevant to large regulated entities in an ever more complex banking regulatory environment.

*Questions Nos. 112 and 113 answered with Question No. 84.*

### **Insurance Costs**

114. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance the progress that has been made to establish a national claims database as recommended by the cost of insurance working group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12061/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, Recommendation 11 of the Cost of Insurance Working Group's Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance recommended the establishment of a National Claims Information Database to increase transparency in the insurance sector.

The Central Bank (National Claims Information Database) Act 2018 provides the Central Bank with the necessary powers to establish and maintain the Database and this legislation was commenced on 28 January 2019 under the Central Bank (National Claims Information Database) Act 2018 (Commencement) Order 2019 (S.I. No. 2 of 2019).

As the underpinning legislation has been commenced, the Central Bank of Ireland is in the process of making appropriate regulations in respect of the National Claims Information Database, as provided for in the Act. The Act requires the Bank to consult with me as Minister in respect of those regulations and I am expecting the Governor to write to me shortly in that regard. Once this consultation has taken place, the Bank will publish the regulations.

Following on from the similar work completed in the process of producing the Motor Insurance Key Information Reports under Recommendation 12 of the Cost of Insurance Working Group's Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance, the Central Bank will continue to collaborate with insurance undertakings to ensure efficient data collection. As outlined previously, the Central Bank expects to publish its first report under the Act during the second half of 2019.

### **Insurance Costs**

115. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he has taken to tackle the rising cost of insurance for small businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12062/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Both I and the Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Mr. Michael D'Arcy T.D., are very conscious of the difficulties that increased insurance costs generally are having on many small businesses in this country.

Consequently, following the publication of its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance in 2017, the Cost of Insurance Working Group undertook an examination of the employer liability and public liability insurance sectors. This second phase culminated in the publication in January 2018 of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. The Report makes 15 recommendations with 29 associated actions, detailed in an Action Plan with agreed timelines for implementation.

The most recent Progress Update was published last week and shows that 24 out of the total of 26 action points which were due for completion during 2018 overall have been accomplished. I am confident that the two outstanding actions will be completed in the coming months, along with the three remaining action points with deadlines set for various quarters throughout 2019.

The actions implemented to date cut across a number of different areas and include:

- The publication of by An Garda Síochána of the Guidelines for the Reporting of Suspected Fraudulent Insurance Claims by Insurance Entities to An Garda Síochána

- The Law Reform Commission confirming that the subject of caps on damages for personal injuries litigation is included in its draft Fifth Programme of Law Reform

- Sections 8 & 14 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 have been amended to ensure defendants are appropriately notified of a claim having been submitted against their policy and

to make it easier for businesses and insurers to challenge cases where fraud or exaggeration is suspected, respectively

- An Garda Síochána commencing the collection of statistics under the new “insurance fraud” category which has been added to the PULSE system
- The Courts Service confirming that it will publish a more detailed breakdown of awards in personal injury cases in its Annual Reports

Undoubtedly the single most essential challenge which must be overcome if there is to be a sustainable reduction in insurance costs is to bring the levels of personal injury damages awarded in this country more in line with those awarded in other jurisdictions. In this regard, the Personal Injuries Commission has highlighted the significant differential between award levels in this country and England & Wales for soft tissue injuries (4.4 times), and has made a number of recommendations to address this issue, in particular the establishment of a Judicial Council to compile guidelines for appropriate general damages for various types of personal injury. Minister of State D’Arcy believes that this awards gap needs to be significantly closed (a view which I share) and he and the Minister for Justice and Equality Mr Charlie Flanagan TD are working closely together to ensure that this happens at the earliest opportunity.

Finally, I would like to assure the Deputy that the Cost of Insurance Working Group will continue to focus on implementing the recommendations of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance in parallel with implementing those from the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance. I am hopeful that the cumulative effects of the completion of the two Reports’ recommendations will include increased stability in the pricing of insurance for businesses and a more competitive insurance market.

*Question No. 116 answered with Question No. 108.*

### **Insurance Coverage**

117. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance if the working group identified in Parliamentary Question No. 132 of 5 March 2019 has identified areas in which there should be increased provision of flood insurance; if flood insurance is being delivered in those areas; if the working group has examined options or made recommendations for flood insurance for areas which are not included in tranche 1 of flood defences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12425/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies to provide flood cover to specific individuals or businesses or in particular areas. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from doing so.

As outlined, in my reply to the Deputy’s most recent question on this issue, Government policy in relation to flooding is focused on the development of a sustainable, planned and risk-based approach to dealing with flooding problems.

This commitment is underpinned by a significant capital works investment programme within the region of €250 million spent on flood relief measures over a five year period from

2012 to 2016. The Capital Programme covering the period 2016 to 2021 will see the current annual allocation for flood risk schemes increased from €45 million to €100 million by 2021, representing a total investment of €430 million. These works will be completed on a prioritised basis.

This is a coordinated whole-of-Government approach led by OPW with relevant local authorities and other bodies to maximise the level of resources available to address flood relief works. Due to the cost and scale of these types of flood defence works, it is an approach which will see benefits over the medium to long term.

The above approach is complemented by a Memorandum of Understanding between the OPW and Insurance Ireland, which provides for the exchange of data in relation to completed flood defence schemes which should provide a basis for the increased provision of flood insurance in areas where works have been completed.

Under the MOU, the OPW requirement is that insurers who are party to the agreement take full account of information provided by the OPW on completed flood defence schemes, when assessing exposure to flood risk. The MOU does not guarantee the availability of flood risk cover in the locations for which information has been provided by the OPW. The MOU recognises that the provision of insurance cover, the level of premiums charged and the policy terms applied are a matter for individual insurers based on the risk they are willing to take on a case by case basis.

The role of the Insurance Ireland/OPW working group, which meets quarterly and the Department of Finance attends, is to support the information flow and improve the understanding of issues between both parties. Therefore, the examination of options or making recommendations for flood insurance for areas which are not included in any tranche of flood defence work does not come under the remit of the group.

Any person with an insurance-related query or complaint can contact Insurance Ireland's Insurance Information Service (01 676 1914 or [feedback@insuranceireland.eu](mailto:feedback@insuranceireland.eu)). In addition, the Financial Services Ombudsman (01 567 7000 or [info@fspo.ie](mailto:info@fspo.ie)) deals independently with unresolved complaints from consumers about their individual dealings with all financial service providers.

### **Flood Relief Schemes**

118. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of plans for a flood relief scheme (details supplied) in County Cork; if the required level of funding is committed; the next steps in the process; the timeline for the completion of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11923/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** A pre-feasibility study into the flooding issues in Ballinlough has been completed by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and has identified a preferred option for the area. Further assessment of the environmental impacts is currently being reviewed to inform the planning process, after which the project will progress to planning and detailed design. While it is not possible to provide a timeframe for the project at this time, provision has been made in OPW's multi annual financial profiles for the progression of the scheme to implementation.

### **Flood Relief Schemes**

119. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount allocated to the Ennis south flood relief scheme to date; the breakdown of the spending; if the original announcement for the scheme of €8.6 million is still budgeted for; the changes that have been made to the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12256/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Ennis South Flood Relief Scheme is being progressed by Clare County Council with funding from the OPW.

The €8.6m project budget referred to was in respect of a tender competition in 2017. The project was re-tendered in the normal manner arising from pre-contractual issues which have now been resolved. The construction contract was signed between Clare County Council and Ward & Burke Construction Ltd on March 11th 2019 and works are expected to commence in the coming weeks.

The overall project budget, based on the contract with Ward and Burke is €9.7m ex VAT, and is provided for in OPW multi-annual capital budgets. Amendments to the scheme include additional flood defence embankment works and increased culvert capacity.

### **Garda Station Refurbishment**

120. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding renovation works at Ballymahon and Longford Garda stations. [11470/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Office of Public Works has agreed with An Garda Síochána upgrade works to Longford Garda Station. These works include the construction of a two story extension incorporating new cells, prisoner processing facilities and office accommodation with alteration works to the existing cell area. This project is to be jointly funded by the Office of Public Works and An Garda Síochána.

Planning Permission has been granted for these works and the tender package is currently being finalised. It is intended to issue invitations to tender to contractors shortly.

In relation to Ballymahon Garda Station, initial meetings have taken place between An Garda Síochána and the Office of Public Works. The Office of Public Works is awaiting a detailed brief of requirements and confirmation of the prioritisation and funding of these works from An Garda Síochána.

### **Pension Provisions**

121. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 88 of 2 May 2018, if a copy of the actuarial tables referred to will be provided. [11539/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The calculations referred to are infrequently required and therefore are done on a case by case basis by my Department.

### **Flood Prevention Measures**

122. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the work carried out by OPW in the areas of Ballymakeogh, Clonsingle and Shower Bog road further to the serious flooding of 2018; the work planned to be carried out in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11675/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Office of Public Works (OPW) is responsible for the maintenance of Arterial Drainage Schemes (ADS) and Catchment Drainage Schemes (CDS) designated under the Arterial Drainage Acts of 1945 and 1995.

The OPW’s Mulkear River (Ballymakeogh CDS) is in operation in the areas referred to by the Deputy. Since the flooding in 2018 the OPW has carried out maintenance works which includes improved river channel conveyance and embankment strengthening works.

Further planned channel and embankment maintenance works scheduled for 2019 includes an enlargement of a field accommodation bridge to further increase channel conveyance.

### **Garda Stations**

123. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of plans for the refurbishment of a Garda station (details supplied); the timeline for the completion of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11686/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Office of Public Works continues to review all options to provide the best possible accommodation solution for An Garda Síochána’s operational and policing needs in the area, while maintaining the existing Garda Station premises.

### **Pension Provisions**

124. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason for the refusal of a supplementary pension for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11692/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Pensions for established civil servants who are not members of the Single Public Service Pension Scheme (SPSPS) were provided for under Section 2 of the Superannuation Act 1859 (as amended by section 2 of the Superannuation Act 1909). The Act provides for payment of an annual pension equivalent to one eightieth of salary for each year of service capped at forty years’ service.

In 1995, the Government decided that full social welfare cover should be extended to all newly appointed civil servants and that they should pay the full Class A social insurance contribution. This change was introduced under the Social Welfare (Modifications of Insurance) (Amendment) Regulations 1995 (S.I. No 77/1995) whereby, with effect from 6 April 1995, all newly recruited civil servants are subject to Class A PRSI.

The new rules were notified to civil servants under Circular 6/1995 – Revised Social Insurance Status and Conditions of Service of Certain Civil Servants.

In accordance with paragraph 3 of the Circular, and consistent with the Social Welfare Regulations, the new rules apply to persons appointed to established civil service positions on or after 6 April 1995. The revised superannuation arrangements are set out at paragraph 13,

which provides that:

Paragraph 18 of the Circular provides for payment of a supplementary pension as follows:

It is understood that similar rules apply across the wider public service.

The grant of a supplementary pension under paragraph 18 of the Circular is not automatic and is conditional upon a number conditions as follows:

Any queries in respect of the individual mentioned should be directed to the relevant pension paying authority.

[1] Social Welfare Benefit is defined in the Rules as State Pension (Contributory), State Pension (Transition); Illness Benefit, Invalidity Pension or Jobseekers Benefit payable under the Social Welfare Acts or any equivalent contributory benefit, by whatever name called, substituted for any of those benefits in any future enactment amending the Social Welfare Acts.

### **Home Loan Scheme**

125. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the level of consultation the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government has with him about extra funding for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; if a formal request for extra funding has been made; the extra amount being sought; the areas that funds will come from if it is granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11789/19]

127. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has given indications, guidance or directive regarding the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme in recent weeks; if funding has been made available to ensure that those who qualify for the loan will not have undue delays in approval due to funding issues; if changes in the scheme including the interest rate are being considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12332/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 125 and 127 together.

The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan launched on 1 February 2018. Prior to its launch, an initial tranche of €200 million of long-term fixed-rate finance was borrowed by the Housing Finance Agency to provide funds for the scheme to local authorities.

When the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan was initially being developed it was estimated that the drawdown of loans under the scheme would be approximately €200 million over three years. From the data collated on the scheme to date, it is clear that there has been a greater demand for the RIHL than initially anticipated, as a result of which, the scheme would require a further tranche of funds to be borrowed by the HFA if it is to continue. The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government has requested sanction for additional funding of €200m annually for 2019 to 2021.

I understand the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government are presently carrying out an internal review of the scheme. Further details on the review can be obtained from my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

In conjunction with this review, the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform are in discussions with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government with regard to the scheme. Upon conclusion of the review and subsequent discussions the Min-

ister for Housing will be in a position to make a statement on the scheme.

### **Office of the Ombudsman Staff**

126. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the necessary funding for the recruitment of two additional assistant legal advisers at assistant principal, AP, level for the Office of the Ombudsman will be provided. [11816/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As part of the annual estimates process each Vote outlines to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform its pay and non-pay requirements for the forthcoming year. This forms the basis for negotiations between both parties, and an agreed allocation for the forthcoming year.

Over the course of the 2018 and 2019 estimates processes, the Office of the Ombudsman's overall gross allocation rose by €1,314,000, which represents an increase of 12.1%. I am informed by the Office that over this period, an additional two assistant legal advisers at Assistant Principal Officer level were recruited, to complement the existing Principal Officer level legal adviser to the organisation.

The legal services unit of the Office of the Ombudsman provides legal services to the Office of the Ombudsman, the Office of the Information Commissioner, the Commissioner for Environmental Services, the Standards in Public Office Commission, the Commission for Public Service Appointments and the Referendum Commission as required.

*Question No. 127 answered with Question No. 125.*

### **Flood Relief Schemes Status**

128. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of flood defence projects delayed due to planning issues. [12347/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** There are two flood relief projects currently awaiting planning consent:

Springfield, County Clare - a Part 8 planning application was withdrawn by Clare County Council in order to more fully assess certain environmental matters. A further application will be made shortly.

Lower Morell project in County Kildare is the subject of a Judicial Review following approval by An Bord Pleanála.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

129. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the supports available to a person (details supplied); the way in which neurological conditions are specifically catered for in the school environment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11475/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department provides for a range of supports for schools which have enrolled pupils with special educational needs, in order to ensure that wherever a child is enrolled, s/he will have access to an appropriate education.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is a separate statutory agency, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for the provision of special educational needs supports to schools. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

All primary and post primary schools have been allocated additional teaching resources to cater for children with special educational needs. In September 2017 the Department introduced a new model to support pupils with special educational needs in our schools. All schools have now received revised allocations for September 2019. DES Circulars 0007/2019 for primary schools and 0008/2019 for post primary schools provide details of how the allocations are being updated for schools from September 2019, based on updated profile data.

The SET model differs significantly from the old Resource Allocation Model, in that Special Education Teacher allocation is now frontloaded into schools to support children with special educational needs. Rather than having to make individual application to the NCSE for additional supports schools can now respond to individual needs in a flexible way and pupils do not have to have a psychological assessment, or a diagnosis of a disability, in order to access Special Education Teaching. This means that those with highest level of need can access the highest level of support within the school in a timely manner.

It is a matter for schools to monitor and utilise their allocation of additional teaching support to best support the needs of identified pupils, in accordance with the Department's guidance. The teaching time afforded to each individual pupil is decided and managed by schools, taking into account each child's individual learning needs.

Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers have been published on the Department's website, at [www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Special-Education/Guidelines-for-Primary-Schools-Supporting-Pupils-with-Special-Educational-Needs-in-Mainstream-Schools.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Special-Education/Guidelines-for-Primary-Schools-Supporting-Pupils-with-Special-Educational-Needs-in-Mainstream-Schools.pdf).

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

Should any students have assessed care needs, the school may apply for access to Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for those students.

The NCSE is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school. The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie), in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

Resources provided to schools also include additional training for teachers through the Special Education Support Service (SESS).

The Support Service provides advice and support to schools on the education and inclusion of students with special educational needs, providing in-school support for teachers and continuing professional development for teachers with additional training needs. The Support Service continues to update current CPD courses and design new CPD courses in response to

the needs of teachers.

Schools can apply for CPD courses directly to the NCSE on their on-line application process at [www.sess.ie/ncsesupport](http://www.sess.ie/ncsesupport).

The Department encourages parents and school authorities to engage locally regarding pupils' education. Should a parent be dissatisfied with the manner in which supports have been provided to support their child's education they should raise this matter directly with their school Principal or the Board of Management of the school. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's present or future special educational needs, using the contact details available on [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

### Departmental Circulars

130. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools here that implemented circular 0038/2018. [11525/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Decisions on the use of smart phones and other such devices in schools are taken at local level by the Board of Management of a school, who under the provisions of the Education Act, 1998 have responsibility for the direct governance of a school.

My Department recognises the requirement to safeguard children from the negative impact of using digital devices but consider that it is also very important to recognise the value of digital technology to enhance teaching and learning for all students. In that context, schools are best placed to identify and put in place appropriate policies in the context of their own particular situation, through consultation with their local school community.

Circular 0038/2018, which issued to all schools, early last year requires all schools to consult with teachers, student and parents in the development of policy around the use of smart phones and personal devices in school. This consultation requirement will be underpinned in law once the Parents and Students Charter is enacted. There is no automatic requirement for schools to report on the implementation of circulars to the Department.

This bottom-up approach will ensure all parents, teachers and school communities are satisfied with the smart phone policy in place in their school. It will also mean that parents will be able to adopt a complementary approach at home to that which is in place in their child's school, if they wish to do so.

The intention is to promote a shared approach regarding the appropriate and beneficial use of digital technologies. The Department recognises that parents are the primary educators of their children, and will prioritise their child's best interests and well-being. In that context, the input of parents to developing school policies as articulated in the draft *Education (Parent & Student Charter)* Bill 2018, which notes and mandates that role, is a priority of this Department.

### Schools Building Projects Applications

131. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for a new building for a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11526/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The project referred to by the

Deputy has been devolved for delivery to the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA).

I can inform the Deputy that the NDFA has started preparations for the appointment of a design team for the project. This appointment will be a key first step in the design and construction stages. While at this early stage it is not possible to provide a timeline for completion of the project, the NDFA will be engaging directly with the school authority to keep it informed of progress.

### **Schools Facilities**

132. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the costs associated with conducting a national audit of secondary schools in respect of the equipment, infrastructure and facilities available to cook, prepare and serve meals to students in addition to the facilities in which they can eat; if this can be undertaken as part of a healthy schools policy; his plans for such an audit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11565/19]

133. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding available to schools that wish to develop and purchase equipment, infrastructure and facilities available to cook, prepare and serve meals to students in addition to the facilities in which they can eat; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11566/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 132 and 133 together.

My Department has in place detailed design guidelines for primary and post-primary schools. These guidelines, which are available on my Department's website, currently provide for a standard range of servery and eating facilities in the design of new Post Primary schools. At Post Primary level a kitchenette, 25m<sup>2</sup> in area, is provided off the General Purpose/Dining Area. These facilities are not intended to be full commercial type canteens where food is prepared or cooked.

My Department has no plans to undertake a national survey along the lines referred to by the Deputy.

### **Schools Facilities**

134. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if schools have contacted his Department in respect of the availability of drinking water in schools; if applications have been made for financial support to address issues in which a school does not have a tap drinking water supply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11568/19]

135. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an audit of all learning centres will be undertaken on the availability of potable drinking water; the estimated cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11569/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 134 and 135 together.

In existing buildings, if a school has concerns about the quality of its drinking water the competent authorities to address this are the relevant local authority and Irish Water. It is matter for schools to take their concerns up with those authorities. Following this contact, if any quality issues are identified as a result of a test, my Department will provide funding to address

them. If a school does not have a tap drinking water supply, the Department will provide funding to address this also.

There is no impediment to a school applying to my Department for funding to remedy either of the situations outlined. Schools and their management bodies will be aware that this is the case from their customary interactions with my Department with regard to all aspects of their buildings.

The availability of tap drinking water supplies is covered by my Department's Emergency Works Grant Scheme under the "mechanical" category. Mechanical components of a building incorporate, among other things, all water systems, including tap drinking water supply. It is also open to schools to apply for remediation works under my Department's Summer Works Scheme which, likewise, has a "mechanical" category. Primary schools receive a minor works grant too which they can use for this purpose if they so wish. In addition, tap drinking water systems are automatically included in new school buildings and extension projects. My Department has dedicated guidelines for Design Teams setting out the standards to be implemented for these construction projects and for all remediation projects.

Given the range of components under the mechanical category in my Department's Grant Schemes, records of the detail of the individual grants approved are not held. As it is open to schools to apply for funding to address drinking water issues in their schools, I have no plans for an audit to be carried out.

### **Schools Amalgamation**

136. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a matter relating to a school amalgamation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11589/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the decision making authority for any amalgamation belongs to the Patron/Trustees of the school, and this is subject to the approval of the Department.

Any proposed change involves extensive negotiations at local level and must be well planned and managed in a manner that accommodates the interests of students, parents, teachers, local communities and contributes to an inclusive education system.

My Department has sought further information from the Patron in relation to the proposed amalgamation and this is awaited. The matter will be considered further following receipt of this information.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

137. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the building programme of a school (details supplied). [11642/19]

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

The Design Team is currently working on the Stage 2(b) report which will be submitted

through the Board of Management to my Department.

Upon receipt and review of this report my Department will revert to the Board of Management with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

### **School Accommodation**

138. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a new set of regulations and standards is being drawn up for temporary prefabs being purchased or leased for school purposes; if the new standards or regulations will apply to the prefabricated buildings already produced and in the system; the way in which the regulations and standards are to be applied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11663/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department has prepared a new Technical Guidance Document for Temporary and Prefabricated Accommodation. It will apply to future projects and not retrospectively and the implementation of this new guidance is currently under consideration.

It should be noted that notwithstanding any technical guidance from my Department, all temporary prefabricated accommodation being purchased or leased must comply with the building regulations in force at the time of installation on site. My Department's Technical Guidance Document will be emphasising this already legally applicable requirement.

### **School Staff**

139. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a concessionary post of administrative principal will be approved for schools (details supplied); the progress to date in respect of each school; the timeframe for a final decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11664/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The criteria for the appointment of an administrative principal to a school, which are enrolment related, are set out in Appendix B of Circular 0019/2019. There is no scope to deviate from these arrangements.

The enrolment required for the appointment of an administrative principal in ordinary schools such as the schools referred to by the Deputy is 176 pupils on 30th September 2018. As the enrolment of the schools referred to by the Deputy was less than this on that date, neither school meets the requirements for an administrative principal for the 2019/20 school year.

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

In Budget 2019, school leadership is again supported with an additional release day for teaching principals in primary schools and a further four additional release days for teaching principals in schools with special classes. These additional release days will be effective from 1st September 2019.

## **Schools Establishment**

140. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the proposed location of the new second level Educate Together school for Galway city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11702/19]

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

The announcement included a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school to be established in 2019 to serve the Galway City and Oranmore school planning areas as a regional solution and patronage of the new school was awarded to Educate Together in October 2018. My Department has identified East Galway City as the preferred location for the school in order to best serve the combined school planning areas.

On that basis, the school will open in September 2019 in suitable interim accommodation in the Merlin Park area. In relation to the permanent school site, my Department is examining all potential suitable site options including zoned school sites. A decision will then be made as part of the site acquisition process in relation to an appropriate site for the school to which the Deputy refers and this will be confirmed at a later date.

## **Schools Building Projects Status**

141. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the stage the building project at a school (details supplied) is at; and the timeframe for construction to commence at the school. [11708/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is currently at an advanced stage of Architectural Planning - Stage 2(b) - Detailed Design.

The Stage 2(b) report was submitted to my Department in late September 2018 and following an initial review was deemed incomplete. A revised Stage 2(b) report which has been submitted to my Department in late January 2019 is currently under review.

Upon review of the revised Stage 2(b) report my Department will revert to the school with regard to the further progression of this project at that time.

## **Home School Community Liaison Scheme**

142. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated amount it would cost in a full year if 75 additional rural co-ordinator posts under the home school liaison services were provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11727/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Currently, all DEIS Urban Primary and DEIS Post Primary schools are included in the HSCL Scheme, which serves 539 schools. The scheme is delivered by 416 full-time HSCL Coordinators who are teachers in these

schools and assigned to HSCL duties either in individual schools or clusters of schools, catering for approximately 156,000 pupils.

The impact of socio-economic factors on educational outcomes can be different between urban and rural settings and the HSCL scheme takes account of that. While urban and rural disadvantage share many characteristics, such as poverty, unemployment and poor housing conditions, the evidence suggests that disadvantage in a rural context does not have the same impact on educational performance.

My Department's objective in implementing DEIS Plan 2017 is to have the maximum possible impact on providing opportunities for students most at risk of disadvantage. To achieve this, additional resources must be targeted as closely as possible at those students with the greatest need in terms of concentrated levels of disadvantage.

The Deputy may wish to note that Rural DEIS primary schools continue to be supported through the DEIS programme with a range of additional supports, including grant aid in the form of a DEIS grant, enhanced book grant, access to the DEASP School Meals Programme and priority access for teachers to a range of professional development programmes as well as the Incredible Years and Friends programmes.

My Department has no plans at present to extend the HSCL scheme to Rural DEIS schools as part of the DEIS programme. It is not possible to give a definitive cost to extend to 75 additional posts, since it is dependent upon a primary or post primary teachers' particular point on the salary scale upon appointment to the role.

### **Commissions of Inquiry**

143. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the Information Commissioner and Data Protection Commissioner have been consulted with regard to proposed legislation (details supplied) to seal records of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, the Residential Institutions Redress Board and the Residential Institutions Review Committee for 75 years; if so, the advice provided by each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11760/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The recently published Retention of Records Bill 2019 represents a very important measure in that it provides for the retention of the records of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, the Residential Institutions Redress Board and the Residential Institutions Review Committee. I must stress that under the legislation establishing these bodies the bulk of their records would, on the dissolution of those bodies, fall to be destroyed. The records held by these bodies represent the personal testimony and stories of many survivors of residential institutional child abuse and related papers. I believe that these records should not be destroyed both to ensure that future generations will be aware of and understand what happened and out of respect to the victims who came forward. Therefore, if the Bill is enacted these highly sensitive records will be retained.

The redress bodies operated under stringent confidentiality requirements as laid down in statute and persons engaged with them on that basis. The proposals in the Bill strike a balance between those requirements and the need to preserve these historically important records.

The proposals contained in the Bill were the subject of normal consultations with other Government departments both at the time the General Scheme of the Bill was finalised in early 2015 and more recently when the text of the Bill was approved for publication. Neither the Information Commissioner nor the Data Protection Commissioner was consulted directly by my

officials as part of that process as that would be a matter for the relevant departments. However I can confirm that informal discussions took place with the Data Protection Commissioner.

I should point out that the legislation under which the three bodies currently operate restricts the application of the provisions of the Freedom of Information Acts and the Data Protection Act. The Bill proposes to continue that dis-application in the case of the Freedom of Information Act. If the Bill is enacted and the records are transferred to the National Archives, further processing will be for archiving purposes and the provisions of section 61 of the Data Protection Act 2018 will therefore apply.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

144. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the allocation of special education teaching support for a school (details supplied) will be reassessed on the grounds of exceptional circumstances in order to provide the staff with the best possible platform to adequately cater for a number of students; the reason the allocation of special education teaching support hours for the school has not been increased but remain the same despite an increase in the number of children who require such specialised support since the introduction of the new allocation of hours for pupils with additional needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11809/19]

145. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied that the current system for seeking an appeal or review of special education teaching support hours is offering schools, principals and boards of management an adequate forum from which they can communicate concerns, seek meaningful reviews or appeals and engage with his Department on behalf of students with complex needs who may require additional supports; if he is further satisfied that the system affords an appropriate level of credence to the principals who care for vulnerable children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11810/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 144 and 145 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools set out details of a new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

DES Circulars 0007/2019 for primary schools and 0008/2019 for post primary schools also provide details of how the allocations are being updated for schools from September 2019, based on updated profile data.

All schools have now received revised allocations for September 2019.

As the re profiling occurred, some schools have gained additional allocations, where the profile indicator data indicates these schools have additional needs. Some schools received slightly reduced allocations, where the data indicates less need, and some schools maintained their existing allocations.

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

Under the allocation model, schools have been provided with a total allocation for special education needs support based on their school profile.

The provision of a profiled allocation is designed to give a fair allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the level of need in each school.

Schools are front loaded with resources, based on each school's profile. The allocations to schools include provision to support all pupils in the schools, including where a child receives a diagnosis after the allocation is received by a school, or where there are newly enrolling pupils to the school.

Both my Department and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) are committed to ensuring that all schools are treated equally and fairly in the manner in which their school profiles have been calculated.

Accordingly, a number of review processes have been put in place to support schools and to offer them a mechanism to have their special education teaching support hours reviewed.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) will publish details of an appeal process for the 2019 allocation process for schools in the coming days.

Schools will be advised that this appeal will consider circumstances where schools considered that their school profile was calculated incorrectly, using the data set out in DES Circulars 007 and 008 2019. An appeal can be submitted for a review of the information used and of the calculation of the allocation.

A second process will be put in place to address circumstances where the school profile significantly changed following the allocation process e.g. a developing school where the net enrolment numbers significantly increased.

The criteria for qualification for mainstream school developing school posts are set out in the Primary and Post Primary School Staffing Schedule for the 2019/20 school year.

Schools who qualify for additional mainstream developing school posts in accordance with these criteria will also qualify for additional Special Education Teaching Allocations to take account of this developing status.

Finally, it is acknowledged that there are some circumstances, which may arise in schools, which fall outside the appeals process, or allocations for developing school status.

These relate to exceptional or emergency circumstances which could not have been anticipated e.g. where the school profile changes very significantly, or where other exceptional circumstances have arisen in a school and which may require a review of schools capacity to provide additional teaching support for all pupils who need it in the school, or of their utilisation of their allocations.

Once the appeal process has concluded, a further process will be available where schools can seek a review of their allocations including the utilisation of their allocations, in circumstances where a school considers that very exceptional circumstances have arisen subsequent to the development of the profile.

I am satisfied that there are therefore in place a number of processes which can review the special education teacher allocation for schools where necessary, including for the school referred to by the Deputy in his question.

This Government is investing heavily in supporting our children with special educational needs, with €1.8bn being spent annually, about €1 in every 5 of the education budget.

There are currently over 13,400 special education teachers in schools, an increase of 37% since 2011.

There are now more special education teachers in schools now than we have ever had previously.

The very significant levels of additional provision we have made in recent years to provide additional Special Education Teachers means that all schools are resourced to provide for the special educational needs of children in their schools.

### **Technological Universities Data**

146. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the name and location of technological universities nationally; and the institutes of technology which merged to form these technological universities. [11824/19]

147. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of institutes of technology which are in the process of applying to become technological universities; and the location of each. [11825/19]

148. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of institutes of technology that have not applied to become technological universities. [11826/19]

149. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an institute of technology must merge with another institute to gain technological university status; and if so, the reason therefor. [11827/19]

150. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there will be negative impacts for institutes of technology which do not become technological universities. [11828/19]

151. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an institute of technology (details supplied) has applied to become a technological university; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11829/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 146 to 151, inclusive, together.

On 1 January 2019 the first technological university (TU) in the State, Technological University Dublin, which formerly comprised Dublin Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Blanchardstown and Institute of Technology Tallaght, was established under the Technological Universities Act 2018. This can be regarded as a landmark date in the evolution of Irish higher education. With some 28,000 students, Technological University Dublin became the largest HEI in the State. TU Dublin's main campuses are located in Grangegorman, Tallaght and Blanchardstown.

On 12 February 2019 the Munster Technological University consortium, comprising Cork IT and IT Tralee, submitted an application to the Minister for Education and Skills seeking TU status under the 2018 Act. The relevant legislative procedures under the Act have commenced in relation to the assessment and decision-making process in relation to this application.

There are two other consortia of IoTs working to develop TU proposals. These are the Technological University for South East Ireland consortium, comprising Waterford IT and IT Carlow, and the Connaught Ulster Alliance, comprising IT Sligo, Galway Mayo IT and Letter-

kenny IT. These consortia are understood to be working toward the submission of applications for TU designation under the 2018 Act in 2019 and 2020, respectively.

In policy terms the National Strategy for Education to 2030 recommended consolidation within the Institute of Technology sector and a pathway of evolution for consolidated institutes of technology (IoTs) to allow them to demonstrate significant progress against stated performance criteria and to become multi-campus technological universities.

The National Strategy states that smaller, stand-alone institutions such as individual IoTs lack the scale required to deliver necessary advances in quality and efficiency. Universities and IoTs are encouraged to work together collaboratively in regional clusters. Smaller publicly funded institutions are encouraged to align with or be incorporated into institutions of sufficient scale to enable quality and efficiency objectives to be met such as is the case in the area of Initial Teacher Education provision.

The Programme for Government supports the creation of technological universities. These regional higher education institutions will have greater links to industry and will have an enormous impact on the capacity to create and retain jobs in regions. Government will prioritise those institutions which have clear ambitions and plans for the furthering of industry-relevant technological research and education.

The Technological Universities Act 2018 which was signed into law on 19 March 2018 provides the legal framework underpinning the process for establishment by two or more IoTs as a TU subject to a decision-making process contingent on the meeting of specified eligibility criteria and including assessment by an international advisory panel. The 2018 Act also sets out the functions and governance requirements for these new HEIs.

In accordance with National Strategy recommendations, Section 29 of the 2018 Act provides for the application jointly by two or more institutes to the Minister of Education and Skills for an order seeking designation as a technological university. Section 38 of the Act provides that an institution and an established technological university may also apply to the Minister for such an order.

The Government has provided the enabling legislation in the Technological Universities Act 2018 for two or more IoTs to come together to seek TU status. Government also continues to support those consortia currently seeking to achieve such status under the legislation in terms of significant Exchequer co-funding. The potential benefits of becoming a successful TU are significant in terms of increased reach, international recognition, research capacity building, FDI attraction, skills retention and creation, regional development, enhanced staff and student experience and opportunities and socio-economic progression. The merging of institutes of technology will create institutions of sufficient size, capacity and critical mass to maximise those benefits and attract greater investment.

TUs will be distinguished by a mission and ethos that is aligned and consistent with the current mission and focus of IoTs with an emphasis on programmes at Levels 6 to 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), industry focused research and the development and use of new knowledge through industry-focused research. However, TUs will also offer post-graduate programmes at Levels 9 and 10 on the NFQ.

TUs will help retain talent in the regions by strengthening the offer available to students who will be able to continue to masters and postgraduate level, including PhDs. Larger management and academic teams permitted by the merger of institutions will increase institutional capacity and will facilitate enhanced performance in areas such as winning research funding.

TUs will also be expected to play a pivotal role in facilitating access and progression particularly through relationships with the further education and training sector. The presence of a technological university in a region, with a specific mandate for promoting regional development, will have a transformative effect on local and regional communities.

By creating institutions of increased scale and capacity, multi-campus TUs will bring greater social and economic benefits to their regions through a strengthened role in research and innovation and the delivery of a broad range of high quality education and training in each of their campuses. It is clear from the progress made with existing consortia and from international exemplars that there is very considerable coherence in sectoral and educational offerings that make a single HEI hub both a catalyst and a magnet for regional economic development and employment.

The strong regional mission of TUs to support development and innovation is aligned with the objectives of Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework. Enhanced HEIs will deliver the skilled and talented people that sustain enterprise and new investments. The National Development Plan 2018 - 2027 cites as a priority the establishment of a clearly prioritised Exchequer-supported higher education building programme including the objective of bolstering the capacity of multi-campus TUs. The current TU development consortia are referenced under Project Ireland 2040 as having a role in deepening the talent pool for distinctive regional clusters and driving research and innovation. TUs will also be well placed to attract increased research funding and to bid for a share of the €4 billion in funding available as part of Project Ireland 2040 over the period 2019 – 2027 under the four broad themes of rural development, urban development, climate action and disruptive technology.

It remains at the discretion of each individual IoT whether or not it chooses to join an existing consortium, or to form a new consortium, of institutes to progress together towards making an application for TU status under the 2018 Act.

Currently four IoTs - Athlone, Dundalk and Limerick Institutes of Technology and the Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology - have to date not joined or formed a consortium seeking to develop TU proposals.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

152. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the construction of a school extension (details supplied); when contact will be made with the school on the matter; if the redesign of the project will be reconsidered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11850/19]

166. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12088/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 152 and 166 together.

The Deputy may be aware that, in April, 2015, my Department approved an all-in devolved grant for the provision of 2 mainstream classrooms and a WC for assisted users for the school to which he refers.

However, the project proceeded to tender on the basis of works that were not approved for funding. The Board of Management of the school was advised that it was required to revert to the original approved works. The Board has agreed to progress the project accordingly.

The issue referred to by the Deputy is currently being reviewed by my Department. This review is taking longer than would normally be the case due to the complexities of the issues involved.

However, I can assure the Deputy that this assessment is close to finalisation. As soon as it is complete, my Department will be in direct contact with the school authority in order to progress the project as set out in the original approval issued in April 2015.

### **Emergency Works Scheme**

153. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether it is fair that funding will not be granted to resolve building conditions in a classroom at a school (details supplied) that will soon be used by a child with cystic fibrosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11851/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The school to which the Deputy refers applied for funding under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme for flooring works at their school. As the scope of the works were outside the terms of the scheme, the application was refused and the school were advised that the correct mechanism for delivery of works of this nature was the Summer Works Scheme. The application did not contain any reference to the future enrolment of a pupil with special needs.

One of the purposes of the Emergency Works Scheme is to provide funding to facilitate inclusion and access for special needs pupils. Therefore, it is open to the school to submit a new application for Emergency Works funding to carry out universal access works to the school to facilitate the enrolment of a special needs pupil. The Emergency Works Circular and Application Form are both available on my Departments Website.

Upon receipt, the new application will be assessed and a decision will issue directly to the School Authorities as soon as possible.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

154. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) has included autism spectrum disorder, ASD, classes in its regeneration plans. [11921/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Individual school boards of management are responsible for the establishment of special classes. It is open to any school to make application to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to establish a class. In deciding where to establish a special class in an area, the NCSE take account of the current and projected demand and the available school accommodation both current and planned. In this regard, the SENO may approach individual schools to discuss the matter with a view to finding the optimal location in terms of convenience and sustainability.

When the NCSE sanction a special class in a school, the school can apply to my Department for capital funding to re-configure existing spaces within the school building to accommodate the class and/or to construct additional accommodation.

Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) who are locally based are available to assist and advise parents whose children have special needs. Where Parents have been unsuccessful in enrolling their child in a school, they should update their local SENO to inform the planning

process.

SENOs are also available to assist and advise schools on special education supports and planning.

The refurbishment project referred to by the Deputy does not include an SEN base.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

155. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application by a school (details supplied) for additional classes to include autism spectrum disorder, ASD, classes has been processed; if so, when it will be finalised; and the number of classes applied for. [11922/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I can confirm to the Deputy that an application has been received for additional school accommodation for the school in question. The application is under consideration and as soon this is complete, a decision will be conveyed to the school authority.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

156. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an intervention will be made to provide autism spectrum disorder, ASD, classes in schools in the Dublin 6, 6W and 12 areas and to protect the rights of a child to access education by invoking section 37A of the Education Act 1998 as inserted by section 8 of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 (details supplied). [11924/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The National Council for Special education (NCSE), an independent agency of my Department, is responsible for planning, coordinating and advising on education provision for children with special educational needs. The Council ensures that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

Individual school boards of management are responsible for the establishment of special classes. It is open to any school to make application to the NCSE to establish a class. In deciding where to establish a special class in an area, the NCSE take account of the current and projected demand and the available school accommodation both current and planned. In this regard, the SENO may approach individual schools to discuss the matter with a view to finding the optimal location in terms of convenience and sustainability.

When the NCSE sanction a special class in a school, the school can apply to my Department for capital funding to re-configure existing spaces within the school building to accommodate the class and/or to construct additional accommodation.

Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) who are locally based are available to assist and advise parents whose children have special needs. Where parents have been unsuccessful in enrolling their child in a school, they should update their local SENO to inform the planning process.

SENOs are also available to assist and advise schools on special education supports and planning.

12 March 2019

The number of ASD special classes in County Dublin have increased from 66 in the 2011/2012 school year to 197 in the 2018/2019, a threefold increase. There are 15 ASD classes in the areas referred to by the Deputy: 2 Early Intervention classes, 8 Primary ASD classes and 5 Post-primary ASD classes.

Special classes for students with ASD are staffed with a pupil–teacher ratio of 6:1 at primary level (including early intervention classes) and 6:1.5 at post primary level, and also have a minimum of two SNAs for every class of 6 children, thus providing for 12 places in Early Intervention, 48 places in Primary and 30 places in post-primary ASD classes in the areas.

My Department is aware that the establishment of special provision in some schools and communities can be challenging.

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

Section 8 of the Act, which commenced on the 3rd of December 2018, provides the Minister with a power, after a process of consultation with the NCSE, the board of management and the patron of the school, to compel a school to make additional provision for the education of children with special educational needs.

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

### **Technological Universities Status**

157. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a motion from a union (details supplied) that Dundalk Institute of Technology should apply to become a technological university under the Technological Universities Act 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11953/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The National Strategy for Education to 2030 recommended consolidation within the Institute of Technology sector and a pathway of evolution for consolidated institutes of technology (IoTs) to allow them to demonstrate significant progress against stated performance criteria and to become multi-campus technological universities.

The Programme for Government supports the creation of technological universities. These regional higher education institutions will have greater links to industry and will have an enormous impact on the capacity to create and retain jobs in regions. Government will prioritise those institutions which have clear ambitions and plans for the furthering of industry-relevant technological research and education.

A technological university (TU) will be distinguished by a mission and ethos that is aligned and consistent with the current mission and focus of IoTs with an emphasis on programmes at Levels 6 to 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), industry focused research and the development and use of new knowledge through industry-focused research. However, TUs will also offer post-graduate programmes at Levels 9 and 10 on the NFQ.

TUs will help retain talent in the regions by strengthening the offer available to students who will be able to continue to masters and postgraduate level, including PhDs. Larger management and academic teams permitted by the merger of institutions will increase institutional

capacity and will facilitate enhanced performance in areas such as winning research funding.

TUs will also be expected to play a pivotal role in facilitating access and progression particularly through relationships with the further education and training sector. The presence of a technological university in a region, with a specific mandate for promoting regional development, will have a transformative effect on local and regional communities.

By creating institutions of increased scale and capacity, multi-campus TUs will bring greater social and economic benefits to their regions through a strengthened role in research and innovation and the delivery of a broad range of high quality education and training in each of their campuses. It is clear from the progress made with existing consortia and from international exemplars that there is very considerable coherence in sectoral and educational offerings that make a single HEI hub both a catalyst and a magnet for regional economic development and employment.

The strong regional mission of TUs to support development and innovation is aligned with the objectives of Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework. Enhanced HEIs will deliver the skilled and talented people that sustain enterprise and new investments. The National Development Plan 2018 - 2027 cites as a priority the establishment of a clearly prioritised Exchequer-supported higher education building programme including the objective of bolstering the capacity of multi-campus TUs. The current TU development consortia are referenced under Project Ireland 2040 as having a role in deepening the talent pool for distinctive regional clusters and driving research and innovation. TUs will also be well placed to attract increased research funding and to bid for a share of the €4 billion in funding available as part of Project Ireland 2040 over the period 2019 – 2027 under the four broad themes of rural development, urban development, climate action and disruptive technology.

In terms of the practical progression of TUs, on 19 March 2018 the Technological Universities Act 2018 was signed into law. The Act provides the legal framework underpinning the process for establishment by two or more IoTs as a TU subject to a decision-making process contingent on the meeting of specified eligibility criteria and including assessment by an international advisory panel. The 2018 Act also sets out the functions and governance requirements for these new HEIs.

On 1 January 2019 the first TU in the State, Technological University Dublin, which formerly comprised Dublin Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Blanchardstown and Institute of Technology Tallaght, was established. This can be regarded as a landmark date in the evolution of Irish higher education. With some 28,000 students, Technological University Dublin became the largest HEI in the State.

Another consortium of IoTs known as the Munster Technological University consortium, comprising Cork IT and IT Tralee, submitted an application to the Minister for Education and Skills seeking TU status under the 2018 Act on 12 February 2019. The relevant legislative procedures under the 2018 Act have commenced in relation to the assessment and decision-making process in relation to this application.

Thus, the Government has provided the enabling legislation in the Technological Universities Act 2018 for two or more IoTs to come together to seek TU status. Government also continues to support those consortia currently seeking to achieve such status under the legislation in terms of significant Exchequer co-funding. The potential benefits of becoming a successful TU are significant in terms of increased reach, international recognition, research capacity building, FDI attraction, skills retention and creation, regional development, enhanced staff and student experience and opportunities and socio-economic progression.

However, while the legislative framework and other supports, including significant Exchequer co-funding, are in place, in the final analysis it remains at the discretion of each individual IoT whether or not it chooses to join an existing consortium, or to form a new consortium, of institutes to progress together towards making an application for TU status under the 2018 Act.

### **Schools Building Projects**

158. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the number of prequalified contractors has been reduced from ten to eight in the re-tendering process for the two schools in Maynooth education campus; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board, KWETB, has reduced this number to seven prequalified contractors and that the tender is to go out the week ending 8 March 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11988/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I can inform the Deputy that only eight valid submissions were received for the prequalification process in respect of the retendering of the project to which she refers. One of those submissions failed to meet the minimum prequalification criteria. In that context, tender documents for completion of the project will issue to seven contractors next week.

### **Schools Building Projects**

159. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a report was composed by the team from his Department that visited Maynooth education campus in August 2018 which determined the application for additional accommodation to be refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11989/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the matter of temporary accommodation was discussed during a site visit relating to the major capital project currently being undertaken at the school. The Department clarified to the patron, Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board, that there is adequate accommodation available at the ETB's property at Manor Mills to accommodate additional enrolments pending construction of the new permanent school buildings. A report was not composed relating to this matter following the site visit.

I understand that the new school buildings will be going to tender shortly with a view to going on site early in the Summer and the project remains on target for occupation in September 2020.

### **Student Universal Support Ireland Data**

160. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applications for a third level maintenance grant refused in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019 as a result of an independent mature student being unable to provide proof of independent residence according to the SUSI requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12047/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Applicant Class is determined by age, first point of entry or re-entry into further or higher education, and provision by the applicant of documentary evidence of independent residence. SUSI requires applicants to provide

evidence to determine they are living independently as per Article 13 (3) of the Student Grant Scheme 2018.

The specific data requested by the Deputy is not collected by SUSI. However, SUSI has provided statistics on the number of independent awards, refusals and cancellations for the period in question. These statistics are set out in the following table:

- Status	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Awarded	11,057	9,760	8,681	7,724
Refused	3,993	3,290	3,083	2,611
Cancelled	2,427	1,914	2,039	1,598
Total	17,477	14,964	13,803	11,933

Independent Awards/Refusals/Cancellations 2015-2019

For the current academic year 11,993 applicants applied as ‘independent’ and out of those the majority, 7,724, were awarded a grant. 2,611 were refused for a number of reasons, including failure to meet one or more of the eligibility criteria. 1,598 applications were cancelled. In relation to cancelled applications there can be a number of reasons as to why an application may be cancelled, including a cohort that would cancel their application prior to a decision on their grant in order that they can re-apply as a ‘Mature Dependent’ with detail of the income of parent(s)/guardian(s).

SUSI works with applicants in relation to the documentary evidence that is required to demonstrate independent residence and will advise of the option to re-apply as a Mature Dependent if an applicant cannot provide the necessary documentation required to validate their application as an ‘independent’ student. SUSI is mindful of the variety of living arrangements of individuals applying for a grant and publicises a list of documents that are deemed sufficient for demonstrating independent residence. Given the variation in the documents supplied by applicants this is done on a case-by-case basis and dependent upon the range of documents that can affirm independent residence for the required periods. Often documents are taken in conjunction with one another to assist in the assessment of an applicant as independent. The type of documentation accepted includes:

- A letter confirming that the address is registered with RTB (Residential Tenancies Board);
- A Local Authority lease agreement or a letter confirming the rental under the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) or any Government Housing Scheme/Arrangement;
- A letter on headed paper from a Rental Agency confirming tenancy;
- A letter confirming the receipt and period of Rent Allowance, Mortgage Interest Supplement or Housing Assistance Payment (HAP);
- A Utility bill in applicant’s own name, for example; landline telephone (mobile telephone bills are not accepted), fixed broadband, gas, electricity or cable/satellite television bill/home heating bills/waste bills/Mortgage Statements/Property Tax Letters. If the utility bills in the household are in the spouse’s name, then a copy of a marriage certificate is required with the utility bill (if co-habiting SUSI will accept utility bills in the partner’s name covering the relevant period together with correspondence e.g. bank statement/P21 issued to the applicant at the same address and covering the relevant period); and/or
- Official documentation posted to the applicant at the address and relating to their residence there. For example, a letter from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection confirming Rent Allowance at the address.

## Schools Building Projects Status

161. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for an extension and-or new build; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12052/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6 year Construction Programme.

The school authority has recently advised my Department that the legal elements associated with the site portfolio are expected to be resolved shortly. My Department awaits further update from the school authority in this regard in due course. In the meantime, my Department has initiated the process of devising the schedules of accommodation for purposes of the school's project brief.

## Schools Refurbishment

162. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the name, location and specific energy conservation measures of the schools set to receive deep energy retrofits in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12064/19]

163. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools built prior to 2008 nationally where he plans to deliver deep energy efficient retrofits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12065/19]

164. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding spent to date on energy retrofits in view of the €2.5 billion identified for the refurbishment and construction of schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12066/19]

165. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills of the €2.5 billion identified for the refurbishment and construction of schools the amount of funding that will be targeted on delivering energy retrofits between 2018 and 2027 to schools built prior to 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12067/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 162 to 165, inclusive, together.

In the National Development Plan (2018-2027) €2.5bn is identified for the refurbishment and construction of schools. Part of this is an intention to undertake a "deep energy retrofit of schools built prior to 2008". Therefore, this pilot scheme is now paving the way for, and informing, a much larger national schools energy retrofit programme based on a range of typical retrofit options, which will have been tried and tested during the pilot.

To date sixteen schools received energy retrofits with an expenditure of €7 million.

For 2019 a provisional list of schools is currently being progressed to design phase and following completion of this stage the final list of schools and associated funding will be identified.

Energy Conservation Measures delivered to date include fabric (roofs, walls, glazing and doors), heating (boilers, controls, Building Management systems), and electrical (LED lighting and solar PV). Work is ongoing on the pilot and is nearing initial design stage. when the menu of specific energy conservation measures will be confirmed

*Question No. 166 answered with Question No. 152.*

### **Education and Training Boards**

167. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12092/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Forth Mountain Outdoor Education and Training Centre referred to by the Deputy is being purpose built by Wexford County Council and there has been consultation between Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board and the local authority on this project.

My Department is not directly involved in the building project but we have received a copy of the proposal from the ETB to relocate the services and facilities of Shielbaggan Outdoor Education and Training Centre to this new facility, and this is currently under review.

### **DEIS Status**

168. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary will be considered for and granted delivering equality of opportunity in schools, DEIS, status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12129/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** 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 based on the geographical CSO Small Areas where the pupil cohort resides.

A detailed document explaining the methodology used in the Identification process under DEIS plan 2017 is available on my Department's website at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>

DEIS Plan 2017 states that the improved data on the socio-demographic of schools resulting from the new identification model will have an impact not only on the assessment of schools for inclusion in the programme but also on the scaling of resources to allow for more graduated levels of support. This in turn allows for the ultimate objective of allocating resources to best meet the identified need of individual schools.

In order to achieve this, the current identification model needs to be as accurate as possible and this requires the use of Eircode to ensure correct inputting of addresses. Further analysis is also required to examine other variables known to be strong predictors of educational disadvantage in the context of resource allocation.

Therefore, in order to ensure the quality of the address data and conduct further analysis it is not intended to extend the DEIS programme to any further schools until this work is complete.

## Special Educational Needs Service Provision

169. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will meet with a person (details supplied) to discuss the educational needs of the person's child. [12137/19]

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

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

Parents/Guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement, including special class placement, should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child, using the contact details available at <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list>.

The NCSE is an independent agency of my Department with responsibility for planning, coordinating and advising on education provision for children with special educational needs. I understand that a senior SENO from the NCSE for the area in question has provided information to the parent in relation to special schools in the locality and continues to be available to assist the parent. I also understand that there is a Section 29 appeal currently underway. As this process is ongoing, I have no plans to meet with the parent at this stage.

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

## Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

170. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if grant assistance is available for students (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12140/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** There is no specific grant allocation available to this Department from which funding can be made available for the purpose referred to by the Deputy.

## Technological Universities Status

171. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an institute of technology (details supplied) is in the process of establishing a formal amalgamation with a college of further and higher education in Northern Ireland; the legislative provision that exists both here and in Northern Ireland for the creation of such an amalgamated institute; if such an amalgamated institute would be able to apply for technological university status here; the implications this may have for staff members; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12148/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The National Strategy for Ed-

ucation to 2030 characterises the formation of alliances on a cross-border basis as a potentially exciting and creative way of aligning the higher education resources of those regions with the needs of students, enterprise and other stakeholders and to be encouraged. This is an approach that is supported by Government in terms of ongoing higher education landscape restructuring.

In terms of the funding of higher education landscape restructuring in 2018 €0.5 million in Exchequer co-funding support was allocated under the Higher Education Authority's call for funding proposals to a number of projects with a cross-border strategic dimension. This included a project involving Dundalk Institute of Technology which facilitated a regional landscape restructuring approach, including improving skills ladder progression pathways in the North East in a cross-border axis with Higher Education Institutions and Further Education and Training colleges such as Queen's University Belfast, Belfast Metropolitan College and Southern Regional College.

My Department is not aware of any amalgamation process involving Dundalk Institute of Technology and other institutions at this time. It is a matter for each individual Higher Education Institution in the State as to where and how it seeks to position itself in the Irish higher education landscape. The primary legislation governing the establishment of Higher Education Institutions in the State is contained in the Institutes of Technology Acts 1992 to 2006, the Universities Act 1997 and the Technological Universities Act 2018. This legislation does not provide for the specific cross-jurisdictional amalgamation of higher education institutions in the State.

Section 29 of the Technological Universities Act 2018 provides for the application jointly by two or more institutes to the Minister for an order seeking designation as a technological university in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Act. Section 38 of the 2018 Act provides that an institute and an established technological university may also apply to the Minister for such an order. The term "institute" is defined in the 2018 Act as meaning the Dublin Institute of Technology, or a college within the meaning of section 2 of the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992, these being Higher Education Institutions in the State.

### **School Placement**

172. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the rights parents of and pupils themselves have in terms of appealing a school decision to reject an application to attend for post-primary schooling in exceptional circumstances, not in terms of special needs requirements, but in terms of personal security reasons. [12158/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The position is that the selection and enrolment of pupils in schools is the responsibility of the authorities of the individual school. My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in an area. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice. As schools may not have a place for every applicant, a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory, and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent, guardian, or a pupil who is 18 years or over, to the Secretary General of my Department (or in the case of an Education and Training Board (ETB) school, to the ETB in the first instance) where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school, expels a student, or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year. My

Department has no authority to compel a school to admit a pupil, except in the case of an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 being upheld.

Further information in relation to section 29 appeals is available on my Department's website or by contacting Section 29 Administration Unit, Department of Education and Skills, Friars Mill Road, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath (or telephone 0761 108588).

The Educational Welfare Service (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) is a statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The contact details for this agency are Educational Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency, Floors 2-5, Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, Dublin 8 (or telephone 01-7718500).

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

173. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address a matter (details supplied) relating to children with special needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12259/19]

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

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

It is open to any school to make application to the NCSE to establish a special class.

In deciding where a special class in an area should be established, the NCSE take account of the current and projected demand and the available school accommodation both current and planned. In this regard, the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) may approach individual schools to discuss the matter with a view to finding the optimal location in terms of convenience and sustainability.

When the NCSE sanction a special class in a school, the school can apply to my Department for capital funding to re-configure existing spaces within the school building to accommodate the class and/or to construct additional accommodation. There are standard arrangements in place for the funding, design and delivery of these projects.

Parents/Guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement, including special class placement, should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child, using the contact details available at <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list>.

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

### **School Transport Applications**

174. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of

an application for school transport for a pupil (details supplied) in County Cork; the steps he will take to ensure transport will be provided for the pupil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12317/19]

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

There are currently over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

The child in question is eligible for school transport and Bus Éireann is currently sourcing an individual service to provide transport to and from school; they will liaise directly with the family in this regard.

In the meantime, the family may continue to avail of the Special Transport Grant towards the cost of making private transport arrangements.

### School Curriculum

175. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether it is sufficient that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, NCCA, in terms of syllabus specifications, merely sets out a list of topics and learning outcomes; and his further views on whether it would be more appropriate also to include depth of treatment standards to be achieved and examination specification. [12415/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) advises the Minister on curriculum and assessment at early childhood, primary and post-primary levels. It uses evidence from educational and other research, national and international, along with the valued experience of practitioners and experts, to arrive at this advice.

NCCA is a statutory, representative body and the approach through which it develops curricula requires that agreement is reached, where possible, with representative stakeholders in education – including teacher unions, management bodies, parents, the early childhood sector, further and higher education, business interests, and the State Examinations Commission. Increasingly, the pupil and student voice is a source of input and feedback on its advice too.

Beyond stakeholder involvement, consultation is a feature of the approach taken: there are public consultations on *all* major policy documents and curricula before advice goes to the Minister. By the time it does, NCCA has discussed and deliberated, sometimes over a couple of years, so the advice is considered and never offered lightly.

NCCA develops the specifications for particular subjects and areas of the curriculum. These specifications do not ‘merely set out a list of topics and learning outcomes’. For example the recent specification for a new subject, Leaving Certificate Computer Science, included the following material and sections:

- An Introduction to the specification
- An outline of the senior cycle of Irish education
- A rationale for the inclusion of Computer Science as a subject

- The aims and objectives of the course in Computer Science
  - Related learning – how Computer Science can link to other subjects and areas across the curriculum
- An overview of the Structure of the course in Computer Science
- An outline of the senior cycle key skills to which it contributes
- A section on the teaching and learning approaches that are fundamental to Computer Science
- An outline of the three strands involved in the course and the learning outcomes for each of these strands
- An outline of how the student’s work on the course will be assessed.

All subject specifications go into this level of detail. In addition, after the finalisation and introduction of the specification, the NCCA publishes Assessment Guidelines. These provide further detail on each of the assessment components, including the final examination and any second assessment components such as projects, practicals, assignments etc. The Assessment Guidelines are developed in collaboration with the State Examinations Commission so that there is clear alignment between the specification and the assessment items in the examinations and assessment briefs administered by the SEC. Increasingly, for example in the case of all recently introduced Junior Cycle subject specifications, the NCCA also develops, on an ongoing basis, exemplification of student work/teaching and learning that demonstrate how learning outcomes in the specification are realised in the classroom or learning site.

Frequently, as in the case of Leaving Certificate Computer Science, Support Material for Teaching and Learning is also provided. This package of material, the Specification, the related Assessment Guidelines, the examples of students’ work, and Support Material for Teaching and Learning is designed to equip teachers with the material they need to successfully teach the relevant course. In addition, of course, the State Examinations Commission also issue teachers and schools with sample papers, and in time, past papers related to the examinations and these too assist teachers in their engagement with the learning outcomes of the course.

Learning outcomes are statements in curriculum specifications to describe the knowledge, understanding, skills and values students should be able to demonstrate after a period of learning. The DES policy on learning outcomes was set out in the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in 2011 - A “learning outcomes” approach needs to be incorporated into all curriculum statements at primary level and in all new syllabuses at post-primary levels as they come on stream. Curricula should state clearly the skills and competences expected of learners at six points in their development (end of early years/infants, end of second class, end of fourth class, end of primary stage, end of junior cycle and end of senior cycle).

The point raised in this question about whether it would be appropriate to introduce ‘depth of treatment standards’ relates to the question of how detailed the specification of learning outcomes should be. This is the source of much debate and contestation in the literature on curriculum development and curriculum specification, with long-established as well as newly developing perspectives on both sides of the debate. NCCA keeps the literature on learning outcomes and outcomes-based specification under review and will shortly, in Q2 of 2019, publish a paper reviewing current approaches and views in this area, both in the literature on learning outcomes and in the experience across six jurisdictions worldwide. The paper has been developed in consultation with an expert in the field of curriculum studies, Prof. Mark Priestley of the University of Stirling in Scotland. It is currently the subject of peer review before being

published and made available for ongoing discussion.

### **Parental Leave**

176. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the additional two weeks paid parental leave for children under one year as outlined in budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11518/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** As the Deputy is aware, the Government has agreed to introduce two weeks of paid parental leave to support the parents of children under one year.

Work is well advanced on the General Scheme of legislative proposals to provide for two weeks paid parental leave. These proposals will be brought to Government for approval shortly.

### **Court Accommodation Provision**

177. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to ensure that the OPW secures another venue in Carndonagh, County Donegal, while the local courthouse will be undergoing essential repair in the time ahead. [11787/19]

196. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to ensure that court sittings will continue to be held at a venue in Carndonagh, County Donegal, while the local courthouse will be undergoing essential repair in the time ahead. [11786/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 177 and 196 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that following professional inspections by the OPW and on their recommendations immediate health and safety issues were highlighted in relation to Carndonagh Courthouse. Therefore court hearings could not continue at the courthouse in the short term.

The Courts Service has advised that a review is currently being carried out and that, in the short term, the Court will sit in Buncrana Courthouse. I understand that the next District Court for Carndonagh will sit in Buncrana Courthouse on 19 March 2019 at 10.30 am.

### **Residency Permits**

178. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11482/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned applied on 02/12/2016 for a residence card as a family member of an EU citizen under the provisions of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015

and Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council. They stated at that time that they were the de facto partner of a citizen of Romania.

This application was refused on 07/11/2017 as the Minister was satisfied that they had submitted false and misleading documentation in support of their application. As such, their application was refused in accordance with Regulation 27(1)(a) of the 2015 Regulations.

The person concerned requested a review of that decision on 21/11/2017. This review application is currently at an advanced stage of consideration. I note that INIS has corresponded recently with the person concerned and a determination will issue in due course, when all matters have been fully considered.

Applications are dealt with in strict chronological order. Although it is not possible at the present time to provide a definitive date by which a determination will be made in this case, there will be no avoidable delay in completing same, and the person concerned should expect a decision in the near future.

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

### **Immigration Status**

179. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current or potential residency status of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11483/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, before a final decision is made.

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

### **Irish Prison Service**

180. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the smoking ban is not being enforced in prisons including Wheatfield Prison, Clondalkin, Dublin 22; and the steps he plans to take to address the matter in order to protect the health of those working in the prison. [11528/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that the custodial estate is exempted from certain provisions of the Public Health (Tobacco) (Amendment) Act 2004 which prohibits smoking in the workplace.

I am informed it is the policy of the Irish Prison Service that, as a place of work, each prison is smoke free, while recognising that a prison cell is a domestic setting for prisoners.

I am further informed that the Irish Prison Service strives to achieve full compliance with the legislation, and has updated the Irish Prison Service Smoking Policy to incorporate smoking in any form, including all vaping devices and e-cigarettes, in addition to the smoking of any tobacco product.

The implementation of the Smoking Policy in all Irish Prisons requires that all smoking and vaping is permitted only by prisoners within their cells (defined as their home) and in outdoor designated smoking areas. I am aware that the Irish Prison Service has a duty to safeguard each individual's health, safety and welfare by maintaining a safe and healthy environment for prisoners, staff, and all other prison visitors.

My officials in the Irish Prison Service have informed me that they are committed to securing full compliance with the smoking policy and have established a National Smoking Cessation Group to support and oversee the implementation of the Smoking Policy.

All Governors are regularly reminded of their obligations to ensure rigorous implementation of the policy.

### **Gambling Legislation**

181. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the areas in which Part III of the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 is in force; the measures in place to ensure that District Courts are kept informed as to the areas in which Part III of the Act is in force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11535/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** While the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 comes under the auspices of the Minister for Justice and Equality, the provisions in Part III of the Act relate wholly to the responsibility of a local authority, the District Court and the Revenue Commissioners to take certain actions or not with regard to the licensing of gaming machines. I have no role or responsibility in relation to the actions of local authorities under Part III of the Act. Thus, my Department does not have the information requested by the Deputy.

The Deputy will appreciate that I am not in a position to comment on decisions by the judiciary or to interfere in the decision making processes of the courts in any manner.

### **Wards of Court**

182. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the legislative proposals to establish a central funds office to provide for the audit of wards of court funds by the Comptroller and Auditor General have not been progressed in view of the commitment made in the Report and Financial Statements of the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice for year ended 30 September 2009 (details supplied). [11646/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware

that section 5(1)(a) of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993 expressly excludes the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) from auditing a fund under the control of the courts. While my Department has examined the proposal to amend the 1993 Act to allow wards of court funds to be audited by the C&AG, I am advised that it is considered to be incompatible with the Constitution's architecture and not consistent with Article 33.1.

Article 33.1 provides "There shall be a Comptroller and Auditor General to control on behalf of the State all disbursements and to audit all accounts of moneys administered by or under the authority of the Oireachtas". The fact that the wardship funds are not public funds and are subject to the control and supervision of the High Court are considered to be essential obstacles to providing that the C&AG may audit such funds. In addition, it is considered that legislating for C&AG oversight of these funds could also undermine the independence of the judiciary and the administration of justice under Articles 34.1 and 35.2 of the Constitution.

### **Wards of Court**

183. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 177 of 24 October 2017, if he is satisfied that the court is responding to requests for summaries, specifically that it is the position that the committee of the person is entitled to seek a summary of the overall amount of funds in court in view of reports that persons seeking them are not being responded to. [11657/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, the High Court has jurisdiction in wards of court matters and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that when a person is taken into wardship, the President of the High Court appoints a Committee, usually one person, and that Committee has an important role in relation to the ward's personal welfare and property. In approximately 75% of all cases the ward's Committee is a family member or a trusted friend. However, if no suitable or willing relative or friend is available, or if there is a conflict of interest between the ward and the person who would otherwise have been appointed, the President of the High Court can appoint the General Solicitor for Minors and Wards of Court to act as the Committee.

The Courts Service has advised that statements as to the valuation of funds held in court are sent to the Committee of the Estate who has responsibility for property and affairs of the Ward. In a small number of cases a family member is the Committee of the Person only and his or her role is limited to matters of welfare of the ward. However, where a Committee of the Person seeks a summary of the overall amount of funds in court, that summary will be provided to them.

The Courts Service has further advised that if such a request has not been responded to, details should be provided to the Registrar of Wards of Court and he will ensure that the matter is dealt with promptly.

### **Wards of Court**

184. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps he will take to remedy the situation that the wards of court system is in conflict with the UN Convention on

the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the EU Convention on Human Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. [11658/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and more broadly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, address the right to equal treatment before the law. The UN Convention provides that people with disabilities should have the same rights as everyone else and should be provided with the practical supports to make that a reality.

As the Deputy will also be aware, the legal framework for persons who are deemed to lack capacity is currently undergoing significant reform with the current system of wardship being phased out and replaced with a more modern system focussed on assisting and supporting persons who may lack capacity. This new legal framework is provided for under the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 which was enacted in December 2015.

The 2015 Act provides a modern statutory framework to support decision-making by adults with capacity difficulties. It will repeal the Marriage of Lunatics Act 1811 and the Lunacy Regulation (Ireland) Act 1871. The current adult wards of court system will be phased out and replaced by a less intrusive system which offers a continuum of options to support people in maximising their decision-making capability.

Part 6 of the 2015 Act provides for the phased transition from adult wardship to the new support framework. It provides for the review by the wardship court of the capacity of all current adult wards within three years of the commencement of that Part of the Act. Following a review of his or her capacity, the ward will be discharged from wardship and depending on the outcome of the review the wardship court may:

- Declare that the ward does not lack capacity and immediately discharge the ward from wardship and order that the property of the former ward be returned to him/her.

- Declare that the ward lacks capacity unless a suitable person is made available as co-decision maker to make one or more decisions. Once a co-decision making agreement is registered the court shall immediately discharge the ward from wardship and order that the property of the former ward be returned to him/her. If there is no suitable person to act as co-decision maker or the co-decision making agreement has not been properly registered within a period set down by the court, then the court shall make orders as appropriate under Part 5 to appoint a decision making representative and order that the property of the former ward be returned to him/her once a decision making representative has been appointed.

- Declare that the ward lacks capacity even if a suitable person is made available as co-decision maker to make one or more decisions. The court shall make orders as appropriate under Part 5 to appoint a decision making representative and order that the property of the former ward be returned to him/her once a decision making representative has been appointed.

The 2015 Act provides for the setting up of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission. New administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service must be put in place before the substantive provisions of the 2015 Act, including Part 6, can be commenced. A high-level Steering Group comprised of senior officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health, the Mental Health Commission and the Courts Service, together with the Director of the Decision Support Service, is overseeing the establishment and commissioning of the Decision Support Service and this work is ongoing.

The key preparations are being put in place under the oversight of the Steering Group to al-

low for commencement orders for the substantive provisions of the 2015 Act to be made when the Decision Support Service is ready to roll out the new decision-making support options. Ms Áine Flynn was appointed Director of the Decision Support Service on 2 October 2017. The Director is working in a very determined way to get the necessary staff resources, processes, IT system, expert panels, codes of practice and regulations in place in order that the Decision Support Service can be up and running as quickly as possible. There are many complex strands to this work, including involvement of multiple organisations. Every effort is underway to ensure that the Decision Support Service has all necessary capacity to open for business as soon as possible.

The Decision Support Service is not yet operational but every effort is underway to ensure that the Decision Support Service has all necessary capacity to open for business as soon as possible. While the Decision Support Service has been working towards being operational and ready for the commencement of the main provisions of the Act in 2020, the situation is being kept under review as the preparatory work on implementation moves forward.

The 2019 Revised Estimates Volume provides for an allocation of €3.5 million in the Justice and Equality Vote for the establishment of the Decision Support Service.

### **Assisted Decision Making**

185. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the full commissioning of the decision support service; and the achievements to date. [11659/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 provides a modern statutory framework to support decision-making by adults with capacity difficulties. The Act was signed into law on 30 December 2015 but has not yet been fully commenced. The Act provides for the establishment of new administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission (a body under the Department of Health).

The Decision Support Service is working towards being operational and ready for the commencement of the main provisions of the Act in 2020. This lead in timeframe ensures that the necessary staff resources, processes, IT system, expert panels, codes of practice and regulations will be in place so that the Decision Support Service will have the capacity to be up and running effectively.

A high-level Steering Group comprised of senior officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health, the Mental Health Commission and the Courts Service, together with the Director of the Decision Support Service, is overseeing the establishment and commissioning of the Decision Support Service and this work is ongoing. There are many complex strands to this work, including involvement of multiple organisations. The 2019 Revised Estimates Volume provides for an allocation of €3.5 million in the Justice and Equality Vote for the establishment of the Decision Support Service.

A number of provisions of the 2015 Act were commenced in October 2016 in order to progress the setting up of the Decision Support Service. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) Order 2016 (S.I. No. 515 of 2016) commenced provisions of the Act to enable the recruitment of the Director of the Decision Support Service. Ms Áine Flynn was appointed Director of the Decision Support Service on 2 October 2017.

The commencement of Part 8 of the Act, which provides a legislative framework for ad-

vance healthcare directives, is a matter for the Minister for Health. On 17 October 2016 the Minister for Health established a multidisciplinary working group to assist in the development and preparation of the code of practice for the AHD provisions of the Act. The role of the working group is to prepare a detailed series of recommendations for the Director of the Decision Support Service in relation to codes of practice.

In anticipation of the completion of that process, the Minister for Health commenced the remainder of section 91 on 17 December 2018 (S.I. No. 527 of 2018). This will enable the Director of the Decision Support Service to progress the preparation of the code of practice on the AHD provisions, based on the working group's recommendations, and in accordance with the specific process outlined in the Act. The multidisciplinary working group submitted its recommendations on the code of practice to the Director of the Decision Support Service on 21 December 2018. Once completed, the final code of practice can be published by the Director with consent of the Minister for Health. The preparation of the code of practice will facilitate the subsequent commencement of Part 8 of the Act, pertaining to AHDs, in its entirety.

In April 2018, the Mental Health Commission engaged the consultancy firm BearingPoint to support the development of a detailed, costed plan to establish a fully operational Decision Support Service. The contract also includes ongoing project management support for the design and establishment of the organisation, business processes, IT systems and risk management framework.

The Mental Health Commission has also received sanction for the recruitment of a number of staff for the Decision Support Service and also a number of staff to provide shared services for the Mental Health Commission and Decision Support Service. These staff are being recruited on a phased basis by the Mental Health Commission.

The National Disability Authority is currently finalising its work on the suite of draft codes of practice in relation to non-healthcare matters which are required to be prepared under section 103 of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015.

In June 2018, my Department recruited an external legal expert to assist in the preparation of draft regulations in relation to decision-making assistance agreements, co-decision-making agreements, certain matters relating to decision-making representatives, and enduring powers of attorney. These regulation-making powers are provided for in sections 10(4), 31, 45(3), 45(4), 46(3) and 79 of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015. Work on the draft regulations is ongoing.

### **Legislative Measures**

186. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when it is planned to bring forward a gambling control Bill in view of the ongoing problems identified with the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 in a recent District Court judgment (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11674/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** Through my previous responses to the Deputy on this matter, he will be aware of the work of the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Future Licensing and Regulation of Gambling, established as a result of the Government Decision to review the 2013 General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill and all relevant developments since.

The Group's Report is currently being finalised and I hope to bring it to Government for consideration shortly.

## Naturalisation Applications

187. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of adult applications for naturalisation based on Irish association granted in 2018. [11687/19]

188. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way in which a person can apply for naturalisation based on Irish descent or Irish association without residing here. [11688/19]

189. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a person is applying for naturalisation based on Irish association, if there are circumstances in which time spent here on a stamp 2 would be considered for the three year residency requirement. [11689/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 187 to 189, inclusive, together.

The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. All applications for a certificate of naturalisation are processed and assessed individually in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

While statistics are not compiled in such a manner as to identify applicants for a certificate of naturalisation by Irish association as required by the Deputy, I am informed by my officials that there are currently 292 Irish association cases under active consideration by INIS.

It is open to an applicant generally to apply under Section 16(a) of the 1956 Act where the applicant is of Irish descent or has Irish association. In such cases the Minister may in his absolute discretion waive the conditions for naturalisation set out under Section 15 of the Act, including residency. The onus is on the applicant to provide evidence of Irish descent or Irish association to the Minister for consideration.

A Stamp 2, which is granted for study purposes, is not reckonable for the purposes of naturalisation.

## Garda Transport Provision

190. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if An Garda Síochána has recently put out to tender a contract to supply new marked Garda cars and vans to the fleet; if so, when the new vehicles will come into the fleet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11724/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that there has been unprecedented investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years.

In relation to Garda vehicles, €46 million has been provided by the Government for investment in the Garda fleet between 2016 and 2021, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet allowing Gardaí to be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime. This is in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the Garda fleet in the period of 2013 to 2015.

The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. This includes responsibility

for the allocation of Garda resources, including vehicles among the various Garda divisions. As Minister, I have no role in that matter. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure their optimum use.

As the Deputy may be aware, a total of €10million has been allocated to the Garda fleet for 2019.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that An Garda Síochána purchase new vehicles under contracts tendered by the Office of Government Procurement and that contracts are currently in place for Garda cars and vans.

In relation to the budget of €10m available for the purchase and fit-out of Garda vehicles this year, I am informed by the Garda authorities that initial orders have been placed and that, following delivery and fit-out, allocation of these vehicles will commence in April 2019.

I understand from the Garda authorities that the allocation of these vehicles will be made on the basis of identified operational demands.

### **Forensic Science Ireland**

191. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated full year cost of recruiting two additional forensic anthropologists for Forensic Science Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11725/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by Forensic Science Ireland (FSI) that they currently do not employ any forensic anthropologists nor am I aware of any being employed elsewhere in the Irish civil service.

There is not therefore, to the best of my knowledge, a grade of forensic anthropologist in the civil service. Having said that, it may be of interest to the Deputy to know that the salary scale for Forensic Scientist Grade III in FSI ranges from €30,987 to €64,981 per annum, as of 1st October 2018.

### **Garda Resources**

192. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new marked and unmarked Garda cars and vans that were attached to the Garda water unit in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; the number withdrawn during the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11726/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that there has been an unprecedented level of investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years.

€46 million has been provided by the Government for investment in the Garda fleet between 2016 and 2021, in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

As the Deputy will appreciate, in accordance with Section 26 of the Garda Síochána Act

2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. Further, the allocation of Garda resources is a matter for the Commissioner, in light of identified operational need. This includes responsibility for the allocation of Garda vehicles among the various Garda divisions. As Minister, I have no direct role in that matter. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure their optimum use.

A capital allocation of €10 million has been made available to An Garda Síochána for the purchase and fit-out of Garda vehicles in 2019. I am informed that initial orders have been placed and that, following delivery and fit-out, the allocation of vehicles will commence in April 2019 on the basis of identified operational demand.

I understand from the Garda authorities that the Garda Water Unit is a national resource under the direction and control of the Assistant Commissioner, Roads Policing and Major Event Management and the operational control of the Superintendent, Operational Support Services.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that no new vehicles were allocated to the Garda Water Unit in 2017 and that one marked vehicle was taken out of service as the vehicle had reached end of life.

I am further informed that 2 new vehicles were allocated to the Unit in 2018, one marked and one unmarked. Two unmarked vehicles were taken out of service due to the fact that the vehicles had reached end of life.

I am informed that no new vehicles have been allocated to the Garda Water Unit to date in 2019 and that in total, 7 vehicles are currently assigned to the Garda Water Unit - one van, two trucks and four 4x4 vehicles.

### **Prison Service Data**

193. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 482 of 15 January 2019, the number of Irish Sign Language interpreting hours provided to the Irish Prison Service in each of the years 2015 to 2018. [11732/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** In my response to Parliamentary Question 482 I indicated that it was not possible to collate the information sought within the relevant timeframe. I have since been advised by my officials in the Irish Prison Service that as the data requested by the Deputy is not recorded centrally, a manual review of records was carried out. The information requested is detailed in the following table.

Year	No. of hours
2015	9 hours
2016	25 hours
2017	13 hours
2018	32 hours

The Deputy may also wish to be aware that the Irish Prison Service facilitated a 10 week Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) level 3 Irish Sign Language training course in Mountjoy Prison during 2018. The course was presented by representatives from the Irish Deaf Society and was completed by 12 Irish Prison Service staff.

In June 2018, the Irish Prison Service commenced the recording of data from committal

interviews undertaken by prison governors on the Prisoner Information Management System. Amongst the data recorded is whether the assistance of an interpreter in a particular language including Irish Sign Language, is requested by the prisoner. I can confirm that since the introduction of this electronic system in June 2018, there are no recorded instances where a prisoner has sought the assistance of an Irish Sign Language interpreter on committal to prison.

### **Legislative Programme**

194. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to update the Registration of Clubs Acts 1904 to 2008. [11739/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Registration of Clubs Acts 1904 to 2008 provide for the grant and renewal of a certification of registration by the courts for bona fide members’ clubs. Those Acts permit the supply of intoxicating liquor to members of such a registered club on the club’s premises and also to members of the public in limited, specified circumstances. In order to be eligible for the grant or renewal of a certificate of registration, a club’s rules must comply with requirements set out in the Registration of Clubs Acts.

A register of clubs is kept by the Registrar of Clubs, i.e. the District Court clerk of the court district in which the club premises are situated. While I have no immediate plans to amend the Registration of Clubs Acts, my Department keeps the operation of the law in this area under ongoing review.

### **Refugee Resettlement Programme**

195. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons, including unaccompanied minors, Ireland committed to accepting under the resettlement and relocation programmes; the date that this was to be achieved by; the number of persons to date including unaccompanied minors accepted under the resettlement programme and the relocation programme in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11781/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** On 10 September 2015, as part of Ireland’s response to the migration crisis in central and southern Europe, the Government established the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP). Under this programme, the Government committed to accepting up to 4,000 people into the State, primarily through a combination of the EU Relocation Programme and the UNHCR-led refugee Resettlement Programme, which is currently focussed on resettling refugees from Lebanon. The Government Decision to accept 4,000 people into the State did not in itself contain a time limit, but the Relocation Programme, which concluded on 31 March 2018, had a time limit of approximately two years.

In a gesture of humanitarian assistance towards the most vulnerable caught up in the migration crisis, the Government also committed to take unaccompanied minors from France who were previously resident in the migrant camp at Calais. 41 unaccompanied minors have arrived in the State from the Calais Special Project, which has now concluded.

Ireland agreed to accept a further 36 unaccompanied minors from Greece, whose arrivals will take place on a phased basis during 2019. In a show of solidarity with those EU Member States most affected by migration in the Mediterranean, Ireland accepted 58 persons from search and rescue missions in 2018, including 4 unaccompanied minors. The Minister has also

agreed to accept 5 further unaccompanied minors from Malta in 2019.

To date, a total of 2,269 people have arrived in Ireland under the various strands Irish Refugee Protection Programme, 51 of whom are unaccompanied minors.

A further 90 programme refugees will arrive from Lebanon under the resettlement strand of the programme on 13 and 14 March 2019. The remaining 850 programme refugees are due to arrive in Ireland by 31 October 2019.

**IRPP commitments and arrivals to-date:**

-	Commitment	Arrived to-date
EU Relocation Strand (concluded on 31 March 2018)	1,022	1,022
Of which are unaccompanied minors	6	6
UNHCR-led Resettlement Strand	1,985	1,135
Calais Special Project	41	41
Unaccompanied minors Greece	60	-
Total unaccompanied minors	101	41
IRPP Humanitarian Admission Programme 2018/19	530	13
Mediterranean search and rescue missions		
Adults	54	54
Unaccompanied minors	4	4
Total from search and Rescue missions	58	58
Mechanism as yet undecided	304	-
Total IRPP Commitment/ Arrivals	4,000	2,269

*Question No. 196 answered with Question No. 177.*

**Garda Equipment**

197. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has received a report from the Garda authorities regarding the issuing of body-worn cameras to An Garda Síochána; and if so, the amount of funding that will be provided for the issuing of body-worn cameras. [11814/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation for 2019 of €1.76 billion. Very significant capital investment is also being made, including investment of €342 million in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021. The Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of these resources and decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of equipment and resources, including ICT resources, are for the Commissioner in light of identified operational demands.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland included a recommendation that An Garda Síochána develop a plan to deploy body worn cameras. The Implementation Plan for that report - A Policing Service for the Future - includes a related action in relation to legislative preparation for deployment of body worn cameras.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that a Working Group in An Garda Síochána, chaired by an Assistant Commissioner, is preparing a report on the issue of body worn cameras. On completion of that report and subject to the Commissioner's views on the way forward, questions including any funding implications will be addressed.

### **Legislative Programme**

198. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to update the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956. [11815/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 (as amended) provides the legal basis for persons seeking to be naturalised and become Irish citizens. There are no immediate plans to amend the Act, however, I am keeping immigration law under review and working with my officials to improve the overall immigration system.

### **Direct Provision Payments**

199. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when an agreement with a company (details supplied) was signed to provide a direct provision centre at a hotel for an initial 12 months; if the agreement commenced on that date; if the company has received payment from that date for supplying a direct provision centre at the hotel; and the value of payments made to date. [11832/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** In January and again in September of last year, the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department published a call for expressions of interest in the national press for premises to meet the increasing demand for accommodation for persons in the protection process. This accommodation is for those seeking international protection, namely asylum seekers.

This call sought expressions of interest from parties who would be interested in providing accommodation and related services on an urgent and emergency basis. This was issued in response to the urgent and unforeseen demand for accommodation and related services from those persons arriving in the state seeking international protection.

Following on-site assessments carried out by staff in the Department, the offer of the Caislean Mara hotel in Moville, Co. Donegal was deemed to be suitable premises for the needs of the Department.

I can confirm that the terms of the agreement have been reached but not commenced as, due to the damage done to the premises following a fire in late November 2018, the premises is not ready to open. The terms will commence once the centre has been repaired and recertified.

No payments have been made to date to the contractor for the provision of accommodation services at the Caislean Mara Hotel.

### **Direct Provision System**

200. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a letter was issued to confirm that a hotel (details supplied) met all the health and safety requirements to be used as a direct provision centre prior to the signing of an agreement; if the terms of the agreement relating to the proposed direct provision centre at the hotel commenced on the date the agreement was signed; and if not, if it commences when the asylum seekers arrive. [11833/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** In January and again in September of last year, the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department published a call for expressions of interest in the national press for premises to meet the increasing demand for accommodation for persons in the protection process. This accommodation is for those seeking international protection, namely asylum seekers.

This call sought expressions of interest from parties who would be interested in providing accommodation and related services on an urgent and emergency basis. This was issued in response to the urgent and unforeseen demand for accommodation and related services from those persons arriving in the state seeking international protection.

The criteria against which the Department assessed the offers of accommodation were availability, standard of property, ability to provide communal social spaces for residents, ability to cater at mealtimes and proximity to required various services.

It should be noted that these premises were offered to the Department by individual contractors across the country. The Department did not randomly choose any one location over another location.

Following on-site assessments carried out by staff in the Department, the offer of the Caislean Mara hotel in Merville, Co. Donegal was deemed to be suitable premises for the needs of the Department. At that time, the premises was available, capable of providing meals to residents and has scope to provide the required communal social areas required by residents.

Before any accommodation centre is opened, the contractor must provide certification from a registered architect/engineer that the premises meets all building regulations and that all safety equipment and alarms have been tested and verified. The Department also liaises with the relevant local authority to ensure there are no outstanding issues in relation to planning and fire safety issues.

I can confirm that the terms of the agreement have not commenced as, due to the damage done to the premises following a fire in late November 2018, the premises is not ready to open. The terms will commence once the centre has been repaired and recertified.

### **Direct Provision System**

201. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if security at a

hotel (details supplied) is being paid for by his Department. [11834/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** In January and again in September of last year, the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department published a call for expressions of interest in the national press for premises to meet the increasing demand for accommodation for persons in the protection process. This accommodation is for those seeking international protection, namely asylum seekers.

As the Deputy is aware, the Caislean Mara Hotel in Moville was selected to provide accommodation and ancillary services to protection applicants but, following an arson attack on the Hotel in late November 2018, it has not been possible to open the centre.

In these circumstances, it has been decided that the Department will cover security costs on a temporary basis, subject to on-going review.

### **Garda Transport Data**

202. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda vehicles allocated to each Garda station in the Garda R and J districts in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11943/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that there has been significant investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years.

In relation to Garda vehicles, €46 million has been provided by the Government for investment in the Garda fleet between 2016 and 2021, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet allowing Gardaí to be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime. This is in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the Garda fleet in the period of 2013 to 2015. A further €10 million is being made available in the Transport Capital Budget for the purchase and fit-out of vehicles. I am informed that initial orders have been placed and that, following delivery and fit-out, the allocation of vehicles will commence in April 2019.

The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. This includes responsibility for the allocation of Garda resources, including vehicles among the various Garda divisions. As Minister, I have no role in that matter. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure their optimum use.

The responsibility for the efficient deployment of all official Garda vehicles within each Division lies with the Divisional Officer, who may allocate vehicles between stations as required by operational circumstances.

I am informed by the Garda Authorities that Coolock (R District) & Raheny (J District) Garda Districts are part of the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) North Division. I am informed by the Garda authorities that the following table sets out the vehicles newly allocated to Garda fleet within DMR North for the years 2015-2018.

DMR NORTH Vehicles allocated 2015-2018	Cars	Vans	Motor-cycles	4 x 4	Other	Total
2015	14	5	0	0	1	20
2016	10	9	2	0	4	25
2017	7	3	0	0	0	10
2018	4	2	0	0	1	7

I am further informed that the total number of vehicles in the Garda fleet in DMR North Division at end of year in each of the years 2015-2018 and to date in 2019 are as set out in the following table.

Fleet DMR North Division	Cars	Vans	Motorcycles	4 x 4	Others	Total
2019 (* as at March 2019)	69	18	0	1	3	91
2018	79	25	1	1	4	110
2017	83	27	1	1	3	115
2016	86	33	2	1	5	127
2015	88	29	0	2	3	122

As set out above, J and R Districts are both among the Garda Districts which make up the DMR North Division. I am informed that the following table details the Garda Fleet in J and R Districts for the years 2015 – 2018 and to date in 2019. Information on the fleet assigned to individual stations is not included, for operational reasons.

	Cars	Vans	Motorcycles	4 x 4	Others	Total
2019 (*as at March 2019)						
COOLOCK-R	18	3	0	0	0	21
RAHENY-J	16	4	0	0	0	20
2018						
COOLOCK-R	21	3	0	0	0	24
RAHENY-J	16	4	0	0	0	20
2017						
COOLOCK-R	22	2	0	0	0	24
RAHENY-J	19	4	0	0	0	23
2016						
COOLOCK-R	23	3	0	0	0	26
RAHENY-J	19	4	0	0	0	23
2015						
COOLOCK-R	26	2	0	0	0	28
RAHENY-J	16	3	0	0	1	20

## Garda Recruitment

203. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Garda crime prevention officer post within the Garda Dublin north division will be filled on a full-time basis in view of the fact the post has been vacant for more than 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11944/19]

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that crime prevention is a core function of An Garda Síochána and that all Gardaí play an active role in crime prevention and reduction. In addition there are dedicated Crime Prevention Officers (CPOs) within each Garda Division. These CPOs are trained to encourage, promote and advise on crime prevention to both the private and business community. These specially trained officers are skilled at identifying risk factors and advise on what mitigating action can be taken to reduce opportunities to commit crime.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that the Divisional CPO for Dublin North retired and pending the holding of a competition to fill this position, the Divisional CPO for the DMR West Division is also covering the DMR North, delivering any crime prevention advice necessary for residents and businesses in the Division.

I am advised by the Commissioner that competitions recently concluded for promotion to the rank of sergeant and inspector with the aim of bringing the number in these ranks up to the full strength as agreed under the Employment Control Framework (ECF). The allocation of successful candidates is currently underway, with 300 newly promoted Sergeants and 113 new promoted Inspectors having been appointed to date.

I am advised that the timing of a competition to fill the position of Divisional CPO for Dublin North, will be considered by the Divisional Officer as resources become available, following on from the ongoing appointment of sergeants from the promotion panel now in place.

### **Fines Data**

204. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who have failed to pay fines imposed by the courts since the commencement of the Fines (Payment and Recovery) Act 2014; the number of persons who have had an attachment order, a recovery order or community service order made against them as a result; the number of persons imprisoned for failure to pay such fines; the equivalent figures for the three year period before the introduction of the Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11958/19]

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

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has provided the following information.

The Fines (Payment and Recovery) Act 2014 was enacted on 16 April 2014 and commenced on 11 January 2016.

The available information as requested by the Deputy is set out as follows.

**Report on the number of persons where fines were imposed by the Courts since the commencement of the Fines (Payment and Recovery Act 2014) from 11 January 2016 to date.**

No of Persons where fines were imposed
154,324

**Report on the number of persons that failed to pay fines imposed by the Courts since the commencement of the Fines (Payment and Recovery Act 2014) for the period from 11 January 2016 to date.**

No of Persons that failed to pay fines imposed by the Courts
84,925

**Report on number of persons that have had an attachment order, a recovery order, community service or imprisonment order imposed from 11 January 2016 to 8 March 2019**

Order	No. of Persons
Imprisonment	170
Attachment of Earnings Order	18
Recovery Orders	10
Community Service Orders	436

**Fines imposed between 01 Jan 2013 – 10 Jan 2016**

- There is no comparative report on the fines due for the period 01 Jan 2013 to 10 January 2016, due to the fact that prior to the introduction of the 2014 Fines Act, Court orders imposing the payment of a fine included a default period of imprisonment if the fine was not paid.

No. of persons fined	No. of Persons who failed to pay fines from 1st Jan 2013 to 10th Jan 2016
158,583	20,104

The Irish Prison Service has provided the following information:

Fine defaulters committed to prison

Year - Fine defaulters

2013 - 7,365 persons

2014 - 8,154 persons

2015 - 8,874 persons

2016 - 7,561 persons

(from 11th January 2016)

2017 - 2,179 persons

2018 - 449 persons

It can be noted that an individual can be committed more than once in a calendar year. It is likely that the majority of persons committed in 2016 and 2017 will have been sentenced prior

to the commencement of the Fines (Payment and Recovery) Act 2014.

### **Irish Prisoners Abroad**

205. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a policy in place as to the way in which the State would respond in the eventuality that an Irish citizen becomes radicalised by foreign terror groups and seeks to return to reside here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9734/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** It would not be appropriate for me to discuss the detail of any individual case.

The return to the EU of persons suspected of having been active in conflict in Iraq or Syria, or residing in conflict areas, presents complex challenges, including questions of public protection, the prosecution of offences, the protection of citizens' rights - particularly the rights of non-combatants - and de-radicalisation, none of which matters lend themselves to easy resolution. The shared challenges arising have been a consistent focus of discussion with my EU colleagues at meetings of Justice and Interior Ministers.

The Deputy will appreciate that the complexity of these cases is such that issues will arise where there is no ready solution. Such cases can only be dealt with on a case by case basis. The Government has made clear that appropriate consular assistance, to which Irish citizens are entitled, will be provided to them where it is possible to do so.

The question of how accountability can best be achieved for the people of Iraq and Syria who have suffered so greatly at the hands of ISIS is a complex one, facing not just Ireland, but also our EU counterparts and other international partners. Whether it is possible to secure prosecutions in Iraq and Syria, by local means or by an international mechanism, is open to question. Whether it is feasible to secure prosecutions in the home states of foreign fighters is also open to question given the difficulty of securing evidence.

If any fighters do return here and there is evidence available that they have committed terrorist offences, then they will be investigated fully by the Garda Authorities with a view to prosecution. Any decision on prosecution would, of course, be a matter solely for the DPP.

The authorities here will continue to work closely with their international partners in this regard.

I can assure the Deputy that all measures necessary and consistent with the law will be taken to protect the State and the people from harm and to vindicate the rights of individuals.

### **Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal Data**

206. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of cases in line to proceed to a member of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal for consideration, namely, cases in which the documents necessary are available to allow a member of the tribunal to consider an application; the date on which and position in line of the next available case to be taken up by a member of the tribunal for consideration; and the date on which the specific application was first submitted by the applicant. [11974/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, The Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal administers the Scheme of Compensation for

Personal Injuries Criminally Inflicted (the General Scheme) and the Scheme of Compensation for Personal Injuries Criminally Inflicted on Prison Officers (the Prison Officer Scheme). Under the terms of the Schemes, the Tribunal is entirely independent in the matter of individual decisions on applications for compensation and I have no role in the matter.

Tribunal Members, who are practising barristers and practising solicitors in the Courts system, provide their services on a part-time basis to the Tribunal. In making their decisions, Tribunal Members must be satisfied that all supporting documentation has been provided to enable them reach a decision on the application and it may be the case that they will seek further documentation to inform their decision. Therefore the time taken to process an application can vary widely from case to case. In addition, there may be circumstances where owing to the nature of the serious injury to the victim it can take a considerable amount of time (in some cases a number of years) before their treating consultant is in a position to give a final prognosis.

I have been informed by the Tribunal that three general scheme decisions have been arrived at by the Tribunal to date in 2019. These relate to applications received in date ranges from January 2009 to October 2015. In addition there are currently two further general scheme cases assigned to Tribunal members for direction on how to proceed.

### **Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal**

207. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 95, 96 and 97 of 28 February 2019, the meaning of applications received but not actively pursued by the applicant; and the criteria that must be met in order for an applicant to be considered to be actively pursuing a case. [11975/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As outlined in my reply to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 95, 96 and 97 I have requested an assessment of the caseload of the Tribunal to determine the current status of applications to the General Scheme. Applicants may be asked by the Tribunal to submit supporting documentation to enable the Tribunal come to a decision on their case. I am informed by the Tribunal that the reference cited by the Deputy relates to cases where a person has made an application but subsequently has not responded to such correspondence from the Tribunal. I understand that these cases are not deemed closed but the Tribunal is not in a position to determine whether an award should be made under the scheme. These and other aspects of the caseload are being considered as part of the assessment I have referred to and I will contact the Deputy again when this process has been completed.

### **Garda Stations**

208. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the plans of the Office of Public Works for the tendering of new Garda stations in County Cork in 2019; the locations of those stations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10618/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, there has been an unprecedented level of investment in An Garda Síochána in recent years, in support of the Government's commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, to provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime.

The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána are significant, with an allocation of €1.76 billion for 2019. Very significant capital investment is also being made, includ-

ing investment of €342 million in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021; and investment of €46 million in the Garda Fleet over the same period.

The Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 is an ambitious 5-year programme based on agreed Garda priorities, which continues to benefit over 30 locations around the country, underpinned by significant Exchequer funding across the Garda and OPW Votes. In addition to that programme, other major works to the Garda estate which are ongoing include the pilot Garda station reopening project, the development of a new facility at Military Road and the major refurbishment of Fitzgibbon Street station.

I would emphasise that the clear goal of this investment is to address deficiencies in the Garda estate and provide fit-for-purpose facilities for Garda members and staff, as well as the public interacting with them. And there has been some good progress in relation to the Garda estate in recent times, including in particular the completion and entry into operational use in 2018 of 3 new Divisional and Regional Headquarters in Wexford, Galway and Kevin Street (Dublin), which collectively required funding of over €100 million.

The Deputy will appreciate that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that a number of Garda stations in Cork are included in these planned or ongoing works:

First, the development of a new station in Glanmire, which will be located in Glanmire Industrial Estate, is included in the Building and Refurbishment Programme. The construction of this station is on-going and the Garda authorities and the OPW advise that completion is expected in early Q3.

I am further informed by the Garda authorities that in order to facilitate the Divisional Policing Model in Cork City, the Cork City Divisional Roads Policing Unit is relocating from Anglesea Street to Ballincollig Garda Station and that works to accommodate the Divisional Roads Policing Unit in Ballincollig Garda Station are scheduled for this year.

A new station in Macroom is also included in the programme, with delivery of that station along with new stations in Clonmel and Sligo as well as a new custody suite at the station on Anglesea Street Cork to be achieved as part of a Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangement. It is not possible at this point to provide a timeframe for completion of the projects. However I can assure the Deputy that delivery of the new Garda stations at Clonmel, Macroom and Sligo through this PPP arrangement is being pursued as a priority.

A station in Cork is also included in the pilot station reopening project. As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government commits to a pilot scheme to reopen 6 Garda stations, both urban and rural, to determine possible positive impacts that such openings will have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order.

The Garda Commissioner's final report, which is available on my Department's website, recommends that Ballinspittle Garda Station be reopened, along with stations in Bawnboy, Co. Cavan, Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow, Donard, Co. Wicklow, and Rush and Stepside, Co. Dublin.

The OPW and Garda authorities are cooperating closely on delivery of these stations. In relation to Ballinspittle, I understand that the OPW proposals for the refurbishment of Ballinspittle Station were agreed by An Garda Síochána at a sign-off meeting in October 2018 and that the next phase of the project is the procurement/tendering of works, which is expected to

commence shortly.

Finally and more generally, I am informed that An Garda Síochána seeks to address minor maintenance issues and refurbishment works across all Divisions as they arise, liaising closely with the OPW and having regard to overall Garda accommodation priorities.

### **Garda Youth Diversion Projects**

209. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which he can intervene to ensure that children at risk are protected from being forced into crime or prostitution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7074/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will appreciate that crime prevention and investigation, including in relation to the involvement of children in crime or prostitution, are matters for An Garda Síochána in the first instance.

However, an important initiative funded by my Department, known as the “Greentown” project, is examining the influence of criminal networks on children in Ireland. The initiative is being led by the REPPP Project, (Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice), at the School of Law in the University of Limerick (UL). The REPPP project is a strategic research partnership with UL which is supported by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and also by my own Department.

In the absence of international models of intervention that could be readily deployed, the original Greentown report (December 2016) recommended the design of a programme to include interventions with children and their families to help them withstand the influence of criminal networks. This new “Greentown Programme” has been designed with the input of leading international expertise on crime and criminal networks, together with Irish scientific, policy and practice expertise in child protection and welfare, drugs and community development.

I understand that it is intended to commence a trial of the Greentown Programme approach, on a pilot basis, during 2019.

More generally, my Department provides funding through the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) to support the operation of 106 Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs). These projects are community based multi-agency crime prevention initiatives which primarily seek to divert young people who have become involved in crime/anti-social behaviour.

For 2019, IYJS has a renewed emphasis on preventative work by GYDPs, looking at the child in the context of the specific family and the specific community. This includes family support work and working with children aged 8 to 11.

IYJS also supports established and planned pilot projects, to help develop better approaches in areas such as engagement with hard-to-reach or more challenging children, as well as family support and other preventative interventions.

A range of relevant legislative provisions are already in place, including the Child Trafficking and Pornography Act 1998, which provides offences for the organisation of child prostitution and related matters. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, as well as the Children Act 2001, provide for several offences relating to the sexual exploitation of children. The Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act, 2008 (as amended), outlaws the trafficking of children for criminal exploitation, and applies to exploitation both within and outside the State. The

sanctions for these crimes include, potentially, imprisonment of up to a life sentence for the most serious instances.

Finally, there are also offences in relation to adults who use or force a child to commit a crime, in particular Section 7 (1) of the Criminal Law Act 1997, as well as offences where a child is used for begging in the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 2011 and the Children Act 2001.

### Courts Service Data

210. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 228 of 5 March 2019, if the value of the fines imposed by the court as requested will be provided; if no fines were imposed, the sanctions given to the eight disqualified drivers for not surrendering their licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12031/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy was informed in the previous Parliamentary Question No. 228 of 5 March 2019, the Courts Service has indicated that eight people were summoned to Court for failing to surrender their driving licences and in relation to these summonses, no convictions are recorded.

The orders made by the Court in these cases are set out as follows:

ORDERS MADE	TOTAL
ADJOURNED	1
STRIKE OUT	1
STRIKE OUT NOT SERVED	2
TAKEN IN TO CONSIDERATION	3
WITHDRAWN	1

### Departmental Consultations

211. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the result of the public consultation carried out by his Department on the impending decision regarding day-light saving time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12038/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, my Department ran a public consultation process on the future of the twice-yearly clock change in October and November of 2018. The consultation comprised a public survey (which received over 16,000 responses) and general submissions from individuals and stakeholders (receiving 171 responses). In addition, the Department commissioned an Amárach Research opinion poll of a sample of 1,000 respondents aligned with the national population.

A report on the consultation exercise is being prepared and will be considered by an interdepartmental steering group for submission to Government. Once the group has reported to Government, more details concerning the consultation process and its outcome will be published on the Department's website.

### Probate Data

212. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the waiting times for the granting of probate in the Probate Office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12127/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Probate Office is an office of the High Court and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that waiting times for Grant applications in the Dublin Probate Office are currently 3 weeks for applications made by solicitors on behalf of clients and 13 to 14 weeks for personal applications.

As the Deputy will appreciate all applications for Grants in deceased persons' estates are made on foot of a number of mandatory legal documents which must be furnished by the applicants. These require detailed checking by the Dublin Probate Office to ensure that the estate of the deceased person is administered correctly and in accordance with the law. Where a person opts to apply for a Grant personally, without the assistance of a solicitor, the process requires significant extra support from the Dublin Probate Office.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Report of the Probate Services Review Group was approved by the Courts Service Board on 23 April 2018 and made a number of recommendations in relation to improvements to business processes. The Courts Service has advised that there are ongoing improvements to the internal processes in the Dublin Probate Office which will form part of a process of continuous business improvement into the future. These changes, in addition to the allocation of additional resources, have provided significant improvement in waiting times.

### **Garda Data**

213. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí assigned to the Roscommon and Longford division and the Galway division in each of the years 2010 to 2018, in tabular form; the number of Garda stations in these divisions which have closed since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12164/19]

**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. I am informed by the Commissioner that 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 resources.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,600 recruits have attested as members and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, some 18 and 41 of whom have been assigned to the Roscommon/Longford and the Galway Divisions respectively.

The Government has increased the budget by 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 he also intends to recruit 600 Garda Civilian Staff. This Garda Staff recruitment will allow the Commissioner to redeploy a further 500 fully trained Gardaí from administrative duties to frontline policing in 2019.

The Garda Commissioner has confirmed that the Government's commitment to increase the overall strength of An Garda Síochána to 15,000 Garda members will be achieved by the target date of 2021. The Government fully supports the Commissioner's management decision which is to ensure that increasing numbers of Gardaí are available for frontline duties in the prevention and detection of criminal activity.

The Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme implemented during 2012 and 2013 resulted in the closure of 39 Garda stations in 2012 and 100 Garda stations in 2013. This included 9 stations in the Roscommon/Longford Division and 11 stations in the Galway Division. These are detailed in the table. The primary objective of the Programme was to identify opportunities to introduce strategic reforms to enhance service delivery, increase efficiency and streamline practices within An Garda Síochána.

The Programme was based on a review of the Garda Station Network by Garda management which concluded in relation to certain stations, many of which were only open part-time and occupied by a single Garda, that resources could be better deployed and more effectively used on the front line if those stations no longer had to be staffed and maintained. In reaching these conclusions, Garda management reviewed all aspects of the Garda Síochána policing model, including the deployment of personnel, the utilisation of modern technologies and the overall operation of Garda stations. The Programme supports the provision of a modern 21st century policing service for both urban and rural areas and allows front line Gardaí to be managed and deployed with greater mobility, greater flexibility, and in a more focused fashion, particularly with regard to various targeted police operations. As a result of the Programme, communities have benefited from increased Garda visibility and increased patrolling hours which has enabled An Garda Síochána to deliver an improved policing service to the public.

#### **Garda Station Closures in 2012**

Division	District	Station
Roscommon/Longford	Castlerea	Loughglynn
Roscommon/Longford	Boyle	Tarmonbarry
Roscommon/Longford	Boyle	Cootehall
Galway	Galway	Corrandulla

#### **Garda Station Closures in 2013**

Division	Current District	Station
Roscommon/ Longford	Roscommon	Ballyforan
Roscommon/ Longford	Roscommon	Knockcroghery
Roscommon/ Longford	Castlerea	Ballintubber
Roscommon/ Longford	Longford	Newtowncashel
Roscommon/ Longford	Granard	Ballinalee
Roscommon/ Longford	Granard	Ardagh
Galway	Galway	Kiltullagh
Galway	Loughrea	Tynagh
Galway	Loughrea	New Inn
Galway	Gort	Shanaglish
Galway	Gort	Kilchreest
Galway	Gort	Kilcolgan

Division	Current District	Station
Galway	Clifden	Leeane
Galway	Ballinasloe	Menlough
Galway	Tuam	Kilconly
Galway	Tuam	Ballymoe

The Garda strength of the Roscommon/Longford and the Galway Divisions from 2009 up to 31 January 2019, as provided by the Garda Commissioner, as provided by the Garda Commissioner is available on my Department's website through the following link.

[http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_31\\_January\\_2019.xlsx/Files/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_31\\_January\\_2019.xlsx](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_31_January_2019.xlsx/Files/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_31_January_2019.xlsx)

The information regarding new recruits as provided by the Garda Commissioner, is available on my Department's website through the following link.

[http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/008\\_Allocation\\_of\\_Probationer\\_Gardaí\\_by\\_Division\\_and\\_Station\\_2014\\_to\\_January\\_2019.xlsx/Files/008\\_Allocation\\_of\\_Probationer\\_Gardaí\\_by\\_Division\\_and\\_Station\\_2014\\_to\\_January\\_2019.xlsx](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/008_Allocation_of_Probationer_Gardaí_by_Division_and_Station_2014_to_January_2019.xlsx/Files/008_Allocation_of_Probationer_Gardaí_by_Division_and_Station_2014_to_January_2019.xlsx)

For additional and more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the following link: [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An\\_Garda\\_Siochana\\_facts\\_and\\_figures](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures)

### Refugee Resettlement Programme

214. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the capacity of a centre (details supplied); if it is at full capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12190/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** The facility at St. Margaret's Road, Baleskin, County Dublin is a reception centre contracted by my Department to provide initial reception services to persons entering the state and seeking international protection.

During their stay in Baleskin, protection applicants are offered health screening and are processed for PPS numbers and medical cards. The purpose of Baleskin is to provide a short orientation period before residents are accommodated in centres around the country.

The current contracted capacity at Baleskin is 350 persons and the current occupancy is 289 persons.

Baleskin plays a pivotal role in the process as it allows the delivery of necessary supports and services to persons newly arrived in the state. The issuing of PPS numbers and medical cards allows persons seeking international protection to access direct provision allowances and medical supports once accommodated in a centre.

### Proposed Legislation

215. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of legislation to tackle the ongoing issue of scrambler and quad bikes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12234/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I would like to thank the Deputy for his continued interest in this important public order issue. Legal advices were sought from the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) in November 2018 in order to identify feasible next steps in response to this public safety concern. These advices were discussed with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS) in January.

My Department has also consulted with An Garda Síochána in relation to the enforcement challenges associated with the misuse of scramblers and quad bikes. I am aware that Gardaí have experienced serious difficulties from an enforcement perspective when attempting to apprehend persons engaging in this dangerous and anti-social behaviour. Interception poses significant risks, not only to the drivers and passengers of these vehicles, but also to members of the public and local Gardaí in affected communities. Most recently, my officials have sought formal views from An Garda Síochána concerning the OAG's legal advice from an enforcement and prosecution perspective.

I have asked my officials, as a matter of priority, to convene a cross-agency meeting comprising DTTAS, An Garda Síochána and Advisory Counsel in order to agree specific measures to deal with the misuse of scramblers and quad bikes. This meeting is scheduled to take place this Friday, 15 March, and I will be happy to update this House further following this meeting.

In terms of current legislation available to Gardaí in the context of the matter referred to by the Deputy, DTTAS has highlighted the following key legislative provisions:

- Scramblers and quad bikes are mechanically propelled vehicles (MPVs), as defined by section 3 of the Road Traffic Act 1961 (as amended). Under road traffic legislation, users of MPVs in a public place must have insurance, road tax and a driving licence, and must also wear a helmet, with severe penalties (including fixed charge notices, penalty points, fines and possible seizure of the vehicle) in the event of non-compliance with these requirements.

- Section 20 of the Road Traffic Act 1961 provides that Gardaí can perform an examination of roadworthiness of any vehicle being used in a public place. Failure to comply with specific standards (for example, in relation to brakes and other essential matters) means that a MPV is not considered suitable for use in a public place as defined in road traffic legislation.

- Section 30 of the Road Traffic Act 2004 makes it an offence to supply a mechanically propelled vehicle to a person under 16 years of age. The supply of such vehicles includes a gift or a loan. Section 41 of the Road Traffic Act 1994 provides for the detention of vehicles by An Garda Síochána for driving without a driving licence, insurance or motor tax.

- An Garda Síochána also has recourse to a range of public order provisions, including section 13 of the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act, 1997 (i.e. offence of endangerment).

I am further informed that the use of quad bikes and scramblers in certain public parks and open spaces is strictly prohibited by the local authorities under the Parks and Open Spaces Bye-Laws 2011.

Insofar as national parks are concerned, my colleague, the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has legislative powers to prohibit the unauthorised use of off-road vehicles.

### **Student Visas Data**

216. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in considering applications under the special scheme for non-EEA nationals who held a student

permission during the period 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2010; and when the remaining applicants can expect a decision. [12246/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the Special Scheme for Students closed to new applications on 20 January, 2019. INIS received approximately 3,100 applications comprising former students and their family members. To date, INIS has made a decision in approximately 560 cases.

The Deputy will appreciate that it is necessary to process such applications in compliance with legal requirements and in accordance with the Scheme criteria. While every effort is made to process applications as soon as possible, processing times will vary having regard to the overall volume of applications and the complexity of individual cases.

INIS has already taken a number of measures to address this cohort of complex cases including the introduction of an on-line application facility for the Scheme to make it as streamlined as possible for applicants. The resources available for these activities, which includes the provision of overtime, and the accompanying operational and organisational structures, are kept under ongoing review to ensure that applications are processed as efficiently as possible.

### **Immigrant Investor Programme Data**

217. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the qualification criteria for the immigrant investment programme; the turnaround time and number of applications for participation in the programme which were determined and given approval or refusal within periods (details supplied) in each year since the programme was introduced; the number of staff exclusively dedicated to assessment and decision making in respect of the applications; the Civil Service grade of such persons; the specialist professional expertise and qualifications they hold; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12247/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Immigrant Investor Programme (IIP) was introduced by the Government in April 2012 to encourage inward investment for the creation of business and employment opportunities in the State.

The IIP provides non-EEA nationals with a number of options to invest in Ireland, and successful applicants are granted a permission to reside in Ireland for a fixed period. Applicants must be high net worth individuals with a personal wealth of at least €2 million. An investment of €1 million in projects must be made for a minimum of three years, which may be renewable following a review.

In common with the operating model found across member states; programmes such as the IIP are first and foremost an Immigration matter. The Immigrant Investor Unit of my Department has eight staff members, comprising of a Principal Officer (who also performs other duties), Assistant Principal Officer, 1.5 Higher Executive Officers, 2 Executive Officers and 3 Clerical Officers. Additionally, this unit has recourse to additional resources from within the Division to support peak processing. The composition of the team is multidisciplinary including experienced immigration officials and staff members with a background in finance

It is important to note that applications are assessed by an Evaluation Committee, composed of senior civil and public servants from relevant Irish Government Departments and Irish State Agencies involved in enterprise development in Ireland. Applications are assessed on the basis of the profile of the applicant, the commercial viability of the project, employment outcomes associated with the proposed investment and the overall benefit to the Irish State. The Evalua-

tion Committee makes recommendations to me on those applications that it decides should be accepted and approved under the Programme.

I am advised that statistics are not compiled in such a way as to provide the specific information requested by the Deputy in respect of time periods. The following table provides details of the outcome of applications processed since the introduction of the programme.

Year	Approved	Refused	Withdrawn
2012	5	0	0
2013	15	0	0
2014	30	2	1
2015	65	0	1
2016	272	53	0
2017	294	8	1
2018	45	3	15

It should be noted that a total of 420 applications were received in 2018 of which 357 are currently being processed. A decision on a significant number these applications is expected in the coming weeks once processing has been completed.

A major external review of the IIP is underway and a tender process will be launched shortly to select a suitable candidate to undertake an independent evaluation. It is expected that the review will be concluded in the second half of 2019.

### Refugee Resettlement Programme

218. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to increase the capacity of a centre (details supplied) to accommodate additional asylum seekers and their families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12257/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** The facility at St. Margaret's Road, Baleskin, County Dublin is a reception centre contracted by my Department to provide initial reception services to persons entering the state and seeking international protection.

During their stay in Baleskin, protection applicants are offered health screening and are processed for PPS numbers and medical cards. The purpose of Baleskin is to provide a short orientation period before residents are accommodated in centres around the country.

The current contracted capacity at Baleskin is 350 persons and the current occupancy is 289 persons.

Baleskin plays a pivotal role in the direct provision process as it allows for the delivery of necessary supports and services to persons newly arrived in the state. The issuing of PPS numbers and medical cards allows those seeking international protection in Ireland to access direct provision allowances and medical supports once accommodated in a centre.

The Reception and Integration Agency is in negotiations with the contractor for Baleskin about upgrading the site to meet the increasing demands for services. This upgrade will include the construction of a modern medical centre located away from the accommodation blocks and will enable HSE staff to deliver a quality health service to residents. As part of the upgrade works, a new accommodation block will be constructed on the site of the existing medical

block which will provide an additional 137 bed spaces. The additional capacity is necessary to respond to the increased number of persons claiming international protection.

It is worth noting, however, that while the current capacity is 350 persons, Baleskin has had a higher capacity previously and from 2001 to 2003, it was contracted to provide 423 bed-spaces.

### Direct Provision System

219. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the tendering process for direct provision services within 40 km of Newbridge, County Kildare, has concluded; if so, the details of the successful bidders; if not, when it will conclude; when the successful bidders will be announced; and the effect the outcome of the process will have for the future of a direct provision centre (details supplied) after June 2019. [12330/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** Following the completion of the assessment of tenders received following a public procurement process, the Department of Justice & Equality has formed a framework for centres within a 40km radius of Newbridge to provide accommodation and ancillary services for persons seeking protection through the international protection process.

Four bids were submitted and placed on the framework for 40 km of Newbridge. These bids are as follows:

Bidder	Location	Proposed Capacity
Fazyard Ltd	The Montague Hotel, Emo, Co. Laois	202
Oscar Dawn Ltd.	Hazel Hotel, Monasterevin, Co. Kildare	143
Fazyard Ltd	The Towers, Clondalkin, Dublin 22	250
Peachport Ltd.	The Eyrepowell, Newbridge, Co. Kildare	125

The Department has commenced the drawdown process in respect of those placed on the frameworks. Bidders must commence a mobilisation period to carry out all works required to deliver on their proposals. It is a condition of the tender that all residents will be able to cook meals of their own choice and that families will have access to designated living areas where they can carry out normal family activities outside of their bedrooms.

Contracts will be commenced on completion of the mobilisation works. Contracts are for an initial 2 year period with two potential extensions of one year each.

I am pleased that the Towers Accommodation Centre has been successful in being placed on the framework and following the completion of the mobilisation works, residents will enjoy greater autonomy and independence in the centre. The contract with the Towers Accommodation Centre, as with other centres placed on this framework, will be for a minimum of two years.

The Department is continuing to roll out its public procurement process on a regional basis throughout the state in 2019. As with the competitions for Sligo and Newbridge, it will be a condition of the tender that that all residents will be able to cook meals of their own choice and that families will have access to designated living areas where they can carry out normal family activities outside of their bedrooms.

## **Garda Deployment**

220. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when Strokestown Garda station, County Roscommon, can expect to return to its five permanent gardaí status. [12342/19]

221. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a serving sergeant stationed at Strokestown Garda station, County Roscommon. [12343/19]

222. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí stationed full-time at Strokestown Garda station, County Roscommon. [12344/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 220 to 222, inclusive, together.

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. I am informed by the Commissioner that 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 resources.

Strokestown Garda Station forms part of the Castlerea District in the Roscommon/ Longford Division. The Garda strength of the Roscommon/Longford Division from 2009 to 31 January 2019 as provided by the Garda Commissioner is available on my Department's website through the following links.

[http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_31\\_January\\_2018.xlsx/Files/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_31\\_January\\_2018.xlsx](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_31_January_2018.xlsx/Files/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_31_January_2018.xlsx)

I am informed by the Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division. Where a deficiency in resources is identified the matter is considered fully and addressed accordingly. In addition, as you will appreciate, in order to deliver an effective policing service, it is essential that Garda management have the flexibility to deploy Garda resources to meet operational policing needs and address critical issues as they arise. For this reason, the number of Gardaí available in any one Garda Station on a particular day is subject to the operational requirements of the overall Division.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,600 recruits have attested as members and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 18 of whom have been assigned to the Roscommon/Longford Division.

The Government has increased the budget by 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 he also intends to recruit 600 Garda Civilian Staff. This Garda Staff recruitment will allow the Commissioner to redeploy a further 500 fully trained Gardaí from administrative duties to frontline policing in 2019.

I believe that the injection of this large number of experienced officers into the field, along with the new recruits, will be really beneficial in terms of protecting communities. This and ongoing recruitment will clearly provide the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy

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increasing numbers of Gardaí to deliver a visible effective and responsive policing service to communities across all Garda Divisions including the Roscommon/Longford Division.

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the following link: [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An\\_Garda\\_Siochana\\_facts\\_and\\_figures](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures)

### **Northern Ireland**

223. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he or his Department has met with a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12363/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** My Department met with SEFF and participated in an event organised by them on 3 July 2018. The event was held at Farmleigh and was an opportunity for my Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to outline how the Irish Government are delivering on our commitments to implement the Legacy framework of the Stormont House Agreement. The event was attended by survivors and family members of victims of paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

### **Crime Prevention**

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which sufficient provision continues to be made to intercept and prevent suspected mail bombing attempts; if he is satisfied with security procedure in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12375/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Protecting the State and the people from terrorism is the highest priority for the Government.

The expert assessment of the terrorist threat to Ireland is that, while an attack is possible, it is not considered likely. The authorities here remain nonetheless very vigilant and the level of threat is kept under constant and active review by An Garda Síochána.

The Garda Authorities supported by the Defence Forces have in place robust response and prevention capabilities and the authorities here work continually with their international counterparts to identify and manage threats.

The discovery in London and Glasgow last week of a number of suspicious postal packages containing small incendiary devices is a matter of serious concern. I commend the emergency services there for their swift response to these threats.

This was a reckless and cowardly attack and I condemn in the strongest possible terms the perpetrators.

Cooperation between An Garda Síochána and their counterparts in the PSNI, as well as the British Security Services and the (London) Metropolitan Police, in countering security and terrorist threats, is a priority for Ireland and continues to be excellent. They are primary partners for us in this field, especially in terms of intelligence co-operation and information exchange.

This positive relationship at all levels should remain positive and be enhanced, where possible, even with the advent of the UK's departure from the EU.

## **Criminal Assets Bureau**

225. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which the Criminal Assets Bureau continues to pursue organised crime activity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12376/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) is a multi-agency statutory body established under the Criminal Assets Bureau Act, 1996. The Bureau's remit is to target a person's assets, wherever situated, which derive, or are suspected to derive, directly or indirectly, from criminal conduct.

Since its inception, the Bureau has been at the forefront of fighting organised crime in this jurisdiction and disrupting the activities of criminal gangs through the removal of their ill-gotten gains.

The Bureau is widely regarded, both nationally and internationally, as a best practice model in the context of combating organised crime. The structure and powers of the Bureau have also been modelled by other jurisdictions as a template for countering those seeking to benefit from the proceeds of crime.

The Bureau works closely with Gardaí and all law enforcement agencies at national and international levels and continues to focus its efforts on targeting assets deriving from all types of criminal conduct.

The Criminal Assets Bureau continues to relentlessly pursue the illicit proceeds of organised crime activity, and to disrupt criminal enterprises and deprive criminals of the benefits of their ill-gotten gains. In doing so, the actions of the Bureau sends a strong message to criminals and to local communities that profiting from crime will not be tolerated.

Reflecting the Government's commitment to ensure that the Bureau is adequately resourced, the CAB's staffing and budgetary allocation has increased significantly in recent years. Since 2016, the Bureau's staffing resources have increased from 71 to 89, while its budgetary allocation has gone up from €7.042 million in 2016 to €8.648m in 2018.

I am informed that the increased resources of the CAB have given rise to substantially increased levels of Bureau activity in recent years, and its successful operations have become a regular feature in media reports. In 2018, the Bureau brought 30 new Proceeds of Crime proceedings before the High Court, up from 28 in 2017 and 13 in 2016. This is the largest number of new cases ever commenced by the Bureau in a single year. Likewise, the money returned to the State as a result of CAB actions increased from €3.8 million in 2016 to €4.3 million in 2017. I understand that provisional figures indicate that this figure is in excess of €5.6 million for 2018.

I am pleased to say that the number of asset profiles submitted to the Bureau, by the nationwide network of asset profilers, increased from 66 in 2016 to 184 in 2018, a 178 per cent increase. This increase has been driven by the increased numbers of Garda, Revenue and Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection personnel who have been trained as Asset Profilers. There is now a national network of some 378 trained asset profilers as compared with 279 profilers at the end of 2017.

## **Garda Strength**

226. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to

which Garda numbers have increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12377/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that as of 31 January 2019, the total Garda strength was approximately 14,000. As of the same date, there were approximately 2,530 Garda Staff employed by An Garda Síochána undertaking a range of administrative and technical duties in the organisation.

The Deputy will be aware An Garda Síochána is currently undertaking a programme of accelerated recruitment, as part of the Government's commitment to achieve an overall workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021, including 15,000 Garda members and 4,000 civilians. We are making real, tangible progress on achieving this goal.

Since the re-opening of Templemore College in September 2014, approximately 2,600 new Garda members have attested and been assigned to duties in communities throughout the country.

This approach to continue and increase recruitment of both Gardaí and Garda Staff is very much in line with the recommendations of the Commission for the Future of Policing in Ireland which Government approved in December. The Government also at that time published an implementation plan 'A Policing Service for the Future' which among its actions will include the recruitment of 600 Garda in 2019 and the redeployment of 500 Garda to visible front line duties and the recruitment of 600 Garda Staff.

These proposals will ensure a strong and visible police presence throughout the country which will maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

### **Garda Station Refurbishment**

227. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which the upgrading of Garda stations nationally is scheduled for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12379/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation of €1.76 billion for 2019. Very significant capital investment is also being made, including investment of €342 million in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021; and investment of €46 million in the Garda Fleet over the same period. This investment is in support of the Government's commitment to ensure a strong and visible police presence throughout the country.

Significant capital investment is also being made in the Garda estate. The Deputy will appreciate that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

The Garda Station Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 is an ambitious 5-year programme based on agreed Garda priorities, which continues to benefit over 30 locations around the country. The clear goal of this investment is to address deficiencies in the Garda estate and to provide fit-for-purpose facilities for Garda members and staff as well as the public interacting with them. This work is being progressed in a planned and structured way.

For example, I am informed by the Garda authorities that works continuing under this pro-

gramme in 2019 includes the new station and immigration centre at Transaer House, Dublin Airport as well as major refurbishment of Athlone Garda station. The programme includes construction of a new Garda station in Glanmire, Co. Cork and development of a new station in Bailborough, Co. Cavan. Other works planned for 2019 include planned remedial works in Henry Street station, Co. Limerick and Ballincollig, Co. Cork. I am further informed that work is ongoing to progress plans for the development of Property and Evidence Management Stores at stations in Naas, Co. Kildare, Drogheda, Co. Louth and Tallaght, DMR South.

I understand that as part of the programme, the Custody Management Facilities in Carlow Garda station will be refurbished this year. Works at a further 17 stations nationwide will also be carried out under the Cell Refurbishment Programme, under which the cells at over 80 Garda Stations have been completed to date.

I understand that a contract has recently been awarded in relation to the provision of upgraded facilities for the Garda Water Unit in Athlone, Co. Westmeath. The refurbishment of Ash-town Gate on the Navan Road, Dublin will be completed in Q1 2019 and a modular building extension in Garda Headquarters is also nearing completion.

In addition to the Building and Refurbishment Programme, a number of other major projects are advancing in relation to the Garda estate and will continue in 2019.

For example I understand that enabling works to refurbish Fitzgibbon Street Garda Station commenced in 2018. I am informed that the OPW is at an advanced stage in the design of the Garda facility to be located at Military Road, Dublin 8. The Pilot Garda station Reopening Project continues to progress and I understand that the OPW expects work at all 6 stations included in that project to be complete this year.

These are some of the many works to the Garda estate now ongoing, on the basis of agreed Garda priorities. I am informed that An Garda Síochána and OPW continue to work on the remaining projects under the Garda Station Building and Refurbishment Programme, all of which are at various stages of design, development or procurement. I further understand that they seek to deal with other maintenance or minor works requirements as they arise, subject to availability of resources and overall Garda accommodation priorities.

### **Prisoner Data**

228. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons serving long-term prison sentences for murder; the number scheduled for review or release; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12380/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that 348 persons are currently serving mandatory sentences of life imprisonment for murder in Irish prisons. The 348 persons are at varying stages of their life sentences as illustrated in the table.

The Parole Board was established in April 2001, their principal function is to advise in relation to the administration of long term prison sentences, including life imprisonment. Where a life sentenced prisoner is considered suitable for release to return to live in the community, he/she remains under the supervision of the Probation Service for the remainder of their life and can be returned to custody if they breach supervision arrangements or any of their Temporary Release conditions.

Prisoners serving life imprisonment are eligible to have their case reviewed by the Parole

Board for the first time after they have served 7 years of their life sentence. Cases are reviewed several times thereafter, depending on progress made. The Parole Board advises in relation to the prisoner's behaviour in custody, the degree to which the prisoner has engaged with the various therapeutic services in the prison and how best to proceed with the future administration of the prisoner's sentence.

I have been informed by the Parole Board that 258 persons with life sentences for murder are currently engaging with them. Of these, 7 have being recommended for Reviewable Temporary Release on successful completion of a phased temporary release programme.

Time served in years on 31 January 2019	Number of Prisoners
40 Years+	1
35 to &lt; 40 years	7
30 to &lt; 35 Years	9
25 to &lt; 30 Years	9
20 to &lt; 25 Years	19
15 to &lt; 20 Years	66
10 to &lt; 15 Years	92
05 to &lt; 10 Years	88
01 to &lt; 5 Years	52
Less than 1 Year	5
Total	348

The average length of sentence served in custody of those life sentence prisoners who were deemed suitable for release is 18.5 years.

### **Garda Equipment**

229. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the degree to which the most modern technology is available to An Garda Síochána in the fight against crime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12381/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government recognises that Gardaí must have the modern technology and resources necessary to detect and investigate crimes, and to prevent loss and harm to citizens and their property on a 24/7 basis.

The Deputy will also be aware that the key importance of ICT and digital innovation was also emphasised in the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland and a number of related actions are included in the Implementation Plan for that report - A Policing Service for the Future.

A total of €342 million is being invested by the Government in Garda ICT infrastructure over the period 2016 to 2021. The Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of these resources and decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of equipment and resources, including ICT resources, are for the Commissioner in light of identified operational demands.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that ICT is recognised as an essential tool for supporting the day-to-day operations of Garda members, staff and reserves. On an annual basis, approximately 13.5 million vehicle registrations are read by the Automated Number Plate Rec-

ognition System, 1.9 million records are exchanged electronically with the Court Services, 9.3 million PULSE searches are conducted, 19.5 million TETRA digital radio calls are made and 118,000 fingerprints are searched.

A range of ICT equipment is of course generally available, as required, to operational members on a day to day basis in support of these actions. For example official laptops and mobile phones may be issued to senior managers and certain operational members, depending on business needs. Automated Number Plate Recognition technology is available in a number of Garda vehicles. ICT technology is also deployed in air support units and mobile command vehicles providing on-site connectivity to Garda ICT systems and communications.

In terms of ICT systems, I am informed by the Garda authorities that a broad range of ICT projects and initiatives are being progressed to support existing systems and develop them further, with the overall goal of supporting the ongoing business requirements of An Garda Síochána in all fields and enabling them to deploy the latest, cutting-edge technologies in the fight against crime.

For example, I am informed that a number of key ICT initiatives are moving to implementation phase this year, including projects such as:

- roll out of the Rosters and Duty Management System, which will give supervisors better and faster information on the resources available to them;

- phased implementation of the Mobility project, which aims to provide operational Garda members with secure mobile access to Garda systems;

- roll out on a pilot basis of the Investigations Management System, which will standardise, digitise and support the management of all investigations arising from a PULSE incident; and

- establishment of the remaining Regional Control Rooms, to capture emergency calls and dispatch of resources to the incident and staged deployment of a new national Computer Aided Dispatch System.

A project to enhance network access to rural Garda stations is also currently being progressed. Work on this project is well advanced and options are being explored to provide members attached to the remaining stations not yet networked with local access to Garda ICT services. In that regard it is important to note that any member attached to a currently unconnected Garda station can access PULSE at their local district station and that members attached to non-networked locations can also contact the Garda Information Services Centre (GISC) or an associated networked station if required.

An Garda Síochána is also, in collaboration with my Department, actively progressing a number of EU ICT projects with a view to improving police co-operation, including implementation of the PRŪM initiative and the Schengen Information System.

The ongoing investment in Garda ICT underpinning these and other projects is in support of the Government's commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

## **Gangland Crime**

230. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which he remains satisfied that adequate resources are made available to An Garda Síochána to enable it to combat gangland wars; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12382/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the allocation of the very substantial resources that An Garda Síochána receives. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities.

A core focus of the work carried out by An Garda Síochána is aimed at tackling drugs and organised crime. An Garda Síochána continues to develop and implement operations and strategies to target, dismantle and disrupt organised criminal networks, utilising advanced analytical and intelligence methodologies. It is important to note that Gardaí, supported by the significant resources allocated to it by this Government, have made important progress in tackling the insidious threat of organised crime. The resources available to the Commissioner have reached unprecedented levels and I am pleased that Budget 2019 provides for the continuation of this with an increase of €110 million in the Garda Vote to bring total provision available in 2019 to €1.76 billion which includes up to €95 million for the payment of overtime.

The Criminal Assets Bureau was established as a national multi-disciplinary agency specialising in targeting of the proceeds of crime. The Bureau draws together the necessary expertise from a number of Departments and agencies. The Bureau has for some considerable time maintained a presence in each of the Garda Divisions through the operation of the Divisional Assets Profiler Programme. Under this Programme asset profilers are providing a criminal asset profiling service across the Garda Divisions in relation to persons or suspects operating within the area, with particular reference to those involved in serious and organised crime. The Bureau utilises the local knowledge supplied to it by the asset profilers which enables it to target the proceeds of crime in local communities. I can inform the Deputy that a number of legislative measures have been introduced to tackle gang-related and associated crime including the Proceeds of Crime (Amendment) Act 2016 which provides additional powers for Gardaí; in particular, powers to allow for the immediate seizure of assets suspected of being the proceeds of crime to prevent them being disposed of.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,600 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. This and on-going recruitment will clearly provide significant additional policing hours throughout the country, both in terms of the increase in new Gardaí and the redeployment of Gardaí to frontline policing duties due to civilianisation of their current roles. These new resources coming on stream have allowed the Commissioner to allocate additional resources to the specialist bureaus that comprise Garda Special Crime Operations including the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

The Garda capital allocation has increased from €61 million to €92 million in 2019, a 50% increase. This will facilitate investment of around €65 million in ICT which is now an important element of the fight against organised crime. This substantial investment will provide new and leading edge technology to support our front line Gardaí in their daily work in tackling the scourge of organised crime in our communities.

I can assure the Deputy that I remain in close contact with the Commissioner to ensure that the necessary resources are available to An Garda Síochána to robustly confront and tackle those involved in organised criminal acts.

**Prisoner Data**

231. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prisoners in various prisons nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12383/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that the information requested by the Deputy in relation to number of prisoners in various prisons nationally are published daily on the Irish Prison Service website [www.irishprisons.ie](http://www.irishprisons.ie). The information can be found in the Information Centre - under Statistics and Information - Daily Prisoner Population.

**Crime Data**

232. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who have reoffended while on bail in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12384/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have requested the information from the Garda authorities and I will contact the Deputy directly when the report is to hand.

**Prisoner Data**

233. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons deemed to have absconded and who still remain free over the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12385/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by my officials in the Irish Prison Service that Irish Prison records indicate that over the past 10 years 298 persons are deemed to have absconded, and that 15 remain unlawfully at large. Annual figures provided in the following table show a significant reduction in the number of absconders, particularly since 2012 when the Director General of the Irish Prison Service established a project team to examine this issue, in conjunction with An Garda Síochána and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Year	Number of Absconders	Number Still at large
2019	0	0
2018	6	0
2017	4	1
2016	9	0
2015	15	2
2014	11	1
2013	16	0
2012	58	2
2011	76	2
2010	103	7

An Garda Síochána are informed when prisoners abscond and they have the power to detain, arrest, and return such persons to prison. Experience has shown that the vast majority of offenders who abscond return voluntarily or are returned to custody to complete their sentences

within a short time frame.

### **Garda Promotions**

234. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of promotional positions vacant and remaining to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12386/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware it is the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps the 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 am advised by the Commissioner that competitions for promotion to the rank of sergeant and inspector were held last year in order to bring the number in these ranks up to the full strength as agreed under the Employment Control Framework (ECF). The allocation of successful candidates is currently underway, with 300 newly promoted Sergeants and 113 new promoted Inspectors having been appointed to date.

Since 1 January 2017 the process of selecting and appointing members to the ranks of Assistant Commissioner, Chief Superintendent and Superintendent lies with the Policing Authority. The Authority held competitions for each of these ranks in 2017 and for Superintendent and Chief Superintendent ranks in 2018. A panel of candidates for both ranks was established by the Authority. The existence of panels ensures that as vacancies arise they can be filled without any undue delay. As Minister, I have no role in the selection and appointment of candidates to these ranks with the exception of members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) whose appointment by the Authority must be approved by the Government.

Appointments to the ranks of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner are made by Government upon the nomination of the Authority.

Appointments to the ranks of sergeant and inspector are a matter for the Commissioner under section 14 of Garda Síochána Act 2005.

In common with Government Departments, An Garda Síochána conducts internal promotional competitions as appropriate which affords staff opportunities to progress in their careers within the organisation if they so wish.

All positions at Executive Officer grade and above are potential promotional opportunities for Garda Staff. At this time, An Garda Síochána is recruiting through the Public Appointments Service for posts from Principal Officer level to Clerical Officer level. There is also currently an internal Executive Officer competition underway. It is planned to hold further internal competitions at Higher Executive Officer and Assistant Principal Officer level later this year. Panels created as a result of these competitions will be used to fill posts as approved by the Policing Authority and in accordance with centrally agreed sequences.

In addition, Garda Staff in An Garda Síochána are Civil Servants of the State and as such are entitled, if otherwise qualified, to participate in interdepartmental competitions for promotion or open competitions for any post within the Civil Service conducted by the Public Appointments Service.

For the Deputy's information I have set out in the table the Garda strength of each rank as compared to the ECF as of 31 January 2019, the latest date for which figures are currently available, as supplied by the Garda Commissioner.

Strength of each rank as compared to the ECF as of 31 January 2019

Rank	Strength	ECF	Vacancies
Commissioner	1	1	0
D/Commissioner	1	2	1
A/Commissioner	9	9	0
Chief Superintendent	45	47	2
Superintendent	161	168	7
Inspector	342	381	39
Sergeant	1,993	2,110	117

### Intellectual Property Management

235. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to publish a task force on digital piracy. [12146/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department is responsible for ensuring that Ireland has a robust legal framework to allow for the protection of intellectual property rights. Protection of such rights from piracy, whether digital or otherwise, is undertaken by rightsholders pursuing civil proceedings. A number of successful cases have been taken in recent years, which have included the establishment of a formal graduated response system to tackle infringements based on a court ruling in 2015.

As enforcement falls across a number of Departments and agencies such as Customs and an Garda Síochána I have no plans to establish a task force on digital piracy.

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment holds responsibility for the Government's Digital Strategy.

### Regional Development Initiatives

236. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which her Department continues to promote rural areas for investment through technology; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11503/19]

238. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which she continues to encourage local and foreign investment in the regions through innovation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11801/19]

241. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the full potential of innovation and technology is fully available throughout the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11804/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 236, 238 and 241 together.

Regional development remains an absolute priority of mine. I am focused on both supporting and sustaining existing employment levels in regional Ireland while also working to create

new economic opportunities and jobs in every county of Ireland.

I remain optimistic about the job creation potential of Irish companies across the regions. To date, I have launched eight of the nine Regional Enterprise Plans that my Department has spearheaded with regional stakeholders. The final plan for the South East will be launched on 22 March. These Plans will play an important role in encouraging regional investment and job creation across the regions, including through technology.

I want to emphasise that creating jobs in the regions will remain key objective of the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and my Department. We are collectively focused on delivering the fairest possible spread of investment across the country. The energy and resources we have invested into regional growth is, as the evidence illustrates, producing results. We will continue to do our utmost to encourage further such job growth across all parts of Ireland in the time ahead.

My Department launched the €500 million Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund in June 2018. In December 2018, I was delighted to announce the 27 projects that were approved in principle for funding under the first Call. These projects will receive over €70 million in government funding between now and 2021 and they represent the health, food, ICT and manufacturing sectors in Ireland.

I would point out that the approved projects involve partners right across the country, showing that excellence in collaborative research, development and innovation transcends county borders and every part of Ireland is capable of participation in one of the most unique Funds Ireland has developed. Specifically, 18 of our successful projects involve enterprise partners based outside the capital and they are located country-wide in Limerick, Cork, Galway, Kildare, Monaghan, Waterford, Louth and Tipperary.

### **Work Permits Eligibility**

237. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if an employment permit will be granted to a person (details supplied); and the recourse the person has to maintain current employment and progress the person's career in this role. [11587/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Employment Permits Section of my Department inform me that it has no record of any application for an employment permit for the above named person (details supplied).

The State's general policy is to promote the sourcing of labour and skills needs from within the domestic and/or other EEA countries. Where specific skills prove difficult to source within the State/EEA, an employment permit may be sought by an employer to hire a non-EEA national in line with the Employment Permits Acts and associated Regulations which lay down in legislation the criteria in relation to the application, grant and refusal of an employment permit.

In order to apply for an employment permit a non-EEA national must have a secured a job offer for an eligible occupation from an Irish registered employer.

Details on how to apply for an employment permit are available on our website at the following link - <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/>

My officials have produced a comprehensive Frequently Asked Question document covering all aspects of the Employment Permits regime which is available here - <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/FAQs/Employment-Permits-FAQs-2018.pdf>

The employment permits system is managed through the operation of the Highly Skilled Eligible Occupations List and Ineligible Categories of Employment List for the purposes of granting an employment permit. The role of Community Employment Supervisor is currently ineligible for 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. In order to remove a skill from this list, there needs 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 Community Employment Supervisors from the ineligible list, based on this detailed data would then need to be put forward through the lead policy Department, in this instance the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, to my Department for review and consideration by a standing Interdepartmental Group.

It is open to the named individual, subject to obtaining a job offer, to apply for an employment permit in respect of an employment that is eligible for an employment permit.

Finally, it should be noted that my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, has responsibility for issuing immigration permissions and visas.

*Question No. 238 answered with Question No. 236.*

### **Job Creation Data**

**239. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the full extent of job creation throughout the regions in the past year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11802/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Year on year, the recently published Q4 2018 CSO Labour Force Survey employment figures are overall very positive. In the year from Q4 2017 to Q4 2018 the figures show that employment continues to grow strongly with 50,500 jobs created, bringing total employment to 2,281,300, the highest number at work ever recorded.

The number of people in employment has increased in six of the eight regions in the year from Q4 2017 to Q4 2018. The exception to this is the Mid-West and the Border region.

In the year from Q4 2017 – Q4 2018, just under half (49 percent) of the new jobs created were for people living outside of Co. Dublin.

Recently, I announced very good results from the Local Enterprise Offices around the country. Overall, they supported the creation of 3,656 new jobs (net) in 2018.

All regions saw increases in IDA employment over 2018, with the Midlands region experiencing the highest growth at 14 percent.

Also, two-thirds (64 percent) of new Enterprise Ireland jobs created in 2018 were outside of

Dublin. The North West saw the largest level of increases at 9 percent.

There has been an increase of 266,900 people in employment across the State since Q1 2015, when the Government first launched the Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017 (RAPJ), with 166,400 people in the regions outside of Co. Dublin entering employment in this Q1 2015 to Q4 2018 period.

In addition, unemployment has fallen in every region since the launch of the RAPJs. Only two regions, the Midlands and South-East, are currently outside the unemployment target set for 2020, i.e. over one percentage point greater than the State average.

Under the new Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020 for each of the nine regions, which I am currently launching, the Government remains committed to achieving an overall jobs uplift of between 10 and 15 per cent in each region by 2020 and to bring and/or maintain unemployment levels in each region to within at least one percentage point of the State average.

The new Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020, will build on the very strong progress made on employment creation under the Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017. Shaped from the 'bottom-up' by regional stakeholders, and overseen by my Department, the new Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020 complement national level policies and programmes emanating from the 'top-down' and, there is strong alignment with Ireland's national enterprise policy, Enterprise 2025 Renewed and the recently launched Future Jobs Ireland initiative.

The principle behind the Regional Enterprise Plans is collaboration between regional stakeholders on initiatives that can help to realise the region's enterprise development potential so that all regions can meet and exceed the regional job creation targets set to 2020. These stakeholders include: the Local Authorities, the LEOs, the enterprise agencies, the Regional Skills Forum, tourism bodies, private sector 'enterprise champions', and others.

As well as meeting the numerical targets, the new Regional Enterprise Plans are also about creating jobs that are of good quality and sustainable over the longer term. The Government is focused on this agenda at the national level through the Future Jobs Ireland initiative, and is focused on this agenda through these new Regional Enterprise Plans.

## **Job Creation**

**240. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which enterprise and innovation continues to feature as a basis for job creation throughout all parts of the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11803/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Enterprise development continues to be a key pillar in the creation of jobs in all regions across the country.

I am currently in the process of finalising the launches of the new Regional Enterprise Plans in every region, with eight Plans launched to date, with the ninth Plan (South-East) scheduled to be launched by the end of this month.

The Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020 are enterprise focused documents that are the result of a refresh and refocus of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs to ensure their relevance and impact out to 2020, so that they continue to deliver jobs across the country, in every region, and can be robust to address the challenges we face, including Brexit.

The principle behind the Regional Enterprise Plans is collaboration between regional stakeholders on initiatives that can help to realise the region's enterprise development potential. These stakeholders include: Local Authorities, the LEOs, the enterprise agencies, the Regional Skills Forum, tourism bodies, private sector 'enterprise champions', the Higher Education Institutes and others.

Shaped from the 'bottom-up' by regional stakeholders, and overseen by my Department, the new Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020 complement national level policies and programmes emanating from the 'top-down'. There is a strong alignment with Ireland's national enterprise policy, Enterprise 2025 Renewed and the recently launched Future Jobs Ireland strategy.

They are two-year, focused Plans, which are also 'live' documents, so new initiatives can be adopted during their operation by the regional stakeholders working together.

Enterprise Ireland's results for 2018 show the progress that the Agency have been making in driving enterprise development at a national and regional level. Client companies assisted by Enterprise Ireland created 18,846 jobs in 2018 and 64% of the jobs created were outside Dublin with all regions recording increases in employment. There were 215,207 people employed by Enterprise Ireland supported companies in 2018, the highest total employment in the history of the agency. Last year, Enterprise Ireland supported 82 high potential start-ups and 50 competitive start fund approvals as well as 245 client investments of over €500k.

The IDA's results for 2018 demonstrate the progress we have been making in encouraging regional investment. Last year, 56% of all new jobs created by the Agency's overseas clients were in locations outside Dublin. Every region in the country saw FDI-driven job gains. There are now over 132,000 people employed in IDA client firms outside the capital, representing nearly 60% of IDA-supported employment. These are all promising figures and show how real strides have been made in boosting FDI-related job creation across Ireland. Last year, the Agency delivered 113 regional investments.

In 2018 clients supported by the Local Enterprise Offices increased employment by 8,007 gross new jobs which resulted in 3,656 net jobs being created across the LEO client portfolio to bring the total number employed to 36,666.

The LEOs approved grants to 1,259 clients in 2018, with over €18.2m. in funding to projects approved. Also, in 2018, the LEOs provided training to 34,907 participants. Of these, 3,944 participants took part in the LEO-run 'Start Your Own Business' programmes. The LEOs have continued to support, build resilience and scale up within their client base. In 2018, 171 of LEO client companies progressed to Enterprise Ireland along with 796 associated jobs, this is an increase from 60 companies in 2017.

We will continue to reinforce and strengthen these positive trends and to further job creation and investment across the entirety of the country.

*Question No. 241 answered with Question No. 236.*

### **Research Funding Data**

242. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the gross expenditure on research and development as a percentage of GDP and GNI; the average gross expenditure as a percentage of GDP of EU-15 countries, EU-27 countries and OECD countries in tabular form. [11852/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** International comparisons for Gross Expenditure on R&D (GERD) as a percentage of GDP are available for 2016 (latest data). Table 1 shows Civil GERD (excluding military expenditure) as a percentage of GDP for EU and OECD countries and of GNP and GNI\* for Ireland in 2016. Ireland's Civil GERD as a percentage of GDP was 1.18 and as a percentage of GNP and GNI\* was 1.46 and 1.84 respectively. This compares to an EU 28 country average of 1.93, an EU 15 country average of 2.06 and an OECD country average of 2.24 as a percentage of GDP. More information can be found in the R&D Budget 2017-2018 at the following link:

<https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/The-R-D-Budget-2017-2018.html>

In particular, Figure 16 on page 31 of the R&D Budget shows Civil GERD as a percentage of GDP for all OECD countries for which data is available. Ireland's Civil GERD as a percentage of GNP and GNI\* is included for comparison.

**Table 1: Civil GERD by country/region as percentage of GDP and of GNP and GNI\* for Ireland, 2016**

Country/Region	%
OECD Countries	2.24
EU (15 countries)	2.06
EU (28 countries)	1.93
Ireland GNI*	1.84
Ireland GNP	1.46
Ireland GDP	1.18

### Research Funding Data

243. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the gross expenditure on research and development activities by Department and expressed by each Department as a percentage of total expenditure on research and development in tabular form. [11853/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The following table shows Government Budget Allocations on R&D (GBARD) by funding Department for 2017 and each Department's GBARD as a percentage of total GBARD. GBARD is all the public funding allocated to R&D performed across all sectors of the economy, e.g. within the higher education sector, by businesses or by Government Departments and agencies. Government Sector R&D (GOVERD) is R&D performed in-house in Government departments or agencies.

The GBARD data is taken from the R&D Budget 2017-2018, published by the Department of Business Enterprise and Innovation. 2017 is the latest data available. The R&D Budget 2017-2018 is available at the following link: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/The-R-D-Budget-2017-2018.html>

**Table 1: Government Budget Allocations on R&D by Funding Department, 2017**

Funding Department	GBARD €000's	Percentage
Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation	380,572.2	51.5%

Funding Department	GBARD €000's	Percentage
Department of Education and Skills	180,438.1	24.4%
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	95,105.0	12.9%
Department of Health	48,697.0	6.6%
Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment	19,571.0	2.6%
Department of Public Expenditure & Reform	6,826.0	0.9%
Department of Culture, Heritage & Gaeltacht	2,463.0	0.3%
Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government	1,510.7	0.2%
Central Bank	1,225.7	0.2%
Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	983.0	0.1%
Department of the Taoiseach	908.0	0.1%
Department of Social Protection	782.0	0.1%
Office of Public Works	265.0	0.0%
Grand Total	739,346.6	100.0%

### Regional Action Plan for Jobs

244. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress to date on the implementation plans for jobs for the midlands region by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11864/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The recently published CSO Labour Force Survey employment figures for Q4 2018, which are only available at the regional level, show that there has been excellent progress in employment growth in the Midlands region since the launch of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017.

From Q1 2015 (baseline year) to Q4 2018, there are 20,000 more people in employment in the Midlands, representing an increase of 18.5 percent.

Unemployment has more than halved over the same period from 14.9 percent to 6.6 percent. This is a substantial and welcome reduction, although there is more progress yet to be achieved to bring unemployment down to within one percentage point of the State average (5.4%).

The Enterprise Agencies under the remit of my Department continue to work to contribute to employment and economic growth in the Midlands and throughout all regions. New job creation results for 2018 on a county by county basis for the Midlands are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Numbers employed in client companies and 2018 increase (in brackets)

County	Enterprise Ireland	IDA Ireland	Local Enterprise Offices
Laois	1,527 (+83)	122 (-12)	635 (+67)
Longford	2,979 (+113)	900 (+155)	1,195 (+70)
Offaly	4,307 (+252)	1,232 (+65)	1,063 (+6)
Westmeath	3,536 (+35)	3,466 (+493)	1,172 (+66)

Under the recently launched Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020, I and my Department remain committed to achieving an overall jobs uplift of between 10 and 15 per cent in each region by 2020 and to bring and/or maintain unemployment levels in each region to within at least one percentage point of the State average.

As well as meeting the numerical targets, this is also about creating jobs that are of good quality and sustainable over the longer term in line with the Government's objectives under Future Jobs Ireland which was launched on 10 March.

The new Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020, which I launched on 6th February in Mountmellick, Co. Laois, is focused around seven 'Strategic Objectives' which will drive enterprise and job creation:

- Strategic Objective 1: Ensure that the Midlands is well positioned to address the challenges posed by the transition to a low carbon economy and renewable energy;
- Strategic Objective 2: Leverage opportunities in big data and data analytics from iLOFAR;
- Strategic Objective 3: Position and support the growth of the Midlands as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence.;
- Strategic Objective 4: Enhance the collective offering of the Midlands as a place to live, work and invest in;
- Strategic Objective 5: Strengthen the attractiveness of the Midlands as a destination to visit;
- Strategic Objective 6: Harness the potential of the food and beverage industry in the Midlands; and
- Strategic Objective 7: Ensure the availability of skills and talent to realise the Midlands' economic potential and address upskilling requirements.

The Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee has now begun the process to drive delivery of the actions within the new Plan, in consultation with and overseen by my Department.

### Job Creation Data

245. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the additional jobs created in 2018 in the Border and west region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11867/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Border region (including Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan) has shown very good progress in employment levels since the launch of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017. From Q1 2015 (baseline year) to Q4 2018, a total of 8,200 more people are now in em-

ployment. Unemployment has more than halved in the Border region falling from 8.6 percent to 3.8 percent during this period.

Unemployment has reduced from 4.8 percent down to 3.8 percent over the last 12 months and the Border region has now the lowest unemployment rate amongst all of the regions nationally.

The Enterprise Agencies have reported good progress on new employment creation in client companies during 2018 in the Border region. In the North-West (Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim), IDA supported employment was up 3 percent, while Enterprise Ireland supported employment was up 9 percent. There was also a net job gain of 260 in the North-West in LEO supported companies. In the North-East (including Cavan, Monaghan and Louth) IDA supported employment was up 3 percent, while Enterprise Ireland supported employment was also up 3 percent. There was also a net job gain of 378 in the companies supported by the three North-East LEOs.

The West region (Galway, Mayo and Roscommon) has shown excellent progress in employment growth since the launch of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017. From Q1 2015 (baseline year) to Q4 2018, a total of 32,800 more people are in employment in the West region. From Q1 2015 (baseline year) to Q4 2018, unemployment has more than halved in the West region, falling from 12.6 percent to 5.8 percent.

The Enterprise Agencies have also reported good progress on new employment creation in client companies in the West over the past year. During 2018, IDA supported employment grew by 6 percent, while Enterprise Ireland supported employment was up 5 percent. There was also a net job gain of 321 in LEO supported companies located in the West region.

The Government remains committed to achieving an overall jobs uplift of between 10 and 15 per cent in each region by 2020 and to bring and/or maintain unemployment levels in each region to within at least one percentage point of the State average.

To that end, in April 2018, I am in the process of launching nine new Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020 (including Plans for the West, North-West and North-East incl. Co. Louth), which build on the very strong progress made on employment creation under the Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017.

Shaped from the 'bottom-up' by regional stakeholders, and overseen by my Department, the new Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020 complement national level policies and programmes emanating from the 'top-down' and, there is strong alignment with Ireland's national enterprise policy, Enterprise 2025 Renewed and the forthcoming Future Jobs Ireland initiative.

The principle behind the Regional Enterprise Plans is collaboration between regional stakeholders on initiatives that can help to realise the region's enterprise development potential so that all regions can meet and exceed the regional job creation targets set to 2020. These stakeholders include: local authorities, the LEOs, the enterprise agencies, the Regional Skills Forum, tourism bodies, private sector 'enterprise champions', and others.

The Regional Enterprise Plans are also about creating jobs that are of good quality and sustainable over the longer term. The Government is focused on this agenda at the national level through the Future Jobs Ireland initiative, and is focused on this agenda through these new Regional Enterprise Plans.

246. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the IDA is working with Enterprise Ireland to secure a tenant for a location (details supplied); and if it will consider putting enterprise units in place at the location. [12036/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** While IDA Ireland is focused on inward investment, the Agency manages its property portfolio for the benefit of both its own clients and those of Enterprise Ireland. The IDA’s property team, for example, works closely with Enterprise Ireland to support the needs of indigenous companies who may be seeking appropriate properties. There is also ongoing engagement between the two agencies about the property needs of their respective clients. This includes plans to develop campus style property solutions to support development and business to business collaborations.

In relation to the specific location referred to, I am informed by the IDA that the Agency currently do not have plans to construct buildings at the approximately six-hectare site in the Fermoy Business Park. However, I understand that it is serviced to accommodate both manufacturing and office facilities. The site is also being actively marketed by the Agency in the context of its ongoing work to attract further investment and employment to Cork.

### **Enterprise Support Schemes**

247. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will consider providing supports to an industry (details supplied) as a result of the recent regulatory changes which have negatively affected the profession; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12096/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen):** The Government, since 2011 has been firmly focused on restoring the economy to a more stable footing and sustaining existing jobs and growing employment in all sectors and in all parts of the country. The economy has recovered strongly and there are now more people at work than any time in the last decade. With the increase in employment and increase in earnings, there is now more spending in the economy and this is to the benefit of all businesses, including hairdressing and personal care sectors.

The supports of my Department to improve access to credit for businesses are available to businesses in the hairdressing and personal care sectors. These include loans of up to €25,000 available through Micro Finance Ireland, the Credit Guarantee Scheme which is operated with the three pillar banks and also the Brexit Working Capital Loan Scheme. I am aware that many businesses may import products for the UK and Brexit may give rise to extra costs. I would also encourage businesses from all sectors to engage with their Local Enterprise Office (LEO), which offer a range of advisory and other supports in every county. In particular at this time of Brexit uncertainty I would encourage personal care businesses to consider participating in the LEO Customs Training programmes if appropriate so they can remain competitive in a post-Brexit environment. Skillnet Ireland and the Education and Training Boards are also engaged with the sector and again I would encourage business owners to engage directly with local providers on their changing skills requirements, in particular where there are requirements for reskilling and upskilling.

Stabilising the public finances and prudent fiscal management is an essential underpinning for a strong and growing economy and is essential to ensuring future growth prospects for all sectors. The Government’s ability to directly fund locally trading businesses is more constrained due to considerations of displacement, fairness and equity between businesses.

This Government has played its part in supporting the personal care sector when it most needed it with the introduction of the reduced VAT rate in 2011, which helped to sustain employment throughout the country in the sector.

As the Minister for Finance noted in introducing Budget 2019, while a Government's decision to provide stimulus to the economy is often an easy one to make, judging when it is appropriate to withdraw stimulus measures is always more challenging. The Minister for Finance gave a commitment in the 2018 Finance Bill to undertake an economic analysis of the 9 per cent rate. The review found that the reduced rate has done its job. In the context of the new economic reality where the economy is strong, growth is broadly balanced and full employment is within sight, the Minister noted that it was appropriate to increase the rate of VAT and underlines the Government's commitment to responsibly manage the public finances and maintain a broad tax base. While it is unfortunate that consumer price inflation in the hairdressing sector as reported by the CSO increased by 4.9% in the year to January 2019, it is to be hoped that this is a once-off increase as the sector adjusts to recent changes for the sector.

### **Regional Enterprise Development Fund Data**

248. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applications made to the regional enterprise development fund; the number of approved grants made under the fund by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11391/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Regional Enterprise Development Fund is a €60m competitive fund introduced by my Department and administered by Enterprise Ireland. It is aimed at supporting collaborative and innovative projects that can help to sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level.

The REDF was designed to support the ambition in the Programme for Government to create an additional 200,000 new jobs by 2020, of which 135,000 are to be located outside of Dublin. One of the principal criteria within the scheme is that proposed projects would strengthen the potential for job creation in their region, thereby contributing to delivering on the Government's ambition.

The REDF is all about supporting local and regional initiatives that will build on sectoral strengths and help to create jobs across the regions.

In total, 152 applications were received under the first and second calls of REDF, comprising a total of 75 projects under call 1 and 77 projects under call 2.

Eligible projects submitted went through a rigorous 7-stage process before being awarded funding. A standard scoring template was used at all stages to ensure consistency of approach.

As this was a competitive process, not all projects were successful. However, to ensure a balanced regional spread, I committed to ensuring that each region would benefit by at least €2 million from the Fund once the required standard for projects is met under the evaluation criteria. This threshold has now been met across all regions.

In total, 42 projects have been awarded funding over two completed Calls worth a total of €60m, with projects supported in every region. The lead region and participant counties for each approved project are included in the following table.

Project	Region/County
Monaghan County Enterprise Board	North East/Monaghan
Bioconnect Innovation Centre Clg	North East/Monaghan, Cavan
Focused Engineering Network Dac	North East/Monaghan, Cavan, Louth
Donegal Digital Innovation Clg	North West/Donegal
Leitrim County Enterprise Fund	North West/Midlands/Leitrim/Cavan/Longford
Leitrim Food Enterprise Zone Clg	North West/North East/Leitrim, Cavan, Sligo, Donegal
Sligo County Enterprise Fund Clg	North West/Sligo, Mayo, Leitrim
Bia Innovator Campus Clg	West/Galway
Galway City Innovation District Clg	West/Galway
Midc Páirc Na Mara	West/Galway
The Burren Lowlands Clg	West/Mid West/Galway, Clare
Emerald Aerocluster Clg	Mid West/Limerick/Clare
Irish Bioeconomy Foundation Clg	Mid West/South East/National/Tipperary
Bnest Social Initiative DAC	Mid West/South West/Limerick, Clare, Tipperary, Cork, Kerry
Clare Mez (Maritime Economic Zone) Dac	Mid West/Clare
Hospital Food Units Dac	Mid/West/Limerick, Clare, Tipperary
Agritech Centre Of Excellence	South West/Kerry
Cork Urban Enterprises	South West/North Cork City
IT@Cork CLG	South West/Cork
Kerryscitech	South West/Kerry
Mol Teic Clg	South West/Kerry
Rdi Hub Clg	South West/Kerry
Sneem Innovation & Tech Services	South West/Kerry
Cit Consortium Projects Dac	South West/Cork, Kerry
Ludgate Operations Clg	South West/Cork
Vista Agri 4.0 Hub Clg	South West/Cork, Kerry, Waterford, Tipperary
Insurtech Network Centre Dac	South East/Carlow
Three D DAC	Waterford
National Design Innovation Hub Dac	South East/Carlow, Kilkenny
Incupharm DAC	South East/Waterford, Wexford, Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary
Crystal Valley Tech Clg	South East/Waterford, Wexford, Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary
County Kildare Community Network	Mid East/Kildare
Boyne Valley Food Innovation District Dac	Mid East/North East/Meath, Cavan, Monaghan, Louth
Bpo Cluster Ireland Clg	Dublin
Dublin Enterprise & Tech Centre	Dublin
Ghala DAC	Dublin
Social & Local Enterprise Alliance Dac	Dublin
Innovate Dublin Communities Clg	Dublin

Project	Region/County
St. Paul's Area Development Enterprise Clg	Dublin
Irish Manufacturing Research	Midlands/Westmeath/National
Mountmellick Development Association Clg	Midlands/Laois
Offaly Innovation & Design Centre Clg	Midlands/Offaly

### Trade Agreements

249. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on whether it is appropriate for her Department to object to trade deals that do not satisfy a precondition (details supplied) at EU level; and her further views on the ongoing negotiations regarding two trade agreements with the USA and that with Mercosur, in view of their lack of compliance with the Paris Agreement. [12304/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Competence on Trade is vested in the European Commission under the Common Commercial Policy in the EU Treaties. In that regard, the Commission proposes legislative and negotiating Proposals which Member States and the European Parliament then consider. Once concluded, all Trade Agreements are considered by the Member States in Council for formal approval. In considering Commission Proposals for Negotiating Directives - or Mandates - the Member States take due regard of the overall trade policies of the Union, and the Commission can only commence formal trade negotiations once the Member States have given their approval. In this regard, both the Commission and the Member States, as well as the European Parliament, would consider how to reflect the latest EU policies on issues such as labour rights, consumer standards, the environment, sustainable development and so on, including, where appropriate, climate change.

When considering trade discussions with the United States, it is important to record that the European Union and the US have the largest bilateral trade and investment relationship and enjoy the most integrated economic relationship in the world. The EU and the US economies together account for about half the entire world GDP and for nearly a third of world trade flows. This relationship has proved indispensable not only for the prosperity of both sides of the Atlantic for many years but for many other countries including least developed countries who participate in global supply chains. Likewise, Ireland and the US have a longstanding bilateral relationship which has proved hugely beneficial in many ways for both our countries. Taking these factors into account, Ireland and the EU remain fully committed to a continued strong partnership with the US as equal partners.

It is in this context that Commission President Juncker met with US President Trump in July 2018, in Washington, to launch a new phase in the relationship between the United States and the European Union aimed at de-escalating growing trade tensions, which would impact the jobs of our citizens. In the Joint Statement the EU and US agreed to dialogue on a range of specific, yet limited, trade matters.

In September 2018, EU Trade Commissioner Cecelia Malmström met U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Robert Lighthizer to initiate the Executive Working Group (EWG), established to improve trade relations between the US and EU. The EWG has met a number of times since, to discuss the scope of future formal negotiations, most recently in Washington on 6th March 2019. As part of the Commission's commitment to transparency, an interim progress report was published on 30th January 2019, providing a detailed overview on the state of play of the talks

to that date.

On 18th January 2019 the EU Commission adopted proposals for “Negotiating Directives” - or Mandates - for its proposed trade talks with the United States: one on conformity assessment, (making it easier for companies to prove their products meet technical requirements on both sides of the Atlantic) and one on the elimination of tariffs for industrial goods (excluding agricultural products). The EU Commission published the draft mandates at the same time as submitting them to the EU Member States.

Subsequently on 19th February 2019 the European Parliament’s Committee on International Trade (INTA) endorsed the launch of formal trade negotiations with the United States. It is anticipated that a further non-binding plenary vote of the European Parliament will take place on the resolution on 14th March 2019.

If approved by Member States in Council, the finalized mandates would set the parameters for formal negotiations to commence. However, it is important to note that these two mandates are of a limited scope, covering two distinct areas agreed in the July 2018 Joint Statement. As I have indicated, they do not constitute a mandate for negotiations on a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, which would involve negotiations across a far wider range of sectors and topics including sustainable development. Additionally, while these negotiations are proceeding both sides are committed to not introducing new tariff measures.

The de-escalation in trade tensions between the US and EU achieved by last July’s accord has been of benefit to Irish trade interests and jobs. Equally, a possible future agreement on conformity assessment as well as the elimination of tariffs for industrial goods, would be a positive development to stimulate growth, create employment and continue to grow our economy.

Ireland, along with its EU partners, will determine its final position on the proposed mandates, taking account of issues such as climate and environmental factors and other sustainable development matters and also in the context of our desire for open, free trade and investment flows between Ireland and the US in a rules-based trading system supporting many thousands of jobs.

Separately, the EU has been negotiating a trade agreement with the four founding members of Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay) for several years. If concluded an EU-Mercosur Free Trade Agreement would be the EU’s largest trade deal to date, four times the size of the trade agreement with Japan. The EU mandate to commence talks was approved in 1999 and aims to eliminate trade tariffs between the EU and the Mercosur region. Irish exporters are currently subject to trade tariffs, barriers and restrictions, when exporting to Mercosur and the proposed Free Trade Agreement should make exports from Ireland more attractive and potentially increase demand for Irish products.

Sectoral opportunities for Ireland in further enhancing a trading relationship with this region include software and services in telecommunications, financial services, digital content and travel, engineering products and services, life sciences, agriculture, food and beverages, and education services. On the other hand, Ireland like other Member States has strong concerns in relation to agriculture, especially the potential impact that these negotiations present to the EU beef sector.

To date, there have been 37 rounds of negotiations and negotiations are still ongoing with the next round planned for the week of 11th – 15th March in Buenos Aires.

Both the EU and Mercosur are each committed to implementing the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

## **Brexit Supports**

250. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applicants and participants in Brexit schemes and supports provided by her Department or agencies under her remit in tabular form; and the amount allocated and expended to each such scheme in each year since being established. [12421/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Brexit represents a significant challenge for businesses in Ireland, which cannot be underestimated. That is why my Department started developing supports for businesses from the time when Brexit first became a possibility. Government's priority is to ensure that businesses around the country can manage risks and avail of any opportunities. This has informed the range of advisory and financial supports that are in place.

My Department's total exchequer allocation increased by 9.1% year on year, up from €871m to €950.2m. This is made up of a record €620m in capital and €330.2m in current funding, which includes an increase of €65m in capital – up 11.7% on last year's allocation of €555m; and, an increase of €14.2m in current – almost 4.5% more than our 2018 allocation of €316m.

I allocated an extra €5m to the 31 Local Enterprise Offices [LEOs], up 22% on 2018, which have a presence in every county, to support start-ups and growth and, in particular, to support businesses to prepare for Brexit. The LEOs will work with the broad range of small and micro indigenous enterprises across sectors to ensure that they are informed and have plans in place to manage the new trading relationships on the island and with the UK more generally. This includes a new customs training programme for all businesses, exporters and importers, rolled out in conjunction with Enterprise Ireland.

I was also pleased to announce an additional capital allocation of €2.75m to Enterprise Ireland to start developing regional innovation and technology clusters with Institutes of Technology right across the country, positioning them as drivers of world-class start-ups and growth enterprises and helping businesses adjust to market changes, including Brexit.

Through Enterprise Ireland, I also doubled funding for the Online Retail Pilot Scheme to €1.25m in 2019, which will support SMEs in the retail sector to have a stronger online presence and find new markets. This new Scheme follows through on my commitment to increase the scale and internationalisation of indigenous enterprise; increase productivity in high-employment sectors; and encourage Brexit readiness. I announced the first 11 successful applicants on Friday 1st March last and there will be a further call for proposals this year. In addition, Enterprise Ireland invested €74 million in Brexit impacted businesses in 2018.

Funding to InterTradeIreland has been increased by 18% and they, along with the LEOs, are offering a range of Brexit-focused supports to companies, including those engaged in cross-border trade with Northern Ireland.

The Brexit Loan Scheme, using a combination of Irish Exchequer and EU guarantees, leveraged up to €300 million of lending at a maximum interest rate 4% at a cost to the Exchequer of €23 million - €14 million provided by my Department and €9 million provided by Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme was announced in Budget 2019. The scheme will be available in early 2019 and it will provide a longer-term facility, 8 to 10 years, of up to €300m to support strategic capital investment for a post-Brexit environment by business at competitive rates. This Scheme is jointly funded by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (€37.2 million) and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (€24.8 million) at a

total cost to the Exchequer of €62 million.

The first table sets out the respective exchequer increases in allocations to ITI, EI, IDA and the LEOs between 2018 and 2019 and the cost/expenditure of the supports available. Whilst these increases are not all due to Brexit, they are mainly provided to assist the enterprise agencies in their responses to the challenges posed by Brexit.

The second table sets out the uptake of the different Brexit-related supports available through the Department and its agencies as at 28 February 2019.

IDA total allocation (current and capital) for 2019 increased by €33.7 million when compared with 2018.

Enterprise Ireland total allocation (current and capital) for 2019 increased by €6.8 million when compared with 2018.

LEOs total allocation (current and capital) for 2019 increased by €5 million when compared with 2018.

ITI total allocation (current and capital) for 2019 increased by €1 million when compared with 2018.

**Table 1.**

Scheme	Expenditure/Cost
Brexit Loan Scheme	The scheme will cost the Exchequer €23 million (€14 million provide by Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and €9 million provided by Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine).
Enterprise Ireland Be Prepared Grant	€258,024 to beginning of March
Enterprise Ireland Market Discovery Fund - A support to EI clients to research new markets	€362,919 to beginning of March
Enterprise Ireland Agile Innovation Fund - Gives rapid fast-track access to innovation funding	€569,033 to beginning of March
Enterprise Ireland Brexit Advisory Clinics	€237,801 to beginning of March
Enterprise Ireland Brexit “Act On Programme” – A support funding the engagement of a consultant to devise report with recommendations to help clients address weaknesses and improve resilience	€380,000 to end of January
Enterprise Ireland Strategic Consultancy Grant – A grant to assist EI clients to hire a strategic consultant for a set period	€1,324,730 to beginning of March
Local Enterprise Office LEAN for Micro – The LEO Lean4Micro offer was developed in collaboration between the EI Lean department and the LEOs to tailor the EI lean offer for LEO micro enterprise clients.	2017 Expenditure€188,8291 Jan to 30 Sept 2018 Expenditure€365,744

Scheme	Expenditure/Cost
Local Enterprise Office LEAN for Micro - The LEO Lean4Micro offer was developed in collaboration between the EI Lean department and the LEOs to tailor the EI Lean offer for LEO micro enterprise clients	2017 Expenditure€529,9221 Jan to 30 Sept 2018 Expenditure€518,411
Local Enterprise Office Mentoring	There isn't a specific budget allocation for LEO Brexit mentoring. It is included in the LEOs overall Measure 2 allocation.
Local Enterprise Office Brexit Seminars/ Events	2017 Expenditure€85,5091 Jan to 30 Sept 2018 Expenditure€57,855
InterTradeIreland Brexit Start to Plan Vouchers	ITI offers 100% financial support up to £2000/€2250 (inclusive of VAT) towards professional advice in relation to Brexit matters.
Pilot Online Retail Scheme administered by Enterprise Ireland	Eleven retailers were awarded funding in March 2019 as part of the new €1.25m fund, with €625,000 available under the first competitive call to support retail businesses to strengthen their online offering.

Table 2: Brexit preparedness supports - uptake of available schemes

Scheme	Uptake (end Feb)
Brexit Loan Scheme	504 applications received, 450 approved by SBCI, 83 Loans progressed to sanction at bank level to a value of €17.47 million (as of 08 March)
Enterprise Ireland Brexit Scorecard - online platform for Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit	4,435 Brexit Scorecards have been completed. 722 LEO clients have completed the scorecard.
Enterprise Ireland Be Prepared Grant	168 Be Prepared Grants have been approved
Enterprise Ireland Market Discovery Fund - A support to EI clients to research new markets	251 projects have been approved under this initiative
Enterprise Ireland Agile Innovation Fund - Gives rapid fast-track access to innovation funding	43 Agile Innovation projects have been approved
Enterprise Ireland Brexit Advisory Clinics	13 Brexit Advisory Clinics have been run with over 1,000 in attendance
Enterprise Ireland Brexit "Act On Programme" – A support funding the engagement of a consultant to devise report with recommendations to help clients address weaknesses and improve resilience	190 "Act on" Plans have been completed

Scheme	Uptake (end Feb)
Enterprise Ireland Strategic Consultancy Grant – A grant to assist EI clients to hire a strategic consultant for a set period	1,057 Strategic Consultancy Grants have been approved
Local Enterprise Office Technical Assistance Grant for Micro Export - an incentive for LEO clients to explore and develop new market opportunities	431 clients were approved assistance under the Technical Assistance Grant (end January 2019)
Local Enterprise Office LEAN for Micro - The LEO Lean4Micro offer was developed in collaboration between the EI Lean department and the LEOs to tailor the EI Lean offer for LEO micro enterprise clients	221 LEO clients have participated in the programme (end January 2019)
Local Enterprise Office Mentoring	471 mentoring participants solely focused on Brexit (end January 2019)
Local Enterprise Office Brexit Seminars/ Events	3,996 Participants at the Brexit Information events (end January 2019)
InterTradeIreland Brexit Start to Plan Vouchers	There have been 1,172 applications, with 840 approved and 7 still pending assessment.
Pilot Online Retail Scheme administered by Enterprise Ireland	Applications are currently being assessed by Enterprise Ireland and the successful applicants will be announced in Q1 2019. There will also be a second call in 2019.

### Brexit Supports

251. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of firms that have applied for working capital under the Brexit SME loan scheme; the number of firms that have been sanctioned financing to date by firm size (details supplied); and the total value of same in tabular form. [12422/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Brexit Loan Scheme provides affordable working capital to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees that are or will be Brexit impacted and which meet the scheme criteria. The €23 million exchequer funding announced in the 2018 Budget (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) has been leveraged to provide a fund of up to €300 million over the lifetime of the scheme.

The scheme features a two-stage application process. First, businesses must apply to the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) to confirm their eligibility for the scheme. Businesses can use guidelines provided on the SBCI website to determine if they are eligible, and if so, to complete the eligibility form. As part of the process, businesses must submit a business plan, demonstrating the means by which they intend to innovate, change or adapt to meet their Brexit challenges. The SBCI assesses the applications and successful applicants receive an eligibility reference number.

Successful applicants can then apply for a loan under the scheme with one of the participating finance providers using their eligibility reference number. Participating finance providers are the Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank and Allied Irish Bank. Approval of loans is subject to the finance providers' own credit policies and procedures.

The number of firms that have applied for working capital under the Brexit Loan Scheme to date by firm size (as at close of business 07/03/19):

Firm size	No. of firms
Less than 10	240
11 to 49	192
50 to 249	63
More than 250	1
No. of employees not provided	2
Grand total	498

The number of firms that have been sanctioned financing to date by firm size and the total value of same (as at close of business 07/03/19):

Firm size	No. of firms	Total value
Less than 10	44	€4,309,000
11 to 49	30	€8,890,000
50 to 249	8	€4,155,000
More than 250	0	€0
Grand total	82	€17,354,000

### Brexit Supports

252. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the latest figures regarding the Brexit SME loan scheme launched in March 2018 for items (details supplied) in tabular form. [12423/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Brexit Loan Scheme provides affordable working capital to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees that are or will be Brexit impacted and which meet the scheme criteria. The €23 million exchequer funding announced in the 2018 Budget (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) has been leveraged to provide a fund of up to €300 million over the lifetime of the scheme.

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Successful applicants can then apply for a loan under the scheme with one of the participating finance providers using their eligibility reference number. Participating finance providers are the Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank and Allied Irish Bank. Approval of loans is subject to the finance providers' own credit policies and procedures.

The figures in the table are those as to 1st March 2019. The Department receives a report each quarter from the SBCI on the uptake of the scheme. A number of requested figures have not been included in this table as they pertain to the relationship between banks and their client SMEs and so are beyond the remit of these reports. Some questions requested the same information and have, therefore, been answered once.

**Requested Details (as at 8 March 2019)**

Applications etc.	Amount
Number of businesses which have applied to the SBCI to confirm eligibility for the scheme	504
Number of businesses which have had their applications assessed by SBCI	462
Number of businesses which have not had their applications assessed by SBCI	42
Number of businesses which have had a successful application and received an eligibility reference number	450
Number of businesses which had a successful application and received no eligibility reference number	N/A
The number of businesses who did not have a successful application and received no eligibility reference number	12
List of current finance providers	Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank and AIB
Number of SMEs which have progressed to sanction at finance provider level	83
Total value of loans progressed to sanction at finance provider level	€17.47m
Current interest rate for those in receipt of approved loans	Maximum interest rate under the scheme is 4%

**Enterprise Support Schemes**

253. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the future growth loan scheme announced in budget 2018 will open for applications; the terms and conditions of this scheme; and the length of time the scheme will stay open for applications. [12424/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Future Growth Loan Scheme makes up to €300 million of loans available with a term of 8-10 years. This scheme will be available to eligible Irish businesses and the primary agriculture and seafood sectors to support strategic long-term investment in a post Brexit environment. Finance provided under the scheme will be competitively priced and have favorable terms, for example no security required for loans up to €500,000.

The scheme has been developed by my Department and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in partnership with the Department of Finance, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland and the European Investment Fund. It will be delivered through participating finance providers.

Loans are for terms of 8-10 years, with minimum loan amount of €100,000 for SMEs (€50,000 for primary agriculture) and maximum loan amount of €3,000,000. As mentioned before, loans of under €500,000 will be made on an unsecured basis.

Loans must be used for investment in tangible or intangible assets for the purpose of pro-

cess and organisational innovation, or investment in assets on agricultural holdings linked to primary agricultural production.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme will feature a two-stage application process. Applications for eligibility under the scheme will be made through the SBCI website. The SBCI will assess the applications and those successful will be issued an eligibility reference number.

Eligible businesses will then be able to apply for a loan under the scheme with one of the participating finance providers using the eligibility reference number. Approval of loans are subject to the finance providers' own credit policies and procedures.

The scheme will be open to all eligible businesses, whether a State Agency client or not.

The SBCI "Open Call" for designation as a lending partner under the Scheme closed on 11th February 2019 and my Department is currently working on the finalisation of the Scheme. The Future Growth Loan Scheme will be launched shortly and it will be open for applications for the next three years.

### **Brexit Supports**

254. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of food businesses that have applied for working capital under the Brexit loan scheme which opened in March 2018; the number of such businesses that have been sanctioned financing to date; and the value of same. [12426/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Brexit Loan Scheme provides affordable working capital to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees that are or will be Brexit impacted and which meet the scheme criteria. The €23 million exchequer funding announced in the 2018 Budget has been leveraged to provide a fund of up to €300 million over the lifetime of the scheme.

Given its significant exposure to the UK market, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine contributed 40% of the State funding. As a result, at least 40% of the fund will be available to food businesses.

The scheme features a two-stage application process. First, businesses must apply to the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) to confirm their eligibility for the scheme. Businesses can use guidelines provided on the SBCI website to determine if they are eligible, and if so, to complete the eligibility form. As part of the process, businesses must submit a business plan, demonstrating the means by which they intend to innovate, change or adapt to meet their Brexit challenges. The SBCI assesses the applications and successful applicants receive an eligibility reference number.

Successful applicants can then apply for a loan under the scheme with one of the participating finance providers using their eligibility reference number. Participating finance providers are the Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank and Allied Irish Bank. Approval of loans is subject to the finance providers' own credit policies and procedures.

As at close of business 7th March 2019, 99 food businesses have applied for eligibility under the Brexit Loan Scheme, 77 received were approved and received eligibility codes while 15 food businesses have been sanctioned financing to date with a total value of €4.8m.

## **Cannabis for Medicinal Use**

255. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health when products of a company (details supplied) will be dispensed through general practitioners or pharmacies here in order to avoid persons having to travel abroad every three months and in some instances monthly to collect the medication. [11985/19]

331. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter regarding medical distribution (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11697/19]

336. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Health his plans to have the medication CBD produced by a company (details supplied) dispensed to pharmacies here rather than persons having to travel abroad to collect this medication; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11707/19]

337. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on accessibility for medicinal cannabis; if patients prescribed medicinal cannabis through the compassionate access programme will have their medication delivered to, and dispensed from their local chemists; the measures he will take in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11711/19]

338. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if all forms of medicinal cannabis will be available to patients from their local chemists; the way in which the dispensing of medicinal cannabis will be undertaken here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11712/19]

343. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to cases in the Northern Ireland and Britain in which a distribution company is facilitating the direct importation of distribution to pharmacies of medication by a company (details supplied); the reason the same process has not been afforded to the 16 patients who have been granted licences here for the medication; if these patients will be facilitated delivery of their medication to pharmacies here in view of rolling out the compassionate access programme; and if not, the reason therefor. [11718/19]

344. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 341 and 342 of 19 February 2019, the reason patients who have been prescribed medicinal cannabis for their health needs still need to leave the State and travel to another state to acquire the medication; the reason a process has not been put in place to import the medication to chemists and pharmacies here under the supervision of the health service to be provided to patients; and his plans to put processes in place to ensure that such medication will be imported and distributed through chemists and pharmacies here. [11719/19]

387. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the progress made on the granting of importation licences for medicinal cannabis and the sourcing of an adequate distribution company to ensure supply of medication to pharmacies here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11950/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 255, 331, 336 to 338, inclusive, 343, 344 and 387 together.

My Department is working towards the introduction shortly of a Cannabis for Medical Use Access Programme.

While the arrangements that will enable this programme to begin are being finalised, it is open to a registered medical practitioner to apply for a Ministerial Licence under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977. Such a licence, if granted, enables them to legally prescribe medical cannabis for a named patient. It is important to note that the decision to prescribe such treatment is a clinical decision for the prescribing doctor.

Until acceptable medical cannabis products are available for use in Ireland, patients who are the subject of a Licence are obtaining their cannabis products from a pharmacy in the Netherlands.

Under Netherlands government policy, cannabis oil products are not permitted to be commercially exported.

Notwithstanding the fact that such cannabis products might eventually be listed as products that could be accessed under the Programme, unless the Dutch export barrier is removed, anyone who is prescribed these products will have to travel to the Netherlands to obtain them.

We are aware that a UK company may provide a service which involves it collecting cannabis products from the Netherlands for persons authorised to use it under the UK medical cannabis regime.

While this company can import medical cannabis products into the UK from the Netherlands, the UK authorities do not currently allow re-export from the UK to other countries, which includes Ireland.

I have been informed that this UK company may be acting as the patient's "nominated representative" in the collection of their personally prescribed medical cannabis products. No similar Irish entity is known to provide this service, but it is certainly open to any patient to engage a representative on their behalf in this regard.

### Background information

#### 1. What is the Cannabis Access Programme?

(i) The purpose of the Cannabis for Medical Use Access Programme is to facilitate access to cannabis-based products or preparations that are of a standardised quality and which meet an acceptable level of quality assurance during the manufacturing process, for three specified medical conditions:

- Spasticity associated with multiple sclerosis;
- Intractable nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy;
- Severe, refractory (treatment-resistant) epilepsy.

(ii) The Cannabis Access Programme was initiated after the publication of:

- (a) The Health Products Regulatory Authority scientific review.
- (b) Detailed clinical guidelines produced by an Expert Reference Group on medical cannabis.

Both reports may be found on the Department of Health's web site.

#### 2. When will the Cannabis Access Programme be introduced?

- (a) Good progress has been made on the introduction of the Cannabis Access Programme. This work is well advanced. It is hoped to introduce the programme in the coming months.

#### 3. What is a Ministerial Licence for the prescribing of cannabis?

- (a) Pending full operation of the Cannabis Access Programme, clinicians may utilise the Ministerial licensing route to prescribe medical cannabis for their patients.
- (b) This is provided by Section 14 of the Misuse of Drugs Act.
- (c) Ministerial licences are time limited. The initial licence is valid for a period of 3 months

- and subsequent licenses in respect of the same patient are valid for 6 months.
4. Why do patients have to travel to the Netherlands for their medical cannabis products once a ministerial licence has been granted?
- (a) Until suitable medical cannabis products are made available in Ireland under the medical cannabis access programme, prescribers and their patients are sourcing the prescribed products from a pharmacy in The Netherlands, on foot of their medical prescription.
  - (b) The Netherland medical cannabis product is sold under the trade name Bedrocan.
  - (c) Due to current Netherlands government policy, Bedrocan products, sold as cannabis oil formulations, are not currently permitted to be commercially exported from the Netherlands, but are only supplied in the Netherlands on foot of a valid medical prescription when presented to the appropriate pharmacy.
  - (d) This Netherlands pharmacy has confirmed to the Department of Health recently that there are no issues with the supply of THC and CBD products to Irish patients, who are in possession of a valid prescription, and that a three-month supply can be obtained.
  - (e) Notwithstanding the fact that Bedrocan products might ultimately be listed as products that could be accessed under the CAP, until the export barrier is removed by the Netherlands government, anyone who is prescribed Bedrocan oils under the Cannabis Access Programme, or a Ministerial Licence will have to travel to the Hague to access it.
5. Further information
- (a) It is intended that the Ministerial licence application scheme will continue to operate in parallel with the Cannabis for Medical Use Access Programme, after the programme becomes operational, for exceptional cases, only where there is an unmet clinical need, or the Cannabis Access programme is not suitable for a patient.
6. Where can information on Cannabis Access Programme and the Ministerial Licence be found?
- (a) The Department of Health website contains detailed information on medical cannabis, including clinical guidance on the use of medical cannabis and details on how a medical practitioner may apply for a Ministerial licence. This information can be found at: [health.gov.ie/blog/publications/cannabis-for-medical-use](http://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/cannabis-for-medical-use).

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

256. **Deputy Kate O’Connell** asked the Minister for Health if an audit of children or adults in long-term residential care has been carried out; the costs associated with the care and stay of such persons during their lives from entry to when they leave; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12179/19]

257. **Deputy Kate O’Connell** asked the Minister for Health the cost of long-term residential care for a person with special needs under the care of the State and-or privately in tabular form; the person or body who provides such long-term residential care in terms of governance, ethos and management; if a list of the organisations will be provided; the details in relation to inheritance of assets by the organisations should a service user die while in care; and if same will be provided. [12180/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 256 and 257 together.

The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

258. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); if they can be placed on a cancellation list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11464/19]

**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.

### **Assisted Human Reproduction Legislation**

259. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the way in which private sector IVF is regulated; his plans in place in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11465/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Currently there is no specific legislation in Ireland governing assisted human reproduction (AHR). There is limited existing regulation relating to the use of gametes and embryos under SI No. 158 of 2006 (Quality and Safety of Human Tissues and Cells) Regulations, which governs the quality and safety standards in the donation, procurement, testing, processing, preservation, storage and distribution of human tissues and cells, including gametes and embryos. These regulations empower the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) to authorise and monitor tissue establishments, which include some fertility clinics.

In addition, the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, reforms and updates family law to address the needs of children living in diverse family types. Parts 2 & 3 of that Act, which are the responsibility of the Minister for Health, contain provisions relating to the regulation of donor-assisted human reproduction (DAHR) procedures carried out in the State, including dealing with the rights of children born as a result of those procedures. It is intended that Parts 2 & 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 will be commenced as soon as possible.

In October 2017, the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human repro-

duction (AHR) and associated areas of research, based on the published General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017. The General Scheme encompasses the regulation of a range of practices, including: gamete (sperm or egg) and embryo donation for AHR and research; surrogacy; pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) of embryos; posthumous assisted reproduction; and embryo and stem cell research. The General Scheme also provides for the establishment of an independent regulatory authority for AHR.

The process of drafting this Bill will be completed in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General. As part of this drafting process officials in my Department will ensure that there is coherent interaction between the AHR Bill and Parts 2 & 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015.

In addition, the Joint Committee on Health is currently conducting a review of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, which began in January of last year. The review is ongoing and the Joint Committee intends to report thereon before the summer recess. However, it is not possible at this time to give a definitive timeline for the completion of the draft Bill and its subsequent passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The provisions outlined within the Scheme, including the establishment of the AHR Regulatory Authority, will ensure that AHR practices and related areas of research are conducted in a more consistent and standardised way and with the necessary oversight.

The aim of the AHR legislation is to promote and ensure the health and safety of parents, others involved in the process (such as donors and surrogate mothers) and, most importantly, the children who will be born as a result of AHR. Consideration of the welfare and best interests of children born through AHR is a key principle underpinning the Scheme.

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

260. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the replacement and refurbishment of 90 community nursing units nationally announced on 26 January 2016, in tabular form; the funding allocated to each project in 2019; and the expected completion date for each. [11466/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

### **Neuro-Rehabilitation Policy**

261. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the funding made available in 2019 to support the implementation of the national neurorehabilitation strategy following publication of the implementation plan 2019 to 2021 by the HSE on 20 February 2019. [11474/19]

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

which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

### **Ministerial Meetings**

262. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of times he met with a person (details supplied); the issues discussed; if his officials attended the meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11476/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have not met with the person identified by the Deputy, in my role as Minister for Health.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

263. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the reason no funding is available to transport young adults with disabilities to day care services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11490/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

### **Assisted Human Reproduction Services Provision**

264. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the public IVF scheme operates; the way in which it is regulated; the criteria for accessing the scheme; his plans in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11494/19]

473. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health when the funding set aside for IVF will be available to couples; the criteria to avail of same; the way in which couples register their interest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12419/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 264 and 473 together.

In October 2017, the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research, based on the published General Scheme. The process of drafting this Bill will be completed in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General. In addition, the Joint Committee on Health is currently conducting a review of the

General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, which began in January of last year. The review is ongoing and the Joint Committee intends to report thereon before the summer recess. However, it is not possible at this time to give a definitive timeline for the completion of the draft Bill and its subsequent passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Interlinked with the legislation, officials in the Department of Health in conjunction with the HSE are developing a model of care for infertility and an associated public fund for AHR. This work includes developing proposals on the allocation approved by Government for a €1 million fund for use in relation to providing public AHR treatment during 2019.

The development of a model of care for infertility will help to ensure the provision of safe, effective and accessible services through the public health system as part of the full range of services available in obstetrics and gynaecology. Once the funding proposals have been submitted and approved by the Minister for Health, there will be an announcement regarding the commencement of this fund.

### **Cancer Screening Programmes**

265. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 363 of 26 February 2019, the details of interactions including dates, substance of advice and position taken by CervicalCheck between his Department and the organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11495/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As set out in the response to Parliamentary Question No. 363 of 26 February 2019, on 28 April 2018, I made the decision to provide for a free out of cycle smear test for any woman who was concerned, where her GP felt she should have a further test as part of her reassurance.

Neither I nor my officials received advice that recommended against these tests in advance of the decision. Subsequent to the decision, on foot of telephone contact by the Department, the National Screening Service raised a number of concerns verbally. Following the announcement, the Screening Service set out concerns in an email to my Department, which related to uncertainty about costs, volume, impact on turnaround times, impact on perceptions of the programme's accuracy, challenges with processing GP payments, and the potential difficulty in ceasing the arrangements in due course.

However, as I have previously stated, the concerns failed to recognise the circumstances of the unfolding crisis in the programme against which such considerations required to be balanced. Were it not for these circumstances, it would never have been necessary to contemplate such a step in the ordinary course of the operation of the screening programme.

The decision cannot be separated from the reality that general practitioners, in difficult circumstances, were dealing with large numbers of worried patients as a result of the issues which came into the public domain over the course of Thursday and Friday, 26th and 27th of April. It was important that GPs be supported while they awaited supporting information to be developed and disseminated by CervicalCheck. A fee to provide for the free repeat smear, and for a GP consultation, was subsequently agreed with the Irish Medical Organisation, and welcomed by TDs across the Dáil and by GP representative bodies. The alternative, i.e. that the State failed to recognise the reality of patients presenting in this way to GPs or the State refused to pay for such smears, would have been untenable in the circumstances.

### **HSE Staff Data**

266. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff at national director level, assistant national director level, general manager level and grade VIII level in the HSE on 1 March 2019 or the latest date available. [11499/19]

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

### **General Practitioner Data**

267. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioner vacancies in each local health area in tabular form. [11500/19]

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

### **Hospital Staff Recruitment**

268. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of the position to be filled at the Midlands Regional Hospital, Mullingar, which has been with the health business services division for advertising and recruitment since 2018 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11508/19]

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

### **General Practitioner Services**

269. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if a general practitioner surgery (details supplied) will be excluded from panel appointments going forward due to the fact that the surgery is operating at full capacity and has experienced difficulties in recruiting staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11509/19]

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

### **National Treatment Purchase Fund Waiting Times**

270. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the criteria for treatment under the NTPF for public patients seeking wisdom tooth removal or impacted teeth removal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11511/19]

271. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times under the NTPF for patient access to wisdom tooth removal or impacted teeth removal; his views on whether the exclusion of accredited specialists from providing this service is causing another significant delay for this cohort of patients (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11512/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 270 and 271 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 committed to improving waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures.

I published the joint Department of Health, Health Service Executive (HSE) and National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) Scheduled Care Access Plan earlier this week. This Plan sets out a number of commitments aimed at improving access for patients waiting for hospital operations or procedures as well as patients waiting for a first Outpatient appointment.

The role of the NTPF is to authorise public hospitals to offer outsourced treatment to clinically suitable long waiting patients who are on an inpatient/day case waiting list for surgery, having been referred on to such a list following clinical assessment by a consultant/specialist at an outpatient clinic. NTPF authorisations are made in respect of the longest waiting patients first.

The information regarding waiting times for Wisdom Tooth Removal requested by the Deputy is currently being collated by officials in my Department and will be provided to the Deputy directly as soon as it becomes available.

With regard to the matter the exclusion of accredited specialists from providing wisdom tooth removal or impacted teeth removal service, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **HSE Properties**

272. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the intended use of a building (details supplied) acquired by the HSE in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11536/19]

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

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

273. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to relocate 33 persons from a home (details supplied); if those persons will be relocated together to a complex; if they will be dispersed to other locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11545/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Report “Time to Move on from Congregated Settings – A Strategy for Community Inclusion” proposes a new model of support in the community, moving people from Congregated settings to the community in line with Government policy.

The Programme for Partnership Government contains a commitment to continue to move people with disabilities out of congregated settings, to enable them to live independently and to be included in the community. The objective is to reduce this figure by one-third by 2021 and ultimately, to eliminate all congregated settings.

By the end of this year, it is expected that under 2,100 people with a disability will remain living in congregated settings. I want to emphasise that the appropriate supports and resources are being put in place to ensure that people are supported as they move out of residential centres. The model of care for individuals will be based on a person centred plan (PCP). The PCP may change over time in line with an individual's needs and circumstances and the model of service delivery applicable at a particular time.

In the context of residents in St Joseph's House, Stillorgan - the Deaf Village Ireland, any opportunity for residents to live in smaller settings in the community will come after considerable planning and discussion with those residents and their families. It will be on the basis that it will enhance their life, and anyone who moves will continue to access the services they require.

As the HSE is responsible for leading out on the recommendations on "Time to Move on from Congregated Settings - A Strategy for Community Inclusion", I have arranged for the Deputy's question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Obesity Strategy**

274. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the research which has been undertaken on evidence based fiscal measures to support healthy eating and lifestyles as per action point 1.8 of A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11552/19]

275. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the review of evidence which has taken place for fiscal measures on products that are high in fat, sugar and salt to reduce their consumption as per action point 1.10 of A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11553/19]

276. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the status of step 9 of the ten steps forward of A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025 in respect of the first 1,000 days of life; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11556/19]

278. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the status of each of the recommendations of A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11558/19]

279. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the status of action point 1.4 of A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11567/19]

280. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the community based programmes with a focus on disadvantaged areas funded by his Department that focus on healthy eating and active living; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11573/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 274 to 276, inclusive, and 278 to 280, inclusive, together.

A Healthy Weight for Ireland', the Obesity Policy and Action Plan (OPAP), was launched in September 2016 under the auspices of the Healthy Ireland agenda.

The OPAP covers a ten year period up to 2025 and aims to reverse obesity trends, prevent health complications and reduce the overall burden for individuals, families, the health system,

and the wider society and economy. Indeed it must be emphasised that every sector of our society has a role in reducing the burden of obesity and the OPAP clearly acknowledges this.

The OPAP policy prescribed ‘Ten Steps Forward’ that would be taken to prevent overweight and obesity. A new Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group (OPIOG) was established in October 2017 and a progress report on each recommendation in the OPAP is currently being finalised under the aegis of the OPIOG.

In the meantime, I am pleased to advise the Deputy of the current position with implementing the Ten Steps Forward as follows:

1. Embed multi-sectoral actions on obesity prevention with the support of government departments and public sector agencies

An Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group (OPIOG) has been established under the Chair of the Department of Health. It is comprised of representatives from the following Departments and Agencies: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Department of Children and Youth Affairs; Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection; Department of Education and Skills; Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government; University College Cork; the Food Safety Authority of Ireland; the Health Service Executive (HSE) - including the National Clinical Lead for Obesity; and Safefood. The OPIOG held its inaugural meeting in October 2017 with further meetings arranged at agreed intervals for the purposes of providing oversight to the implementation of the national Obesity Policy & Action Plan (OPAP).

The OPAP recommended that proposals be developed relating to the rollout of evidence based fiscal measures, including a levy on sugar-sweetened drinks, in support of healthy eating. An internal working paper was published by the Department to inform consideration of a sugar sweetened drinks levy from a health perspective. This was entitled *Introducing a Tax on Sugar Sweetened Drinks: Health Rationale, Options and Recommendations* with a policy objective to reduce rates of childhood and adult obesity in Ireland by reducing the consumption of sugar sweetened drinks (SSDs) as a contributor to health and dental deterioration, particularly among young people.

As the Deputy is aware the Sugar-Sweetened Drinks Tax commenced on 1 May 2018. It represents a positive step in our national policy to deal with the problem of obesity. The question of considering further fiscal measures similar to the Sugar Sweetened Drinks Tax is being kept under review by the OPIOG during this early implementation phase of the Sugar Tax.

On the issue of Step 1 Action 1.4 of the OPAP, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) has advised that in relation to school buildings (primary and post-primary), the Department of Education and Skills (DES) provides tap drinking water system as a matter of routine. In existing buildings if a school has concerns about the quality of its drinking water, the matter can be addressed by the relevant local authority and Irish Water. If any quality issues are identified as a result of a test, the DES provides funding to address the issue. If a school does not have a tap drinking water supply, the DES will provide funding to address this.

2. Regulate for a healthier environment

The development of legislation for calorie posting to support people to make healthy choices is underway by the Department of Health. A behaviour study on how best to make the posting of calories meaningful to customers and more likely to impact on their behaviours has been published by the ESRI.

A number of Government policies aim to support the design and development of built envi-

ronments that enhance health, wellbeing and quality of life for all. The National Physical Activity Plan (NPAP) and OPAP both require that joint action is taken to promote the importance of physical activity and to reduce the obesogenic nature of the built environment.

In line with Actions 31 of the NPAP and 2.1 of the OPAP, which commit to developing guidelines and support materials for those working in developing the built environment in order to promote the importance of physical activity, and Action 59 of the NPAP which commits to developing a programme of on-going stakeholder communication and engagement, a Stakeholder Forum was held on 21 November last.

The event was planned in partnership, with substantial input from three Government Departments, (Health; Transport, Tourism and Sport; and Housing, Planning and Local Government). Work will progress in 2019 taking account of the outcomes of the forum's discussions.

3. Secure appropriate support from the commercial sector to play its part in obesity prevention

At its inaugural meeting, the OPIOG agreed to establish two sub-groups for Reformulation and Healthy Eating. Both sub-groups have met on a number of occasions since being established and agreed their Terms of Reference.

The Reformulation sub-group is technical in its work programme. The work of the sub-group will primarily set targets on reformulation of food and drink. It will also make recommendations on addressing reduction of portion sizes and on monitoring and validation procedures.

One of the priority actions under Step 3 of the OPAP was to 'Establish a forum for meaningful engagement with industry on best practice initiatives towards a healthy food environment'. It is intended to progress this action under the auspices of the OPIOG. And in this regard, workshops between the Reformulation sub-group of the OPIOG and Food Sector Stakeholders on reformulation took place last September and again in February this year. These workshops provided an opportunity for detailed engagement with key Food Sector Stakeholders on the challenges and opportunities of reformulation in the interest of promoting the health and wellbeing of the population.

A code of practice for food and beverages promotion, marketing and sponsorship has also been developed involving representatives from the food industry, advertising sector, statutory agencies, and various Government Departments. It was chaired by the former CEO of the statutory Food Safety Authority of Ireland, and published in 2018. Work on the implementation of the Codes of Practice is continuing.

4. Implement a strategic and sustained communications strategy that empowers individuals, communities and service providers to become obesity aware and equipped to change, with a particular focus on families with children in the early years

The Healthy Ireland 2018 communications and citizen engagement campaign sought to encourage people to make small, healthy changes under the themes of Healthy Eating, Physical Activity and Mental Wellbeing, and to link them with partner organisations and initiatives providing information and support. This campaign will continue in 2019.

In addition, under Healthy Ireland, the Department, *safe* food and the HSE run a campaign called START which aims to inspire, empower and support parents to start building and persist with healthy lifestyle habits in the family to prevent childhood obesity.

5. The Department of Health, through Healthy Ireland, will provide leadership, engage and co-ordinate multi-sectoral action and implement best practice in the governance of the Obesity

## Policy and Action Plan

As referred to at step 1 above, an Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group was established to oversee implementation. New Healthy Eating Guidelines, Food Pyramid and supporting resources have already been published, disseminated and communicated in 2017, including dissemination of the new Guidelines to all primary and post-primary schools.

Work has also commenced on developing Healthy Eating Guidelines for the 1-5 year old age group. As a first step in this work, the Scientific Committee of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) is currently developing scientific recommendations for food based dietary guidelines for 1 to 5 year olds.

New Nutrition Standards for schools, with an initial focus on school meal programmes funded by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, have also been developed. These Nutrition Standards were published in September 2017. The Nutrition Standards were developed by the Department of Health with the assistance of *safe* food and the Health Service Executive, in cooperation with the members of the School Meals Programme in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Department of Education and Skills.

6. Mobilise the health services to better prevent and address overweight and obesity through effective community-based health promotion programmes, training and skills development and through enhanced systems for detection and referrals of overweight and obese patients at primary care level

A Healthy Eating, Active Living Programme has been established as a Policy Priority Programme within the HSE and a three-year plan for the programme has been finalised. The GP contract for the provision of free care to children under 6 years, already provides that the medical practitioner shall take an active approach toward promoting health and preventing disease through the provision of periodic assessments to child patients.

The HSE is also implementing a Breastfeeding Action Plan and a new Making Every Contact Count brief intervention framework which aims to capitalise on the opportunities that occur every day within the health service to support people to make healthy lifestyle choices.

On the issue of nutrition in hospitals, the HSE, in conjunction with the Department of Health and Healthy Ireland, is to roll out a new Food, Nutrition and Hydration Policy for patients in acute hospitals in the coming months. A team working at national level, composed of all relevant staff including catering, (managers and chefs), dietitians, management, medical, nursing, occupational therapy and speech and language have worked together to develop the policy. Support and guidance to aid implementation of the policy will be provided in an accompanying toolkit. The policy and toolkit are due for publication and implementation in the near future.

7. Develop a service model for specialist care for children and adults

A National Clinical Lead for Obesity was appointed in 2017. This appointment is important in further advancing the implementation of many of the recommendations in the OPAP including the development of a national integrated service model for the health and social care of overweight and obese people and for developing quality assurance guidance for obesity services.

8. Acknowledge the key role of physical activity in the prevention of overweight and obesity

‘Get Ireland Active! The National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland’ (NPAP) is one of the key developments arising from Healthy Ireland, and implementation of that Plan is well under-

way in collaboration with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and a range of other stakeholders. An updated progress report on the implementation of the NPAP will be published in Q1 2019.

9. Allocate resources according to need, in particular to those population groups most in need of support in the prevention and management of obesity, with particular emphasis on families and children during the first 1,000 days of life

The implementation of the Healthy Eating and Active Living Plan within the HSE is supporting work in the education sector, as well as with parents, families and communities in delivering a more co-ordinated approach to prevention and early intervention in child obesity.

In addition, the Healthy Ireland fund was established in 2017 with an allocation of €5 million and with additional allocations of €5 million in 2018 and 2019. The first round of the Fund was distributed through Local Community Development Committees, Children and Young Person's Services Committees and statutory organisations. The aim of the Fund is to support innovative, cross sectoral, evidence-based projects, programmes and initiatives that support the implementation of key national policies in areas such as Obesity, Smoking Alcohol, Physical Activity and Sexual Health.

The Fund has been effective at targeting population groups that experience health inequalities. In Round 1 (2017/18), there was a focus on specific groups experiencing health inequalities, including people living in areas of social disadvantage (71% of actions), people with disabilities (45%), people from new communities including refugees and asylum seekers (39%) and members of the Traveller community (36%). Furthermore, of the local actions that were implemented in Round 1, 61% related to physical activity and 32% were related to food, nutrition and weight management. Round 2 of the Fund is currently being implemented.

10. Develop a multi-annual research programme that is closely allied to policy actions, invest in surveillance and evaluate progress on an annual basis.

The development of an annual bulletin or score card to evaluate progress in relation to the national Obesity Plan and dissemination of results, has also been initiated. Finally, a progress report on implementation of the OPAP is currently being finalised under the aegis of the OPIOG.

Finally, there are a number of relevant commitments in the First 5 whole-of-government strategy for babies, young children and their families, which will be taken forward by the relevant Departments, agencies and other partners.

### **Maternity Services**

277. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation of the breastfeeding action plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11557/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** As the question relates to service matters it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

*Questions Nos. 278 to 280, inclusive, answered with Question No. 274.*

### **Public Health Policy**

12 March 2019

281. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation of the HSE programmes, cook it and healthy food made easy, in 2018 in terms of targets and attendances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11574/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** As the question relates to service matters it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland**

282. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of external consultants employed on a full-time basis by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, NMBI; and the levels within the organisation at which these consultants work. [11576/19]

283. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the annual staff turnover in the NMBI since 2011; and the turnover rate at each level of the organisation. [11577/19]

284. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of agency staff employed in the NMBI in each year since 2011; and the percentage of total staff represented by agency staff in the case of each year. [11578/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 282 to 284, inclusive, together.

As these questions refer to operational matters, they has been referred to the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland**

285. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of protected disclosures lodged by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, NMBI, staff being investigated. [11579/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** All protected disclosures submitted to my Department are given due attention in keeping with the Department's protected disclosures policy and procedures and in accordance with the requirements under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014. Given that all protected disclosures must be treated as confidential, it would not be appropriate for me to provide this information.

Annual Reports detailing the number of protected disclosures received between 2015 and 2017 are available on the Department's website. The Report for 2018 will be published no later than 30th June 2019.

### **Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland**

286. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the status of progress toward the publication of revised legislation in an area (details supplied). [11580/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland is required, as are all state bodies, to comply with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. The Code is designed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to ensure the highest standards of corporate governance in State Bodies.

The report referred to by the Deputy was a full organisational review of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland. It contained a number of recommendations, one of which was that the Department of Health should assess whether legislative changes are required in order to make the Fitness to Practice process more effective.

The recently published Regulated Health Professionals (Health and Social Care)(Amendment) Bill 2019 proposes a number of amendments to the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011 Act aimed at achieving this.

### **Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland**

287. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the changes made to the size and make-up of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, NMBI, board since the publication of a report in 2015 (details supplied). [11581/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The composition of the Board is set out in the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011. The membership is set to ensure the Board reflects the range of skills, competencies and experience required to enable it to fulfil its statutory obligations.

The report referred to by the Deputy was a full organisational review of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland. It contained a number of recommendations, one of which was that the Department of Health review the legislation governing the NMBI and consider a reduction in the size of the NMBI Board.

The membership of the Board is in line with other regulators under the aegis of this Department and, furthermore, has 23 members which is 21% less than that of its predecessor, An Board Altranais. In light of this, while the recommendation has not yet been progressed, it remains under review within the constraints of the pressing legislative demands of this Department.

### **Ambulance Service Accommodation**

288. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if emergency accommodation is provided by the HSE for nursing staff of St. Mary's Hospital in a building (details supplied); if so, the number of managers of the national ambulance service, NAS, who have used this accommodation facility in the past five years; the number of interns of the NAS who have used the facility in the past five years; if the attention of interns has been drawn to the fact that this facility is available; if not, the reason therefor; and the costs of using this facility [11582/19]

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

### **Ambulance Service Accommodation**

289. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a national ambulance service, NAS, paramedic intern used accommodation in a campsite due to the fact that the intern could not afford to rent accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11583/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am not in a position to comment on indi-

viduals cases such as that outlined by the Deputy.

However, I can respond in general terms about forthcoming increases in public service pay which will benefit all employees, including intern grades. In 2017, the Government agreed an overall Public Service Stability Agreement with public sector unions which sees very significant increases in public service pay, including for intern grades.

From January 2018, public service staff received a 1% pay rise with a further 1% increase in October 2018. In addition, staff earning up to €30,000 received a further 1% rise in January 2019. Pay increases still to come include a 1.75% cent increase in September 2019 for all staff. A further rise of 0.5% will be put in place for those on salaries of up to €32,000 in January 2020. Finally, all staff will get an additional 2% increase in October 2020.

### **Ambulance Service Staff**

290. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason overtime for intermediate care operative, ICO, grades in the national ambulance service, NAS, in Limerick has been discontinued. [11584/19]

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

### **Ambulance Service**

291. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the amount paid to private ambulances from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2018 in the Limerick area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11585/19]

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

### **Ambulance Service Staff**

292. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on the significant deterioration in bullying figures between the 2016 national ambulance service, NAS, survey and the survey carried out in 2018; and his further views on the levels of discrimination that have been highlighted in both surveys. [11586/19]

415. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health his views on the significant deterioration in bullying figures as contained in the NAS surveys carried out in 2016 and 2018; his further views on the levels of discrimination highlighted in both surveys; and his views on the fact only 9% of staff feel involved in decisions that affect them in their work. [12100/19]

449. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that more than 50% of staff responded to the NAS survey in 2016 and 28% responded to the 2018 survey; his views on whether this significant drop in engagement could be due to deteriorating morale within the service; his further views on whether the survey results relating to the service are significantly worse than those in other sections of the HSE; and his views on whether such survey results give the impression of a service in turmoil. [12240/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 292, 415 and 449 together.

The Deputies have raised a number of issues in relation to a Health Sector National Staff Survey which was carried out in 2016 and 2018. The purpose of the surveys was to measure employee sentiment and engagement within the publicly funded Health Sector.

As with all surveys, it raised a number of both positive and negative results. These results have prompted the National Ambulance Service to take a range of measures to address the areas where improvements could be made.

I am clear that bullying or harassment in any workplace must not be tolerated and any such instance must be addressed in accordance with the appropriate grievance and disciplinary policies and procedures. Any employee who experiences or witnesses work place bullying or harassment should be aware that they can report these instances under the Dignity at Work Policy for the Health Service.

The NAS is also developing anti bullying work place initiatives in line with the Positive Workplace Programme and bespoke sessions for the NAS are currently in development. Staff Health & Wellbeing initiatives and programmes are ongoing in the NAS as part of Healthy Ireland including significant focus on staff health initiatives such as mental wellbeing, physical activity, health checks and improving the workplace environment.

There are a number of other ongoing programmes and initiatives being undertaken and supported by the National Ambulance Service. For example, a number of NAS managers across the country have undertaken Leadership Development Programmes including Continuous Quality Improvement courses using the Lean Sigma process.

The NAS has also established a National Staff Engagement Forum as well as local Engagement Networks. The role of the Forum is to create a space for conversations about what matters to staff in terms of engagement and to gather suggestions on how to improve it by building on existing approaches and continually looking for new ways to engage staff.

In addition, the NAS has strengthened representative bodies and increased the number of NAS staff representation in order to provide further regular and scheduled discussion around areas such as improvement in internal and upward communication, raising awareness around dignity at work issues, and health and wellbeing initiatives.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

293. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when medical surgery will take place for a person (details supplied). [11590/19]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for sched-

uled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

### **Disability Services Provision**

294. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made on providing a person (details supplied) with an inpatient place at the National Rehabilitation Centre, Dún Laoghaire; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11592/19]

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

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

### **Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans**

295. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for scoliosis operations; the steps taken to reduce waiting times for these operations; if there has been an increase in the number of consultants dealing with patients with scoliosis and future plans to reduce waiting lists for children with scoliosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11598/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I sincerely regret that children can experience a long waiting time for treatment for scoliosis. I am conscious of the burden that this places on them and their families.

The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services from 2018 and into 2019 is a priority for me and for the HSE. Children's Health Ireland (CHI) advises that the impact of investment, and the implementation of the Scoliosis 10 Point Action Plan, is now starting to deliver results with a consistent reduction in waiting times being recorded.

Children's Health Ireland (CHI) also advises that the total number of surgeries performed in 2018 was 418 compared with 371 in 2017. This represents an increase in activity of 12% against 2017 and an increase in activity of almost 87% compared to 2016 when 224 procedures were carried out.

Furthermore, the number of patients on the waiting list for scoliosis related surgeries as of 01 March 2019 is 158, of which 87 are waiting for spinal fusion (see table). This is a reduction of 22 or 12% since Jan 2018

Since the beginning of 2018, there has been a 51% reduction in the number of children waiting over 4 months for surgery (from 74 at the start of 2018 to 36 as of 01 March 2019).

In addition, CHI advises that an additional 60 posts have been approved for 2018 and 2019, and in this context, it is currently recruiting two additional general orthopaedic consultants which will further reduce waiting times for children for an orthopaedic outpatient appointment.

More broadly, all patient referrals to the orthopaedic spinal service at CHI are reviewed and clinically prioritised by a consultant. These patients are seen in order of clinical priority. Most patients are seen within 12 months.

An additional 800 OPD appointments were given to patients in CHI at Crumlin in 2018 compared to 2017 which led to a 31% reduction in the overall orthopaedic outpatient waiting list.

Finally, the CHI will continue to work to reduce waiting times for children and young people attending orthopaedic and scoliosis services.

The following document provides details of the number of scoliosis surgeries performed to date this year along with the number of patients on waiting lists clinically deemed as requiring surgery as at 01 March 2019.

Total surgeries (inc. single & multiple stages) performed as of 1 March 2019

Week ending 01/03/2019	CHI at Crumlin	CHI at Temple Street	Cappagh Hos- pital	Total
Number of Spi- nal Fusion YTD	18	2	6	26
No. of Other Spinal Proce- dures YTD	18	11	4	33
Total	36	13	10	59

Total No. of patients on waiting lists clinically deemed as requiring surgery as of 1 March 2019

*Number of patients on waiting list waiting for scoliosis related surgeries. Includes active, pre-admit and planned procedures (excluding suspensions\*)*

	Number	Number waiting for other spinal procedures
CHI at Crumlin	63	43
CHI at Temple Street	13	28
Cappagh Hospital	11	0
Total	87	71

*\*suspensions are patients temporarily unavailable due to clinical or family reason*

### Hospitals Funding

296. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be provided to the national clinic in Beaumont Hospital that assists those affected by amyotrophic lateral sclerosis also known as motor neurone disease (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11599/19]

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

### Health Services Data

297. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the direct discharge rate to nursing homes for stroke patients from 2010 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11603/19]

**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.

### Health Services Data

298. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the average cost of keeping a stroke patient in long-term care assuming a mean three-year survival; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11604/19]

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

### Health Services Data

299. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of stroke patients who are admitted to a stroke unit; the number of stroke patients who receive treatment in a stroke unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11605/19]

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

### Health Services Data

300. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the thrombectomy service available here; the number of patients who have accessed this service; the five-year budget impact of moving from the service to a national thrombectomy service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11606/19]

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

### Stroke Care

301. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the costs associated with addressing the resource deficit in the provision of the thrombectomy services; the costs of addressing the infrastructural issues relating to the current neurointerventional radiology and thrombectomy equipment in Beaumont Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11607/19]

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

### **Stroke Care**

302. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of stroke beds here; the deficit that exists for the population on the basis of recommendations contained in the UK's national clinical guidelines for stroke; the number of stroke beds required to manage the predicted increase in stroke outlined by SAFE; the costs of meeting the staffing requirements for a singular stroke unit bed; the cost required to meet the increase in incidence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11608/19]

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

### **Stroke Care**

303. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the detail of capital projects in the national stroke programme that have been approved but which have not progressed due to lack of capital funding; the costings for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11609/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

### **Stroke Care**

304. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the recommended staffing per early supported discharge team under the national stroke programme; the costs of staff; the estimated cost of an ESD team here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11610/19]

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

### **Hospitals Discharges**

305. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of early supported discharge here; the number of operational ESD teams; the number of the teams that have the recommended staffing levels of an ESD; the staffing deficits that exist in each of the teams; the full year costs of the staffing required to fully staff the teams; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11611/19]

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

### **Stroke Care**

306. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated costs of a national roll-out of early supported discharge for stroke patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11612/19]

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

### **Stroke Care**

307. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will develop a new FAST media campaign to ensure national awareness of stroke symptoms among adults and ensure more persons get to hospital for treatment early thereby reducing disability after stroke and associated care required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11613/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Department of Health has no plans to commence the funding or running of the FAST media campaign. The selection, prioritisation and decisions on resource allocation associated with any media campaigns associated with a clinical condition is a service matter and as such is a decision for the HSE. The PQ has therefore been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Neuro-Rehabilitation Services Data**

308. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the costs associated with the implementation plan for the national neurorehabilitation strategy which outlines a ten step plan to develop neurorehabilitation services at hospital and community level nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11614/19]

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

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

### **Home Care Packages Data**

309. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons under 65 years of age that were in receipt of homecare packages in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11615/19]

**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.

### **National Clinical Programme for Heart Failure**

310. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of establishing a heart failure unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11616/19]

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

### **National Clinical Programme for Heart Failure**

311. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the planned review of the model of heart failure care; if an audit of existing service levels has been conducted; if there has been a service gap analysis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11617/19]

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

### **National Clinical Programme for Heart Failure**

312. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the geographical gaps that exist with respect to heart failure service; the costs associated with addressing this disparity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11618/19]

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

### **National Clinical Programme for Heart Failure**

313. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the costs associated with the national roll-out of heart failure integrated care projects in the community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11619/19]

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

### **National Clinical Programme for Heart Failure**

314. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the rehabilitation needs being met by cardiac rehabilitation services; the geographical disparities that exist with cardiac rehabilitation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11620/19]

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

### **National Clinical Programme for Heart Failure**

315. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the costs associated with providing national capacity for cardiac rehabilitation for persons for whom cardiac rehabilitation is recommended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11621/19]

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

## **National Clinical Programme for Heart Failure**

316. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the review undertaken by the national ACS working group of all PPCI and PCI centres nationally to assess strengths and weaknesses and steps necessary to maintain the ORS protocol and to introduce a NSTE-ACS protocol; the resources needed to implement the recommendations arising from it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11622/19]

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

## **Neuro-Rehabilitation Services Provision**

317. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the introduction of brain injury identity cards here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11623/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I thank the Deputy for his question and for his interest in the matter.

I am pleased to note that on 20 February, the HSE published the Implementation Framework of the National Strategy & Policy for the Provision of Neuro-Rehabilitation Services in Ireland. This was the culmination of the work of the National Steering Group established in 2017, and I thank them for their work. The Steering Group included representation from stakeholder groups including the Neurological Alliance of Ireland. The ultimate goal is to put in place a national framework of acute, in-patient and community based specialist rehabilitation services.

The Health Service Executive provides specialist services for people with a variety of disabilities, including those with Acquired Brain Injury, either directly or through service agreements with appropriate organisations. I am familiar with the cards that the deputy is referring to. Brain Injury Identity cards are a means for people with an Acquired Brain Injury to communicate; the cards are intended to inform others, so that they can better assist the person as they go about their daily lives.

Any decision to introduce Brain Injury Identity Cards would be a matter for the HSE to consider in the context of the Neuro-Rehabilitation Implementation framework and the actions arising from it.

## **Health Services Provision**

318. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11634/19]

**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.

## **Health Services Provision**

319. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the services which will be

provided for a person (details supplied); if psychiatric, dietary and occupational therapy services will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11635/19]

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

### **Abortion Legislation**

320. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the status of the work of the group established under the chairmanship of the chief medical officer to consider the issues raised by the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution in its ancillary recommendations; the number of times the group has met; the membership of the group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11641/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Work on progressing the ancillary recommendations on contraception made by the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution is a priority for 2019. As such, a new Working Group is to be formally established within the Department to examine the matter and make appropriate policy recommendations.

The Working Group will consider the range of policy, regulatory and legislative issues related to improving access to contraception and will include representatives from all relevant policy areas within the Department to ensure a comprehensive and integrated approach is taken. The group will also draw on appropriate advice and expertise from the HSE and other relevant stakeholders as necessary. The group is scheduled to begin its work in April 2019.

### **General Practitioner Services Provision**

321. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter regarding out of hours doctors in County Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11649/19]

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

### **Hospital Staff Data**

322. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospital managers and CEOs educated to MBA level or equivalent; and the number who have been funded to acquire such a qualification since 2016. [11656/19]

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

### **National Children's Hospital**

323. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the ownership of the land now being used for the national children's hospital prior to the land in question being acquired for the site. [11667/19]

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

324. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of scheduled treatments and procedures cancelled in all acute hospitals in 2018. [11670/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

325. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an operation on their spine; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11676/19]

**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.

### **Cross-Border Health Services Provision**

326. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a repayment for an operation received through the cross-border directive; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11679/19]

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

### **Cross-Border Health Services Provision**

327. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the amount expended by the HSE on services provided under the cross-border directive that resulted in claims being made to the HSE in each year since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11680/19]

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

ferred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Cross-Border Health Services Provision**

328. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the number and value of claims in process by the HSE for reimbursement under the cross-border directive; the average delay in paying claims; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11681/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE operates the Cross Border Directive in Ireland. Patients in Ireland can seek to be referred to another EU/EEA country for medical treatment that is available in the public health service in Ireland. The patient may access the overseas service in either the public or private health sector of the country they choose to receive the service in. The patient pays for the treatment and claims reimbursement from the HSE at the cost of that treatment in Ireland or the cost of it abroad, whichever is the lesser.

The HSE's target for reimbursing patients for healthcare accessed abroad under the CBD is a maximum of 20 working days from receiving all the completed documents. However, the HSE confirmed that it currently takes approximately 64 days to process reimbursements. The HSE have confirmed the increase in processing times is due to a significant increase in the amount of applications received for the CBD.

As it is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on the number and value of claims for reimbursement under the Cross Border Directive.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists Data**

329. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time for MRI scans in Galway University Hospital by category of urgency; the steps proposed to be taken to reduce the waiting time for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11682/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Facilities**

330. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take with the HSE to provide a kidney dialysis unit at Ennis General Hospital thereby reducing significant transport costs associated with taking patients to hospitals in counties Limerick and Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11684/19]

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

*Question No. 331 answered with Question No. 255.*

### **Hospital Appointments Administration**

332. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have a follow-up appointment with the dermatology unit at University Hospital Waterford;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11698/19]

**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.

### **Counselling Services Provision**

333. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who availed of the counselling in primary care service in each year since its inception; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11703/19]

**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.

### **Counselling Services Provision**

334. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of extending eligibility for the counselling in primary care service to all adult general practitioner card holders. [11705/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** The Counselling in Primary Care (CIPC) service was established in July 2013 to provide counselling for patients experiencing mild to moderate psychological difficulties who present in the primary care setting. All adults in receipt of a medical card are eligible for the service. Access to this service is by referral from the client's GP or a member of the Primary Care Team. All clients referred to CIPC are requested to opt into the service before they are allocated to a counsellor and an appointment is then offered.

Under Section 58 of the Health Act 1970 (as amended) the HSE can make available a GP visit card to eligible persons. This card enables eligible persons to visit a participating GP free of charge. No other health or social services, such as counselling, are provided by this card.

As of 1 February (latest figures available) 506,283 individuals hold eligibility for a GP visit card. This figure also includes GP visit cards which are provided on a discretionary basis.

As the part of this question in relation to full year costs is a service matter, I am referring that section to the HSE and I have asked them to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

## **Counselling Services Provision**

335. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of extending eligibility for the counselling in primary care service to all children whose families qualify for a medical card and to all children whose families qualify for a general practitioner card, respectively. [11706/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Counselling services for children in primary care aims to ensure that adolescents and young people with mild to moderate mental health needs can access services in their local communities in a timely manner. The service is suitable for children who are experiencing certain difficulties such as depression, anxiety, panic reactions, relationship problems, loss issues, stress. A medical card is not required in order to access these services.

A national pilot programme involving the recruitment of staff grade psychologists and assistant psychologists has been introduced in order to improve access to counselling services for children in primary care settings.

*Questions Nos. 336 to 338, inclusive, answered with Question No. 255.*

## **Hospital Staff**

339. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of conferring consultant status on specialists in public health medicine here further to a report (details supplied). [11713/19]

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

## **Cannabis for Medicinal Use**

340. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter regarding medication for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11714/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy will be aware, I cannot respond to questions regarding individuals, however the following information may be of assistance.

This question raises a query over a PQ reply that was recently issued to Deputy Stephen Donnelly, and specifically that it indicated that the forthcoming Cannabis Access Programme (CAP) would be aligned with the existing Ministerial licence system, whereby patients access medical cannabis products currently from a pharmacy in The Hague.

The reply to the Deputy's PQ indicated that the Ministerial licence application scheme will continue "to operate in parallel" with the CAP after the CAP becomes operational, for exceptional cases only, where there is an unmet clinical need. The reply did not use the word "align".

While both the CAP and the Ministerial licence route might run in parallel initially, it is possible that some of the patients currently using the Ministerial licence route might be subsumed into the CAP, should their treating clinician decide to change their current prescribed cannabis medication to a product that will be provided under the CAP. It may not be possible for all the

current Ministerial licence holders to transfer immediately into the CAP, however this will be based on a clinical decision.

It is envisaged that over a period, a variety of medical cannabis products, both THC and CBD and manufactured by multiple producers, would be available for use in the CAP.

Travel to The Hague to obtain Bedrocan medical cannabis product after the CAP is introduced may be a necessity for some licence holders and their patients. Due to current Netherlands government policy, Bedrocan products as oil formulations are not permitted to be commercially exported from the Netherlands, but are only supplied in The Hague on foot of a valid medical prescription to the appropriate pharmacy. Notwithstanding the fact that Bedrocan products might ultimately be listed as products that could be accessed under the CAP, until the export barrier is removed by the Netherlands government, anyone who is prescribed Bedrocan oils under the CAP, will have to travel to the Hague to access it.

It is open to any patient to discuss their current prescribed medication with their clinician, and consider whether it might be possible to change it to a product that will be provided under the CAP. To reiterate, this is a clinical decision and as Minister for Health I have no role to play in it.

The Department of Health website contains detailed information on medical cannabis, including clinical guidance on the use of medical cannabis and details on how a medical practitioner may apply for a Ministerial licence. This information can be found at: [health.gov.ie/blog/publications/cannabis-for-medical-use](http://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/cannabis-for-medical-use).

With reference to the fact that in the UK a distribution company is being used to get Bedrocan medication delivered to patients in the UK. I understand that this company is acting as the patient's "nominated representative" in the collection of medical cannabis products. No similar Irish entity is known to the Department to provide this service, but it is certainly open to licence holders to engage someone to carry out a collection service.

Finally, I understand that the Transvaal pharmacy in the Hague has confirmed to the Department of Health that there are no supply issues with THC and CBD Bedrocan products to patients and that a three-month supply can be obtained.

### **Home Help Service Provision**

341. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a further assessment will be arranged for a person (details supplied) in County Cork who requires additional home help hours. [11715/19]

**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**

342. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11716/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Ser-

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

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

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

*Questions Nos. 343 and 344 answered with Question No. 255.*

### **Drug and Alcohol Testing**

345. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the establishment of a working group to examine drug testing at nightclubs and music festivals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11720/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** Government policy in relation to drug and alcohol addiction services is set out in the national drugs strategy, Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery—a health led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025 (RHSR).

There is a specific action in RHSR which commits the HSE to establishing a working group to examine the evidence in relation to early harm reduction responses including drug checking at festivals, amnesty bins and media campaigns, current and emerging trends in relation to the use of new psychoactive substances and image and performance enhancing drugs.

It is anticipated that the HSE will establish this working group in Quarter 2 of 2019. It is also anticipated that the working group will draw together the relevant stakeholders and examine the available evidence and best practice models from other countries.

### **Medical Card Administration**

346. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the reason medical card holders in County Wexford no longer receive appointments with a medical centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11723/19]

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

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

347. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of extra home support for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11741/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

### **Abortion Services Provision**

348. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE helpline providing information on terminations will have a facility for deaf persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11766/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

349. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the way in which funding issues for residential care for a person (details supplied) will be addressed; if the HSE received correspondence from the person's psychologist regarding the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11767/19]

**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**

350. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11772/19]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for sched-

uled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

351. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a matter (details supplied) regarding Orkambi; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11775/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Eligibility for public health services in Ireland is subject to the criteria of being ‘ordinarily resident’ in the State. ‘Ordinarily resident’ means a person is living in the State or can provide evidence that he/she intends to remain in the State for at least one year.

The Health Service Executive is responsible for assessing if a person meets the ‘ordinarily resident’ criteria.

Should the Deputy wish to provide the person’s contact details, including her Irish address, I will forward to the HSE for examination and direct reply to the Deputy. Alternatively, the person should contact her local area health office for advice on entitlement to public health services in Ireland.

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

352. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been brought to a shortage of a medication (details supplied); the efforts under way to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11782/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In Ireland, the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the competent authority for the regulation of medicines. The Agency’s role includes monitoring and inspecting medicinal products on the market to ensure their safety, efficacy and legality. The HPRA also leads the co-ordination of efforts by national agencies and stakeholders to manage medicine shortages.

I am informed that the supplier of this product has confirmed that there is currently no shortage of Risperdal® 2mg tablets (which contains the active ingredient risperidone) in Ireland.

However, the HPRA was made aware of a shortage of another medicine containing risperidone 4mg from a different supplier in February. This may have resulted in an increased demand for risperidone 4mg and 2mg tablets from other suppliers. However, there have been no reports of shortages of any other medicine containing risperidone. That said, some localised issues may arise for a period of time as stock levels return to normal throughout the system.

Unfortunately, medicines shortages do arise from time to time for a number of different reasons and are a feature of health systems around the world. The shortage of the risperidone 4mg product was not as a result of Brexit. I can confirm that no shortages currently affecting the Irish market are attributable to Brexit.

The Government does not anticipate an immediate impact on medicine supplies should there be a no deal Brexit on 29 March. There are already additional stocks of medicines built

into the Irish medicine supply chain, and these additional stocks, together with planning by Revenue to allow fast-tracking of essential medicines into Ireland, will help deal with any delays that may arise.

It is important to note that there is no need for any patient to order extra quantities of medicines or for doctors to issue additional prescriptions, as this could disrupt existing stock levels and hamper the supply of medicines for other patients.

Risperdal®, and other medicines containing the active ingredient risperidone, have been designated as interchangeable by the HPRA. Interchangeable medicines contain the same active ingredient, in the same strength, and therefore other brands containing risperidone may be safely switched to if necessary. If a patient has any concerns regarding their treatment with this or any other medicine, I would encourage them to discuss this directly with their doctor or pharmacist.

### **Disability Support Services Provision**

353. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a new respite service recently opened in Dundalk, County Louth, is not fully wheelchair accessible; if funding will be made available to make this facility fully wheelchair accessible and suitably staffed to deal with the needs of those who seek the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11784/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications**

354. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the status of a fair deal application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11807/19]

**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.

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

355. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the target date for the opening of the new 60-bed modular unit at University Hospital Limerick; the target date for the opening of the new permanent 90-bed structure at the hospital; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [11836/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

### **Hospital Facilities**

356. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of the new diabetes treatment centre at Sligo University Hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11837/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

### **HSE Properties**

357. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health if a decision has been made regarding the future use of a building (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11841/19]

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

### **Care of the Elderly Provision**

358. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will be transferred to a nursing home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11846/19]

**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.

### **Patient Transport Data**

359. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent by the HSE on taxis in each of the years 2011 to 2018, in tabular form; the reason for using taxis for patient transfer, transfer of paper files between hospitals and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11848/19]

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

### **Patient Transport Data**

360. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent on private ambulances by each hospital in each of the years 2011 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11849/19]

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

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Expenditure**

361. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the contracts in place in the HSE for recycling various medical products such as crutches, walking aids, Zimmer frames, wheelchairs and other aids to assist persons; the amount paid in respect of collecting and refurbishing for recycling purposes in each of the category of items involved per unit; the process in place by which these items are reused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11866/19]

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

### **Occupational Therapy Data**

362. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding children in County Wexford with autism accessing occupational therapy; the number on the waiting list; the number waiting more than six and 12 months, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11872/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Applications**

363. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of a hoist at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11880/19]

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

### **Home Care Packages Data**

364. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of intensive home care packages for persons with dementia allocated in 2018, by CHO in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11881/19]

**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.

### Treatment Abroad Scheme

365. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in County Waterford who applied for the treatment abroad scheme in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11882/19]

**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.

### Hospital Waiting Lists Data

366. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for a cataract operation at University Hospital Waterford for longer than six, 12 and 18 months, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11883/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** 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.

Budget 2019 announced that the Government had further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the NTPF increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019.

The joint Department of Health/HSE/NTPF Scheduled Care Access Plan 2019 was published on Monday. The plan sets out measures to improve care for patients waiting for scheduled care in 2019 by reducing wait times for inpatient/day case treatment and outpatient appointments and will place a strong focus on a number of high-volume procedures including cataracts. When combined with HSE activity it is projected that the NTPF will be in a position to offer treatment to all clinically suitable patients waiting more than 6 months for one of these procedures.

The NTPF will deliver 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 University Hospital Waterford, to continue to collaborate with the NTPF to identify waiting list initiatives.

The data requested by the deputy is contained in the following table.

Cataract IPDC waiting list in UHW – patients waiting over 6, 12, 18 months

6 months +	12 months +	18 months +	Total Waiters
531	70	33	1211

### Hospital Procedures

367. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who had elective surgery cancelled or rescheduled more than once in 2017 and 2018 at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11884/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### Hospital Appointments Delays

368. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting follow-up appointments for knee and hip operations at University Hospital Waterford in 2017 and 2018, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11885/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** 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 committed to improving waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures.

Budget 2019 announced that the Government had further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the NTPF increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019.

The joint Department of Health/HSE/NTPF Scheduled Care Access Plan 2019 was published on Monday. The plan sets out measures to improve care for patients waiting for scheduled care in 2019 by reducing wait times for inpatient/day case treatment and outpatient appointments and will place a strong focus on Orthopaedics.

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 addition, the NTPF 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 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 University Hospital Waterford, to collaborate with the NTPF to identify waiting list initiatives.

The data requested by the Deputy is contained in the following table.

Orthopaedic Outpatient waiting list in UHW – 2017 & 2018

Year	No.
2017	6646
2018	6321

### Home Care Packages Data

369. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of home help hours allocated under the home care package in each of the years 2016 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11886/19]

**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.

### **Psychological Services**

370. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to assist the estimated 150,000 adults here who may be undiagnosed and untreated for ADHD; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11888/19]

**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.

### **Psychological Services**

371. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the shortage of psychiatrists diagnosing adults with ADHD here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11889/19]

**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.

### **Psychological Services**

372. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to create a viable assessment and treatment pathway for adults with ADHD here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11890/19]

**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.

### **Psychological Services**

373. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 290 of 11 December 2018, if funding will be released to the HSE for the provision of three multidisciplinary ADHD clinics here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11891/19]

**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.

## HSE Properties

374. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the details of all current and proposed HSE operational lease infrastructural projects here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11892/19]

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

## Ambulance Service

375. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his views on the dynamic deployment method AMPDS system that is being used by the NAS control centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11898/19]

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

## Ambulance Service Data

376. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulances that have been deployed to calls that are between 50 km and 100 km away from the location they received the call; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11899/19]

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

## Ambulance Service Data

377. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulances that have been deployed to calls that are between 100 km and 150 km away from the location they received the call; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11900/19]

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

## Ambulance Service Data

378. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulances that have been deployed to calls that are over 150 km away from the location they received the call; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11901/19]

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

## Ambulance Service Data

379. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the categories of calls in respect of the number of ambulances that have been deployed to between 100 km and 150 km away from the location they received the call; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11902/19]

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

#### **Ambulance Service Staff**

380. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if the AMPDS system has a facility to allocate crews a rest break; if not, the system used to ensure crews have their mandatory rest breaks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11903/19]

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

#### **Ambulance Service Staff**

381. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether driver fatigue is an issue in the NAS; the number of ambulance crews in 2018 that had to discontinue their shift due to fatigue; the number of incidents in which ambulance crews and-or managers had to recover them and provide assistance to get them back to their station's base; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11904/19]

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

#### **Ambulance Service Staff**

382. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if staff are being deducted pay from their core salary after having availed of mandatory compensatory rest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11905/19]

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

#### **Ambulance Service**

383. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the progress made between the HSE and his Department regarding meetings between both in respect of the ongoing ambulance service dispute; the resolution he has found; when he plans to inform, update or invite a union (details supplied) into the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11906/19]

421. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the progress made between the HSE and his Department regarding meetings about the ongoing ambulance service dispute; and when he plans to inform, update or invite a union (details supplied) into the process. [12106/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 383 and 421 together.

As we are aware, a branch of the Psychiatric Nurses Association called the National Ambulance Service Representative Association (NASRA) has been engaged in Industrial action.

The PNA state that their industrial action is in connection with the automated deduction of union subscriptions and a refusal by the HSE to engage in negotiations with the PNA or to recognise the PNA as union representatives when representing its ambulance personnel members.

To be clear, NASRA, which is affiliated with the PNA, is a group which is not recognised by the HSE and therefore does not have negotiating rights. The PNA do not have negotiating rights for ambulance personnel.

The HSE deducts subscriptions at source for those ambulance staff that are members of SIPTU, FORSA and UNITE. This is not a legal right but a concession granted to recognised unions.

While it is regrettable that the PNA has taken this action, it is not possible to negotiate with a union which is not recognised as having negotiating rights for ambulance grades. In saying that, I am keen to see an end to this dispute. Officials from my Department have met with representatives of the HSE and the management of NAS to explore possible options. This is a complex, challenging situation however, I remain confident that a solution can and will be found.

### **Hospital Services**

384. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health if the newly opened 12-bed short-stay surgical ward at University Hospital Limerick is being used by non-surgical patients to alleviate overcrowding in the emergency department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11911/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE National Escalation Framework consists of a tiered and incremental suite of actions intended to be adapted and implemented in Hospitals with an Emergency Department (ED) and the wider Local Health Economy as part of an inter-disciplinary, multi-provider system response to avoid Emergency Department overcrowding. It requires that local strategies and plans are in place to understand and respond to surges in demand in a responsive and planned way that meets national access and quality standards and underpins patient safety.

With regard to the specific question, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Services**

385. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the policy on accepting or rejecting corporate sponsorship from the fast food industry for hospitals and hospital related facilities; if fast food outlets operating within hospitals are banned here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11912/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The Deputy's question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for their direct reply.

## **Home Care Packages Provision**

386. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if a home care package will be provided to a person (details supplied). [11925/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

*Question No. 387 answered with Question No. 255.*

## **Services for People with Disabilities**

388. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 136 of 23 October 2018, the action being taken to resolve a situation (details supplied). [11976/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

## **Health Services Staff Data**

389. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if the educational psychologist vacancy has been filled in the school age team in the Dublin south-west area; if the dedicated team manager position has been filled; if the psychologist position has been fully filled; if the speech and language position has been filled permanently; if the occupational therapist position has been filled; if the social worker positions have been filled; and the number of the 100 new therapy posts allocated to CHO7. [11986/19]

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

## Services for People with Disabilities

390. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) can apply for private financial assistance through the HSE; and the way in which the person can apply for financial support if available. [12017/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

### Hospital Staff Recruitment

391. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the method of recruitment of internationally trained non-consultant hospital doctors here; the number of non-consultant hospital doctor positions filled by doctors trained here and internationally, respectively; the number of positions advertised; and the number left vacant in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019. [12022/19]

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

### Hospital Staff Recruitment

392. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the way in which internationally trained non-consultant hospital doctors' qualifications are assessed and evaluated; and the agency responsible for the oversight of same. [12023/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Medical Council (Council) is the regulatory state body for all registered medical practitioners. It has a statutory role in protecting the public by promoting the highest professional standards among medical practitioners practising in the Republic of Ireland. It is responsible for setting the standards of medical education and training in Ireland and it maintains a register of all doctors who are legally permitted to practise in Ireland.

The Medical Practitioners Act 2007 (MPA) is the legislation governing the Council's work and determines the Divisions of the Register and the terms and conditions for registration of doctors on the Register. Section 7 of the MPA sets out the functions of the Council, one of which is to establish procedures and criteria for registration including the issue of certificates of registration and renewal of registration.

In order for a medical practitioner to practice medicine in Ireland they must be registered with the Council.

All EEA nationals can avail of the recognition of professional qualifications laid down in Directive 2005/36/EC which enables the free movement of professionals and sets the rules for automatic recognition for professions with harmonised minimum training conditions such as doctors. The Medical Practitioners Act also provides for the registration of a medical practitioner who is a national of a Member State who has been awarded a qualification in medicine or a certificate of acquired rights by a competent body or authority designated for that purpose by a Member State, pursuant to Directive 2005/36/EC.

All doctors who graduate from non-EU/EEA countries may be required to sit the Council's Pre-Registration Examination System (PRES). The purpose of the PRES is to assess a doctors' competence in two areas; Clinical Knowledge and Clinical Skills.

In 2016, the Council made the PRES easier for applicants outside of Europe to apply for registration. Instead of having to pass the PRES Level 2 exam, applicants were required to provide evidence as part of their initial application for registration that they had passed an acceptable equivalent exam. The Council accepted 4 alternative examinations in lieu of the Level 2:

Professional and Linguistic - Assessment Board (PLAB), Part 1

- United States Medical - Licencing Exam (USMLE), Steps 1 and 2

- Medical Council of Canada - Evaluating Examination (MCCEE)

- Australian Medical Council - (AMC) MCQ Exam

Applicants applying with a pass in one of these examinations could directly access the PRES Level 3 (OSCE) exam.

The PRES Level 3 is an assessment of doctors' clinical skills, knowledge and attitude in the main clinical disciplines of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Paediatrics, Psychiatry, Surgery, Medicine and General Practice. The Level 3 is also based on the Eight Domains of Good Professional Practice as devised by the Council. It is assessed through an Objective Structured Clinical Exam (OSCE) and a written 'Data Interpretation' paper, which is a one-hour long test involving interpretation of laboratory results, X-Ray images, ECG's etc.

There are three types of skills being assessed namely Practical, Communication and Interpretation. The cases that are used represent the kinds of patients and medical conditions normally encountered during medical practice in Ireland and are specifically designed to demonstrate, through the process of examining a candidate's practical, communication, and interpretation skills, the examinee's clinical ability.

The pass mark for this exam is standard set using the 'modified Angoff' method for the data paper and 'borderline regression' for the OSCE. Candidates are expected to meet a level equivalent to an Irish graduate at end of intern year.

### **Health Services Staff Training**

393. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health if there is a difference in the clinical performance between non-consultant hospital doctors trained here and internationally, respectively; and the way in which this is assessed and addressed. [12024/19]

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

### **Health Services Staff Data**

394. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health if the dependency of Ireland on internationally trained non-consultant hospital doctors has grown or reduced between 2010 and 2018 and to date in 2019; and the reason therefor. [12025/19]

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

### **Health Services Data**

395. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health when a unique identifier will be introduced for patients here; and the reason for the delay in the introduction of same. [12026/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Individual Health Identifier (IHI) is a key aspect of the eHealth strategy and has a legal basis in the Health Identifiers Act 2014. Under the Health Identifiers Act 2014 (Delegation of Relevant Functions) Order 2015, the HSE have responsibility for implementing the IHI which is a long term project intended to be phased into a number of national systems on a periodic basis over the coming years. As the implementation of the IHI is a matter for the HSE, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Provision**

396. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the grant schemes for items (details supplied) available through his Department or the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12028/19]

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

### **Alcohol Pricing**

397. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if a revised decision on minimum unit pricing in the event of an extension to Article 50 will be committed to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12029/19]

398. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason for delaying minimum unit pricing pending further clarity on Brexit in view of the fact that statistics show the level of cross-Border trade has not increased between 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12030/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 397 and 398 together.

It remains my intention to seek a revised Government Decision to implement Minimum Unit Pricing after the existing date for the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union has passed and there will be more certainty about the outcome of that process.

### **Home Care Packages Data**

399. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the status of a home care application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12035/19]

**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.

### **Cross-Border Health Services Provision**

400. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an application under the cross border scheme by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [12053/19]

**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.

### **Hospital Staff Data**

401. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacancies in a hospital (details supplied) unfilled or filled on a temporary basis by category. [12055/19]

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

### **Health Services Staff Data**

402. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the number of internationally trained non-consultant hospital doctors who were or are registered and working in hospitals here in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by hospital group. [12059/19]

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

### **Generic Drugs Substitution**

403. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the actions he is taking to increase the use of biosimilar drugs in order to get more value for money; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12060/19]

**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%.

The HSE is also working on identifying barriers to the prescribing of biosimilars with a specific focus on education and support. It is seeking to increase understanding of biosimilars through targeted presentations to clinicians and hospitals.

The culmination of these initiatives is a greater uptake in the usage of biosimilars and this is evident by hospital dispensing data. For example, the prescribing rate for the biosimilar drug Infliximab has increased from 5% in 2017 to 40% in 2018.

My Department proposes to build on these positive developments and to bring forward a policy that would support and complement the many initiatives which are already underway.

### **Respite Care Services Funding**

404. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if efforts have been made to increase the funding for respite care services for children in care with disabilities. [12068/19]

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

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

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

### **Disability Services Provision**

405. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if his Department or agencies under his remit have conducted a systematic review of the supports and services being offered in a case (details supplied) which was reviewed in 2018. [12069/19]

406. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if his Department or agencies under his remit have conducted a review of the services and supports which are offered to children in care who have disabilities; and if so, if this report will be published. [12070/19]

407. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if his Department or agencies under his remit have developed performance metrics to monitor and measure the outcomes of children in care with disabilities. [12071/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 405 to 407, inclusive, together.

The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in ac-

cessing 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.

### **Cross-Border Health Services Provision**

408. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an application for cross-border assistance will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [12074/19]

**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.

### **Hospital Staff Data**

409. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacancies unfilled or filled on a temporary basis in Cavan General Hospital; and the details of each by categories. [12084/19]

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

### **Medical Card Eligibility**

410. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if the income thresholds will be raised for medical card means tests (details supplied). [12085/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health Service Executive (HSE) issues income guidelines to assist in determining entitlement to medical cards/GP visit cards. Any revision to the income thresholds must have regard for Government policy, increases in the Consumer Price Index and other issues which may be relevant.

While there are no plans at present to revise the income thresholds for medical cards, it is vitally important that the medical card system is responsive and sensitive to people's needs. In that regard my Department keeps medical card issues, including existing thresholds under constant review. It should be noted that the gross medical card limits for the over 70s are reviewed annually in line with the Consumer Price Index.

The Deputy may be aware that Budget 2019 made provision for a 10% increase across all GP visit card thresholds. This measure will be implemented on 1st April 2019.

### **Speech and Language Therapy Provision**

411. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time for a speech

and language therapy appointment for children in County Meath. [12091/19]

**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.

### **National Drugs Strategy Implementation**

412. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the degree to which each of the 50 actions of the national drugs strategy has been implemented; the timeline for the implementation of each outstanding action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12093/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** It is just over 18 months since the Government launched the national drug strategy 'Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery - A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017 - 2025' (RHSR). RHSR sets out the Government's health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland up to 2025. The strategy contains a 50 point Action Plan from 2017 to 2020 and provides the scope to develop further actions between 2021 and 2025 to ensure the continued relevance of the strategy to emerging needs into the future.

My officials recently presented the progress report on the Strategy for 2018 and the planned activity for 2019 to the National Oversight Committee (NOC), which I chair.

This Committee has representatives from all relevant Government Departments, State Agencies, Drug and Alcohol Task Forces, Voluntary Organisations and community representatives. Its remit is to give leadership, direction, prioritisation and mobilisation of resources to support the implementation of the Strategy.

The progress report will be reviewed on an ongoing basis during 2019 by a standing sub-committee. Progress will be further reported through Cabinet Committee B, chaired by An Taoiseach and the associated senior officials group.

Next year will see the launch of a mid-term evaluation of the Strategy. This will allow all stakeholders the opportunity to reflect on progress on implementing the Strategy and to identify what new actions may be required for period up to 2025.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Provision**

413. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is not entitled to assistance towards the cost of a cushion and shoes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12095/19]

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

### **Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists**

414. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 161 of 24 January 2019, the breakdown of orthodontic patients waiting less than two years for treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12098/19]

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

*Question No. 415 answered with Question No. 292.*

### **Ambulance Service Staff**

416. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the level to which staffing levels in the national ambulance service need to fall to before it is considered a national emergency; and the point at which the Army could be called to assist the service [12101/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Over recent years significant investment has been made in the National Ambulance Service (NAS) both to build capacity and to reconfigure the management and delivery of pre-hospital emergency care services. The objective is to develop a clinically driven nationally co-ordinated system, supported by improved technology.

In relation to the specific operational issue raised I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

### **Ambulance Service Staff**

417. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the number of complaints received during 2018 from staff in the north-east national ambulance service regarding failure to be given a break during their shift. [12102/19]

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

### **Ambulance Service Accommodation**

418. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulance stations nationally in which there have been reports of rat, mice or other rodent infestation in 2018; the actions taken on such matters; and if there have been incidents in which staff have had to vacate due to such infestations. [12103/19]

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

### **Ambulance Service Accommodation**

419. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason staff were moved from the ambulance station in UCHG to Merlin Park and then subsequently moved back out. [12104/19]

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

### **Ambulance Service**

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420. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if a health and safety report was carried out on the ambulance based in UCHG; if a report was also carried out by HIQA; if the reports have been made available to the local health and safety representative in the ambulance base; and if a copy will be made available. [12105/19]

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

*Question No. 421 answered with Question No. 383.*

### **Hospital Procedures**

422. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health the number of elective surgeries and procedures cancelled by specialty at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, by each month in 2017 and 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12108/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Ambulance Service Provision**

423. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the amount the HSE spent on the provision of private ambulances from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2018. [12122/19]

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

### **Ambulance Service Staff**

424. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the collective agreement between the recognised unions and the HSE regarding paramedic ICO locations; and if there have been adverse incidents regarding this agreement. [12123/19]

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

### **Ambulance Service Staff**

425. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health his views in whether ICO staff should progress to paramedic training and compete for training with members of the public. [12124/19]

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

### **Ambulance Service Staff**

426. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if the current roster is the minimum staffing level for ICO nationally. [12125/19]

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

### **Ambulance Service Staff**

427. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that paramedics in the national ambulance service are being refused payment for attending court when summoned by the court to give evidence on behalf of the State; his views on whether the HSE may be in breach of its financial regulations on the matter; and if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that paramedics are being sent to alternative State agencies to retrieve payment contrary to the HSE financial regulations policy. [12126/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to operational issues, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

### **Public Procurement Contracts**

428. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the OJEU notice under which the contract for the provision of a national agency vendor management system to manage its recruitment agency framework was awarded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12130/19]

429. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health when the contract for the provision of a national agency vendor management system was awarded to a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12131/19]

431. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the duration of the HSE contract with a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12133/19]

432. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the number of other companies that tendered for the vendor management system contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12134/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 428, 429, 431 and 432 together.

As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Departmental Funding**

430. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the financial consideration that has been afforded for the use of a system (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12132/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** My Department has never used nor had any dealings in respect of the system indicated.

*Question Nos. 431 and 432 answered with Question No. 428.*

### **National Children's Hospital**

433. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health if all fire certifications are in place and approved for the underground car park for the national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12135/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) has statutory responsibility for planning, designing, building and equipping the new children's hospital and outpatient and urgent care centres. I have asked the NPHDB to respond to you directly.

### **National Children's Hospital**

434. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health if fire certifications relevant to the underground car park at the new national children's hospital include approval for the parking of large numbers of electric vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12136/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) has statutory responsibility for planning, designing, building and equipping the new children's hospital and outpatient and urgent care centres. I have asked the NPHDB to respond to you directly.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

435. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a MRI scan will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [12142/19]

**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 Staff**

436. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn

to a cost to those using emergency accommodation provided by the HSE for nursing staff of a hospital (details supplied) over the past five years. [12149/19]

**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 Transfers**

437. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect to be transferred from Letterkenny University Hospital to the St. Conal's rehabilitation unit in Letterkenny, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12151/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Admissions**

438. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect to be admitted to the National Rehabilitation Hospital, Dún Laoghaire; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12152/19]

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

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

### **Hospital Charges**

439. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in refunding the costs of a hip operation carried out in London on a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12155/19]

**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.

### **General Data Protection Regulation**

440. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to concerns in relation to the impact of the general data protection regulation and health research regulations on the ability to undertake clinical research; if researchers here are being put in a unique position which differs substantially from other European countries and may deprive

persons here of timely access to potentially life saving treatments and making Ireland less attractive to pharmaceutical companies engaged in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12160/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a European Union wide regulation protecting citizens' personal data from improper use across the spectrum of recording, processing, usage and storage, to include data for health research. To this end, it is a welcome regulation, providing harmonisation across EU member states and protecting the fundamental rights and freedoms of our populations. GDPR came into effect in May 2018, having provided all data controllers with a two-year lead-in phase to review processes and procedures of data protection.

The GDPR is not the first time that principles and requirements were set out for data protection in Ireland. There has been data protection legislation since 1988. In the previous legislation, informed consent was a key requirement for the processing of data for research purposes whereas in GDPR it is called explicit consent - the only difference in interpretation being that GDPR stresses that explicit consent must be clear and unambiguous and that a researcher must be able to provide evidence of the consent secured should they be asked to present it.

While both the GDPR and Ireland's subsequent Data Protection Act 2018 mentioned health research, both had a broader remit and specific regulations were required to provide clarity for health researchers. The Data Protection Act 2018 (Section 36(2)) (Health Research) Regulations 2018 sought to provide safeguards for Article 9(2) of GDPR, providing certainty to the health research community with regard to processing of special categories of personal data and the necessity of obtaining explicit consent from individuals for their inclusion in health research. As such, the Health Research Regulations (HRR) provide a framework for current practices in this country that are standard, or at least are expected to be standard, and as such should not be onerous on the research community.

However, in highlighting that explicit consent should continue to be sought and secured for the purposes of processing personal data for health research purposes, the Department was very aware that there are situations which arise where securing consent is either impossible or impracticable for various reasons. Therefore, the HRR importantly contains an innovation in Irish law (the establishment of the Health Research Consent Declaration Committee- HRCDC) to directly address these situations where consent for a health research project is of significant public importance but where it is not possible to obtain consent. This is a major development that will certainly benefit those carrying out important health research who could not secure explicit consent, and it will provide them with a mechanism to put forward their proposal and to secure a lawful decision from the Committee.

Far from seeking to make Ireland a restrictive place to do research, the Minister and the Department of Health have repeatedly publicly stated the importance of health research to better patient care and treatment, the development of innovative and life-saving therapies and at a wider economic level to bringing in foreign investment and creating high skilled jobs. Ireland has a vibrant and growing research community, supported by significant investment by the Department of Health, and there are high levels of public support for, and trust in, health research conducted in Ireland. The purpose of the HRR is namely to promote the conduct of health research in Ireland aligned with best international practice, while at the same time maintaining and promoting public confidence in health research.

The long-term success of health research in any democratic society requires public confidence. Without that confidence, the necessary support for health research, especially in evolving and complex areas such as genomics or artificial intelligence, will not be forthcoming.

Above all, the purpose of the HRR is, therefore, to promote the long-term success of health research in Ireland by ensuring that individual patients and the public generally can have confidence in how their sensitive health information is being used.

### **Dental Services Data**

441. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical card holders awaiting dental surgery at a clinic (details supplied); the number of medical card holders awaiting dental surgery at another clinic; the number of persons at both surgeries waiting more than six, 12, 18, 24 and 36 months, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12165/19]

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

### **Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists**

442. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for orthodontic treatment; the waiting time for orthodontic treatment in the Galway region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12176/19]

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

### **Hospitals Building Programme**

443. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health if the upgrade to Clonakilty Hospital in accordance with the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, regulations will proceed as scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12181/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

### **Hospitals Building Programme**

444. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health if the upgrade to Skibbereen Hospital in accordance with the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, regulations will proceed as scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12182/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

### **Hospitals Building Programme**

445. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health if the upgrade

to Kinsale Hospital in accordance with the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, regulations will proceed as scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12183/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

### **Hospitals Building Programme**

446. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health if the upgrade to Castletownbere Hospital in accordance with the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, regulations will progress as scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12184/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

### **Hospitals Building Programme**

447. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health if the upgrade to Dunmanway Hospital in accordance with the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, regulations will proceed as scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12185/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

### **Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

448. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) cannot claim reimbursement for a drug; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12186/19]

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

*Question No. 449 answered with Question No. 292.*

### **Ambulance Service Staff**

450. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the minimum staffing level for intermediate care operative grades in County Limerick; and the provisions that have been put in place to cover absences for the grade in the area. [12241/19]

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

### **Ambulance Service Staff**

451. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason overtime for intermediate care operative grades in the national ambulance service in County Limerick has been discontinued; and the amount paid to private ambulances from 1 January to 31 December 2018 in County Limerick. [12242/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the queries raised by the Deputy relate to operational issues, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

### **Ambulance Service Staff**

452. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the number of interns in the national ambulance service that have used the emergency accommodation provided by the HSE for nursing staff of St. Marys Hospital in a location (details supplied) in the past five years. [12243/19]

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

### **Nursing Staff Data**

453. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if emergency accommodation is provided by the HSE for nursing staff of St. Marys Hospital at a location (details supplied) occupied by the national ambulance service DNL; and if so, the number of managers of the service who have used the accommodation facility in the past five years. [12244/19]

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

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Staff**

454. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is a vacancy for a consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist at the Mater child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, in Dublin; if the position will be filled to facilitate the estimated 150 patients of the consultant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12249/19]

**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.

### **Psychological Services**

455. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding primary care psychology for children in County Wexford; the number of children awaiting a primary care psychology appointment; the number waiting more than six, 12, 18, 24, 30 and 36 months,

respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12254/19]

**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.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Provision**

456. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding a medical device (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12258/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

457. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health if the drug Sativex is available for use by prescription in all HSE areas; if not, the HSE areas it is available in; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12303/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of medicines; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Hospital Services**

458. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health his future plans for dermatological services at Letterkenny University Hospital; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that these services were recently removed and relocated to Sligo University Hospital; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that this decision has caused considerable disruption to those wishing to avail of these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12305/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **National Children's Hospital**

459. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1195 of 20 June 2017, if he will provide the international benchmarking exercise used to compare the construction cost of the planned national children's hospital with other hospitals built throughout the world; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12310/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) has statutory responsibility for planning, designing, building and equip-

ping the new children's hospital and outpatient and urgent care centres.

Following evaluation by the NPHDB in early 2017 of main construction tenders and the selection of preferred contractors, the final cost of the design, build, and equipment programme for which the NPHD is responsible was €983m. At the time, an NPHDB post-tender exercise, led by quantity surveyors Linesight, benchmarked construction costs of the new children's hospital against construction costs for major acute hospitals internationally. That exercise demonstrated that construction elements of the project compared favourably to the costs of international projects of a similar size and scale.

Following completion of the second stage of the two-stage tender procurement process in November 2018, the capital project is now at €1.433n. Prior to concluding the Guaranteed Maximum Price process an international hospital construction costs benchmarking exercise, carried out by AECOM for the NPHDB, concluded that in terms of cost per sq.m, the new hospital was at the higher end but aligned with similar projects.

I have asked the NPHDB to respond to you directly regarding the benchmarked post tender construction costs exercise led by Linesight and the international hospital construction costs benchmarking exercise carried out by AECOM.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Provision**

460. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made on offering the FreeStyle Libre device to diabetic patients over 21 years of age for free; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12313/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Home Help Service Data**

461. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the number of home help hours provided by local health area to date in 2019; the number of hours to be targeted in 2019; the number of home help hours delivered in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12319/19]

**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.

### **Medical Card Applications**

462. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the reason, in the case of a medical card application, a notice of assessment must be provided for the purpose of demonstrating tax liability but in which a letter of tax exemption from the Revenue Commissioners has already been provided; if the case of persons (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12323/19]

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

### **Long Stay Residential Units**

463. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the status of plans for a unit (details supplied) in County Roscommon. [12335/19]

464. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of residents occupying a centre (details supplied) in County Roscommon. [12336/19]

465. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if plans to close down a centre (details supplied) in County Roscommon will be reconsidered. [12337/19]

466. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if a unit (details supplied) will be reopened to full capacity in order to deal with the rising numbers of Alzheimer and dementia patients in County Roscommon. [12340/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 463 to 466, inclusive, together.

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

### **Health Services Provision**

467. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the way in which victims of terrorism who live here could receive specific supports, in particular counselling, from the health service; if they receive support in accessing health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12366/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Car Parks**

468. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the number of cars clamped by an operator at a facility (details supplied) in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [12329/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is an operational issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

### **HSE Staff Recruitment**

469. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a contract (details supplied) is a temporary rolling contract which is being recruited at present; if it is recruitment for the permanent position of registrar at a hospital; if persons can still apply for same; the location they can apply to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12401/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Civil Registration Service is operated by the Health Service Executive (HSE) on behalf of the General Register Office under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection.

As this is a service matter I have referred your question to the HSE for direct response.

### **Mental Health Services Data**

470. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the hours resourced and cost per hour of the number of professionals providing dialectical behaviour therapy through HSE funding by area in tabular form. [12416/19]

**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.

### **Psychological Services**

471. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health his plans to further support access to dialectical behaviour therapy across the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12417/19]

**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.

### **Psychological Services**

472. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the high demand for dialectical behaviour therapy access in the north Lee area of County Cork and the surrounding areas; and his plans for supporting access in this area further in view of the fact that there are currently no psychologists providing the therapy in the area. [12418/19]

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

*Question No. 473 answered with Question No. 264.*

### **Beef Data and Genomics Programme**

474. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason deductions were made to payments of a person (details supplied); if the matter can be appealed; when full payment will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11489/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In submitting an application to participate in the Beef Data Genomics Programme (BDGP), applicants gave an undertaking to adhere to the terms and conditions that govern the Programme.

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Payments under BDGP are based on the full completion of specified actions over the course of six years which were designed to improve the genetic merit of a beef farmer's herd.

Participants are required to take genomic samples from a prescribed number of animals at a cost to the participant of €22 per genomic sample. €220 was deducted from the payment of 12th February 2018 to the person named for ten genomic samples and €176 was deducted from the payment of 17th December 2018 for eight genomic samples.

€297.50 was deducted from the payment of 17th December 2018 to the person named for a failure to submit the survey data as required under the Programme. A further €238 was deducted as at the time of payment as there was no record of the required annual carbon navigator update being submitted at that time.

A member of staff from my Department has contacted the person named regarding these requirements as, while the Carbon Navigator has now been submitted, the survey data requirement is not yet fully completed.

The Programme provides for further payments to issue once sufficient compliance with the programme's requirements has been verified.

### **Greyhound Industry**

475. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether it is appropriate to continue funding the greyhound industry in view of the recent assessment by sports information services (detailed supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11540/19]

481. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on continued funding for the greyhound industry in view of a recent report from the company which broadcasts Irish greyhound racing globally that informed the Irish Greyhound Board in October 2018 that greyhound racing here has a serious integrity problem due to doping and irregular betting patterns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11695/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 475 and 481 together.

Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry.

In relation to the comments made in the article on betting, any patterns of irregular betting that are brought to the attention of Bord na gCon are investigated and if necessary, the results of any investigation are forwarded to An Garda Síochána.

I consider the greyhound sector to be an integral part of many regions within Ireland and as a source of pride and enthusiasm for participants and spectators. A report by Economist Jim Power in November 2017 calculated that there are 5,058 full and part-time jobs within the sector, with a further 7,313 greyhound owners deriving economic benefit from the industry. The impact of this employment creates €171 million in additional spending while the greyhound owners contribute €135 million in spending. The national industry therefore contributes €300 million in additional economic activity.

For these reasons I have no plans to cease funding for the sector.

**School Milk Scheme**

476. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of schools in receipt of the EU school milk scheme; the number of students who received an allocation from the scheme in each of the past five academic years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11570/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The number of schools and the number of children participating in the School Milk Scheme for the last five academic years, is as follows.

-	*2017/18	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14
No. of Schools	* 531	691	782	899	1,061
Approx. No. of Children	* 69,514	38,536	42,544	47,791	51,160

It should be noted that not every child in every school is participating in the school milk scheme.

\* It should be noted that there was a change in the methodology of calculation by the Department following the change in the EU Regulatory framework with effect from August 2017.

**School Milk Scheme**

477. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if research has been undertaken on the reasons schools do not, or have ceased taking up, the school milk scheme; if there are links to issues relating to facilities and equipment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11571/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department commissioned UCD, in April 2018, to carry out research to identify the barriers to the uptake of the School Milk Scheme.

The background to this decision is that the EU School Milk Scheme merged with the EU School Fruit and Vegetables Scheme on 1 August 2017 to form a Single School Scheme under a joint EU legal and financial framework. Under this new Regulatory framework, Ireland submitted a six-year Statement of Strategy for the implementation of the School Scheme in Ireland covering the period 1 August 2017 -31 July 2023. As regards the School Milk Scheme, my Department as the Competent Authority stated its key objective was to halt the decline in the participation in the School Milk Scheme in Ireland. Participation had decreased over 50% in the eight school years preceding the 2017/18 school year.

The research identified a number of reasons for the decrease in participation levels, including: increase in water consumption (31%); price perceived as too expensive (15%); parental contribution required for non-DEIS schools (15%); children do not consume milk at home (23%). The research also highlighted some issues regarding facilities and equipment, including the frequency of delivery, particularly in rural areas, and the quality of milk where deliveries of milk are made outside the school grounds in the early hours of the morning.

Following the research, my Department has undertaken a number of actions to deliver an improved School Milk Scheme in the current school year i.e. the 2018/19 school year, including:

- Targeted recruitment campaign in advance of the commencement of the new school year by the National Dairy Council (NDC) (Sept 18).

- Enhanced accompanying measures/educational resources in the form of a new School Milk Week delivered (February 2019), with associated publicity campaigns and competitions to raise awareness.

- Increasing the parental subsidy by 60% (Sept 18) to make the scheme more affordable for parents.

- Trialling of a new method of delivery of milk to schools.

- The NDC is addressing the issue of frequency of deliveries in contracts with individual suppliers.

I would anticipate that, as a direct consequence of these additional measures, the numbers of participating schools and the volume of milk distributed in the school year 2019/2020 will increase compared to school year 2018/2019. However, final figures will not be available until the end of 2019.

### **EU School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme**

478. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of schools in receipt of the EU school fruit and vegetables scheme; the budget allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11572/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In accordance with the six-year Statement of Strategy for the implementation of the School Scheme in Ireland (1 August 2017 – 31 July 2023) my Department projects that 700 schools and 120,000 children will participate in the School Fruit and Vegetables Scheme in the current school year (2018/19). 692 schools participated in the school year 2017/2018. Subject to available funding, the number of participating schools and children will scale up to 1,400 schools and 240,000 children in the 2019/20 school year and 2,100 schools and 360,000 children in the 2020/21 school year.

As regards funding, Ireland has been allocated an annual envelope of EU funding of €1.758 million for the scheme. This funding will be utilised in full in the 2018/19 school year. My Department also plans to apply to the Commission for a share of the unused EU aid allocated to other Member States.

### **Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme**

479. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the process by which the areas of natural conservation were identified; the methodology used; if an appeal process is in place for landowners left out of the scheme who are of the view they fit the criteria for inclusion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11665/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Under the current Rural Development Regulation (and subsequent amendments under the Omnibus Regulation), Member States are required to change the approach to the designation of land under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme. Before this year, my Department had been identifying eligible areas using a range of socio economic indicators such as family farm income, population density, percentage of working population engaged in agriculture and stocking density.

From 2019, eligible areas must instead be designated using the following list of bio-physical criteria:

- Low temperature
- Dryness
- Excess soil moisture
- Limited soil drainage
- Unfavourable texture and stoniness
- Shallow rooting depth
- Poor chemical properties
- Steep slope

This process has now been completed and details in relation to the outcome have been published following a series of consultation meetings with key stakeholders.

In summary, the vast majority of land that was eligible under the existing Scheme will remain eligible under the new approach and over 2,000 townlands will now be eligible under the new approach and will be eligible to receive a payment for the first time in 2019. Some 700 townlands that would have previously been eligible are not eligible under the new designation. Farmers impacted financially by this change will receive a degressive phasing out payment in 2019 and 2020.

Farmers who hold land in townlands that are no longer eligible in 2019 have been written to, and included in this letter, is an application form to begin the process of an appeal should they wish to take up this option. This form is also available on the Department's website.

I have put an independent appeals process in place for any farmer who wishes to appeal the status of a particular townland following this process. This committee is chaired independently and also has an independent technical expert on it.

### **Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme**

480. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an Area of Natural Conservation 2019 appeal by persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11669/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Further to the completion of the review of eligible lands under the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme, which was required by EU regulation, my Department wrote to all impacted farmers advising of the status of their lands under the 2019 ANC scheme. These letters included a form to instigate an appeal. The appeals form is also available on [www.agriculture.gov.ie](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie). For any farmer who wishes to appeal the status of a particular townland under the 2019 ANC scheme, an independently chaired appeals process is available.

My Department has received a notification of appeal from the persons named in relation to the townlands of Ballykelsh, Ballysampson, Shilmaine and Ballycorboys Big in County Wexford. On foot of this notification, my Department has provided further information in relation to the data underpinning the status of these townlands to the persons named so that they can base

any appeal to the independent Appeals Committee on full information.

*Question No. 481 answered with Question No. 475.*

### **Plant Protection Products**

482. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the impact on agriculture of the ban of a chemical (details supplied) introduced in France in January 2019; his plans to introduce a similar ban on the weedkiller here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11710/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In January of this year, the French authorities responded to a ruling of a French administrative tribunal in Lyon by removing the product “Roundup Pro 360” from its register of authorised plant protection products. The tribunal ruled that ANSES (French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety) should have given more weight to potential safety risks when initially authorising the use of “Roundup Pro 360”. However, all other products containing glyphosate continue to be unaffected by the ruling and consequently the official register of approvals in France contains over 60 glyphosate containing products. This particular trade name, “Roundup Pro 360” has never been placed on the Irish market.

Regulatory decisions on the approval and use of pesticides are based on the scientific consensus view of all the relevant technical information from all sources. Regarding the use of plant protection products containing glyphosate in Ireland, I continue to be guided by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), who have both concluded, on the basis of extensive reviews involving public consultation, that glyphosate can be used safely without putting consumers or users at risk. This process guided the decision to renew the authorisation of Glyphosate within the European Union in 2017.

My Department will continue to monitor international peer-reviewed scientific evidence and the guidance provided by EFSA and ECHA.

### **Horse Racing Ireland**

483. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he last met the chairperson of an organisation (details supplied); the issues discussed; when he will next meet the chairperson; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11728/19]

**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.

I last met officials from Horse Racing Ireland (HRI), on Thursday 28th February 2019 with officials from my Department. HRI’s Chairperson, Mr Nicky Hartery, joined the discussions via teleconference from London.

The items discussed during the meeting were the current re-development of the Curragh Racecourse, the draft HRI Strategic Plan 2019 to 2023, and the potential re-development of the Irish Equine Centre.

No further meetings between the Chairperson of HRI and myself have been scheduled for the present.

## **Beef Industry**

484. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to change the rules to allow a beef animal which is fit for slaughter and from a quality assured farm to be sold in a mart and killed no more than three days later by the new owner to retain its quality assurance bonus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11776/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The standards required for participation in the Bord Bia Sustainable Beef and Lamb Assurance Scheme (SBLAS) are set out on the Bord Bia website:

[https://www.bordbia.ie/industry/farmers/quality/BeefSchemeStandards/Sustainable\\_Beef\\_and\\_Lamb\\_Assurance\\_Scheme\\_Standard.pdf](https://www.bordbia.ie/industry/farmers/quality/BeefSchemeStandards/Sustainable_Beef_and_Lamb_Assurance_Scheme_Standard.pdf)

Requirements for cattle to meet the SBLAS standard include that the animal must have spent the last 70 days (unbroken) in the Quality Assured Chain - this does not preclude movements from one SBLAS farm to another SBLAS farm, including through a mart.

However, I also understand that meat processors make bonus payments in respect of cattle which meet market specifications, determined by them in conjunction with their retail customers. In order to obtain the bonus payment, animals supplied must meet these specifications. One such specification relates to residency.

Such specifications are entirely a commercial matter and are not conditions imposed by my Department.

## **Harbours and Piers**

485. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the provision and supply of services at Killybegs pier in County Donegal, namely, stevedoring, crane hire and-or shipping agents at the pier are being procured under contract; if so, if the services are being supplied exclusively by a private firm; if the contract excludes other third party firms from operating at the pier in such a capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11843/19]

**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.

Procurement of the services referred to by the Deputy is an operational matter for the various harbour users in Killybegs and the services in question are procured directly by them from the relevant service providers.

## **Harbours and Piers**

486. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the boundary area under which his Department has and exercises jurisdiction at Killybegs harbour in County Donegal; the lands owned by his Department located in the town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11844/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Killybegs Fishery Harbour Centre, which is operated and maintained by my Department, was designated

12 March 2019

as a Fishery Harbour Centre (FHC) under Statutory Instrument No, 210 of 1969.

Its current boundary is defined in Statutory Instrument No. 235 of 1987 which includes a map showing the FHC area, a copy of which is at the link for the Deputy's information.

[<a href="/debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/72621D82364F86B8802583BB00653D62/\$File/SI%20No%20235.pdf?openelement">SI No. 235</a>]

### **Afforestation Programme**

487. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application (details supplied); when a decision on it will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11863/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An application for Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme in relation to the contract referenced was received in my Department in December 1998. The application was approved for participation in the scheme and over the duration of the contract, the Afforestation Grant, the Maintenance Grant and all premiums have been paid, with the final (twentieth) premium paid in January 2018. The application is therefore paid in full and the contract is now complete.

My Department is not aware on any ongoing issue with this application that requires a decision.

### **Animal Welfare**

488. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of horses injured and killed at racecourses and point-to-point events here in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019. [11869/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board (IHRB) is the regulatory body for all horseracing in Ireland. The Board is a company limited by guarantee set up by the Turf Club (established 1790) and the Irish National Hunt Steeplechase Committee (established 1866) for the purpose of carrying out the regulatory and licensing functions for Irish horseracing.

The role of the IHRB is provided for under the Irish Horse Racing Act 2016 and subsequent Statutory Instruments. The body is responsible for protecting the integrity and reputation of horseracing in Ireland. This role was previously carried out by the Turf Club and the Irish National Hunt Steeplechase Committee.

The question raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the IHRB and I have requested my officials to refer the question to them for direct reply.

### **Animal Welfare**

489. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if data on the death and injuries of greyhounds will be provided for the period from January to December 2018. [11870/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon

is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The question raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for Bord na gCon and therefore the question has been referred to Bord na gCon for direct reply to the Deputy.

### Animal Welfare

490. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an organisation (details supplied) will be representing Ireland at a dog show in China in April 2019; if so, his views on same in view of the fact that China is a country with few or no animal or dog welfare laws or regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11893/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Irish Kennel Club is a private organisation and, therefore, any decisions taken by it are strictly a matter for its members.

However, I understand that the Irish Kennel Club have indicated to my Department that they will not be attending the dog show in question.

### Environmental Policy

491. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the actions being taken with respect to the bioeconomy; and the meetings of the inter-departmental group jointly chaired by his Department to implement actions in this area, by date and location, in tabular form. [12039/19]

#### **Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Status of the Actions**

The bioeconomy provides economic opportunities for farmers, foresters and the agri-food industry to use renewable biological resources from land and sea – such as crops, forests, fish, animals and micro-organisms – to produce food, materials and energy in a sustainable and circular manner. My department contributed to the development of the National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy published on 12 March 2018 by the Department of the Taoiseach.

The high-level Implementation Group, jointly chaired by my Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and consisting of nine departments and eight agencies, established to progress the actions in the Statement, held four meetings in 2018. The minutes of the meetings are publically available on my Department's website. The Implementation Group is currently finalising a report to government on addressing the policy statement actions and will bring forward recommendations for further developing the bioeconomy in Ireland.

Meeting	Date	Location
1st meeting	24th May	Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, Kildare Street.

Meeting	Date	Location
2nd meeting	5th July,	Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, Kildare Street.
3rd meeting	19th October	National Bioeconomy Campus, Lisheen Mines, Co. Tipperary
4th meeting	27th November	Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, Kildare Street.

Policy Statement actions addressed to date include providing input into a range of national policy and funding instrument developments to exploit synergies and provide funding opportunities for national bioeconomy development. Additionally, the Implementation Group coordinated an Information Day in UCC in May 2018 with partners Marine Institute, InterTrade Ireland and Department of Environment, Agriculture, Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland to highlight funding opportunities available under the EU Biobased Industries Joint Undertaking initiative.

The Implementation Group also coordinated the inaugural Bioeconomy Ireland Day information & networking event in Lisheen, Co. Tipperary in October 2018. Additionally, dairy, horticulture, crop, forestry, marine and organic residues are being examined in Irish and EU funded projects for production of biobased chemicals, food, and feed and energy products.

### Afforestation Programme

492. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if data (details supplied) will be provided for each of the years from 2007 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12040/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The information requested by the Deputy is not immediately available in the format required, but will be sent to the Deputy separately as soon as possible.

### Horse Sport Ireland

493. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is satisfied with the supports provided to an organisation (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the importance of the industry to rural Ireland; his views on whether more funding should be provided for dispersal to various persons and organisations that support and underpin this sector of the equine industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12107/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department is fully committed to maximising the potential of the Sport Horse industry and continues to provide support to it both financially and with policy initiatives. I have demonstrated my commitment to the industry by increasing the budget allocated to Horse Sport Ireland from €2.0m in 2017 to €2.5m in 2018 and I have approved a further increase of €500,000 to €3.0m in 2019. This is an increase of 50% on the 2017 allocation.

In 2016 my Department commissioned Indecon International Consultants to undertake a review of Horse Sport Ireland. Indecon found that additional resources will be needed to support

the expansion of the sector and reports like the strategy report from The Sport Horse Alliance make this point clearly.

Horse Sport Ireland have been making huge strides in implementing the Indecon recommendations. The proposal to rationalise the board is close to finality with only the Northern representative outstanding. A recruitment process through the Public Appointments Service was undertaken to select a new chairperson and three board members. These members are now in place alongside the four industry representatives.

I remain committed to the sport horse industry and I am confident that this additional Government support will help the sector increase its economic and social contribution into the future.

### **Animal Welfare**

494. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of companies providing dog microchipping services; if the companies provide details of dogs to his Department; and if his Department maintains a central database of all micro-chipped dogs. [12112/19]

495. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an island-wide microchipping database that can be accessed by dog wardens throughout the island of Ireland will be established. [12113/19]

496. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is a legislative requirement for the seller to re-register dog ownership details when a dog is sold. [12114/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 494 to 496, inclusive, together.

Four companies were authorised to register owner details of dog microchips by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine. They do not provide data to the Department and there is therefore no central database maintained within my Department. However, all of these companies provide details of the chips they hold to Euro Pet Net which is a group of national and local associations based across Europe which register owner information about pets that have been uniquely identified. This directs Dog Wardens or other such persons who have scanned a dog to the appropriate database to identify the dog owner.

While the microchips themselves are of a standard numeric and technological format across Europe, the dog microchipping system in Northern Ireland operates on a quite distinct basis. The UK has approximately thirteen databases operating and does not currently require registration with a centralised clearing house such as Euro Pet Net to identify which database holds a particular dogs information. Some UK databases are part of Euro Pet Net however.

Both buyer and seller are required to update the ownership details with the relevant database.

### **Brexit Preparations**

497. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for the application of certification post-Brexit (details supplied); and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [12139/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord Bia operates a series of quality assurance schemes for the food industry, full details on which can be sourced at <https://www.bordbia.ie/industry/farmers/quality/pages/qualityassuranceschemes.aspx>.

Logos have been developed to promote the QASs to the consumer and can only be used on product by members of Bord Bia QASs. Where a logo is to be used on product, all links in the production of the finished product must be QAS Certified members.

There are currently a number of quality assurance logos that are permitted to be used, depending, primarily on the origin of the produce. A comprehensive document on the Bord Bia Logo Use Policy is available at <https://www.bordbia.ie/industry/farmers/quality/Documents/Quality-Assurance-Scheme-Logo-Guidelines2017.pdf>.

Any implications arising from Brexit will be considered by Bord Bia in due course.

### **Agriculture Scheme Eligibility**

498. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 458 of 19 February 2019, if individual parcels of land in the folio are not required to be separately fenced; if the parcel meets land eligibility 2015 guidelines under traditional farmed hill land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12141/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The rules with regard to eligibility of agricultural land to draw down payment are set out in detail in both the Terms and Conditions document for the Basic Payment/Greening Scheme that is provided to each farmer annually and in the 2015 Guide to Land Eligibility. It is the responsibility of each claimant to assure themselves that their lands meet the relevant conditions to be deemed eligible for payment under the various area-based schemes.

With regard to fencing there is no requirement for individual parcels within the folio to be fenced. However, in the normal course of events external boundaries must be fenced and the fencing must be appropriate to the type of livestock grazing the land. Fencing is not however required for exclusively owned hill lands, provided the lands continue to be farmed in the traditional manner.

For hill land to be deemed eligible an agricultural activity needs to be carried out. In practical terms this requirement is often satisfied via the stocking of appropriate livestock.

In cases where a claimant is in any doubt with regard to the eligibility of lands they can employ the services of an advisor, trained by officials from my Department, under the Farm Advisory System (FAS), to provide advice on specific cases. A full list of FAS advisors is available on the Department's website.

### **Export Credit Insurance**

499. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the export credit insurance scheme in place; and, if there is none, if such a scheme will be put in place. [12153/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** There is no export credit insurance scheme in place and there are currently no plans to develop such a scheme.

I understand that, under the 2017 Action Plan for Jobs, a High Level Group chaired by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) was established to progress the development of an export finance strategy for Ireland. The group's work led to the development of the "Brexit Loan Scheme", which provides low cost finance at favourable terms and conditions to businesses impacted by Brexit.

DBEI has informed my Department that it will work with the Department of Finance to build on the learnings from this Scheme in achieving the availability of appropriate financing supports for exporting Irish businesses.

### Animal Diseases

500. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of cases of bovine tuberculosis herd incidents, by county, in 2017 and 2018 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12235/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** At the end of 2018, national herd incidence for TB stood at 3.51% as is shown in the following table, marginally up on the same period last year (comparable figure for 2017 is 3.47%). This means that in 2018, 3.51% of all herds tested for TB have experienced a new breakdown, i.e., they have had at least 1 animal that tested positive for TB.

The tables show by county the number of herds restricted, number of reactor animals and herd incidence in 2017 and 2018.

RVO	Herd Incidence 2018	Herds Restricted in 2018	Reactors in 2018
CARLOW	2.75%	35	105
CAVAN	4.19%	201	893
CLARE	3.77%	225	1,265
CORK North	5.66%	320	2,086
CORK South	2.72%	161	582
DONEGAL	1.70%	87	113
DUBLIN	8.40%	30	169
GALWAY	2.23%	241	838
KERRY	2.62%	172	1,069
KILDARE	3.52%	63	167
KILKENNY	2.92%	88	352
LAOIS	3.60%	100	505
LEITRIM	2.02%	58	185
LIMERICK	1.79%	94	364
LONGFORD	1.97%	46	207
LOUTH	4.88%	56	101
MAYO	2.20%	193	501
MEATH	5.39%	193	754

RVO	Herd Incidence 2018	Herds Restricted in 2018	Reactors in 2018
MONAGHAN	8.91%	371	1,677
OFFALY	3.96%	122	360
ROSCOMMON	2.72%	144	336
SLIGO	3.94%	134	482
TIPP NORTH	4.85%	165	1,296
TIPP SOUTH	2.86%	96	399
WATERFORD	2.78%	59	343
WESTMEATH	4.82%	147	666
WEXFORD	4.33%	129	709
WICKLOW E	9.51%	98	596
WICKLOW W	8.60%	46	371
TOTAL	3.51%	3,874	17,491

  

RVO	Herd Incidence 2017	Herds Restricted in 2017	Reactors in 2017
CARLOW	3.55%2.75%	4635	103105
CAVAN	5.53%4.19%	263201	1,408893
CLARE	3.37%3.77%	204225	1,2071,265
CORK North	4.72%5.66%	270320	1,7752,086
CORK South	4.10%2.72%	246161	809582
DONEGAL	2.00%1.70%	10487	184113
DUBLIN	5.57%8.40%	2130	86169
GALWAY	2.59%2.23%	284241	975838
KERRY	2.70%2.62%	180172	1,1731,069
KILDARE	3.64%3.52%	6863	146167
KILKENNY	3.24%2.92%	9988	421352
LAOIS	3.28%3.60%	93100	667505
LEITRIM	2.87%2.02%	8358	309185
LIMERICK	2.26%1.79%	12194	533364
LONGFORD	2.21%1.97%	5246	73207
LOUTH	4.01%4.88%	4656	181101
MAYO	2.20%2.20%	197193	507501
MEATH	5.77%5.39%	206193	654754
MONAGHAN	4.94%8.91%	207371	1,0891,677
OFFALY	3.66%3.96%	114122	346360
ROSCOMMON	2.71%2.72%	146144	422336
SLIGO	3.04%3.94%	105134	290482
TIPP NORTH	4.26%4.85%	146165	8421,296
TIPP SOUTH	3.27%2.86%	11196	361399
WATERFORD	1.66%2.78%	3659	149343
WESTMEATH	5.72%4.82%	175147	919666
WEXFORD	4.57%4.33%	138129	907709
WICKLOW E	5.97%9.51%	6398	421596
WICKLOW W	11.05%8.60%	6146	309371

RVO	Herd Incidence 2017	Herds Restricted in 2017	Reactors in 2017
TOTAL	3.47%3.51%	3,8853,874	17,26617,491

### Nitrates Usage

501. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he has taken to monitor the transfer of slurry and farmyard manure from feedlots to areas removed from the site of production; if a ring-fenced system will be put in place, particularly in areas in which the soil type is heavier and prone to more rainfall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12236/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The amount of nitrogen from livestock manure that can be applied to land is limited to 170 kgs nitrogen per hectare per year by the Nitrates regulations (SI 605 2017). These regulations are the responsibility of the Department of Housing Planning and Local Government and apply to all farms including feedlots, in effect, placing a limit on the amount of manure applied to land.

The transfer of livestock manures (slurry and farm yard manure (FYM)) between holdings is controlled by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and every farmer is required to keep records of these movements. Farmers are obliged to complete records and submit such records annually to the Department. Each year DAFM carries out a 100% administrative check on all farms to ensure compliance with the nitrate regulations limit.

The conditions for the application of manures in order to prevent waters from being polluted by nitrogen and phosphorus are as below:

- Farmers must spread chemical fertilisers, livestock manure and other organic fertilisers, effluents and soiled water as accurately and as evenly as possible;
- Farmers must not use an upward-facing splash plate or sludge irrigator on a tanker or umbilical system for spreading organic fertiliser or soiled water;
- Farmers must not spread organic fertilisers or soiled water from a road or passageway, even if the road or passageway is on your own holding;
- Farmers must not spread chemical fertilisers, livestock manure, soiled water or other organic fertilisers when land is waterlogged, flooded or is likely to flood, is frozen or covered with snow and if heavy rain is forecast within 48 hours;
- Farmers must not spread chemical fertiliser on land within 2 metres of a surface water-course;

Buffer zones are adhered to for various types of water bodies (i.e. lakes, rivers, wells etc).

### Animal Diseases

502. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the role the animal health computer system has in monitoring levels of tuberculosis; if the system is updated on an ongoing basis, particularly in bovine herds identified as high risk; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12237/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Animal

Health Computer System (AHCS) is a fully integrated online disease management system developed by my Department over many years and is highly regarded internationally by veterinary disease programme managers. It is primarily used for bovine TB management but also has functionality in relation to Brucellosis, BSE, Bluetongue, Avian Influenza, Foot and Mouth Disease, Aujeszky's Disease and Salmonellosis.

It is integrated with my Department's laboratory information system, spatial system, corporate customer system and the animal traceability system. It contains functionality for regional Department staff as well as staff in bovine slaughterhouses. In addition, it has a user interface for almost every bovine veterinary practitioner in Ireland.

In relation to TB, it is used to list TB tests to vets, accept test results and it allows staff in my Department to interpret TB tests. Veterinary inspectors use it to apply risk to TB breakdowns and to take appropriate follow-up actions in relation to documentation, future testing and the implementation of testing programmes as is deemed epidemiologically appropriate.

It also manages the valuation and permitting of TB reactor animals, the processing of payments to hauliers, vets, valuers and farmers and the forward and backward tracing of disease from infected farms. It has functionality in relation to epidemiological evaluation of herds as well as quality control of the overall TB testing system.

The system is updated daily by Department staff and all herds including those with a high risk status are monitored and managed according to agreed policies. Each regional office has a veterinary inspector on duty dealing with queries as information is fed into the system. This is monitored locally and is also subject to oversight centrally at ERAD Management meetings in relation to operational issues and by the AHCS Management Board in relation to system maintenance and upgrade issues. The AHCS IMT team provides onsite support and maintenance services as well as developing and implementing on-going enhancements.

### **Animal Disease Controls**

503. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he has put in place to confine outbreaks of bovine tuberculosis in areas of high incidence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12238/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Addressing area-based risk is a well-established fundamental aspect of the Tb Eradication Programme. As well as regular diagnostic testing, specific measures are targeted at mitigating disease spread in a local area. This includes initiating a wildlife programme to limit spread from wildlife to cattle. Contiguous testing is also carried out on herds that neighbour a breakdown.

In discrete areas of high incidence of TB, my Department puts in place a range of additional measures and can include a TB control plan to address the issue. These measures include:

- Strict enforcement of official controls and on-going review of current controls in place in the area;
- Increased frequency of skin testing in order to remove infected animals from the population;
- Renewed focus on wildlife activities;
- Enhanced communication with stakeholders so that any changes in policy and DAFM

activities are explained to PVPs, farmers and farming representatives;

- Scheduling of gamma tests - Consideration is given to scheduling additional gamma interferon tests with formal notifications being issued to herd owners;
- Enhanced supervision of cleansing and disinfection of herds;
- A sample deer cull is considered if deemed necessary;
- Additional visits to PVPs and herd owners;
- Additional resources are prioritised to deliver the agreed performance targets;
- TB testing quality control.

### Laboratory Facilities

504. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of samples submitted to the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory from licensed export slaughter plants operating in counties Roscommon and Galway in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12239/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The number of samples submitted to the Central Veterinary Laboratory from licensed export plants in counties Roscommon & Galway between 1 January 2017 and 28 February 2019 is in the table.

Table: The number of samples submitted to the Central veterinary Laboratory from licensed export plants from Roscommon & Galway from 1st January 2017 to 28th February 2019. There is one export licensed plant in Galway and one in Roscommon. The table represents the cumulative figures for both.

	Central Veterinary Research Laboratory	Pesticide laboratory	Notes
Sample Name			
NATIONAL RESIDUE SCHEME	2017=238 2018=348 2019=91		Part of the National Residue Plan required under Directive 96/23/EC
LEAD survey samples	2017=25 2018=57 2019=0		Meat samples from animals originating from herds in defined areas of mineral enriched soils
SUSPECT/DETAINED ANTIBIOTICS	2017=94 2018=75 2019=7		Implementation (SI183/2009) of the National Residue Plan required under Directive 96/23/EC.
VTEC ( verotoxigenic e.coli)	2017=48 2018=132 2019=16		Samples for verification of plants own controls to support export to USA.

	Central Veterinary Research Laboratory	Pesticide laboratory	Notes
TB (bovine tuberculosis)	2017=229 2018=165 2019=12		Council Dir 98/46/EC: All cattle slaughtered are examined for lesions of tuberculosis. The official tuberculosis-free status of a herd is suspended where tuberculosis is suspected at post-mortem examination. Suspect lesions are submitted to the laboratory for confirmatory examination (histopathological and bacteriological).
WATER	2017=2 2018=2 2019=1		Samples sent for verification of own controls in plant (bacterial culture, chlorine concentration and conductivity)
Pesticide monitoring programme		2017=182 2018=19 2019=0	Part of the National Residue Plan required under Directive 96/23/EC. Regulation (EC) No. 396/2005, establishes EU Maximum Residues Levels (MRLs) for all pesticides in and on fruit and vegetables, cereals and in food of animal origin.
TOTALS	1542	37	

### Afforestation Programme

505. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an appeal by persons (details supplied) against the decision to withdraw a forestry licence will be heard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12253/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** A decision to grant an afforestation licence under the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme issued to the person named and their registered forester in May 2018. The decision was subsequently appealed to the Forestry Appeals Committee (FAC).

As the FAC is independent of my Department, I cannot enter into any correspondence with them on any appeal. Queries with regard to scheduling appeal hearings should be addressed directly to the FAC.

### Pigmeat Sector

506. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for pig farmers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12306/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Price volatility is a significant issue for the pig sector and indeed has been for the last 18 months, highlight-

ing the cyclical nature of prices in the sector.

Continuing Brexit uncertainty lends emphasis and urgency to the expansion of international market access, and I have made market diversification a priority. In 2017 I visited Mexico, the fourth largest importer of chilled and frozen pork in the world, to establish market access. Following visits from Mexican authorities, six export plants were recently audited as part of the first stage of gaining access to that market for Irish exporters.

There has also been a substantial expansion in Ireland's pig meat exports to Asia, with exports to China, Japan and South Korea topping €100m last year. In May 2018, I led a trade mission to China, which included events, in association with Bord Bia, to promote Irish pork and develop export opportunities. I also travelled to Japan and South Korea in 2017 to expand opportunities for Irish exporters in these markets.

Exports to Japan increased by 36% to €30m last year and exports to South Korea increased by 29% to reach €11m. Additionally, I led the first ever Irish agri-food trade mission to Malaysia last November, where a veterinary health certificate for pigmeat was agreed, a vital milestone in the process of gaining market access. I will continue to work closely with the sector and, by focusing on insight-led growth strategies, capitalise upon opportunities for Irish pig meat exporters on international markets.

As regards support for primary producers, TAMS II measures (under the 2014-2020 RDP plan) provide grants for capital investment in physical assets to assist pig producers to develop their businesses. In 2016, I established a Pig Implementation Strategy Group to oversee implementation of the report of the Pig Industry Stakeholder Group. This group plays a vital facilitating role in achieving the objectives for the industry as laid out in Food Wise 2025.

The possibility of a disorderly Brexit poses a threat to the entire agri-food sector, including the pigmeat sector. I have stressed in discussions with Commissioner Hogan that there will be a need to deploy a range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on the sector, including via traditional market supports and exceptional aid under the CAP's Single Common Market Organisation regulation, and increased flexibility under State Aid regulations. Commissioner Hogan has reiterated the EU's willingness to respond and support Ireland, and we will remain in contact on these issues as a clearer picture emerges.

### **GLAS Issues**

507. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12308/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and is fully up to date with his GLAS payments.

Actions undertaken for GLAS whether on owned, leased or rented land must be delivered for the entire period of the contract. GLAS is an EU part-funded scheme and must be administered under the relevant EU regulations and the terms and conditions of the scheme which must be complied with in full.

The Department has already been in contact with the participant's Advisor in relation to this issue.

## **Afforestation Programme**

508. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a series of matters in regard to forestry will be examined (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12309/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Ireland's Forestry Programme 2014-2020 was approved by the Government and secured State aid approval from the European Commission in 2015. The scheme provides financial support of up to 100% of the cost of establishment as well as an annual premium each year up to 15 years.

My Department has sought to address falling planting rates through the introduction of higher rates and premiums, arising from the Mid-Term Review of the Forestry Programme, for new forestry planting – with grants increased, for example, by 2% to 7% depending on the species category and the premiums for certain categories increased by 5%. Currently, under the most popular planting category, the premium rate is €520 per hectare for planting areas greater than 10 hectares. The grants and premiums available under the programme represent a considerable investment by the National Exchequer in afforestation and the 15 year rule will remain in place for the current Programme, as per State Aid approval.

While the Forestry Programme does not cover the cost of reforestation, forest owners can realise their asset through clear-felling, when their forest matures. It should be noted that since 1/1/2016 changes to taxation rules means that income from felling is no longer subject to the High Earners Income Tax restriction which limited the exemption to €80,000 per annum. Furthermore, under paragraph (591) of the European Union Guidelines for State aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas 2014 to 2020, State aid is not allowed for reforestation grants where felled trees are replaced with equivalent ones.

As payment for reforestation is not provided for under the current Forestry Programme, no further premiums are paid once the 15 year period has elapsed.

## **Animal Slaughtering Data**

509. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of carcasses graded by a given machine between when it was discovered to be working out of synchronicity and the last time it was inspected by a Department official (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12368/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The number of inspections conducted by my Department in slaughterhouses far exceeds the legal requirement as set down in regulation and is consistent with inspection controls applied in other Member States. The Divisional Annual control plan operated by Beef Carcase Classification section of my Department requires officers to conduct, where possible, a factory inspection every 2 weeks.

In 2017 for the 13 incidences where machines were found to be out of tolerance, the average interval between the inspection by my officials and a previous Department inspection when the machine was operating within tolerance, was 9 production days.

In 2018, for the 7 incidences, this average interval between these 2 dates was 8 production days. The exact day within each period that the machines went out of tolerance is not possible to determine. At each production day in the factories concerned, the average number of carcasses

classified was 342 in 2017 and 303 in 2018.

### **Beef Exports**

510. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the provisions which have been made to facilitate the live export of beef animals in the event that high import tariffs are placed on Irish beef exports in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12369/19]

**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. I continue to prioritise efforts to gain access to new third country markets and, equally importantly, to deepen existing markets for live exports.

I visited Turkey last week to meet with my Turkish counterpart, Dr Bekir Pakdemirli, Minister for Agriculture and Forestry. We discussed existing and future opportunities for technical cooperation and trade in agri-food products between Ireland and Turkey. I impressed upon Minister Pakdemirli the importance of the Turkish market for Irish livestock and our desire to re-establish trade as soon as possible. I am pleased that the Minister indicated his intention to consider the re-opening of the market in the second half of 2019 and I assured him that there is significant interest from industry in this country in resuming that trade.

The stringent system of animal health and welfare controls operated by my Department on the sea journey to Turkey ensures that Irish cattle arrive in excellent condition, a point acknowledged by the Turkish delegation.

My Department is engaging closely with Egypt to reach agreement on health certificates for the export of fattening, slaughter and breeding cattle. The Chief Veterinary Officer has written to his Egyptian counterpart on 4th March in this regard.

In November 2018, the 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. Live exports to Libya more than doubled in 2018 over 2017 to 5,450 head. There was a recent shipment of 1,000 bulls to Libya.

In January I also extended an invitation to my Algerian counterpart to visit Ireland in early 2019. This follows earlier contact with Algeria, in an effort to reach agreement on revised and separate slaughter, fattening and breeding certificates.

### **Animal Slaughtering Data**

511. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of factory-fit beef animals from Ireland slaughtered in meat plants in Northern Ireland in 2017 and 2018, respectively, and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [12370/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The number of beef animals that were exported to Northern Ireland for the years 2017 and 2018, were 16,687 and 17,740 respectively as recorded on the Department's Animal Identification and Movement (AIM) database, while a total of 3,017 beef animals have been exported to Northern Ireland from the start of 2019 to 3rd March.

The AIM database does not record the intended purpose for export. This information is, however, recorded on the Veterinary Health Certificate which is issued when an animal is exported and is accessible through the TRACES system which is an intra EU traceability system. This data will be compiled and sent directly to the deputy's office.

### **Animal Slaughtering Standards**

512. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 239 of 6 March 2019, when a factory must revert to using an approved manual grader; if there is a protocol for a farmer to follow if unhappy with the grade awarded to an animal which he or she sent to slaughter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12413/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Unlike mechanical grading, it is open to a farmer to appeal a manual grading of the carcass. Manual classifiers are factory employees and are licensed to classify by my Department under the EU legislation. Therefore a farmer looking to make such an appeal or to have the grade rechecked should contact the factory in question.

### **Animal Slaughtering Standards**

513. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if approved manual carcass graders are employed by his Department or the food business operator when they are called upon in a situation in which a mechanical grading machine is found to be working out of synchronicity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12414/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2017/1184 of 20 April 2017 governs the monitoring of carcass classification, carcass presentation and weighing.

If a mechanical classification machine is found to be working outside EU defined tolerances the factory is instructed to revert to manual grading immediately. All manual classifiers are factory employees and are licensed to classify by my Department under the above regulation. Where manual classification is applied, this is identified on the farmer's remittance documents.

### **Departmental Schemes**

514. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the applications will open and the expected lending interest rate for the future growth loan scheme for long-term investment loans announced in budget 2018; and the percentage of the €300 million scheme that will be ring-fenced for sectors (details supplied) in tabular form.

[12427/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Future Growth Loan Scheme has been developed by my Department and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation in partnership with the Department of Finance, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (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.

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.

The loans will be competitively priced at 4.5% or lower, will be for terms of 8-10 years and will support strategic long-term investment in a post-Brexit environment. There is a minimum loan amount of €100,000 for SMEs or €50,000 for primary agriculture. The maximum loan amount is €3,000,000 and loans of under €500,000 will be made on an unsecured basis.

There will be €50 million to €60 million available initially for farmers, within an overall agri-food package of €120 million. Should demand exceed these levels, this can be reviewed.

The Scheme features a two-stage application process whereby initial application is made through the SBCI website. Successful applicants are issued an eligibility reference number which can then be used in an application to one of the participating finance providers. Approval of loans is subject to the finance providers' own credit policies and procedures. Further information including a FAQ document may be accessed on the DAFM website via the following link: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/agri-foodindustry/agri-foodandtheeconomy/agri-foodbusiness/futuregrowthloanscheme/>.

SBCI recently issued an open call inviting banks and other lenders to become lending partners and this closed on 11 February. SBCI advise that that a period of due diligence, which will include the EIF, is now under way. 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 announcements in this regard will be made shortly.

### Live Exports

515. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of cattle and calves exported by country in the 2010 to 2018 period; the figures for 2019 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12428/19]

**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. I continue to prioritise efforts to gain access to new third country markets and, equally importantly, to deepen existing markets for live exports.

My decision in 2017 to reduce the veterinary inspection fee payable on live exports of calves less than three months of age from €4.80 to €1.20 has brought greater equity to the inspection fee regime. Since then there has been continued growth in the export of calves, rising

from 102,000 in 2017 to 159,000 in 2018. It should be noted that the reduction of live exports in Northern Ireland over the last decade is linked to the demands by the UK multiples under the beef labelling rules.

In 2018 live exports of cattle increased by over 30% to 246,000 head compared to 2017. The following are tables with figures for exports of cattle and calves from 2010 to 2019.

Live exports of cattle (including calves) 2010 to 2019

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Belgium	33,600	26,200	8,300	19,500	21,700
France	3,100	1,000	200	7,000	5,300
GB	8,600	7,600	11,500	11,300	18,100
Greece	1,300	1,700	2,500	1,600	1,300
Hungary	400	1,000	1,100	100	100
Italy	70,800	53,700	37,900	26,000	30,000
Libya	0	0	0	14,500	17,700
Morocco	2,700	2,100	2,300	1,400	800
Netherlands	61,900	34,500	15,000	31,500	38,200
Northern Ireland	95,100	59,400	62,600	54,600	54,400
Poland	0	0	0	0	0
Romania	0	100	200	400	200
Slovakia	0	0	0	0	0
Spain	60,700	25,100	15,400	36,800	44,300
Tunisia	0	200	1,300	2,900	3,700
Turkey	0	0	0	0	0
Total *	339,000	214,500	160,400	208,900	236,800

Table ctd.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Belgium	600	400	5,500	13,500	900
France	8,600	5,900	2,800	9,100	0
GB	9,100	6,600	5,900	5,500	400
Greece	700	1,500	1,000	1,600	500
Hungary	100	400	100	200	100
Italy	24,900	18,600	19,400	24,100	3,100
Libya	400	2,200	1,800	5,500	0
Morocco	300	200	0	700	0
Netherlands	43,700	27,000	41,800	48,900	9,900
Northern Ireland	55,300	24,500	26,100	24,600	4,400
Poland	0	0	0	2,700	1,400
Romania	300	600	1,400	800	0
Slovakia	0	500	300	1,800	0
Spain	29,600	37,000	50,500	92,500	11,100
Tunisia	3,900	0	0	200	200
Turkey	0	19,300	30,600	12,900	0

Total *	178,000	145,200	188,300	246,200	32,000
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Live exports of calves 2010 to 2019

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Belgium	33,300	26,200	8,300	19,200	20,100
France	3,000	900	100	6,700	5,000
Netherlands	61,700	34,400	14,900	31,400	34,200
Northern Ireland	12,000	1,400	800	700	2,000
Italy	11,700	5,200	1,200	1,400	2,000
Spain	36,300	20,000	13,000	31,200	38,200
Total *	159,000	88,100	38,300	90,700	101,600

Table ctd.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Belgium	0	0	4,200	13,300	900
France	8,300	5,600	2,400	8,500	0
Netherlands	43,400	26,600	41,400	48,600	8,700
Northern Ireland	2,000	1,100	1,200	2,100	100
Italy	4,100	6,800	8,400	12,700	1,300
Spain	27,400	32,600	44,000	73,000	7,900
Total *	85,500	72,700	101,600	158,800	19,900

\* Countries with smaller numbers of exports are not listed on tables but are included in totals.

### Beef Exports

516. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value in 2018 of total beef exports by country; the percentage of total exports to each country in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12429/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Irish beef exports increased from €2,405 million in 2017 to €2,439 million in 2018. The following table provides beef exports from the start of January to the end of December 2018, in both value and volume terms according to the CSO trade statistics.

Country	€000	Tonnes	% Value	% Volume
Austria	4,668	1,503	<1%	<1%
Bahrain	91	13	<1%	<1%
Belgium	54,039	5,834	2.22%	1.09%
Benin	19	26	<1%	<1%
Bulgaria	671	112	<1%	<1%
Canada	2,179	585	<1%	<1%
China (incl Hong Kong)	65,028	20,726	2.67%	3.87%

Country	€000	Tonnes	% Value	% Volume
Comoros	10	20	<1%	<1%
Congo	127	151	<1%	<1%
Costa Rica	25	25	<1%	<1%
Croatia	670	120	<1%	<1%
Cyprus	400	36	<1%	<1%
Czech Republic	15,517	2,863	<1%	<1%
Denmark	40,367	10,799	1.65%	2.02%
Estonia	320	70	<1%	<1%
Finland	2,117	343	<1%	<1%
France	233,146	50,174	9.56%	9.38%
Gabon	125	50	<1%	<1%
Georgia	90	67	<1%	<1%
Germany	140,588	17,786	5.76%	3.32%
Ghana	9,454	9,319	<1%	1.74%
Gibraltar	60	14	<1%	<1%
Greece	911	84	<1%	<1%
Guinea	84	126	<1%	<1%
Guinea Bissau	28	26	<1%	<1%
Honduras	38	25	<1%	<1%
Hungary	1,072	350	<1%	<1%
Iceland	17	3	<1%	<1%
Israel	896	155	<1%	<1%
Italy	184,505	26,667	7.56%	4.98%
Ivory Coast	3,586	4,834	<1%	<1%
Jamaica	39	25	<1%	<1%
Japan	3,626	842	<1%	<1%
Latvia	8	3	<1%	<1%
Lebanon	91	39	<1%	<1%
Liberia	225	300	<1%	<1%
Libya	435	179	<1%	<1%
Lithuania	450	126	<1%	<1%
Luxembourg	4,768	362	<1%	<1%
Malta	5,849	810	<1%	<1%
Morocco	54	15	<1%	<1%
Mozambique	382	557	<1%	<1%
Netherlands	200,530	40,169	8.22%	7.51%
Norway	526	112	<1%	<1%
Papua New Guinea	38	25	<1%	<1%
Philippines	31,692	17,674	1.30%	3.30%
Poland	10,100	3,628	<1%	<1%
Portugal	16,119	3,155	<1%	<1%
Romania	1,386	234	<1%	<1%
Saudi Arabia	58	26	<1%	<1%

Country	€000	Tonnes	% Value	% Volume
Senegal	3,214	3,935	<1%	<1%
Sierra Leone	35	50	<1%	<1%
Singapore	1,024	312	<1%	<1%
Slovakia	2,922	534	<1%	<1%
Slovenia	167	13	<1%	<1%
South Africa	3,008	2,614	<1%	<1%
South Korea	619	188	<1%	<1%
Spain	56,709	10,389	2.32%	1.94%
Sweden	87,540	19,669	3.59%	3.68%
Switzerland	24,624	2,103	1.01%	<1%
Togo	36	52	<1%	<1%
Trinidad & Tabago	552	141	<1%	<1%
UK (incl Northern Ireland)	1,206,163	269,631	49.45%	50.40%
Tunisia	377	328	<1%	<1%
United Arab Emirates	622	24	<1%	<1%
United States	9,515	2,135	<1%	<1%
Vietnam	4,876	1,686	<1%	<1%
Grand Total	2,439,227	534,991		

### Food Exports

517. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the countries to which Ireland exports lamb; the volume and value in 2018 of total exports by country; the percentage of total exports to each country in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12430/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Sheepmeat exports increased by 1.5% in value in 2018 compared to 2017, to an estimated €314.8 million, or almost 60,000 tonnes. The following table provides sheepmeat exports from the start of January to the end of December 2018, in both value and volume terms according to the CSO trade statistics.

Country	€000	Tonnes	% Value	% Volume
Austria	1,340	195	<1%	<1%
Belgium	27,648	3,823	8.78%	6.39%
Bulgaria	425	32	<1%	<1%
Canada	5,709	1,262	1.81%	2.11%
China (incl Hong Kong)	3,192	1,252	1.01%	2.09%
Comoros	30	6	<1%	<1%
Congo	20	19	<1%	<1%
Croatia	32	2	<1%	<1%
Czech Republic	314	29	<1%	<1%

Country	€000	Tonnes	% Value	% Volume
Denmark	11,096	1,470	3.53%	2.46%
Estonia	56	14	<1%	<1%
Finland	590	110	<1%	<1%
France	102,014	18,878	32.41%	31.53%
Gabon	58	25	<1%	<1%
Germany	39,569	6,315	12.57%	10.55%
Ghana	397	399	<1%	<1%
Greece	12	2	<1%	<1%
Hungary	68	17	<1%	<1%
Italy	11,300	1,993	3.59%	3.33%
Ivory Coast	682	919	<1%	1.54%
Latvia	64	5	<1%	<1%
Luxembourg	499	62	<1%	<1%
Malta	299	28	<1%	<1%
Mozambique	35	51	<1%	<1%
Netherlands	7,182	1,533	2.28%	2.56%
Philippines	129	124	<1%	<1%
Poland	898	241	<1%	<1%
Portugal	440	50	<1%	<1%
Romania	28	2	<1%	<1%
Singapore	39	26	<1%	<1%
Slovakia	163	22	<1%	<1%
South Africa	574	708	<1%	1.18%
Spain	862	121	<1%	<1%
Sweden	23,465	4,558	7.46%	7.61%
Switzerland	18,292	1,258	5.81%	2.10%
UK (incl North- ern Ireland)	56,650	14,199	18.00%	23.72%
United Arab Emirates	340	18	<1%	<1%
Vietnam	247	102	<1%	<1%
Grand Total	314,758	59,870		

### Pork Exports

518. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the breakdown by country in volume and value in 2018 of pork exports; the percentage of total exports to each country in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12431/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Last year the total value of pigmeat exports, taking account of all pigmeat including prepared and preserved, was more than €832 million, an increase from €793 million in 2017. Additionally, in volume terms, exports rose by almost 10 million tonnes growing from 277 million tonnes in 2017 to 286 million tonnes in 2018.

The following table, based on CSO data, shows the total pigmeat exports and exports to

some of Ireland's key markets in 2018.

Country	€000	Tonnes	% value
Angola	13	25	<1%
Australia	18,025	6,670	2.17%
Austria	759	277	1%
Azerbaijan	31	25	<1%
Bahrain	5	1	<1%
Belgium	2,835	2,427	<1%
Bermuda	106	35	<1%
Bulgaria	474	289	<1%
Canada	5,120	1,538	<1%
Central African Republic	10	25	<1%
Chile	81	52	<1%
China (incl. Hong Kong)	79,164	59,438	9.52%
Congo	131	147	<1%
Croatia	16	3	<1%
Czech Republic	14,184	5,583	1.70%
Denmark	51,472	20,238	6.19%
Equatorial Guinea	13	25	<1%
Estonia	1,572	651	<1%
Finland	1,372	252	<1%
France	19,668	3,187	2.36%
Germany	31,638	16,155	3.80%
Ghana	462	712	<1%
Gibraltar	14	5	<1%
Greece	103	30	<1%
Guam	355	143	<1%
Haiti	33	75	<1%
Hungary	1,403	955	<1%
Iceland	24	5	<1%
Italy	3,545	744	<1%
Ivory Coast	292	606	<1%
Jamaica	385	174	<1%
Japan	41,364	14,805	4.97%
Latvia	74	59	<1%
Lebanon	83	14	<1%
Liberia	22	49	<1%
Lithuania	723	298	1%
Luxembourg	8	2	<1%
Malaysia	18	25	<1%
Malta	156	36	<1%
Netherlands	9,308	2,375	1.12%
New Zealand	1,718	734	<1%

Country	€000	Tonnes	% value
Philippines	7,878	8,248	1%
Poland	3,378	1,374	<1%
Portugal	2,446	202	<1%
Romania	21	3	<1%
Saudi Arabia	25	25	<1%
Singapore	439	445	<1%
Slovakia	53	12	<1%
Slovenia	17	3	<1%
South Africa	1,347	895	<1%
South Korea	13,765	6,193	1.65%
Spain	14,226	1,617	1.71%
Sweden	7,154	6,436	<1%
Switzerland	680	58	<1%
Trinidad & Tobago	2,392	960	<1%
United Kingdom	471,533	115,041	56.67%
United Arab Emirates	1,370	342	<1%
United States	18,267	5,145	2.20%
Vietnam	313	211	<1%
Grand Total	832,083	286,099	

### Food Exports

519. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the breakdown by country in volume and value in 2018 of dairy ingredient exports; the percentage of total exports to each country in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12432/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In 2018, Ireland exported dairy products to over 130 countries totalling over €4.5 billion worth of produce, an increase of over 5% by volume compared to 2017 and another year of strong performance by the Irish dairy sector.

The following table, based on CSO data, outlines details in respect of values and tonnage by country for dairy exports, and the share of total dairy exports to that country with respect to trade in 2018.

#### Exports of dairy ingredients from Ireland in 2018

Country	€000	Tonnes	% of Total Volume
OVERALL TOTAL	4,564,152	1,432,956	
Afghanistan	6,505	3,627	<1%
Algeria	49,889	17,301	1%
Angola	6,223	3,346	<1%
Argentina	2,722	1,080	<1%
Australia	5,088	860	<1%
Austria	12,711	3,588	<1%

Questions - Written Answers

Country	€000	Tonnes	% of Total Volume
Azerbaijan	77	9	<1%
Bahamas	2,154	301	<1%
Bahrain	5,501	1,086	<1%
Bangladesh	9,408	5,648	<1%
Barbados	255	37	<1%
Belarus	422	84	<1%
Belgium	150,938	32,090	2%
Benin	792	519	<1%
Bermuda	289	41	<1%
Brazil	5,214	1,861	<1%
British Virgin Islands	407	239	<1%
Bulgaria	833	230	<1%
Burkina Faso	7,333	4,068	<1%
Burma	1,354	701	<1%
Cameroon	366	160	<1%
Canada	8,921	1,150	<1%
Cape Verde	647	200	<1%
Cayman Islands	327	48	<1%
Ceuta	80	52	<1%
Chad	1,214	806	<1%
Chile	5,095	697	<1%
China (incl Hong Kong)	541,372	95,681	7%
Colombia	10,007	1,342	<1%
Congo	5,911	3,271	<1%
Congo (Dem Rep)	16,306	9,588	1%
Costa Rica	3,851	1,291	<1%
Croatia	1,451	374	<1%
Cyprus	3,151	316	<1%
Czech Republic	6,427	1,298	<1%
Denmark	14,306	5,921	<1%
Dominica	482	415	<1%
Dominican Republic	4,889	1,181	<1%
Ecuador	1,649	208	<1%
Egypt	23,453	8,486	1%
El Salvador	3,999	1,116	<1%
Ethiopia	649	72	<1%
Finland	393	89	<1%
France	204,458	55,975	4%
Gabon	1,088	657	<1%
Gambia	2,748	1,543	<1%
Georgia	191	44	<1%
Germany	357,690	105,664	7%
Ghana	15,742	10,222	1%

Country	€000	Tonnes	% of Total Volume
Gibraltar	130	18	<1%
Greece	15,332	3,121	<1%
Guatemala	8,482	1,945	<1%
Guinea	4,066	2,266	<1%
Guyana	1,005	270	<1%
Honduras	1,228	319	<1%
Hungary	1,836	372	<1%
India	135	189	<1%
Indonesia	14,035	7,413	1%
Iran	487	100	<1%
Iraq	51,805	23,818	2%
Israel	22,374	2,879	<1%
Italy	32,979	10,655	1%
Ivory Coast	10,167	6,214	<1%
Jamaica	1,175	504	<1%
Japan	40,728	12,169	1%
Jordan	19,375	5,008	<1%
Kenya	923	463	<1%
Kuwait	15,489	1,984	<1%
Latvia	2,305	549	<1%
Lebanon	8,730	2,779	<1%
Liberia	973	557	<1%
Libya	14,127	3,458	<1%
Lithuania	168	28	<1%
Madagascar	544	191	<1%
Malawi	4,629	1,969	<1%
Malaysia	52,548	28,019	2%
Maldives	35	47	<1%
Mali	29,094	18,793	1%
Malta	4,595	1,564	<1%
Marshall Islands	31	3	<1%
Mauritania	2,903	1,729	<1%
Mauritius	2,130	777	<1%
Mexico	43,222	11,067	1%
Morocco	18,804	4,871	<1%
Mozambique	44	28	<1%
Nepal	30	47	<1%
Netherlands	610,758	192,069	13%
New Zealand	9,256	5,631	<1%
Nicaragua	63	5	<1%
Niger	4,250	2,554	<1%
Nigeria	77,329	43,531	3%
Norway	1,409	274	<1%
Occupied Palestine	6,805	681	<1%

Questions - Written Answers

Country	€000	Tonnes	% of Total Volume
Oman	10,065	1,538	<1%
Other (Non-EU)	144	15	<1%
Pakistan	10,902	6,294	<1%
Panama	4,111	345	<1%
Peru	11,704	2,164	<1%
Philippines	17,871	8,749	1%
Poland	80,434	28,383	2%
Portugal	4,340	1,203	<1%
Qatar	4,994	648	<1%
Romania	3,456	795	<1%
Russia	24,986	7,759	1%
Sao Tome & Principe	46	27	<1%
Saudi Arabia	101,405	16,145	1%
Senegal	43,365	24,564	2%
Seychelles	800	133	<1%
Sierra Leone	461	266	<1%
Singapore	17,671	7,696	1%
Slovakia	418	110	<1%
Slovenia	1,010	261	<1%
Somalia	647	85	<1%
South Africa	23,478	9,643	1%
South Korea	4,031	1,378	<1%
Spain	62,945	16,031	1%
Sri Lanka	91	14	<1%
St Vincent & Grenadines	238	101	<1%
Sudan	1,219	625	<1%
Surinam	1,631	521	<1%
Swaziland	76	9	<1%
Sweden	6,376	1,434	<1%
Switzerland	5,644	1,588	<1%
Syria	2,429	2,708	<1%
Taiwan	19,262	2,248	<1%
Tanzania United Rep	1,441	855	<1%
Thailand	23,185	9,067	1%
Togo	10,672	6,415	<1%
Trinidad and Tabago	8,427	2,499	<1%
Tunisia	6,866	2,483	<1%
Turkey	32,758	6,489	<1%
United Arab Emirates	40,478	14,635	1%
United Kingdom	1,021,759	407,540	28%
United States	293,398	48,232	3%

Country	€000	Tonnes	% of Total Volume
Vietnam	10,915	2,482	<1%
Yemen	3,253	1,491	<1%
Zambia	1,728	842	<1%
Zimbabwe	1,511	935	<1%

### Food Exports

520. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the breakdown by country in volume and value in 2018 of cheddar exports; the percentage of total exports to each country in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12433/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In 2018, Ireland exported dairy products, including cheese to more than 130 countries totalling over €4.5 billion worth of produce. Total cheddar cheese exports for 2018 was in excess of €560 million.

The following table, based on CSO data, outlines details in respect of values and tonnage by country for cheddar exports, and the share of total cheddar exports to that country with respect to trade in 2018.

#### Exports of cheddar cheese from Ireland in 2018

Country	€000	Tonnes	% of Total Volume
OVERALL TOTAL	560,598	171,189	
Algeria	32,057	9,776	6%
Australia	52	4	<1%
Austria	1,347	524	<1%
Bahamas	126	22	<1%
Bahrain	1,703	374	<1%
Belgium	16,096	4,708	3%
Bermuda	25	5	<1%
Canada	429	63	<1%
Cayman Islands	76	12	<1%
Chile	31	4	<1%
China (incl Hong Kong)	1,208	270	<1%
Cyprus	1,533	101	<1%
Czech Republic	384	112	<1%
Denmark	2,800	996	1%
Egypt	11,760	3,592	2%
Finland	4	<1	<1%
France	10,744	3,039	2%
Germany	38,624	11,613	7%
Gibraltar	5	1	<1%
Greece	558	109	<1%
Guatemala	365	105	<1%
Guyana	809	200	<1%

Questions - Written Answers

Country	€000	Tonnes	% of Total Volume
Hungary	194	35	<1%
Iraq	89	24	<1%
Italy	2,295	680	<1%
Ivory Coast	72	20	<1%
Jamaica	65	9	<1%
Japan	37,201	11,435	7%
Jordan	1,831	494	<1%
Kenya	47	10	<1%
Kuwait	785	212	<1%
Lebanon	896	226	<1%
Libya	11,936	3,136	2%
Lithuania	147	24	<1%
Malaysia	110	15	<1%
Malta	2,769	842	<1%
Mauritius	287	33	<1%
Morocco	5,778	1,805	1%
Netherlands	48,959	15,696	9%
Nigeria	30	9	<1%
Norway	737	156	<1%
Oman	38	10	<1%
Poland	574	167	<1%
Portugal	175	28	<1%
Qatar	362	66	<1%
Romania	168	48	<1%
Saudi Arabia	15,120	4,667	3%
Senegal	347	94	<1%
Seychelles	342	52	<1%
Singapore	519	151	<1%
Slovenia	10	1	<1%
South Africa	700	182	<1%
South Korea	69	20	<1%
Spain	16,088	4,341	3%
Sri Lanka	17	4	<1%
Sweden	70	6	<1%
Switzerland	456	122	<1%
Trinidad & Tabago	309	67	<1%
Tunisia	3,488	1,105	1%
Turkey	2,922	840	<1%
United Arab Emir-ates	5,202	1,267	1%
United Kingdom	266,445	85,280	50%
United States	12,213	2,180	1%

**Waste Management**

521. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department had studied the work of an organisation (details supplied) by which the Scottish Government tries to accelerate the development of a circular economy; if the targets aimed for by the organisation could be a model for a similar approach here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11673/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** A review of “A Resource Opportunity - Waste Management Policy in Ireland” will commence this year. This review process will take account of a number of initiatives, such as the European Circular Economy waste and plastics legislation framework and the reports from the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the Price Monitoring Group. This process will inform the development of future national waste management policy, including our environmental goals, regulatory and market structures, and policy instruments and tools.

In that context, officials from my Department are currently reviewing Circular Economy Action Plans published throughout the EU in preparation for development of our own Circular Economy Action Plan. This includes the work of the Scottish government. The Department has also funded a report by the National Economic and Social Council on ‘Moving towards the Circular Economy in Ireland’.

While we can learn from existing plans in operation in other jurisdictions, it is accepted that any new policy design will need to take into consideration the context of Ireland’s economy and will need to be aligned with our wider policy goals.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

522. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated time for connection under the roll-out of the national broadband plan for an area (details supplied); if this property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11463/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I welcome recent announcements of further commercial investment in high speed broadband infrastructure by telecommunications operators. While my Department has received high level presentations from the operators with regard to their recent announcements, the operators have not published, or provided my Department with, detailed commercial or technical plans identifying the individual premises to be served.

The premises referenced by the Deputy is in the BLUE area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department’s website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The BLUE areas are where commercial providers are either currently delivering, or have plans to deliver, high speed broadband services.

Where a citizen living in a Blue area is unable to obtain a high speed broadband service, I would encourage them to email my Department at [broadband@dcaae.gov.ie](mailto:broadband@dcaae.gov.ie) with their Eircode and details of the service providers they have contacted and the issues encountered in respect of accessing high speed broadband.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

523. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated time for connection of a property (details supplied) under the roll-out of the national broadband plan for the area; if the property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11472/19]

525. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated time for connection to the roll-out of the national broadband plan for a property (details supplied); if this property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11485/19]

526. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated time for connection to the roll-out of the national broadband plan for a property (details supplied); if this property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11486/19]

527. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated time for connection to the roll-out of the national broadband plan for a property (details supplied); if this property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11487/19]

528. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated time for the connection of a property (details supplied) to the roll-out of the national broadband plan for a property; if the property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11506/19]

529. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated time for connection to the roll-out of the national broadband plan for a property (details supplied); if the property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11519/19]

530. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated time for connection to the roll-out of the national broadband plan for a property (details supplied); if the property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11520/19]

531. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated time for connection to the roll-out of the national broadband plan for a property (details supplied); if the property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11522/19]

532. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated time for connection to the roll-out of the national broadband plan for a property (details supplied); if the property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11523/19]

533. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated timeframe for a broadband connection for a property (details supplied); the timeframe for the roll-out of the national broadband plan for the area; if the property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11529/19]

534. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated timeframe for a broadband connection for a property (details supplied); the timeframe for roll-out of the national broadband plan for the area; if the property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11530/19]

535. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated timeframe for a broadband connection for a property (details supplied); the timeframe for roll-out of the national broadband plan for the area; if the property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11531/19]

536. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated timeframe for a broadband connection for a property (details supplied); the timeframe for roll-out of the national broadband plan for the area; if the property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11532/19]

537. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated timeframe for a broadband connection for a property (details supplied); the timeframe for roll-out of the national broadband plan for the area; if the property was part of the additional 80,000 residential and businesses expansion recently announced by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11533/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 523 and 525 to 537, inclusive, together.

I welcome recent announcements of further commercial investment in high speed broadband infrastructure by telecommunications operators. While my Department has received high level presentations from the operators with regard to their recent announcements, the operators have not published, or provided my Department with, detailed commercial or technical plans identifying the individual premises to be served.

The premises referenced by the Deputy are in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP. This intervention is the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. I will bring a recommendation to Government in relation to the NBP in the coming weeks.

### **Climate Change Policy**

524. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 539 of 16 October 2018, the terms of

reference for the report on just transition due in early 2019 as mentioned by an official at the Joint Committee on Climate Action meeting on 17 September 2018; and the date for the likely completion of the report. [11473/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I am currently preparing an All of Government Climate Plan which will set out the actions which must be taken to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. I am working with colleagues across Government to develop new initiatives in electricity, transport and heat, as well as a range of other sectors. The All of Government Plan will build on the previous actions and framework put in place by both the National Mitigation Plan and the National Development Plan.

It is proposed that the new plan will include a series of actions aimed at further developing our analytical understanding of the socio-economic and distributional impacts of the low-carbon transition, ensuring that we design policies and measures to address both the challenges and the opportunities arising, and putting in place appropriate frameworks to support regions that are expected to be particularly impacted by the transition. This includes work to analyse the economic and employment implications of the transition to be completed by the end of 2019, in line with the timeframe committed to in the National Mitigation Plan.

The publication of the Government's Future Jobs Ireland on 10 March also reflects the importance of a just transition for Ireland and sets out a series of complementary actions, including commissioning the National Economic and Social Council to develop policy recommendations for consideration by Government for the operation of Transition Teams to manage the impact of economic transition on vulnerable workers and sectors. These may comprise: developmental supports for enterprises and sectors faced with challenges arising from the move to a low carbon economy; sustainable business models and new technologies; career advice and training guidance to managers and workers in sectors and job roles affected by future changes; accessible training to upskill and retrain such workers including through Skills to Advance as well as tailored development plans for them; and potential EU financial assistance opportunities for such a programme.

*Questions Nos. 525 to 537, inclusive, answered with Question No. 523.*

### **Waste Disposal Charges**

538. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the provision of an annual support towards the cost of bin charges for homes in which a family member uses incontinence pads; when details of the scheme will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11643/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department is continuing the work of developing a mechanism to provide a support for vulnerable persons with a condition such as lifelong or long-term medical incontinence to help meet the average annual cost of disposing of their domestic waste. I am informed that this process has taken longer than envisaged, due to a number of issues, including data protection issues that have arisen since the introduction of GDPR. However, I can assure the Deputy that I am committed to introducing an annual support as soon as practically possible in conjunction with relevant agencies and stakeholders.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

539. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the date for the roll-out of high-speed broadband for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11709/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP. This intervention is the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. I will bring a recommendation to Government in relation to the NBP in the coming weeks.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

540. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if fibre broadband will be brought to Stamullen, County Meath. [11847/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In April 2017 my Department published an updated version of the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map. This is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan. The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/Eircode:

- The AMBER area represents the parts of the country where commercial operators have no plans to build high speed broadband networks. Premises in the AMBER area will be provided with high Speed Broadband through a State Intervention.

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

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

There are 524 premises in Stamullen. 5% (28) fall within the AMBER area and will be served under the State led Intervention, while 95% (496) of premises are in a BLUE area and are, or will be, served by commercial providers. Information on categories of specific premises can be accessed on my Department's website, [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie), by entering the relevant

Eircode into the High Speed Broadband Map.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. I will bring a recommendation to Government in relation to the NBP in the coming weeks.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements.

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

541. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the role of hedgerows acting as a carbon sink here; the position with regard to a national inventory system to facilitate the reporting of carbon sequestration by hedgerows in the landscape here to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11946/19]

542. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the role of land use management, forestry, hedgerows and woodland patches in the removal of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11947/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 541 and 542 together.

Greenhouse gas emissions and removals associated with land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF), as reported in Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions inventory prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency, include activities associated with afforestation and forestry harvesting, grassland and cropland management under agricultural use, managed and unmanaged wetlands, and other land-use categories. While such emissions are not currently accounted for in relation to the calculation of compliance with Ireland's emissions targets in the period to 2020, from 2021 onwards these emissions will be integrated into the EU framework for compliance with national emissions targets. It is, therefore, essential that Ireland has robust policies in place to manage emissions and enhance removals from relevant LULUCF sectoral categories.

Hedgerows are an important feature of the Irish pastoral landscape and can play a potential role in carbon sequestration. The latest estimates suggest that the hedgerow length in Ireland is over 600,000km. On the basis of the information available at the moment, hedgerows could potentially sequester somewhere in the region of 0.1 Mt carbon dioxide to 0.5 Mt carbon dioxide. In order to refine the figures to allow for inclusion in the National GHG Inventory, further remote sensing investigations would be required to create a national detailed inventory of hedgerows. Further hedgerow surveys would also be required to refine classifications and identify appropriate sites. Proposals for research along these lines are under consideration in the Environmental Protection Agency in the context of its 2019 research call.

I am currently preparing an All of Government Climate Plan which will set out the actions which must be taken to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. I am working with colleagues across Government to develop new initiatives in electricity, transport and heat, as well as a range of other sectors. I intend that the Plan will also include actions to develop and implement policies to manage emissions and enhance removals from relevant LULUCF sectoral categories.

### **Broadcasting Sector**

543. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 435 of 5 March 2019, if he has raised with the European Commission the need to implement the recommendations of the Report of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and the Environment on the Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting and the need to establish a public service broadcast fund in the context of state aid rules and ensure that such rules would not inhibit such a development in view of the need to support the independent radio sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11982/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In light of the recommendations in the Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action & Environment Report on Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting, the Working Group on the Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting was set up by Government decision in July 2018 to examine options for the reform of TV licence collection. The Group's work is ongoing and it is scheduled to report to me at the end of this month.

As I noted in the Dail last week, EU state aid rules prohibit the setting up of the sort of fund envisaged by the Independent Broadcasters of Ireland (IBI). However, the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill includes proposed amendments to Sections 33 and 123 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 to allow the Broadcasting Authority (BAI) to be allocated public funding from TV Licence fee receipts towards meeting its operating expenses. It is intended that the consequent reductions in levy contributions, up to a maximum of 50% would be applied 'across the board' so that all broadcasters would benefit in equal proportion from the measure. Drafting is at an advanced stage by Parliamentary Counsel and I intend to publish the Bill in quarter 2 this year.

The independent radio sector already benefits from the BAI Sound and Vision Scheme which is funded from 7% of the net TV Licence fee receipts. The Scheme provided over €494,000 towards 77 different radio projects for broadcast on independent commercial stations in 2018.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

544. **Deputy Hildegard Naughton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if it is possible under EU law to ask a semi-State company, such as the ESB, to roll out broadband under the national broadband plan; if this would require a new procurement process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12032/19]

546. **Deputy Kate O'Connell** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if it is possible under EU law to ask a semi-State company, such as the ESB, to roll out the national broadband plan; if this would require a new procurement process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12050/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 544 and 546 together.

The Attorney General has advised that there are significant legal risks in relation to both procurement law and state aid law, if the State was to mandate and fund directly outside a procurement process any economic undertaking, including a commercial semi-state body such as the ESB, to carry out the National Broadband Plan.

Furthermore, engagement between officials of my Department and DG Competition, which is the Directorate General of the European Commission with responsibility for state aid matters, has clearly established that it is the view of DG Competition that it would not be possible to provide a State subsidy to a commercial semi-state body, such as the ESB, to roll out the National Broadband Plan without undertaking a new public procurement process.

### **National Broadband Plan**

545. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason provided by companies (details supplied) for withdrawing from the national broadband plan; if the prospective level of subsidy available was provided as a reason; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12033/19]

547. **Deputy Kate O’Connell** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason provided to his Department by a company (details supplied) for withdrawing from the national broadband plan; if the prospective level of subsidy available was provided as a reason; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12051/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 545 and 547 together.

I have been clear that the level of State subsidy for the National Broadband Plan State intervention will be determined through the NBP procurement process and the nature and cost of the solution required to deliver the State intervention network would only become known through extensive engagement with bidders during the procurement process.

SIRO withdrew from the National Broadband Plan State intervention procurement process on 26 September 2017. In its formal communication to the Department SIRO stated it “could not develop a business case to justify continued participation in the NBP bid process”.

Eir withdrew from the NBP procurement process on 30 January 2018. In its formal communication to my Department it stated its withdrawal was due to “commercial, regulatory and governance issues”.

Both companies made the reasons for their withdrawal from the NBP procurement process public at the time.

I note that in a recent appearance before the Public Accounts Committee the CEO of eir referenced the company’s withdrawal from the NBP procurement process. In this appearance, the potential level of investment to be provided by the State was not cited as a reason for that withdrawal.

*Question No. 546 answered with Question No. 544.*

*Question No. 547 answered with Question No. 545.*

## Broadband Service Provision

548. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of high-speed broadband in an area (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12054/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP. This intervention is the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. I will bring a recommendation to Government in relation to the NBP in the coming weeks.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements.

## Electric Vehicles

549. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the perceived inadequate number of ESB electric car charge points nationally will be recognised and remedied, in particular in County Clare (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12086/19]

554. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to roll out electric vehicle charging stations in towns and villages across County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12166/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 549 and 554 together.

Providing adequate charging infrastructure is critical to ensure the continued growth in the uptake of electric vehicles.

Home charging is the primary method of charging for the majority of electric vehicles both internationally and in Ireland. Charging at home at night is the most cost-effective and eco-friendly way to charge an electric vehicle. Given the high proportion of homes with driveways and dedicated parking spaces, Ireland has greater capacity for home charging than many other countries. A Government funded grant of up to €600 is available, via the SEAI, to the purchasers of new and second-hand electric vehicles to support the installation of home chargers.

There are currently 668 standard public charge points as a part of the ESB eCars Network

and circa 80 fast chargers, mainly on national routes to facilitate longer journeys. In addition, there are a number of location/destination charging points located at hotels, shopping centres, visitor attractions, places of employment, private car parks etc.

Under the first call for applications from the Climate Action Fund, I approved funding of up to €10 million to support ESB eCars to develop a nationwide, state-of-the-art electric vehicle fast charging network. The project successfully completed the assessment stage and is now going through the validation stage. On completion of this stage further detail on the project, including information in relation to the location of chargers and an implementation timeline, will be set out.

The key elements of the project include:

- Six high speed charging hubs on motorways capable of charging eight vehicles simultaneously
- 16 high speed charging hubs capable of charging four vehicles simultaneously
- Additional high power chargers at 34 current fast charger locations
- Upgrading 50 standard chargers to fast chargers
- Replacing up to 264 standard chargers (totalling 528 charge points) to next generation high reliability models

At the end of 2017, there were 3,799 electric vehicles (including battery electric vehicles and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles) on the road in Ireland. This increased to 7,647 at the end of 2018 – a doubling of the number of electric vehicles on the road. It is estimated that the implementation of the ESB eCars project will provide the necessary fast charging infrastructure to support at least 40,000 electric vehicles.

Funding for public charging in local communities is available through the Better Energy Communities Scheme. The scheme, which is administered by the SEAI, supports community-based partnerships, many of which include local businesses and enterprises.

In addition, my Department, in conjunction with the SEAI, is working on how best to support the provision of greater levels of on-street public charging.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

550. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the roll-out of broadband under the national broadband plan in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12144/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every home, school and business in Ireland has access to high speed broadband. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment across the country, and a State intervention in those areas where commercial operators acting alone are unlikely to invest.

Since December 2015, the number of premises with access to high speed broadband in Laois has increased by 1,934. Today in total, the number of premises in Laois with access to high speed broadband is 24,415, 62% of total premises in the County. Another 2,066 will be served by eir under that company's ongoing rural deployment.

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The remaining 12,772 homes, schools and businesses in Laois will be connected under the National Broadband Plan.

In April 2017 my Department published an updated High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan. The Map is colour coded and searchable by address or Eircode.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. I will bring a recommendation to Government in relation to the NBP in the coming weeks.

### **Waste Management**

551. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has considered a different model of household waste collection. [12145/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** A review of “A Resource Opportunity - Waste Management Policy in Ireland” will be initiated in 2019. This review process will take account of a number of initiatives, such as the European Circular Economy waste and plastics legislation framework and the reports from the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the Price Monitoring Group. This process will inform the development of future national waste management policy, including our environmental goals, regulatory and market structures, and policy instruments and tools.

### **Nuclear Waste**

552. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on reports that the British Government was examining the construction of a geological disposal facility for the dumping of nuclear waste in the Mourne Mountains and at Slieve Gullion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12161/19]

553. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the correspondence he has had with the British Government outlining his views regarding the construction of a nuclear waste facility on the island of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12162/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 552 and 553 together.

I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 563, 578 and 585 on February 12th 2019. The position is unchanged.

*Question No. 554 answered with Question No. 549.*

### **Waste Tyre Disposal**

555. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment his plans to fund a scheme through an organisation (details supplied) for farmers to dispose of waste tyres correctly, similar to the scheme run in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12245/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In 2017, my Department made funding of €1 million available to local authorities to deal with the clean-up of existing stockpiles of tyres across the country. This was done to support the introduction of a new compliance scheme for tyres and waste tyres from 1 October 2017. At that time, it was also indicated that the issue of waste tyres on farms would be considered.

In 2018, €700,000 was made available to remove waste tyres from farms. Irish Farm Film Producers Group (IFFPG), the national farm plastics recycling compliance scheme, undertook the work on behalf of my Department. Four collection sites were chosen based on the fact that they represented a good geographical spread. The sites in question were Cootehill Mart, Co. Cavan, New Ross Mart, Co. Wexford, Athenry Mart, Co Galway and Gort Drum Mines, Monard, Co. Tipperary. In total 4,253 tonnes of tyres were collected and 2,229 farmers availed of the service. The budget for this initiative was fully expended in 2018.

Further actions during 2019 to address waste agriculture tyres are being considered in the context of the development of the compliance scheme for tyres and waste tyres.

### **Road Toll Data**

556. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the fees paid to a company (details supplied) for each of the past four years in its role as the enforcement service provider for the M50 barrier-free tolling system. [11780/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy in relation to roads. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects on national roads are a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the relevant local authority. For regional and local roads it is a matter for each respective local authority.

More specifically, the statutory powers to levy tolls on national roads as well as regional and local roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors are vested in TII (for national roads) and each local authority (for regional and local roads) under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Roads Act 2007).

Noting the above, I am referring the question to TII for direct reply within 10 working days. Please inform my private office if you do not receive the information.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

557. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the capital expenditure of his Department from 1 January to 31 December 2018 under the greenways heading; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11468/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The outturn for capital expenditure under the Greenways (E7) heading in 2018 was €3,256,402. This was spent on

ongoing projects that were allocated funding by my Department in previous years. Funding of €13.3m has been made available for Greenways funding under subhead E7 in 2019.

### **Driver Licences**

558. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the plans in place for UK driver licence holders resident here to continue using their licence in the event of a no-deal Brexit (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11601/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Motorists resident in Ireland with a UK driving licence are being advised to exchange that licence for an Irish driving licence before the 29 March 2019. The Department has always advised people to exchange their EU driving licence for an Irish driving licence once they become a resident of Ireland.

Currently, a UK licence is recognised as an EU licence and that is why it can be accepted by Irish insurance companies. In the event of a no deal Brexit, this will no longer be the case. Irish driver licensing law operates within a framework of EU law.

In the case of non-EU jurisdictions, legislation exists, under the Road Traffic Acts, to allow for the recognition of foreign driving licences for exchange purposes. If there is a no deal Brexit, the UK becomes a 3rd country and the potential then exists for arrangements to be made under the Road Traffic Acts. Ireland will be pursuing this option. This may take a little time to complete as it involves a formal agreement and legislation here in Ireland.

### **Road Safety**

559. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to review speed limits here in view of the levels of death and serious injury on Irish roads to date in 2019; the legislation which would have to be reviewed in such a review of speed limits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11624/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy in relation to roads. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects on national roads are a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the relevant local authority. For regional and local roads it is a matter for each respective local authority.

The Road Traffic Act 2004 establishes default speed limits that apply to defined categories of roads and which can only be changed by county and city councils through the making of special speed limit bye-laws, and Section 9 of that Act sets out the range of special speed limits that may be set by local authorities through such bye-laws. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide advice and guidance in relation to the making of speed limit bye-laws by county and city councils for the purpose of applying special speed limits. Transport Infrastructure Ireland and all local authorities commenced a comprehensive review and update of speed limits in their administrative areas in accordance with the latest 2015 guidelines and for which a significant amount of local authorities have completed the required process to date.

### **Road Safety**

560. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on recent reports that a leading car manufacturer (details supplied) plans to introduce a speed limiter on all its new vehicles from 2020; his further views on such a proposal to promote speed limiters on all new vehicles made or imported into the EU at the EU Transport Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11625/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the deputy will know increasing road safety is very important to me and any measure that can help this aim is to be welcomed.

Directive 2007/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council established an approval system for vehicles within the EU. The system ensures that a vehicle must be manufactured in compliance with a wide range of safety standards before it can be placed on the market. This ‘type-approval’ system is periodically updated to account for improvements in safety standards and to allow advanced safety features to become mandatory requirements. Amendments to Directive 2007/46/EC are scrutinised, evaluated and voted upon by a number of different EU-level technical committees and working groups attended by representatives from the State.

The type-approval system is transposed into Irish law by SI No. 158 of 2009 – the European Communities (Road Vehicles: Type-Approval) Regulations 2009. These regulations have been amended several times to account for the continually improving safety standards that have become obligatory for vehicles in the European fleet.

### **EU Funding**

561. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department will be making applications to the recently announced €100 million fund under the Connecting Europe Facility. [11628/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The current call for proposals for the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) Transport projects has €100 million of co-funding available for successful applications. This sum is broken down into two funding priorities: €65 million of this funding is for actions related to projects on the comprehensive TEN-T network, while the remaining €35 million is for projects concerning reductions in rail freight noise. Further information on the specific funding objectives of this call is available on the website of the European Commission at the following link:

*<https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-transport/apply-funding/2019-cef-transport-call-proposals>*

The call is open to public and private bodies from all EU Member States. My Department will work with, and aims to provide guidance to, any potential Ireland based applicants. The Department is required to review and sign off on applications of any Irish entities submitting applications under the Call.

The deadline for submitting an application is 24 April 2019. My Department is aware from preliminary discussions that a number of State bodies have expressed interest in submitting an application under this call. It is possible that other Irish organisations may be intending on submitting applications but have not yet made contact with the Department. It is not envisaged that my Department will be making an application in its own right under the current call.

All submitted applications will be assessed and evaluated by the European Commission in conjunction with independent external experts, and co-funding will be awarded on a competi-

tive basis to successful applicants. Rates of co-funding vary depending on the type of project, in line with the specific criteria for eligible projects outlined in this call for proposals.

### **Dublin Bus Fleet**

562. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects to have phased out completely the use of diesel buses from the Dublin Bus fleet in view of the commitment not to purchase more diesel buses. [11677/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Deputy is aware that Project Ireland 2040 commits to ending the purchase of diesel-only buses from July 2019 for all our urban bus fleets. This is an important commitment and one which we all are looking forward to commencing as part of this year's PSO bus purchase programme by the National Transport Authority (NTA).

In support of that change a comprehensive series of low-emission bus trials is currently underway in Dublin and Cork, funded through my Department's Green Public Transport Fund and with support from multiple agencies including the NTA, Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann.

It is expected that the trials will conclude in April 2019; a final report will be produced which will further inform the best lower-emission option - or options - for our PSO services in the GDA and in the regional cities in the years ahead.

In addition to this, a number of double-deck diesel-electric hybrid buses are due to be delivered shortly to Dublin Bus for a trial which will allow for a comparison of various manufacturers' offerings.

Complementing these trials, the NTA will soon commence a tender process for the purchase of diesel-electric hybrid buses as part of next year's bus purchase programme. This new contract will be in place during the second half of this year but the exact date of delivery of the new hybrid vehicles will only be confirmed subsequent to the appointment of the successful tenderer.

In light of the NTA's statutory responsibilities on the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to it for a more detailed reply. Please advise my Office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

### **Air Services Provision**

563. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he is taking to assist Shannon Airport improve access after Brexit when its current hub, Heathrow Airport, will no longer be in the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11685/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I refer to my response to a similar parliamentary question from the Deputy of 4 December 2018 on this subject. In that response, I explained that the establishment of air transport connections are the result of commercial agreements between airlines and airports and that as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have no function in these commercial decisions.

Engagement between my Department and aviation stakeholders has continued in the months since the Deputy raised this matter previously, and my officials and I have continued to reiterate

the importance of the aviation industry, including airports, taking steps to prepare and where possible to reduce their exposure and to limit reliance on any one particular destination or service.

As the Deputy will be aware, the European Commission last year put forward a draft legislative proposal aimed at ensuring basic air connectivity in a no deal scenario. The measures proposed will, subject to reciprocity, provide a large degree of certainty to the Irish aviation sector and to the travelling public. The situation was further clarified on 7 March, when the United Kingdom confirmed its intention to reciprocate the proposed measures. While this cannot mitigate the overall impact of a no-deal scenario, or the assurances contained in the negotiated Withdrawal Agreement, the fears that aircraft might not be able to fly are being addressed.

Government also supports the development of air connectivity and the expansion of air services more generally through funding from Tourism Ireland for cooperative marketing activity. Cooperative campaigns with partners facilitate increased marketing effort and help promote the destination more widely. An increased budget allocation in Tourism Ireland for 2019 will continue to support both seasonal and regional growth and will be underscored by a commitment to focus co-operative partnership activities on the January-April and October-December periods for Great Britain and the North American and European markets. I would encourage all airports to avail of this funding to optimise air services, including Shannon Airport with regard to alternative European hub connections.

### **Tourism Ireland Funding**

564. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of increasing funding to Tourism Ireland by 12.5%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11730/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Tourism Ireland is funded through the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland. Funding from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in 2019 amounts to €52,624,000. Accordingly, a 12.5% increase would cost €6,578,000

### **Sports Capital Programme**

565. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a sports capital application from a group (details supplied) was granted only partial funding under the sports capital programme 2017 in view of the fact the amount does not facilitate completion of the works applied for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11734/19]

566. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if it is policy to allocate partial funding for applications under the sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11735/19]

567. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which the percentage or level of funding is determined in circumstances in which it is decided to only partially fund applications under the sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11736/19]

568. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the scoring system and assessment procedures used to validate the allocation of partial funding for

a group (details supplied) under the sports capital programme 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11737/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 565 to 568, inclusive, together.

The total amount sought under the Sports Capital Programme (SCP) has exceeded the total funding available under every previous round of the programme. Accordingly, it has not been possible to allocate the full amount sought to every applicant.

As part of the 2018 SCP, 431 applicants that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the Programme were invited to submit corrected documentation to allow their applications to be considered for funding. 186 organisations took up this offer and 170 (91%) were ultimately awarded grants including the organisation referred to by the Deputy.

As the application in question was a resubmitted 2017 application, the same methodology for assessment and allocating grant amounts was used as for the original 2017 applications. The full scoring system and assessment procedure in this regard is available on the Department's website. All applications were assessed according to the published criteria including the likelihood of increasing participation, whether the proposed facilities were being shared, the level of socio-economic disadvantage in the area of the project (based on the Pobal index of deprivation) and the level of SCP funding previously allocated.

The overall score at assessment stage, the amount of funding sought and the amount available for that county (on a per capita basis) were the key determinants of individual grant awards.

Full details of the scoring obtained under the various criteria were provided to all successful applicants including the organisation referred to by the Deputy when the letter of provisional allocation issued. With regard to the possibility of providing any additional funding, it is of course open to the organisation to make a further application when the next round of the SCP is open for applications.

### **Road Toll Data**

569. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the revenue collected in each of the past four years and to date by a company (details supplied) acting in the capacity of enforcement service provider for the M50 barrier-free tolling system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11779/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy in relation to roads. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects on national roads are a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the relevant local authority. More specifically, the statutory powers to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors are vested in TII under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Roads Act 2007).

Noting the above, I am referring the question to TII for direct reply within 10 working days. Please inform my private office if you do not receive the information.

570. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will direct the NTA to investigate if the services and stops on the S1 and S2 Bus Éireann public service routes in Sligo town can be reviewed to allow more frequent stops in the Treacy Avenue area of the town in view of the ageing population of the homeowners in the area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11783/19]

**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) is the statutory body with responsibility for overseeing the delivery of bus services by Bus Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Rail Network Safety**

571. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to update the Railway Safety Act 2005. [11813/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Work is in progress on the updating of the Railway Safety Act 2005 and, in that regard, a General Scheme for a Railway Safety (Amendment) Bill was published in May 2018. Work with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel has commenced and it is expected that the Rail Safety (Amendment) Bill will be published later this year.

### **EU Funding**

572. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position on the inclusion of the western rail corridor as a transport link eligible for funding under the European Union Connecting Europe Facility (details supplied); his views on the position of the European Parliament; if he will relay same to EU Council negotiators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11830/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** During negotiations on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Connecting Europe Facility and Repealing Regulations (EU) No 1316/2013 and (EU) No 283/2014, the European Parliament proposed an amendment to the Annex. The Parliament's proposed amendment was to include the alignment of Derry - Sligo - Galway on the North Sea - Mediterranean Core Network Corridor. This amendment was deemed unacceptable by the European Commission on the grounds that alignments of the core network corridors can only include elements of the core TEN-T network, which as presently defined does not include any of Derry, Sligo or Galway. A number of similar proposed amendments by the Parliament concerning other Member States were also rejected on the same grounds.

In late February, my Department received correspondence from European Commissioner for Transport, Violeta Bulc, which stated that the European Commission is considering advancing the review of the TEN-T Network, which is due to take place no later than the end of 2023, as stipulated in the TEN-T Regulation. The Commission's review process will include: an evaluation study, to be launched this month and to conclude in spring 2020; a public stakeholder consultation process, opening this month and concluding in June 2019; and targeted consultation with Member States and a wide range of stakeholders, commencing in the second half of 2019.

In addition, my Department will be making a formal submission to the European Commission within the next six weeks calling for an early review of the TEN-T Network as outlined in the Programme for Government, taking into account our National Development Plan, our National Planning Framework and the implications of Brexit.

### **Rail Network Expansion**

573. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has commissioned a feasibility study into the extension of the western rail corridor (details supplied); the sections of the rail line being prioritised; if the prospective costs of the project have been examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11831/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy is aware, both the 'Programme for a Partnership Government' and Project Ireland 2040, commit to an independent review of the costings for a proposal to extend the existing Western Rail Corridor (WRC).

Iarnród Éireann has completed a procurement process in relation to an independent financial and economic evaluation of a possible extension of the WRC. I understand the successful tenderers will be announced very shortly. As stated in the published tender documentation, the process will involve appropriate consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

Project Ireland 2040 states that if the findings of the review are approved by Government, the project will be prioritised during the lifetime of the National Development Plan.

### **Bus Éireann Fleet**

574. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of Expressway coaches which have been purchased in each year since 2008; and the number of coaches that will be purchased in 2019. [11838/19]

575. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the Expressway buses that will be purchased in 2019 will be of a hybrid electric variety; and if so, the number. [11839/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 574 and 575 together.

The issue raised is an operational matter for Bus 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.

### **Bus Éireann**

576. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount spent on private hire services in each year since 2008. [11840/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issue raised is a matter for Bus 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.

## **Appointments to State Boards**

577. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the name of the person who will replace a person (details supplied) as chairperson of the Taxi Advisory Committee. [11855/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy may be aware, 13 positions, including that of Chairperson, of the Advisory Committee on Small Public Service Vehicles (more commonly known as the Taxi Advisory Committee) have been advertised through the Public Appointments Service. This process has not yet been completed and therefore no decision has yet been made as regards a Chairperson.

## **Park and Ride Facilities**

578. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he or the NTA will source alternative public park and ride facilities to serve passengers from the Newcastle-Rathcoole areas who use the Luas at Citywest following the proposed closure of the Luas park and ride facility at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11951/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The National Transport Authority (NTA) have statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the provision of Luas Park & Ride facilities.

Noting their responsibility in relation to this matter, I have forwarded your query to the NTA for their consideration and direct reply. Please notify my office if you have not received a reply within 10 working days.

## **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

579. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital application by a club (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12049/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme opened for applications on Friday 7 September and the application period closed on Friday 19th October. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding.

186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January.

Work is now underway in assessing the new 2018 requests and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation referred to by the Deputy.

For the first time, applicants who have submitted incorrect documentation under this round will be given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to

correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a number of months to have all applications assessed. Accordingly, I expect that it may be the third quarter of this year before the full set of allocations under this current round of the programme are announced.

### **Public Transport Provision**

580. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure there is better synchronisation between rail services on the Dublin to Maynooth line and the 39 Dublin Bus service in order that passengers can better interchange between the two services and do not face lengthy waits after disembarking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12058/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann and Dublin Bus and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Road Traffic Legislation**

581. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on making dashboard cameras mandatory in all motor vehicles. [12073/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The introduction of a mandatory component or separate technical unit for a new vehicle type would require an amendment to Directive 2007/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council. This Directive established an approval system for all vehicles registered within the EU and it ensures that a vehicle must be manufactured in compliance with a wide range of safety standards before it can be placed on the market. This 'type-approval' system is regularly updated to account for improvements in safety standards and to allow advanced safety features to become mandatory requirements. Amendments to Directive 2007/46/EC are scrutinised, evaluated and voted upon by a number of different EU-level technical committees and working groups attended by representatives from the State.

The type-approval system is transposed into Irish law by S.I. No. 158 of 2009 – the European Communities (Road Vehicles: Type-Approval) Regulations 2009. These regulations have been amended several times to account for the continually improving safety standards that have become obligatory for vehicles in the European fleet.

Making the use of dash cameras a mandatory requirement for all existing vehicles in the national fleet is not considered to be a practical measure at present.

### **Electric Vehicles**

582. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the targets for the use of electric vehicles nationally; the targets and dates associated with achieving same; the measures he is leading on an all-of-Government approach to achieve the targets; the level of electric vehicle usage, trends and projections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12089/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The transition to alternatively fuelled vehicles, including electric vehicles (EVs), is a necessary step-change to effect a substantial reduction in transport emissions. While there are no certainties in predicting future technologies, the full electrification of the national car fleet represents a feasible option. Indications from car manufacturers and energy market analysts suggest that mass market adoption of EVs is probable.

Accordingly, Ireland's National Policy Framework on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport in Ireland: 2017-2030 set an ambitious target that from 2030, all new cars and vans sold in Ireland will be zero emission capable. In addition, Ireland has a national target of 20,000 EVs on Irish roads by 2020 and an ambitious longer term target of 500,000 by 2030.

In order to expedite the deployment of low carbon technologies, especially the uptake of EVs, my Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment jointly convened an interdepartmental Low Emission Vehicle Taskforce. The Taskforce includes representatives from across the public sector and has consulted widely with industry, stakeholders and representative groups. Phase one of their Work Programme focused exclusively on EVs and their recommendations were considered ahead of Budgets 2018 and 2019. A suite of continued and new EV supports has subsequently been established (see below) and a Progress Report has been published on my website (available at this link.)

There has been a substantial recent increase in EV sales; in 2018, a total of 1,972 new EVs were registered, bringing the total number on Irish roads to almost 7,650 by the end of December. 2019 is seeing a continued rise in EV numbers - in the first month of the year 1,112 EVs were registered compared to 213 in January 2018. By the end of February, there were almost 9,500 EVs under taxation.

Suite of EV supports currently available:

Purchase Grant Scheme - A grant of up to €5,000 towards the purchase of a new BEV or PHEV

VRT Relief - VRT Relief of up to €5,000 for BEVs (until end 2021), up to €2,500 for PHEVs (until end 2019) and up to €1,500 for conventional hybrids

Domestic Charger Grant - A grant of up to €600 towards the installation cost of a domestic charge point for new and second-hand BEVs or PHEVs

Low Motor Tax - BEVs qualify for the lowest tax band of motor tax at €120 per annum, while a PHEV is typically taxed at circa €170 per annum

Toll Incentive Scheme - As of July 2018, BEVs and PHEVs qualify for 50% and 25% toll reductions respectively up to a maximum €500 annual threshold for private vehicles and €1,000 for commercial vehicles

Lower fuel and maintenance costs - Studies show that you can save circa 70% annually on fuel costs in comparison with a diesel alternative

Comprehensive public and on-street charging network - ESB e-Cars rolled out and are further investing to enhance a network of EV charging points throughout Ireland, including almost 80 fast chargers. This network is complimented by charge points provided at locations such as hotels, shopping centres, visitor attractions, places of employment and private car parks

0% Benefit in Kind (BIK) Rate - BEVs qualify for a 0% Benefit in Kind rate up to €50,000 without mileage conditions

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Accelerated Capital Allowance - BEVs/PHEVs and their associated recharging infrastructure qualify under the ACA scheme. This scheme enables businesses to identify and buy the most energy efficient equipment including electric charging infrastructure and write down the cost of such equipment in the year of purchase rather than over the traditional 8 years

eSPSV Grant Scheme - A grant of up to €7,000 or €3,500 towards the purchase of a BEV or PHEV respectively for vehicles in the taxi/hackney/limousine sector

Public Engagement Programme - A National Awareness Campaign was launched in April 2018 as part of a wider public engagement programme which aims to increase awareness and familiarity with the technology of EVs

Test Driving an Electric Vehicle - An online interactive map shows the availability of dealers throughout the country and enables a test drive to be booked online

### **Road Signage**

583. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an issue previously raised with him directly in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12150/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** It is set out in S.I. 181 of 1997, Road Traffic (Signs) Regulations, 1997 that markings for bus lanes should be in white.

There are two main reasons why white is chosen over yellow for bus lane markings:

The first is retro-reflectivity which is a measure of the reflection of light and which is relevant when driving at nighttime. Higher values of retro-reflectivity can be achieved with white road markings than with yellow markings and therefore it is easier to see white markings at night.

The second reason is luminance which is a measure of the brightness of a colour. Higher values of luminance can be achieved for white markings than for yellow markings.

Overall white road markings have better conspicuity than yellow markings and It is for this reason that white is used for most road markings including for bus lane markings.

### **Road Traffic Legislation**

584. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status on an issue previously raised with him directly in correspondence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12188/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** There is nothing set out in Road Traffic law that specifically requires motorists to clear the way for emergency vehicles. Section 51A of the Road Traffic Act 1961, however, clearly states that there is a duty of care on all road users to use public roads with care and consideration for others. This principle is carried through into Section 12 of the Rules of the Road which lays out what to do when approached by an emergency vehicle.

As stated in the Rules of the Road, Gardaí, fire fighters and ambulances save lives in the course of their work and every second counts when they are responding to an emergency. Mo-

torists are required to familiarise themselves with the Rules of the Road and respond to emergency situations accordingly.

There are no plans to introduce further legislation in this area.

### **Road Safety**

585. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request Transport Infrastructure Ireland to investigate major safety issues arising on a national primary route (details supplied). [12341/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the improvement, maintenance and operation of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Fáilte Ireland Staff**

586. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons now employed on the Hidden Heartlands Fáilte Ireland project; and if it is planned to provide further personnel in order to ensure the project comes to fruition as soon as possible. [12345/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The staffing of the Hidden Heartlands Brand Experience is a matter for Fáilte Ireland and I have asked them to reply directly to the Deputy. I should point out that as well as the development work on the brand, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands also benefits from a range of other supports provided by Fáilte Ireland including capital investment, festivals, business tourism and events, enterprise development, business development, marketing, and training.

Please contact my private office if you do not hear from Fáilte Ireland within ten working days.

### **Rural Transport Services Provision**

587. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to provide a rural transport scheme for south County Roscommon following the removal of Bus Éireann stops at a location (details supplied). [12346/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education Standards**

588. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of on-site audits carried out by her Department or on its behalf on ECCE providers in each of the years 2015 to 2018; the attendance records of those children for which payment was made; the proportion of providers audited in each of the years in question; and if she will provide a detailed analysis of the results of these audits. [11478/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department funds a number of early learning and care (ELC) and school age childcare (SAC) programmes. Given the large amount of public money that is used in funding these programmes, there needs to be an appropriate level of oversight and accountability. The largest programme, both in terms of public funding and children registered, is the Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) programme.

The ECCE scheme is administered by Pobal on behalf of my Department. Pobal conducts unannounced compliance visits to participating service providers. The purpose of compliance visits is to assess whether a service is operating the ECCE programme in accordance with both the 'ECCE Funding Agreement' and 'Rules for DCYA childcare funding programmes', the most recent of which was published on 9th August 2018.

Over the course of a compliance visit Pobal will typically check all of the schemes operated by a service against the corresponding rules. Rules are designed to not only protect public money but also to ensure that certain quality and operational standards are met by the service provider. This is vital in order to make sure that the goals of the ELC schemes, funded by my Department, are being met.

In relation to attendance records, this requirement is not just a means of safeguarding public money; it is also an issue of child safety and a requirement of the statutory regulator, Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate.

The number of children participating in ECCE, the number of services providing ECCE, and the number of compliance visits varies from each programme cycle. Each year the Department agrees a new compliance service offer with Pobal. While the specifics may change each year, the underlying principle of the compliance approach remains to effectively address risk, ensure the ELC schemes are operating as intended and provide assurance that the significant public investment in ELC is being protected.

In each programme cycle since 2015, the approach, coverage and categories of compliance have changed to some extent.

Prior to 2017/2018, major non-compliance referred to any breach of specific programme rules, such as incorrect PIP registrations. Previously, any incorrect PIP registrations would result in a finding of major non-compliance. This was revised in 2017/2018 to ensure that major non-compliance referred to cases where a breach of the rules resulted in a significant risk to exchequer finances. For example, a small number of incorrect PIP registrations will now result in a finding of moderate non-compliance, while a large number of incorrect registrations will result in a finding of major non-compliance. This change ensures that the finding of major non-compliance is now a more accurate and proportionate categorisation.

As a consequence, it is important to note that the compliance outcomes are not directly comparable with the previous programme cycles.

In the 2015/16 programme cycle there were 4,178 ECCE contracts. Pobal reviewed 2,075 of these representing 49.66% of all ECCE contracts. In the 2015/16 programme cycle Pobal found that 38% of all contracts reviewed were recorded as major non-compliant with ECCE

programme rules. However, only 2% of ECCE contracts were found to be major non-compliant in relation to attendance records.

In the 2016/17 programme cycle Pobal reviewed 1,644 ECCE contracts out of 4,260, representing 38.59% coverage of all ECCE contracts. 45% of ECCE contracts reviewed were found to be major non-compliant in the 2016/17 programme cycle. 10% of ECCE contracts were found to be major non-compliant in relation to attendance records.

In the 2017/18 programme cycle Pobal reviewed 1,598 ECCE contracts out of a total of 4,246. This represented 37.64% coverage of ECCE contracts. The level of major non-compliance fell to just 7% of ECCE contracts reviewed ( note the statement above re the re-categorisation at the beginning of this year).

Further, in 2017/18, only 2% of ECCE contracts reviewed were found to be major non-compliant for not delivering sufficient free access to ECCE. This shows that 98% of services are meeting the core goal of ECCE; to provide access to 3 free hours per day of ELC to children. This represents a positive outcome for ECCE which will continue to run in parallel with National Childcare Scheme (NCS) into future programme years.

I am not in a position to provide the attendance records for children registered in the ECCE programme and my Department does not routinely collect such records from services. During a compliance visit, Pobal reviews attendance records on site but may also take copies and remove the records from the premises if necessary.

In summary, it is a key priority of my Department to ensure that providers fully comply with all programme rules in an effort to ensure the programmes are operating as intended and to safeguard public funds.

One of the most significant developments in the childcare area in recent years will be the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) later this year. The NCS is a legislatively based ELC scheme, that will provide great opportunities to children, families and service providers. Building on existing schemes, the NCS will contain rules that will be child-centred, fair and proportionate, clear and consistent. They will recognise the need for flexibility for parents. They will not disadvantage services for what can be considered minor non-attendances. At the same time, they will recognise the need to protect State finances by ensuring that Exchequer funds are used to support the maximum number of families in need of financial support, represent value for money for taxpayers, and are managed and allocated in accordance with robust and appropriate procedures.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes**

589. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if it is the policy of her Department, or the agents under the remit of her Department, to check all PPS numbers of children supplied by ECCE providers with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to confirm that the numbers quoted are correct and that the children are eligible and resident here; if so, the number of PPS numbers checked in each of the years 2015 to 2018; and the number of cases which required additional investigation. [11479/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** In order to register a child for the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, the parent/guardian must supply their chosen childcare service provider with the child's PPS number.

The PPS number is then checked by Pobal, who administer ECCE on behalf of my Depart-

ment, via the Department of Social Protection and Employment Affairs database on the Programme Implementation Platform (PIP) to ensure that the PPS number supplied is valid and matches the child's details as supplied, and that the child is in the eligible age bracket to register for ECCE. If this PPS number check fails, the registration is returned to the service provider who informs the parent/guardian. Pobal does not investigate further.

This process must be completed for every registration made on the PIP system by childcare providers.

All figures are taken from the PIP CRM and are correct as at the 11th of March 2019.

Total Registrations ECCE 2014	-	-	-	-	71,683.00
Programme Call	Approved	Declined	Deferred	Provisional	Grand Total
ECCE 2014	68,333.00	3,307.00	41.00	2.00	71,683.00
Total Registrations ECCE 2015/2016					81,251.00
Programme Call	Approved	Declined	Deferred	Provisional	Grand Total
ECCE 2015	77,449.00	3,797.00	-	5.00	81,251.00
Total Registrations ECCE 2016/2017					132,935.00
Programme Call	Approved	Declined	Deferred	Provisional	Grand Total
ECCE 2016	128,497.00	4,432.00	-	6.00	132,935.00
Total Registrations ECCE 2017/2018					132,153.00
Programme Call	Approved	Declined	Deferred	Provisional	Grand Total
ECCE 2017	126,470.00	5,652.00	-	31.00	132,153.00
Total Registrations ECCE 2018/2019					117,121.00
Programme Call	Approved	Declined	Deferred	Provisional	Grand Total
ECCE 2018	113,662.00	3,415.00	-	44.00	117,121.00

### Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

590. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if it is the policy of her Department, or the agents under the remit of her Department, to check all PPS

numbers of children supplied by ECCE providers with the Department of Education and Skills to confirm that the children are not also registered as pupils in a national school; the number of PPS numbers checked in each of the years 2015 to 2018; and the number of cases which required additional investigation. [11480/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Neither my Department, or Pobal, who operate early years schemes on behalf of my Department, supply the PPS numbers of children registered on the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme to the Department of Education and Skills for the purpose set out by the Deputy.

### Departmental Staff Data

591. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of staff in her Department engaged on the audit of funded programmes; the level of qualifications of each, for example, part or fully qualified accountants; and the number of on-site audits carried out for each of the programmes managed by her Department in each of the years 2015 to 2018. [11481/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** There are three staff members in situ in the Internal Audit Unit in the Department:

- 1) The Head of Internal Audit – CIMA Qualified (Professional Accountant Grade 1)
- 2) Higher Executive Officer – Certificate in Audit Skills (IPA) with 4/5 years of experience working in the Internal Audit Unit in the Department.
- 3) Executive Officer – Accountant Technician (ATI) and Certificate in Audit Skills (IPA)

All staff in the unit are involved in the audits of funded programmes.

Internal Audit also has access to internal audit services provided by Internal Audit Consultants under the management of the Head of Internal Audit. These consultants were procured under the OGP (Office of Government Procurement) Framework for the provision of Accounting, Audit and Financial Services. As part of the requirements a senior consultant is appointed for each project and is required to be a qualified accountant/auditor.

Oversight of the Internal Audit function is provided by the Department's Audit Committee.

A list of audits completed by Internal Audit in the Department is listed in Table A:

Table A

Name of Audit	Audit Issued
2015 (5)	
Desktop Review of Policy and Procedures	January
Support Services Audit	January
Programme Integration Programme - PO-BAL	July
National Children Detention Facility	July
Children Referendum 2012	October
2016 (6)	
Transactions Audit	March

Name of Audit	Audit Issued
Review of Policies and Procedures	July
Governance Arrangements in respect of Tusla	June
Technical Security Assessment	April
Review of Appropriation Account Preparation	November
Data Protection Assessment	November
2017 (8)	
CCS Audit 2016 - Lookback Exercise	February
Affordable Childcare Scheme Project	March
Transactions Audit	March
Tusla Payments	June
Youth Affairs Grants	October
Bank reconciliations, Petty Cash, Credit Card in DCYA	November
DCYA Governance Arrangements	December
Financial Processes in Oberstown Campus	December
2018 (14)	
DCYA Internal Report into Incident of Theft	January
Risk Management Policy and Process in DCYA	March
Review of Governance Arrangements in respect of Tusla	April
Review of Implementation of Recommendations in relation to Honesty Box Procedures	May
Review of Bank Reconciliation, Petty Cash & CC Controls	June
Procurement Processes and Controls 2017	June
Desktop Review of Documented Financial Policies and Procedures	September
AIM (Access and Inclusion Model) Review	September
Transaction Audit 2018	September
SLAs for Commissioning Arrangements - ABC (Area Based Childhood) Programme	September
SLAs for Commissioning Arrangements - Early Years	September
SLAs for Commissioning Arrangements - Youth Organisations & Services	September
ECCE and PIP High level follow up review on 2014 and 2015 reports	December
Review of Business Continuity and Technical Disaster Recovery Management	December

### Early Childhood Care and Education

592. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a decision will be overturned regarding the provision of an overage exemption for a person (details supplied) for an ECCE scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11496/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** 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 and 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.

This Department does its best to ensure, in so far as possible, the equitable treatment of all children and families who apply for childcare funding under the ECCE Programme. In order to ensure objectivity and fairness, it is essential that clear rules exist for the scheme and that they are applied evenly. The child in question has utilised their full allocation of two years of the ECCE programme.

It should be highlighted 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 could have the capacity to lead to breaching the statutory school starting age.

In the past, the operation of the system of overage exemption has caused confusion where some parents and providers have mistakenly assumed 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 application process for an exemption from the upper age limit for the ECCE programme was introduced within a context where:

- The ECCE programme was for a year only; and
- The Access and Inclusions Model (AIM) did not exist.

Given the extension of the ECCE programme in 2016/2017, the further extension of the programme to two full years from September 2018, and the introduction of AIM in June 2016, the rationale underpinning the policy intent of the system of overage exemption came under review as the initial premise for the provision of an exemption might have been considered to be no longer valid, i.e. an overage exemption as originally designed allowed for a child to avail of one programme year of ECCE over two years, whereas the standard provision is now a full two programme years.

The overage exemption process has recently been the subject of a consultation process and report 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 and 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 ex-

emption 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 ECCE entitlement had already been availed of.

I regret if this process and decision has caused any upset to the parents involved, but I can only seek to assure you that the decision was taken with due regard for the best interests of the child, especially as it relates to research showing broad agreement that it is in the best interest of the child to start school with their peers. 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 the child from September 2019.

### **UN Conventions Ratification**

593. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the second optional protocol of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child will be ratified; the reason Ireland is the only EU member state yet to ratify the convention; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11541/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am strongly committed to the ratification of the Second Optional Protocol. Preparations to ratify the protocol are at an advanced stage and my Department is currently finalising a submission for the attention of the Attorney General, proposing the ratification of the Second Optional Protocol. Once approved, I will seek a Government decision on the ratification of the Convention at the earliest opportunity.

To date, ratification has been pending to ensure that all of the necessary measures have been put in place to fully comply with the obligations of the convention. The recent enactments of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 and the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017 by the Department of Justice and Equality have fulfilled a number of the protocol's requirements.

I greatly look forward to advancing progress on this important area of work and moving towards the confirmation of Ireland's ratification of the Second Optional Protocol in the near future.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education**

594. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to issues with the ECCE scheme by which childcare providers are prioritising children whose parents are paying for full day-care services over children whose parents are seeking to enrol them for half day care which they are entitled to under the scheme; if her attention has further been drawn to the fact that such an approach by childcare providers is making it extremely difficult for parents to identify and secure childcare services under the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11694/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Childcare service providers are private enterprises and are therefore free to set their own policies, including their admission policies which can include prioritising full day places. However, my Department actively seeks to ensure adequate capacity to allow service providers latitude to accom-

moderate all children. If a gap in capacity is objectively identified, we can consider a range of measures to address this in collaboration with the local Childcare Committee.

If the Deputy is aware of any specific case of a parent who is having difficulty in accessing a childcare place I would recommend that they make contact with their local city or county childcare committee who will be able to assist. Contact details for all of the CCCs and details of the services they provide may be found on [www.myccc.ie](http://www.myccc.ie)

With regard to capacity generally in the system, my Department provided a total of €4.61 million in Capital funding in 2018 specifically for the creation of new childcare places. This represents the creation of some 1,950 additional early years childcare places, of which 1,253 are for ECCE. In addition, my Department is currently taking applications for the Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare Capital 2019, for which I have secured €6.106 million funding.

### **Unaccompanied Minors and Separated Children**

595. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding separated children seeking asylum; the number Ireland has committed to accepting; the number accepted to date; when the procurement process to provide residential beds was completed; if additional beds have been made available since 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11835/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Separated children who come to Ireland to seek asylum are taken into the care of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Separated children seeking asylum are defined as “children under eighteen years of age who are outside their country of origin, who have applied for asylum and are separated from their parents or their legal/customary care giver”.

As the Deputy may be aware, the majority of separated children seeking asylum present at ports, airports or points of entry to Ireland and are referred to Tusla under the International Protection Act 2015. In addition unaccompanied minors are received into the care of Tusla through programmes such as the Calais Special Project (CSP) and Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP).

In December 2018 there were 67 separated children seeking asylum in the care of Tusla, which includes young people arriving through the IRPP programme and those presenting at ports, airports and points of entry. All children and young people in this service have an allocated Social Worker. All young people and young adults in the service who are entitled to Aftercare services have an allocated Aftercare Worker.

Young people in the IRPP were brought in under the following programmes:

Calais Special Project (41)

EU Relocation Programme (6)

Malta Programme (4)

Tusla is currently engaged in a further mission to Malta, to carry out interviews with the young people with a view to relocating a further 5 unaccompanied minors to Ireland this year.

My colleague Minister Flanagan has written to Greek authorities to inform them of our intention to accept an additional 36 separated children seeking asylum from the refugee camps

in Greece, under the IRPP programme. Tusla has begun to liaise with the agencies responsible for unaccompanied children in Greece, with the support of the IRPP and the Irish Embassy in Athens, for the identification and nomination of unaccompanied children who fit the profile for relocation to Ireland.

I would note that there has been an existing service for separated children seeking asylum for a number of years. Capacity to meet commitments of Government has been put in place.

A tendering process took place in 2017 to award private providers a contract for three 6-bed residential centres. The same tendering process allows for provision of further residential places, if needed, where the provider would be asked to provide one 6-bed centre. However, in 2017 two of Tusla's statutory children's residential centres changed their purpose and function to become centres for separated children seeking asylum. In total these two centres are providing 9 placements and no additional places have been sourced to date under the new contract.

### **Domestic Violence Refuges Provision**

596. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of domestic refuge centres here in tabular form; the number of spaces available by centre; the number of persons who availed of the services of each centre in 2018; the periods during 2018 when each of these centres were full to capacity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11861/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has responsibility for the provision of funding, co-ordination and support to 21 organisations which provide emergency refuge and emergency non-refuge accommodation to victims of domestic violence and their children. In addition to this Tusla maintains a refuge facility in South Dublin which has been temporarily closed for essential refurbishment works. This facility is expected to re-open as a domestic violence refuge in Quarter 2 of this year. In total, 155 family units of emergency accommodation are provided - 145 in emergency refuges and 10 in emergency non-refuge accommodation.

Table 1 sets out the location and capacity of emergency refuge and emergency non-refuge accommodation throughout the country.

Tusla receives activity data from service providers retrospectively on an annual basis. Data on 2018 occupancy will be available later in 2019. Information on specific periods when the occupancy of accommodation exceeds capacity is not currently available.

There are challenges in ensuring that there is an appropriate configuration of spaces available to all women and children who require emergency refuge accommodation. Tusla seeks to achieve the optimum use of specialist emergency accommodation while also focusing on prevention and effective community based services to avoid, in so far as possible, the need for use of refuges or emergency non-refuge accommodation by vulnerable women and families.

It is important that the needs of victims of domestic violence are met in the best way possible, with due attention to the quality, accessibility, and outcome of services. I am committed to supporting Tusla in meeting the needs of individuals who experience domestic violence. I will engage with Tusla, and with stakeholders from the sector, regarding the most appropriate use for the €1.5m in additional funding secured for DSGBV services in 2019.

Table 1: Location and number of emergency refuge and emergency non-refuge accommodation family units

Questions - Written Answers

County	Emergency Refuges Funded By Tusla	No. of Units
Clare	Clarehaven Services	6
Cork	Cuanlee Refuge	6
Donegal	Donegal Domestic Violence Services	4
Dublin	Saoirse Women's Refuge, Tallaght	6
Dublin	Sonas, Dublin	15*
Dublin	Aoibhneas Women & Children's Refuge, Coolock	10
Dublin	Rathmines Women's Refuge (Operated by Tusla)	9**
Galway	COPE Galway	6
Kerry	ADAPT Kerry Ltd.	6
Kildare	Teach Tearmainn Refuge	4
Kilkenny	Amber Women's Refuge, Kilkenny	7
Limerick	ADAPT Domestic Abuse Service, Limerick	14
Louth	Drogheda Women's and Children's Refuge Centre	11
Louth	Women's Aid Dundalk	5
Mayo	Mayo Women's Support Services Refuge	5
Meath	Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services	5
Sligo	Women's Domestic Violence Service	3***
Tipperary	Cuan Saor Women's Refuge And Support Services, Clonmel	4
Waterford	Oasis House Women's Refuge	14
Westmeath	Esker House Women's Refuge And Support Services, Athlone	4
Wexford	Wexford Women's Refuge	4
Wicklow	Bray Women's Refuge	7
Total		155

Explanatory Text on Table

\* The overall figure of 15 includes 8 family units of emergency refuge accommodation, and 7 family units of emergency non-refuge accommodation.

\*\* As Rathmines Women's Refuge has temporarily closed, the availability of these units is currently on hold. The facility is expected to re-open as a domestic violence refuge in Quarter 2 of this year.

\*\*\* These 3 units are provided in the form of emergency non-refuge accommodation only.

### **Court Orders**

597. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a person who has undergone a parental capacity assessment can be required to undergo a second one immediately or shortly after the first despite there being no issues of process or otherwise with the first one. [11862/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can advise the Deputy that I am not in a position to comment on matters which are subject to court decisions. Parental capacity assessments are requested by the courts to assist their decision making. Matters relating to the operation of the courts are more appropriate to my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

### **Child and Family Agency Reports**

598. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 519 of 5 March 2019, if the reason she did not seek a copy of the report in question was due to the fact that she was informed by Tusla that it was an internal management report; and the circumstances in which Tusla informed her of same. [11940/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can confirm to the Deputy that the primary reason that I did not seek a copy of the report in question was that I was informed by Tusla that it was an internal management report.

I received correspondence from the sub-committee of the Board of Tusla, which indicated that the report was to review management, structures and processes in the Midlands. I was informed that this report was not intended for publication. I had separately sought assurances as to the improvements implemented by Tusla to address issues in the Midlands and have outlined these in previous correspondence with the Deputy in November 2018.

There are a number of reasons why I may or may not seek a report from an agency under my remit. I continue to seek assurances from Tusla and other statutory bodies through regular engagement on routine and specific matters. Such assurances are supported by information from a number of sources including performance data, reports and engagement with key stakeholders.

The Deputy will be aware that I have sought written clarification from Tusla in relation to a number of matters regarding the report, and will also be part of an investigation which is being overseen by a sub-committee of the Board of Tusla.

### **Child and Family Agency Reports**

599. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 519 of 5 March 2019, when her attention was drawn to the fact that the report in question had been received by Tusla in May 2016. [11941/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Deputy tabled a Parliamentary Question in relation to this report on 11 September, 2017 that suggested that the report was concluded in July 2016. Tusla's reply indicated that the report was under

legal review and a date for publication had not been set but did not say when the report was received.

I received correspondence in May 2018 from the sub-committee of the Board of Tusla that is responsible for the oversight of the investigation into matters raised in the correspondence of December 2016, and includes matters relating to this report. This correspondence indicated that the report was with Tusla in May 2016. I corresponded with the Deputy in November 2018 on matters relating to this report when it was clear that the information provided to the Deputy in September 2017 was incorrect.

The Deputy will be aware that I have sought written clarification from Tusla in relation to a number of matters regarding the report, and will also be part of an investigation which is being overseen by a sub-committee of the Board of Tusla.

### **Child and Family Agency Staff**

600. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated full year cost of recruiting 30 additional full-time early years inspectors for Tusla; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11945/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The total estimated cost of recruiting 30 new full-time Early Years Inspectors in Tusla would be €2,504,820.

This includes pay and non pay costs and is made up of a cost of €83,494 per Inspector

- Total Pay Costs: (basic salary of €61,415 plus employers PRSI @10.95%)
- Non Pay Costs (Overheads): €15,354

The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate is currently in the process of recruiting nine new Early Years Inspectors from an expanded pool of professional backgrounds. Previously, Early Years Inspectors were required to hold a level 9 QQI qualification (Masters Level) and be registered as a Public Health Nurse. Recent changes to the recruitment criteria mean that these posts are now also open to graduates with suitable qualifications in Early Years Care and Education, Social Care, Social Work, Psychology and Education.

This development reflects the on-going professionalisation of the Early Learning and Care sector, and it is intended that the recruitment of these posts will compliment and strengthen the work of the Inspectorate in promoting the quality, safety and appropriate care of children in Early Learning and Care services. Of these new posts currently being filled, three have already been appointed, six have accepted, and one remains to be filled.

The current pay scale for an Early Years Inspector ranges from €56,452 to €64,812. The costings above are based on mid-point of this pay scale.

### **Child and Family Agency Reports**

601. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 514 of 5 March 2019, if a copy of the minutes requested will be provided in view of the fact the investigation of matters pertaining to the midlands management review are no barrier to the minutes requested being provided. [11949/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Deputy will be aware that I have sought written clarification from Tusla in relation to a number of matters, including decisions taken by Tusla management, in relation to the midlands management review.

The Deputy will also be aware that a sub-committee of the Board of Tusla has advised me that the matters raised in relation to the review will be part of the investigation, which is currently underway.

### **Childcare Services Regulation**

602. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 2335 of 24 July 2018, the details of the findings regarding the crèche in question being investigated; the actions taken by her Department; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that this facility has continued to advertise and operate itself under the guise of being a fully registered childcare facility; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12037/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As outlined in question No. 2335 of 24 July 2018, section 58D (1) and (2) of the Childcare Act 1991 (as amended by Part XII of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013), require that all persons wishing to operate an early years service must be placed on a register of early years services, maintained by Tusla - the Child and Family Agency. Continued operation of a service is contingent on registration, and the service is monitored by Tusla, through the Early Years Inspectorate by inspection for compliance with the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016. Where a service meets the requirements for registration (as outlined by Part XII of the Child and Family Agency Act) but refuses to cooperate with this process, then the Early Years Inspectorate may escalate this matter to the District Court.

The Early Years Inspectorate has been aware of the service in question for some time, and has continued to engage with them in order to regularise their registration status. Since July this has escalated to enforcement proceedings. It is anticipated that these proceedings will conclude shortly. In the interim, the service has registered with the Early Years Inspectorate as and from 1 March 2019, and it is intended that the Inspectorate will continue to monitor this service closely to ensure on-going compliance with the 2016 regulations.

### **Childcare Legislation**

603. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to update the Child Care Act 1991. [12045/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As the Deputy will be aware, the primary legislation regulating child care policy is the Child Care Act 1991.

My Department is reviewing the Act in line with a Government commitment under Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People. The purpose of the review is to identify what is working well within the existing legislation, address any identified gaps or new areas for development and reflect recent policy and practice developments.

An important step of this process is to engage with a wide range of stakeholders to col-

lect their views and experiences and my Department commenced this process with an open policy debate in Dublin Castle late 2017. Since then we have concluded a written consultation that received over forty submissions, hosted a series of consultations with front line staff and management from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and consulted with a number of other stakeholders including legal professionals. These consultations have been crucial to informing the scoping work by the Department and development of policy papers.

Our aim for the upcoming year is to refine and finalise our policy proposals, with a view to seeking permission from Government to draft the Heads and a General Scheme of a Child Care (Amendment) Bill.

The Deputy might wish to note that the reform of Section 26 of the 1991 Act, concerning the role and function of Guardian *ad litem*, is progressed separately. The Department, in consultation with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, is finalising the drafting of the relevant Bill and it is anticipated that this will be published in the coming months.

### **Child and Family Agency Investigations**

604. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the assurance review by Tusla of allegations made regarding a carer of a child or young person with a disability. [12115/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I have referred the matter to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have asked Tusla to reply to the Deputy directly.

### **Disability Support Services Provision**

605. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department or Tusla has reviewed the provision of disability supports and services to children in care as discussed in the Ombudsman for Children report on a case (details supplied). [12116/19]

608. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department or agencies under her remit have conducted a systematic review of the supports and services being offered in a case (details supplied) that was reviewed in 2018. [12119/19]

609. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department or agencies under her remit have conducted a review of the services and supports which are offered to children in care who have disabilities; and if so, if this report will be published. [12120/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 605, 608 and 609 together.

I wish to thank the Deputy for her questions, and can confirm that I have referred the matter to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for their direct reply.

### **Children in Care**

606. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to

introduce an enhanced support payment for children in care with disabilities. [12117/19]

607. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there has been an engagement between the Department of Health and her Department on formulating a national policy to support children in care with a disability. [12118/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 606 and 607 together.

There are existing national policies to support children in care with a disability.

Under Tusla's National Policy on Financial Payments in Foster Care, Aftercare and Supported Lodgings, an enhanced foster care allowance may be payable to foster carers in certain circumstances. A maximum of twice the weekly allowance may be paid in respect of children aged up to 18 years if they require significant care over and above the needs of other children in foster care. This includes children who have been diagnosed with significant special needs and require a high level of personal care and supervision.

Foster care allowances are payable for the benefit of the foster child and therefore must be used to meet the day to day costs associated with looking after the foster child. In considering any enhanced allowance the social worker must show that the standard fostering allowance does not adequately provide for the cost of caring for the child.

In general terms, disability services are provided by the HSE, and the eligibility of children, including children with a disability, to relevant supports and services is determined on the basis of clinical need.

Tusla and my Department are aware that children in care with a disability may face specific challenges. The Joint Protocol for Interagency Collaboration between the Health Service Executive and Tusla, agreed by the two agencies, is designed to address such matters.

This protocol clarifies how children in care access HSE-funded disability-related services, setting out the respective roles and duties of the relevant agencies, as well as the arrangements in place when children in care reach 18 years of age. While the Protocol is managed at a local level in the first instance, it provides a clear escalation process should an issue arise, or if there is an unresolved matter around access to appropriate services.

The Protocol's development came on foot of intensive and productive engagement at the highest level between the HSE, Tusla, my Department, and the Department of Health. My officials are continuing to work closely with Department of Health colleagues regarding young people in care transitioning to HSE Disability Services placements upon turning 18, in order to effect a sustainable transition mechanism.

*Question Nos. 608 and 609 answered with Question No. 605.*

### **Children in Care**

610. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department or agencies under her remit have developed performance metrics to monitor and measure the outcomes of children in care with disabilities. [12121/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can advise the Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency collects data for each child in its care, on the National Child Care Information System (NCCIS). Information gathered includes data on the

child's individual needs, including disabilities and supports that may be required to meet those needs. The data is collected for the purposes of care planning, and not collated centrally for reporting purposes at this time.

Tusla also collects point-in-time data on children with disabilities each year. The data collected consists of the number of children in care on the last day of September, who have received a diagnosis of moderate to severe disability by a clinical specialist, i.e. registered general medical practitioner, psychiatrist or other appropriately qualified clinical specialist (e.g. paediatrician). This census is taken by care type. The data collected reflects only children in the statutory care of the Child and Family Agency. Tusla does not gather data on children living in disability services who are not in statutory care.

My officials are currently working with Tusla staff to further develop the range and scope of performance metrics used in relation to children in care.

### **Childcare Services Regulation**

611. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will report on the concerns of a forum (details supplied) regarding the reporting of registration and attendance of children in community childcare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12250/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Assisting families to access high quality, affordable early learning and care and school age childcare is a priority for me as Minister and hence I take any concerns raised by the sector very seriously.

My Department funds a number of early learning and care and school age childcare programmes. Given the large amount of public money that is used in funding these programmes, there needs to be an appropriate level of oversight and accountability. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs believes that our approach to compliance and supporting services strikes a necessary and appropriate balance. Our approach involves setting out the rules for the receipt of State funding, supporting providers to deliver services, and at the same time, the approach offers assurances to the taxpayer that the funding assigned is being spent as it was intended.

A high level of compliance with the rules of the various childcare schemes is vital to maintaining existing investment as well as ensuring future investment. It is a requirement that services operating the early learning and care and school age childcare programmes funded by my Department must be compliant with the 'Rules for DCYA childcare funding programmes', the most recent of which was published on 9 August 2018. Compliance with these Rules is overseen by Pobal on behalf of my Department. Because subsidies for the early learning and care and school age childcare programmes are paid based on attendance (not enrolment), this is a vital governance component of the funding for which my Department is responsible.

I very much appreciate that community childcare settings provide a valuable service to children and families across the country. I also appreciate their stated concerns regarding their sustainability. Hence, significant support is available to them to bring their service onto a more sustainable footing, whilst being necessarily compliant with scheme rules.

My Department oversees an integrated Case Management system operated by Pobal through which a dedicated team assesses services facing challenges. This Case Management service provides non-financial assistance or support in the first instance. Financial supports are also available for services facing certain challenges which may also be accessed through Case Management following a financial assessment.

Results from Pobal compliance visits for the first part of the programme year 2018/2019 show some issues in relation to non-compliance which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. I am encouraged however that most services have engaged constructively with the process so far. I would recommend all other services to get in contact with Pobal or their local City / County Childcare Committee if they need support or advice, or if they believe a sustainability issue arises.

The Deputy will be aware that investment in childcare has increased by an unprecedented 117% over the last four budgets, now totalling €575 million per year. Community services access much of this growing investment. Turnover for many services has increased quite substantially (given that the number of servicers operating has increased only slightly) and co-payments / top-up payments made by parents has decreased, both measures assisting many services to strengthen their sustainability and review their business model to meet compliance requirements.

The existing targeted childcare schemes will be replaced later this year with the National Childcare Scheme. In launching this new scheme today with the Taoiseach, we began a major national information campaign in relation to how this new scheme will operate. A significant amount of time will be invested in working with services to ensure that they are ready for it. The new scheme will not have a snapshot window. Its attendance rules will seek to reflect the reality of children and parents' lives and the need for services to operate as businesses. The attendance rules will reflect a certain degree of flexibility whilst honouring the requirement to ensure that Exchequer funding is used for the purposes it was intended.

My Department's policy relating to the new National Childcare Scheme (NCS) was informed by evidence and with the best interests of children and families in mind. The legislation that I brought forward, supporting the scheme, the Childcare Support Act 2018, was the subject of much discussion in the Houses and many elements of the policy were considered by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children on a number of occasions.

Under NCS, subsidies will be paid to a service provider for a child regularly using the childcare place. In other words, the scheme will contain rules in relation to circumstances where a child leaves the service, is absent or is not fully using the agreed place over a prolonged period. The rules have been developed to be fair, proportionate and child-centred, while also being clear and consistent. Importantly they will recognise the need for flexibility for parents. My Department has worked hard to ensure that they will not disadvantage services for what can be considered minor non-attendances. At the same time, they will recognise the need to protect State finances by ensuring that Exchequer funds are used to support the maximum number of families in need of financial support, represent value for money for taxpayers, and are managed and allocated in accordance with robust and appropriate procedures.

The National Childcare Scheme will mark another significant milestone for early learning and care and school age childcare in this country, creating an infrastructure from which Government can further increase investment in services over the next decade, This is in line with the commitment made in First 5, the Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, I published last November.

## **Brexit Preparations**

612. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the specific arrangements made regarding children in care who are placed in residential and-or therapeutic facilities in the United Kingdom; and the impact on the arrangements in the event that the UK

leaves the European Union. [12320/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The placements of children in State care into the jurisdiction of the UK are subject to relevant applications under domestic and international instruments including Council Regulation (EC) No 2201/2003 (the Brussels II bis Regulation), the Child Abduction and Enforcement of Orders Act, 1991 (as amended) and the Protection of Children (Hague Convention) Act, 2000. Tusla is currently reviewing its position, in respect of the potential impact of Brexit, on the placement of this cohort of young people into the UK.

The European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers has provided a notice to stakeholders in relation to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom (from the EU) and EU rules in the field of civil justice and private international law. This Notice, which is informing Tusla's review, provides guidance in respect of the following:

- Proceedings pending on the withdrawal date;
- Proceedings initiated as of the withdrawal date;
- Exequatored judgements;
- Judicial cooperation procedures between Member States.

This notice sets out the legal position with regard to children in care that are placed in residential or therapeutic facilities in the United Kingdom and provides a framework for State agencies in assuring governance of these cases.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is in place between Tusla, the Department of Justice and Equality and International Social Services (ISS) Ireland which governs applications for cross border placements and requests for social work reports. Under this MOU, ISS Ireland undertakes the following functions:

- Acting as the central point of contact for all cross-border applications;
- Expediting applications for social reports and the placement of children in care with a cross border dimension;
- Supporting the Central Authority and State agencies in delivering their legal obligations with regard to applications as provided for in the legislation;
- Defining each stakeholders' expectations given their legal responsibilities;
- Defining inputs, outputs and expected outcomes for the stakeholders.

A possible review of this MoU in the context of Brexit is also being considered by Tusla.

Tusla continues to engage with the Department of Justice and Equality in relation to the impact of Brexit on relevant applications under domestic and international instruments. Tusla will also continue discussions with officials in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and other Government Departments as required, in the coming weeks to establish appropriate jurisdiction, judicial cooperation with third countries and the appropriate procedures to be followed under national law and international conventions in relation to actions surrounding the cohort of young people in question.

While it is not possible to determine, at this point, what form the UK's exit from the EU will take, my officials are satisfied, on the basis of legal advice received, that the provisions of

the 1996 Hague Convention on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Co-operation in Respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children will provide a legal framework, post Brexit, for the placement of children in specialist facilities in the United Kingdom.

### **Control of Dogs**

613. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if an out-of-hours dog warden service will be introduced in County Louth. [12109/19]

614. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the development of a reciprocal arrangement which would enable dog wardens in County Louth to follow dogs which have killed sheep into neighbouring counties here and into Northern Ireland will be supported. [12110/19]

615. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the procedure for dogs which have been removed by a dog warden due to sheep worrying. [12111/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 613 to 615, inclusive, together.

The overall intention of dog control legislation is to place the onus on dog owners and those in control of dogs to act responsibly by keeping their dogs under effectual control. Such responsible dog ownership is the key to reducing incidences of sheep worrying and other problem behaviours.

The Control of Dogs Acts 1986, as amended, set out a range of requirements for all dog owners or any other person in charge of a dog. In particular, section 9 of the 1986 Act outlines requirements regarding keeping dogs under effectual control. Section 9 (2) states that the owner or any other person in charge of a dog that worries livestock is guilty of an offence, while Section 21 of the 1986 Act provides that the owner of a dog shall be liable in damages for an attack on livestock.

Upon seizure of a dog under Sections 9 or 11 of the Control of Dogs Act, the seized dog is taken to the Local Authority dog pound, with relevant details regarding the dog entered in the register. Section 14(3) specifies the information to be entered in the register while Section 11 outlines the duration of detention of the dog.

As all operational matters in relation to the Control of Dogs Acts 1986, as amended, are matters for local authorities, an out of hours dog warden service is solely a matter for the relevant local authority. I understand that Louth County Council dog warden service has been very active in addressing all aspects of sheep worrying, from dealing with actual cases, including the scanning of dead dogs for microchips at the scenes to preventive measures such as seizing stray dogs from the area.

My Department will continue to work with all responsible stakeholders and support any practical reciprocal arrangements between local authority areas, and where relevant, other jurisdictions. In many cases these arrangements can be dealt with at an operational level by local authorities. My Department will work with all responsible stakeholders towards the shared aim of promoting responsible dog ownership and consistently reinforcing the message that dogs should never be allowed to roam alone.

*Questions - Written Answers*  
**Voluntary Sector Funding**

616. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the action he has taken arising from a report (details supplied); the options for funding being considered; if there is a timeframe for a final decision; if he is working with all of the volunteer centres affected by the underfunding of the services; if an interim agreement on funding will be reached to support the centres while a long-term plan is being devised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11636/19]

617. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the options under consideration for the funding of underfunded volunteer centres; the timeframe for a decision on the matter; and if additional funding will be made available. [11808/19]

621. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his attention has been drawn to a report (details supplied) and the content of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11907/19]

622. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the plans he is considering to assist under-resourced volunteer centres; when additional funding will be made available to these groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11908/19]

624. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the recommendations of the report Developing Funding Criteria for Volunteer Centres in Ireland will be implemented (details supplied); the options being considered; the timescale in which these decisions will be reached; if the necessary funding will be granted to services such as those in counties Westmeath and Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12042/19]

625. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his views on a report (details supplied) which identified the minimum funding necessary for centres as €121,016; the options being considered for volunteer groups that are underfunded and fall significantly below this amount; when a decision may be reached; and if the necessary funding will be granted. [12193/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 616, 617, 621, 622, 624 and 625 together.

My Department's community and voluntary supports and programmes unit provide a cohesive framework of support for the community and voluntary sector. €3.5 million is being provided in 2019 under this programme to support 21 volunteer centres, eight volunteering information services and a number of volunteer-supporting organisations, such as Volunteer Ireland.

Following the publication of the 2017 Dermot McLaughlin report "Developing Funding Criteria for Volunteer Centres in Ireland", my Department secured additional funding of €300,000 which was allocated to all Volunteer Centres in 2017 on a proportionate basis. This increased funding level has been maintained in 2018 and 2019.

The Dormant Accounts Action Plan 2018 included the provision of €1.2 million to upgrade the eight Volunteer Information Services to full Volunteer Centres in order to provide a consistent level of volunteering service nationwide. My Department is currently engaging with stakeholders in the roll-out of this initiative. As part of this exercise, my Department is also examining options with regard to a number of existing Volunteer Centres which are currently receiving less funding than the minimum amount recommended in the McLaughlin report.

My Department is also currently collating information received from a recent call for input exercise that was designed as a first step towards developing a draft national volunteering strategy. Among the topics under consideration in this context is the issue of volunteering support infrastructure and how best this can be structured to support volunteering.

### LEADER Programmes Data

618. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the percentage of total expenditure by each LEADER group on administration and animation in the 2009 to 2014 programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11818/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** LEADER is a multi-annual EU co-funded programme to support rural development. The 2007-2013 LEADER programme was delivered by the Local Development Companies who were the Local Action Groups (LAGs) for each LEADER area.

Total project and administration expenditure, which included engagement with potential promoters (known as “animation”), under the 2007-2013 LEADER programme amounted to approximately €369 million. Table 1 provides details of the administration and animation expenditure incurred by each LAG, expressed as a percentage of their total spend under the 2007-2013 LEADER programme.

Under the 2007-2013 programme, the LEADER Local Action Groups could claim 20% of their funding allocation for the purposes of administration and animation costs. The LAGs could also avail of additional funding from their project budget allocation to fund additional animation activity, and these amounts are also included in Table 1.

**Table 1: LEADER 2007-2013 Percentage Administration and Animation expenditure by LAG.**

Local Action Group	% Administration & Animation
Avondhu/Blackwater Partnership Limited	27.6%
Ballyhoura Development Limited	20.1%
Carlow County Development Partnership Limited	24.8%
Cavan/Monaghan Area Partnership Ltd.	24.3%
Cill Dara ar Aghaidh Teoranta	26.7%
Clare Local Development Company Limited	21.1%
Co Kilkenny LEADER Partnership Co Ltd	20.5%
Co Wicklow Community Partnership	24.1%
Comhar na nOileáin Teoranta	22.7%
Donegal Local Development Company Limited	23.9%
Fingal LEADER Partnership	27.3%
FORUM Connemara	25.7%
Galway Rural Development Company Limited	23.2%
I.R.D. Duhallow	21.4%

Local Action Group	% Administration & Animation
Inishowen Development Partnership	22.4%
Laois Community & Enterprise Development Co Ltd	21.4%
Leitrim Integrated Development Company	23.3%
Longford Community Resources Limited	23.8%
Louth LEADER Partnership	26.2%
M.F.G. (Meitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta Teoranta)	42.2%
Mayo North East LEADER Partnership Co Teo	21.6%
Meath Community Rural & Social Development Partnership Ltd	22.0%
North & East Kerry LEADER Partnership Teoranta	26.0%
North Tipperary LEADER Partnership Company	18.4%
Offaly Integrated Local Development Company	22.6%
Roscommon Integrated Development Company	26.4%
Sligo LEADER Partnership Co	21.1%
South & East Cork Area Development Limited	23.9%
South Kerry Development Partnership Limited	24.6%
South Tipperary Local Development Company Limited	19.0%
South West Mayo Development Company Limited	25.4%
Waterford LEADER Partnership Limited	23.6%
West Cork Development Partnership Ltd	24.8%
West Limerick Resources Ltd	25.2%
Westmeath Community Development Ltd	25.5%
Wexford Local Development	20.8%

### LEADER Programmes Expenditure

619. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the planned level of administration and animation expenditure over the lifetime of the current LEADER programme for all LAGs, both independent and local authority, expressed as a percentage of their total budgets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11820/19]

620. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the percentage of the total expenditure of local action groups on LEADER programmes retained by local authorities; if this retention applies to all LAGs administering LEADER; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11822/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 619 and 620 together.

The LEADER programme has a total budget of €250 million over the period to 2020. €220 million of this funding has been allocated to the Local Action Groups (LAGs) throughout the country who deliver the LEADER programme. The remaining €30 million is available for schemes which will be overseen at a national level.

Article 35 of Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013 stipulates that support can be provided for the administration costs of the LAGs and the cost of their engagement with communities to generate projects - also referred to as “animation” costs.

In line with the Regulation, the maximum percentage of funding that can be spent by Local Action Groups on administration and animation is 25% of the LEADER expenditure incurred in the delivery of their Local Development Strategy (LDS).

25 of the 29 LAGs delivering LEADER are Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) working in partnership with the Local Development Companies and Local Authorities in their respective areas. In these LAGs, the funding for administration and animation expenditure is all provided to the Local Development Companies or it can be shared between both the Local Development Companies and the Local Authorities.

The division of the administration and animation funding between the Local Authorities and the Local Development Companies is a matter for each individual LAG. My Department understands, based on submissions from the Local Authorities, that the percentage funding retained by each Local Authority for their own administration purposes related to the LEADER programme ranges from 0% to 5% of the LAG budget.

In the other 4 cases, the Local Action Groups are Local Development Companies that are not in a formal partnership with the LCDC and Local Authority. Therefore the full 25% funding for administration and animation is available solely for the Local Development Company.

Table 1 outlines the following details for each LAG:

- The total allocation for the LEADER 2014-2020 programme;
- The total planned administration and animation expenditure as outlined in each Local Development Strategy;
- The total planned administration and animation expenditure as outlined in each Local Development Strategy expressed as a percentage of the total allocation;
- The percentage of the total allocation retained by Local Authorities for administration and animation costs. It should be noted that this percentage is already included in the overall percentage provided in the table for Administration & Animation, and is not an additional allocation.

The LAGs may also be entitled to additional administration and animation expenditure associated with projects approved from the €30 million available at national level.

This expenditure is monitored by my Department on an ongoing basis.

**Table 1: LEADER 2014:2020 LAG allocations and associated administration and animation expenditure**

Questions - Written Answers

Local Action Group	Total Allocation	Planned Administration and Animation (A&A) Expenditure	A&A as % of Total Allocation	% of Total Allocation to be Retained by Local Authority
Carlow	€6,416,803.43	€1,604,202.00	25.0%	5%
Cavan	€8,522,285.84	€2,080,571.00	24.4%	5%
Clare	€8,920,224.65	€2,229,225.00	25.0%	N/A
Cork North	€5,091,845.73	€1,272,961.00	25.0%	0%
Cork South	€3,831,303.31	€957,825.00	25.0%	0%
Cork West	€5,015,674.19	€1,253,918.00	25.0%	0%
Donegal	€12,913,877.86	€3,228,467.00	25.0%	0%
Dublin Rural	€6,370,438.43	€1,592,609.00	25.0%	1.3%
Galway East	€7,655,850.61	€1,768,369.00	23.1%	N/A
Galway West	€4,540,033.00	€1,089,608.00	24.0%	N/A
Kerry	€10,219,868.29	€2,554,967.00	25.0%	0%
Kildare	€5,261,600.01	€1,315,400.00	25.0%	2.8%
Kilkenny	€7,791,572.91	€1,947,893.00	25.0%	N/A
Laois	€7,124,586.86	€1,774,629.00	24.9%	5%
Leitrim	€5,998,474.74	€1,475,686.00	24.6%	3%
Limerick	€9,276,593.96	€2,319,232.00	25.0%	0%
Longford	€7,597,623.07	€1,869,123.00	24.6%	3%
Louth	€6,101,862.01	€1,525,465.50	25.0%	0.7%
Mayo	€11,121,431.88	€2,753,549.00	24.8%	3.4%
Meath	€6,903,123.57	€1,725,781.00	25.0%	0%
Monaghan	€7,592,719.51	€1,839,923.00	24.2%	2.4%
Offaly	€8,036,763.90	€2,006,737.00	25.0%	0%
Roscommon	€8,852,659.22	€2,213,164.00	25.0%	5%
Sligo	€7,655,647.81	€1,913,912.00	25.0%	3%
Tipperary	€10,103,443.28	€2,520,859.00	25.0%	1.3%
Waterford	€7,522,796.18	€1,880,699.00	25.0%	2%
Westmeath	€7,384,206.22	€1,795,210.00	24.3%	1.2%
Wexford	€9,840,140.56	€2,260,036.00	23.0%	3%
Wicklow	€6,336,549.00	€1,556,965.00	24.6%	0%

Questions Nos. 621 to 622 answered with Question No. 616.

### Grant Payments

623. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the grant schemes available for items (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12027/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The provision the items referred to by the Deputy may be eligible for funding under a number of my Department's programmes, including LEADER, the Community Enhancement Programme and CLÁR.

LEADER is a multi-annual programme covering the period 2014-2020 which is delivered through Local Action Groups in each of the 28 LEADER sub-regional areas around the country. Funding can be provided under a broad range of defined themes, which include enterprise development and social inclusion.

The Social Inclusion theme of the LEADER Programme focuses on the provision of services for people living in rural and remote areas and, in that context, support for the services referred to by the Deputy could potentially be considered eligible for LEADER funding.

In order for a project to be eligible for funding under LEADER, it must be compatible with the actions outlined in the approved Local Development Strategy in the LEADER sub-regional area concerned, and it must comply with the Operating Rules and EU Regulations in place for the programme.

The decision to approve a project, or otherwise, is a matter for the Local Action Groups (LAGs) which administer the programme in each LEADER area. Interested applicants should, in the first instance, contact the relevant LAG through its Implementing Partners to discuss the funding that may be available. Contact details for all LAGs are available on my Department's website at <http://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/list-of-LAGs.pdf>.

The Community Enhancement Programme provides capital grants to community groups to help them to enhance facilities in disadvantaged areas. The details of the 2019 programme are currently being finalised by the Department and I anticipate that the programme will be launched in the coming weeks. Applications should be made to the Local Community Development Committee in the relevant area.

The CLÁR programme has, in the past, provided funding for the items referred to by the Deputy, to established organisations that operate on a voluntary basis and are involved in emergency rescue or first response efforts in the community. CLÁR operates in specific designated rural areas that have experienced high levels of depopulation.

I launched the 2019 CLÁR programme on 28 February last. The measures being funded under the programme this year include a Community Wellbeing Supports measure, comprising:

- (a) First Response Support
- (b) Mobility and Cancer Care Transport
- (c) Sensory Gardens.

The First Response Support, in particular, encompasses the assistance given in previous years for voluntary first-response organisations. Application forms for this funding are available on my Department's website [www.drcd.gov.ie](http://www.drcd.gov.ie).

*Questions Nos. 624 and 625 answered with Question No. 616.*

### **National Minimum Wage**

626. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to put a trainee wage rate in place (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11510/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):**

Legislation governing the national minimum wage is set down in the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 and the National Minimum Wage (Low Pay Commission) Act 2015. These Acts provide for the setting of a national minimum wage (NMW) and also provide that in specified circumstances, such as younger workers and trainees, a reduced, sub-minimum rate may be applied.

In September 2015, the then Minister requested the Low Pay Commission to examine the appropriateness of the sub-minimum rates as provided for in the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 with regard, in particular, to their impact on youth unemployment rates and participation in education.

The Commission undertook a consultation process on this subject in line with its evidence based approach to making recommendations to Government and received 15 submissions in total. The Commission's final report was published on 20 February 2018.

Having examined all available evidence and submissions, and considered a range of options, the Commission recommended the abolition of training rates. The Commission had heard evidence in submissions of the training rates being paid in order to reduce wage costs rather than as part of a structured training programme. The Commission found that the lack of clear definitions around training rates left them open to abuse. In light of these considerations and the low usage of the training rates the Commission was of the view that training rates should be abolished. The Commission encouraged sectors to register for state approved apprenticeship programmes, which are under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills, if they felt that a period of structured training was required.

In its report the Commission also recommended simplifying the rates of minimum wage for those aged under 18 to 20 as follows:

- Employees under 18 would receive a minimum of 70% of the NMW
- Employees aged 18 would receive a minimum of 80% of the NMW
- Employees aged 19 would receive a minimum of 90% of the NMW
- Employees aged 20 and over would receive the full NMW.

These recommendations were accepted by Government and the amendments to make the necessary legislative changes to the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 were implemented via the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018. The changes came into effect on 4 March 2019.

The Low Pay Commission is an independent authoritative body on matters relating to the national minimum wage and I am confident that the Commission gave consideration to the impact of any recommendations it made in regard to training rates.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **EU Directives**

627. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the need for mediation between the Department of Finance and her Department over differences in the proposed transposition of the IORP II directive regarding a derogation for small single member pension schemes as was provided in the previous directive on this issue. [11770/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I want to assure the Deputy that the IORP II Directive will be transposed into Irish law in accordance with the Government Decision of 9 January 2019. Government approved the approach of applying the requirements of the Directive to all funded occupational pension schemes to enhance pension scheme governance and the consumer protection of pensioners, members and future members. Responsibility for the transposition of the Directive lies with my Department.

The over-arching objective of IORP II Directive is to facilitate the development of occupational retirement savings in the EU. The transposition of the Directive will result in significant improvements to the regulation of funded occupational pension schemes in Ireland. Transposition will raise governance standards, improve trustee qualification and suitability, and increase supervision through enhanced powers for the Pensions Authority.

It had been suggested that single person pension schemes should be exempt from the application of IORP II rules on the basis that the scheme members are competent in the management of their own affairs and that the governance requirements are unduly onerous. However, the value of investments held in many schemes fell substantially during the financial crisis. This highlighted the need for stricter supervision and regulation of schemes, especially for small schemes investing in unregulated markets. Money saved for pension purposes should be properly protected to ensure that people have adequate income for their retirement years.

Pension policy comes within my remit and in carrying out this role I consult with the Minister for Finance on various matters. Given that the State incentivises and supports pension savings through tax relief, my officials consulted with Department of Finance officials on this transposition, where the merit of the principle of improved regulation and consumer protection for pension savers as provided for in the IORP II Directive was agreed.

The application of the Directive is prospective, not retrospective. This means that existing investments and borrowings can remain in place. After transposition all single member schemes, including Small Self-Administered Schemes, who are the only schemes currently allowed to borrow, will not be allowed to enter into new borrowing arrangements, except for short term and liquidity purposes. All of their future investments will have to be made in accordance with the investment rules in the Directive.

Transposition of the Directive is also a key part of the Government's Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023. The Roadmap was launched by the Government in February 2018 and details specific measures that will modernise our pension system.

Officials in my Department, supported by the Pensions Authority, are managing the transposition process for this Directive. This is a substantial Directive and preparation of regulations to transpose it is at an advanced stage. Codes of practice will also be issued by the Pensions Authority. Furthermore, to ensure that trustees of schemes are informed of their obligations under the Directive, the Authority will also undertake a communication campaign on the implementation of the Directive. The emphasis of this engagement will be on providing sufficient support, time and information in order for industry and trustees to plan for and make the changes needed.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **EU Directives**

628. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which the EU working time directive is interpreted here; the statutory basis of the directive here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12154/19]

630. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which the EU working time directive (details supplied) is interpreted here; the statutory basis of the directive here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12252/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 628 and 630 together.

The EU Working Time Directive 2003/88 of the European Parliament and Council concerning certain aspects of the organisation of working time, was a consolidation of Council Directive 93/104/EC and Directive 2000/34/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council. The aim of the Directive is to protect workers' health and safety by ensuring that working hours meet minimum standards applicable throughout the EU.

The original Directive 93/104 was transposed into Irish legislation by the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997. The 2003 Directive made some changes in respect of a number of categories of work including doctors in training, mobile transport, offshore work, and workers on board seagoing fishing vessels. These were transposed by sectoral regulations as follows:

- European Communities (Organisation of Working Time) (Activities of Doctors in Training) Regulations 2004,
- Organisation of Working Time (Inclusion of Transport Activities) Regulations 2004,
- Organisation of Working Time (Inclusion of Offshore Work) Regulations 2004,
- European Communities (Workers on Board Sea-going Fishing Vessels) (Organisation of Working Time) Regulations 2003.

Questions of interpretation are a matter for the Workplace Relations Commission, which adjudicates on complaints under the Organisation of Working Time Act and has an enforcement role in terms of its application. The Labour Court hears cases on appeal from a Workplace Relations Commission adjudicator's decision, and decisions of the Labour Court in such appeals can be enforced by the District Court.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Insurance**

629. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing the level at which the higher rate of employer PRSI commences at to €452.20 a week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12156/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The National Training Fund Levy (NTFL), collected alongside Employer PRSI for Classes A and H, increased by 0.1% from 0.8% to 0.9% from 1 January 2019. This means that Employer rates (combined PRSI and NTFL) for Classes A and H increased by 0.1% from 1 January 2019.

Currently, Class A employers pay PRSI at the rate of 8.7% where weekly earnings are between €38 and €386. Once weekly earnings exceed €386, the rate of employer PRSI is 10.95%.

The estimated cost to the Social Insurance Fund of raising the weekly 8.7% threshold to €425.20 and the estimated number of employments impacted by such a change are set out in the following table -

Thresholds:

Higher rate threshold	€425.20
Cost	€21.7 million
Employments affected	86,002

These estimates are based on the latest available data and reflect macro-economic indicators for 2019. It should be noted that the estimates do not take possible changes in employer behaviour arising from changing rate thresholds into account.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 630 answered with Question No. 628.*

### Departmental Records

631. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if all issues related to identity have been resolved in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11484/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department has advised that it has been difficult to locate the individual's records on the basis of the information provided. If the Deputy can provide more details in relation to this person to my officials, further enquiries will be made.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Social Welfare Appeals Data

632. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the waiting times for appeal for all social welfare payments in tabular form. [11513/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The average appeal processing times for 2018 and to date in 2019 are outlined in the following tables.

All claim decisions taken by the Department's Deciding Officers and Designated Persons are appealable to the Chief Appeals Officer. In any year about 85% of all claims are awarded by the Department and just 1% are appealed.

Nevertheless, the Department is concerned that these cases are dealt with as quickly as possible.

Accordingly, a number of new Appeals Officers have joined the Appeals Office over the past 12-18 months, to replace staff leaving on retirement. Given the complexity of the appeals process it takes some time for new staff to be trained up and develop expertise and this has led to somewhat longer processing times during this period. The Chief Appeals Officer has advised me that appeal processing times continue to be a priority for her Office.

Significant efforts and resources have been devoted to reforming the appeal process in recent years. As a result, appeal processing times in respect of all schemes improved between 2011 and 2017 from 52.5 weeks for an oral hearing in 2011 to 26.4 weeks in 2017 and from 25.1 weeks for a summary decision in 2011 to 19.8 weeks in 2017. The corresponding process-

ing times for the year 2018 were 30.0 weeks for an oral hearing and 24.8 weeks for a summary decision.

The time taken to process an appeal reflects a number of factors including that the appeals process is a quasi-judicial process with appeals officers being required to decide all appeals on a ‘de-novo’ basis. In addition, appeals decisions are themselves subject to review by the High Court and decisions have to be formally written up to quasi-judicial standards. Other factors that influence appeals processing times include the quality of the initial decision – in this respect the Department has changed the decisions process in respect of medical schemes, in order to provide more information to the claimant. I expect that this will help to reduce the number of appeals over time.

Finally, where a claimant has been refused a social welfare payment, regardless of the scheme involved, and is appealing that decision, if their means are insufficient to meet their needs it is open to them to apply for supplementary welfare allowance in the interim.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

#### **Appeal Processing Times by Scheme 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018**

-	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Blind Person’s Pension	33.7	27.7
Carer’s Allowance	24.3	28.4
Carer’s Benefit	22.2	25.6
Child Benefit	36.1	42.7
Disability Allowance	17.1	23.8
Illness Benefit	30.7	36.5
Partial Capacity Benefit	32.6	32.8
Domiciliary Care Allowance	31.6	36.2
Deserted Wife’s Allowance	70.6 (1 case)	Nil
Deserted Wife’s Benefit	28.7	69.1 (5 cases)
Farm Assist	44.0	47.8
Bereavement Grant	36.1	Nil
Death Benefit (Pension)	31.5	Nil
Working Family Payment *	29.4	40.1
Invalidity Pension	24.7	30.2
Liable Relatives	44.0	30.7
Maternity Benefit	30.4	30.7
Paternity Benefit	32.7	23.0
One Parent Family Payment	31.7	37.0
State Pension (Contributory)	39.9	50.2
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	32.2	43.0
Occupational Injury Benefit	36.0	50.7
Disablement Pension	34.3	34.6

-	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
OIB-Medical Care	17.5	Nil
Incapacity Supplement	38.7	29.7
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	29.8	28.9
Guardian's Payment (Non-Contributory)	25.5	29.6
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	31.9	36.8
Jobseeker's Allowance (Payments)	25.2	31.4
BTW Family Dividend	30.8	Nil
Jobseeker's Transitional	30.1	28.5
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	34.9	Nil
Pre-Retirement Allowance	64.0 (1 case)	29.9
Jobseeker's Benefit	25.1	28.5
Carer's Support Grant	28.0	31.9
Insurability of Employment	53.0	63.9
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	20.7	29.1
Widow/Widower's Pension (Contributory)	35.0	32.8
Widow/Widower's Pension (Non-Contributory)	28.4	25.7
Widowed Parent Grant	45.1	43.7
All Appeals	24.8	30.0

\* Previously called Family Income Supplement

-	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	19.6	Nil
Carer's Allowance	26.3	27.8
Carer's Benefit	27.9	18.1
Child Benefit	33.4	48.7
Disability Allowance	17.0	21.8
Illness Benefit	36.5	35.3
Partial Capacity Benefit	37.8	Nil
Domiciliary Care Allowance	30.2	33.4
Deserted Wife's Allowance	20.4	Nil
Deserted Wife's Benefit	91.7 (1 case)	30.4
Farm Assist	26.9	27.6
Bereavement Grant	39.7	Nil
Working Family Payment *	30.5	32.9
Invalidity Pension	27.4	29.3
Liabile Relatives	25.9	Nil

Questions - Written Answers

-	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Maternity Benefit	36.2	Nil
Paternity Benefit	31.5	Nil
One Parent Family Payment	34.5	27.4
State Pension (Contributory)	36.4	41.8
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	40.2	39.9
Occupational Injury Benefit	32.3	63.5
Disablement Pension	30.3	34.1
Incapacity Supplement	Nil	39.3
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	19.2	Nil
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	19.7	Nil
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	31.0	37.8
Jobseeker's Allowance (Payments)	24.8	32.5
BTW Family Dividend	30.6	Nil
Jobseeker's Transitional	32.5	40.2
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	40.9	Nil
Jobseeker's Benefit	25.3	24.7
Carer's Support Grant	26.3	34.0
Insurability of Employment	76.3 (7 cases)	96.6 (10 cases)**
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	20.9	24.3
Widow/Widower's Pension (Contributory)	38.0	36.2
Widow/Widower's Pension (Non-Contributory)	24.4	Nil
All Appeals	25.0	28.7

\* Previously called Family Income Supplement

\*\* Includes the finalisation of 2 exceptionally long-running cases

### Local Employment Service

633. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the work undertaken on the future of the local employment service; and the initial work being carried out in respect of the service in its current form. [11514/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department oversees the procurement process for the Local Employment Services (LES).

In looking to the future of the contracted public employment service, my Department commissioned Indecon to conduct a review of the Local Employment Services and Job Clubs. LES

and Job Club providers were aware of the Indecon review and were consulted during the review process. This review was published in January and my Department hosted an information session with representatives of all the LES and Job Clubs in attendance on 25 January.

The process of procuring contracted public employment services for 2020 and beyond is still in its early stages and my officials are working to design a procurement model that will balance the need for value for money for taxpayers with the importance of preserving high-quality labour activation services. No final decisions have been made in this regard but my Department will continue to engage with relevant stakeholders.

### **Community Services Programme**

634. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to make changes to or end a community employment scheme (details supplied) in view of plans for development at the scheme location; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11515/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The scheme that the Deputy is referring to is a Community Services Programme. This is therefore not a matter for this Department and is proper to the Department of Rural and Community Development. The Deputy should raise this matter with my colleague, the Minister for Rural and Community Development.

### **Brexit Issues**

635. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if all those in receipt of the winter fuel payment from the UK will continue to receive the payment in circumstances in which they are not in receipt of the fuel allowance post Brexit as per the convention on social security between Ireland and the UK; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11516/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Fuel Allowance Scheme represents a contribution towards a person's normal heating expenses. It is means tested and is paid only to customers who are getting a qualifying payment, either a State Pension or a means-assessed payment. The rate of fuel allowance is €22.50 per week or €630.00 annually. Currently the fuel season is 28 weeks, and the allowance can be paid weekly or in two lump sums of €315 each, being at the start of the fuel season in October and at the midway point in January.

I understand that the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Winter Fuel Payment (WFP) is an annual tax-free payment made to eligible people to help towards their winter heating costs. It is a lump sum payment between £100 stg and £300 stg and in most cases it is paid automatically between November and December, to qualified persons. I also understand that as of winter 2012/13, people who live in the EEA or Switzerland who have "a genuine and sufficient link" to the UK are potentially eligible to receive the WFP, regardless of whether they previously had entitlement to it whilst living in the UK. This change occurred, following the 2011 European Court of Justice ruling (the 'Stewart Case'). Prior to that, only people who had an entitlement to WFP before moving from the United Kingdom were eligible.

Post-Brexit, including in the event of a no-deal Brexit, Irish and British citizens will continue to enjoy the right to travel, live, and work between the UK and Ireland in the same manner

as before. This is because of a long-standing arrangement known as the Common Travel Area (CTA).

Under the CTA, Irish and British citizens can move freely and reside in either jurisdiction and enjoy associated rights and entitlements, including access to employment, healthcare, education, social benefits, and the right to vote in certain elections. The CTA pre-dates Irish and UK membership of the EU and is not dependent on it. Both the Government of Ireland and the UK Government have committed to maintaining the CTA in all circumstances.

As part of that commitment, the Government has entered into a Convention on Social Security with the Government of the United Kingdom replicates the current arrangements that apply to the coordination of social security benefits between the two jurisdictions post-Brexit. There is no provision in the Convention which will change the existing practices in relation to fuel or other payments. Existing arrangements will continue.

### **School Meals Programme**

636. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of schools in receipt of the school meals programme; the number that do not have DEIS status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11559/19]

637. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost of extending the school meals programme to cover the cost of kitchen equipment, facilities or staff costs for those current recipients; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11560/19]

638. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost of developing a pilot for the school meals programme to youth services, early years settings and after-school programmes to address the issue of food poverty for children and young persons availing of those services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11561/19]

639. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the consideration that has been given to extending the school meals programme to youth services, early years settings and after-school programmes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11562/19]

640. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost of extending the school meals programme to cover schools that do not have DEIS status but that would otherwise have disadvantaged status under the Pobal HP deprivation index; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11563/19]

641. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the qualifying criteria for the school meals programme; if these have been reviewed or will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11564/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 636 to 641, inclusive, together.

The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to some 1,580 schools and organisations benefitting 250,000 children at a total cost of €57.6 million in 2019 representing an increase of €3.6 million over the previous year. The objective of the scheme is to provide regular, nutritious food to children who are unable, due to lack of good quality food,

to take full advantage of the education provided to them. The programme is an important component of policies to encourage school attendance and extra educational achievement.

In recent years entry to the School Meals Scheme has been confined to DEIS schools in addition to schools identified as having levels of concentrated disadvantage that would benefit from access to the School Meals Programme. In the 2017/2018 academic year there were 1,214 schools benefitting from the scheme; 367 of these schools do not have DEIS status.

Participation in the scheme is entirely voluntary with the onus being on the individual eligible schools to make an application. Schools and organisations must reapply for funding in advance of each school year and are required to submit detailed records at the end of the school year. Funding is based on a rate of payment per meal, per child, per day. The maximum rates of payment and examples of food to be provided are contained in the following tabular statement.

Nutrition Standards for School Meals were published in September 2017 under the auspices of Healthy Ireland, Safefood and the HSE. The Standards are mandatory from the 2018/2019 funding year and organisations will be required to provide evidence of full compliance with them as part of the application and inspection processes.

As part of Budget 2019, it was announced that DEASP would commence a pilot scheme from September 2019, providing Hot School Meals in 36 schools for an estimated 7,200 children at a cost of €1 million for 2019 and €2.5 million in a full year. The premise of the pilot is to take account of the fact that the majority of schools don't have kitchen/canteen facilities and that the food be prepared off-site in such instances. Issues relating to capital expenditure within schools is a matter for the Department of Education and Skills. The focus on the pilot will be on primary schools and currently there are no plans to extend it to youth services, early years settings and after-school programmes.

I trust that this clarifies the position.

#### **Tabular Statement - School Meals Food Clubs Rates of Payment**

Meal	Max Rate of Payment (per child per day)	Minimum number of food items	Examples of Food to be Provided
Breakfast/Snack	€0.60	2 items	1 serving of wholemeal/wholegrain cereal or bread PLUS 1 serving of fruit OR 1 serving of milk, yogurt or cheese
Lunch	€1.40	1 substantial item + 1 small item + a drink	Wholemeal/wholegrain sandwich or roll containing 1 serving meat, poultry, egg or cheese and 1 serving salad PLUS 1 serving fruit PLUS a drink (e.g. water, milk, unsweetened juice)

Meal	Max Rate of Payment (per child per day)	Minimum number of food items	Examples of Food to be Provided
Dinner	€1.90	Hot meal + drink	1 serving meat, poultry, egg, beans PLUS 1 serving potatoes, pasta or rice PLUS 2 servings vegetables/fruit PLUS a drink (Milk, Water, Unsweetened Juice)

### Blind Person's Pension Eligibility

642. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the blind pension is not paid after a recipient reaches 66 years of age even though the recipient can receive it up to that date in addition to another social welfare payment; her plans to review this policy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11597/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Blind Pension (BP) is a means-tested payment for blind and visually impaired people between the ages of 18 and 66 who are habitually resident in Ireland. According to section 161A(a) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended), a person shall be entitled to BP where the person has attained the age of 18 years but has not attained pensionable age. The payment is made up of a personal rate and extra amounts for a qualified adult and any child dependents.

The payment is administered by my Department, which contacts all BP recipients three months in advance of their 66th birthday in order to inform them that their BP payment will cease and invite them to apply for either the means-tested State Pension Non Contributory (SPNC) or the State Pension Contributory (SPC).

BP claimants would be expected to be financially better off on SPC or SPNC when 66 years or over as the weekly rate of pension is higher than for BP. As SPC is not a means-tested payment, a person can receive payment of SPC and continue to work or have other income. For those who wish to engage in work or self-employment, the earnings disregard for SPNC is also higher at €200 per week for both the claimant and their spouse.

On SPNC the first €30 of calculated means is disregarded whereas the first €7.60 is disregarded on BP.

Persons in receipt of the SPC or SPNC may also qualify for half rate Carer's Allowance.

Therefore in no case would it be expected that a claimant over 66 years of age would be financially better off on BP than on SPNC or on SPC. Any changes to the eligibility criteria for BP would have to be considered in the overall budgetary context.

### Jobseeker's Payments

643. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to extend the length of time jobseeker's payments will be paid to two years for those obliged to retire by contract at 65 years of age early in 2020 and who will not qualify for a pen-

sion until they are 67 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11626/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years from its current age of 66. The first increase to 67 years of age will be in 2021 and the second to 68 years of age in 2028. The purpose of these changes is to make the pension system more sustainable in the context of increasing life expectancy. This has significant implications for the future costs of State pension provision which are currently increasing by roughly €1 billion every 5 years.

There is no statutory retirement age in the State, and the age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers. While such a contract may have been entered into with a retirement date of 65, in the context of the previous State pension arrangements, there is no legal impediment to the employer and employee agreeing to increase the duration of employment for one or more years, if both parties wish to do so.

Jobseeker's payments are paid to eligible jobseekers aged 18 to 66 years. Any person who retires before reaching State pension age may apply for either jobseeker's benefit (JB), a social insurance contribution based income support or means tested jobseeker's allowance (JA), subject to them satisfying the rules of the schemes. Recipients may continue to get a jobseeker's payment if they find part-time or casual work but they must be unemployed for at least 4 days out of 7.

JB is normally paid for 9 months (234 days) for people with 260 or more PRSI contributions paid and for 6 months (156 days) for people with fewer than 260 PRSI contributions paid. Arrangements are in place to provide that jobseekers whose benefit expires in their 65th year can generally continue to be paid benefit up until pensionable age (66 years) provided they satisfy the necessary contribution conditions.

The jobseekers schemes are kept under review and any further changes, including entitlement beyond the 66th year, will be considered by Government having regard to the scope of the overall resources available for welfare improvements at that time.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance**

644. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the claim of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11627/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** As part of a Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) Self-Employed review project, the Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) requested the person concerned's income and expenditure details for the previous two years and sent their findings to the Deciding Officer (DO). The DO used this information to reassess means, and concluded that he was in receipt of income that was in excess of the JA rate applicable to their circumstances and disallowed the claim. The person concerned provided additional information and requested a review of the decision. The DO concluded there was no basis for a review and communicated this to the person concerned on the 30 January 2019. The person concerned may submit an appeal to the Appeals Office.

The person concerned met with a Community Welfare Officer (CWO) on 1 February 2019 but no application for assistance under Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) has been recorded. He can submit an application for SWA providing the required supporting documentation to assist a Designated Person (DP) in making their decision.

I trust this clarifies matters for the deputy.

### **Departmental Staff**

645. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans for the appointment of a new community welfare officer for Ardee, County Louth; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11630/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Department of Employment Affairs seeks to provide comprehensive income and employment support services to residents in County Louth, through our Intreo Centres in Dundalk and Drogheda, and the Branch Office in Ardee. Some concern has been expressed about the future delivery of community welfare services in Ardee following the retirement of the community welfare officer. I can assure the public that arrangements have been made to ensure the continuation of the service.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Departmental Offices**

646. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps that have been taken to source alternative accommodation for the community welfare service in Dunleer, County Louth, which was closed due to health and safety concerns in March 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11631/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Department operated an outreach Community Welfare Services (CWS) clinic from HSE premises in Dunleer County Louth each Wednesday from 10am to 12 noon. An average of 7 customers attended, but most of these were enquiries that resulted in less than 1 payment a week.

Other claims for Dunleer, such as Jobseeker and One Parent Family Payment, were dealt with by Drogheda Intreo Centre, with some outlying areas dealt with by Ardee Branch Office.

On 21 March 2018, the HSE building manager informed my Department that the condition of the building had rapidly deteriorated and now posed a serious Health & Safety risk to customers and staff. The HSE stated that it did not intend to renovate the premises as no HSE staff were located there.

In light of the Health and Safety risks, my Department had no option but to close the clinic in Dunleer with immediate effect. Customers were directed to the Drogheda Intreo Centre which is 15 km away and on a main bus route. The CWS service in Drogheda is available every day of the week. If a customer is unable to visit the Drogheda office, arrangements are made to conduct a home visit.

The current service is operating well. Customers from Dunleer have access to a service in Drogheda throughout the week and are not confined to a half-day clinic once a week. Most enquires can be dealt with over the phone, saving customers the inconvenience of travelling. Any customers who have a difficulty getting to the office in Drogheda are facilitated with a home visit.

Enquiries were made of my Department's Facilities Management Unit and the OPW to ascertain whether it was possible to secure alternative accommodation. Potential locations were

examined, but all would have required a long lead-in time for the completion of negotiations, planning permissions and necessary alterations to render them suitable. There would also have been cost implications.

Under these circumstances, the use of alternative premises in Dunleer to provide a half-day clinic once a week would not improve service to customers.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Offices**

647. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the plans in train to provide new social welfare services for the mid County Louth area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11632/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Department of Employment Affairs seeks to provide comprehensive income and employment support services to residents in County Louth, through our Intreo Centres in Dundalk and Drogheda, and the Branch Office in Ardee. Some concern has been expressed about the future delivery of community welfare services in Ardee following the retirement of the community welfare officer. I can assure the public that arrangements have been made to ensure the continuation of the service.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications Waiting Times**

648. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the processing times for disability allowance applications; and the work being done to reduce this processing time. [11633/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** My Department is committed to making decisions on entitlement as quickly as possible.

In general, social welfare schemes with a number of complex qualifying conditions can take longer to process. Before a decision can be made on entitlement to disability allowance (DA), evidence must be provided in respect of the person's medical condition, the extent to which it restricts them from taking up employment, their means and their habitual residency.

In January 2019, the average waiting time for new DA applications was 14 weeks. The claim processing target for DA is to process 75% of claims within 12 weeks. Staff are being redeployed within the DA area to assist with claims processing.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Operation**

649. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a project (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11644/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Community Employment (CE) is an active labour market programme with the emphasis on progression into employment and/or further education and training. It is designed to break the cycle of unemployment and maintain work readiness, thereby improving a person's opportunities of returning to the open labour market. On an annual basis, my Department contracts with the local sponsoring organisations and agrees participant numbers and funding arrangements.

In cases where a sponsor organisation is not able to fill their agreed contract places, they may consider a merger with another scheme in order to ensure viability. My Department will facilitate these mergers and work with sponsor organisations. In the case referred to by the Deputy, the project is unable to fill the agreed participant places. This issue has been raised with the sponsor organisation.

As the current contract is not being honoured and the project is no longer viable, my Department are not in a position to renew the contract at the end of March. I am very cognisant of the valuable community and voluntary services delivered in these local communities and the need to protect these services and the participant placements into the future. In that context, it is hoped that the sponsor organisation will continue to engage with my Department to reach a positive outcome.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Schemes Data**

650. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address concerns that those engaged with the services provided by Turas Nua and who are employed in part-time work are being pressured to leave their part-time employment and pursue unsuitable or full-time employment at great distance or expense from the location they reside and thus nullifying an income gain; if she will consider limiting the mandatory engagement with Turas Nua to those who are full-time unemployed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11645/19]

651. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of part-time or casual workers required to attend Turas Nua in each of the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11647/19]

652. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of those who have transitioned to full-time work from part-time or casual work through engaging with the services provided by Turas Nua; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11648/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 650 to 652, inclusive, together.

All jobseekers including those who are working part time and in receipt of Jobseeker payments from my Department are required to be actively seeking and available for full time employment and to engage with my Department's activation services

JobPath provides an intensive personal activation service, which focuses on the skills and experience of each person. In the case of people already in part-time employment, this may focus on options or opportunities in their current job to increase their level of employment. Alternatively, this could also entail looking at possibilities in other areas, which may require some training but could provide a more sustainable income and a move away requiring a jobseekers

payment. It is important therefore that these jobseekers continue to engage with their JobPath provider.

Jobseekers referred to JobPath who are also working part-time will have all activities including meetings with their personal advisor scheduled around their work commitments and the JobPath contractors are required to be flexible in the provision of the service in that respect.

Often a lack of adequate and affordable transport is a barrier to people returning to employment. Turas Nua works to help their clients put solutions in place not only for their appointments but also to prepare them for the reality of returning to full-time work. Personal Advisers work with clients on their barriers to employment to ensure that when a suitable employment opportunity presents itself that they have a potential solution in place.

When a person is considering applying for a particular position, the Personal Adviser, where appropriate will discuss the journey time to the job and the person's available transport options. The financial implications of returning to work are also discussed and information is given on payments such as the Working Family Payment and the Back to Work Family Dividend. Turas Nua provide a Job Start Information Pack for their clients containing relevant information on returning to work and also provide in-work support for up to 52 weeks after the person commences employment over 30 hours per week.

From the beginning of 2016 to the end of 2018 approximately 12,700 part-time or casual workers have been referred to Turas Nua, of which over 4,000 have commenced full-time work to date, as set out in table 1 below.

It should be noted that many of these clients are currently still engaged with JobPath, are still in the first phase of the service and thus will not have had sufficient time with the service to have gained employment. Performance will improve over time as more clients complete their engagement with the service.

**Table 1**

Year	Casual/Part time jobseekers engaged by Turas Nua	Commenced full time employment
2016	799	312
2017	7008	2746
2018	4955	1337
Totals	12762	4395

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Eligibility**

653. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if carer's allowance or benefit will continue to issue to a person (details supplied); the other financial supports available to the person; if the history of the benefit paid will be provided; and the reason benefit was not continued. [11662/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment while Carer's benefit (CARB) is a social insurance payment made to full-time employees who leave the workforce.

Both payments may be payable to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that they require that level of care, provided that they satisfy the qualifying conditions.

The person concerned was in receipt of CA from 28 June 2007 to 18 October 2017 in respect of her daughter.

However, following a review of her claim in October 2017, her entitlement to CA ceased, as her means were determined to exceed the statutory limit.

The person concerned re-applied for CA on 7 December 2017.

The application for CA was disallowed as her means were determined to still exceed the statutory limit.

The person concerned was notified on 18 April 2018 of this decision the reason for it and her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned applied for CARB on 16/11/2018. This application was disallowed because the person concerned failed to show that she was working a minimum of 16 hours per week in 8 weeks out of the 26 week period before her claim was due to start.

The person concerned was notified on 26 February 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and her right of review and appeal.

No request for a review or appeal was received from the person concerned in relation to CA or CARB.

Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) is a monthly payment for a child aged under 16 with a severe disability, who requires on-going care and attention, substantially over and above the care and attention usually required by a child of the same age. It is not means tested. The person concerned is in receipt of DCA in respect of her daughter.

The Carer's Support Grant (CSG) is an annual payment made to carers by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Carers can use the grant in whatever way they wish. In June of each year (usually on the first Thursday of the month), the Department pays the grant automatically to carers getting CA, CARB, or DCA. Only one CSG can be paid for each person getting care.

It can also be paid to certain other carers providing full-time care who do not qualify for CA, CARB or DCA.

The person concerned has qualified for the CSG each year since 2008.

Individuals who are caring and who do not qualify for CA may qualify for the homemaker's scheme. The homemaker's scheme is designed to help homemakers and carers qualify for the SPC, and applies to homemaking periods since 6 April 1994. It equally applies to both men and women.

The scheme provides that years spent working in the home while caring on a full-time basis for a child up to 12 years of age or an incapacitated person age 12 or over will be disregarded in calculating a person's yearly average number of contributions for the purposes of determining the rate of their entitlement to SPC. In this way the homemaker's scheme ensures that an individual's entitlement to SPC is protected during periods spent caring.

12 March 2019

Accordingly I have arranged for a statement of payments to issue to the person concerned in respect to the period she was in receipt of CA.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Payments**

654. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will arrange for details in the case of a person (details supplied) to be sent to the illness benefit section from a local branch of her Department; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the information has been sought from the branch on two occasions by email but no response has issued and a person that claimed illness benefit cannot receive payment of same until the information sought has been received; and if her attention has been further drawn to the fact that the information was first sought in November 2018. [11672/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Illness Benefit claim from the person concerned has been processed and all arrears owing to her have been issued.

The person concerned was a qualified adult on her partner’s Jobseeker’s Allowance claim. This means that her partner was in receipt of a qualified adult allowance in respect of her.

The monetary difference between this allowance and her Illness Benefit entitlement had to be calculated before her Illness Benefit payment could be made to her. This has now been completed.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Supervisors**

655. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of community employment supervisors (details supplied); if further discussions have taken place with unions on this matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11693/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I am acutely aware of the valuable and dedicated service that Community Employment, CE, sponsor organisations provide in running CE Schemes all over the country. CE supervisors, as employees of these organisations, are an integral part of that good work.

However, it is important to emphasise the fact that CE scheme supervisors are employees of private companies in the community and voluntary sector that receive public funding. They are not employees of my Department or public servants, and as such were not subject to pay reductions, pension contributions or the Pension-related Deduction, PRD, under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest, FEMPI, which only applied to public servants.

The State is not responsible for funding pension arrangements for employees of private companies, even where the companies in question are reliant on State funding. Pension arrangements are a matter to be agreed between employees and their employers. All employers, including CE sponsoring organisations, are legally obliged to offer access to at least one Standard Personal Retirement Savings Account, PRSA, under the Pension (Amendment) Act 2002.

The issue was examined by a Community Sector High Level Forum, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. A number of Departments including my own Department were represented on this group, as were the unions and Pobal.

Exchequer funded pension entitlements for CE supervisors presents very significant issues for the Exchequer. These supervisors comprise just one small group within the wider Community and Voluntary sector. Nevertheless, on foot of the Labour Court recommendation, a detailed scoping exercise was carried out with input from the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service, IGEES, on the potential costs of providing Exchequer support for the establishment of such a pension scheme for employees across the Community and Voluntary sector in Ireland. This exercise estimated a potential cost to the State of between €188 million per annum and €347 million depending on the numbers involved, which is hard to establish. This excludes any provision for immediate ex-gratia lump sum payment of pension as sought, which could entail a further Exchequer cost of up to €318 million.

CE supervisors may qualify for the State Pension (Contributory) if they have accrued sufficient *PRSI* contributions. The State Pension (Contributory) is not means-tested. This pension has a maximum personal rate payable of €12,695 per annum, increasing to €12,956 in March 2019.

The entitlement to an occupational pension is not a matter for this Department. It would therefore be proper for the Deputy to raise this matter with my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

### **Social Welfare Rates**

656. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full-year cost if the island allowance of €12.70 per week was increased to €15.50 per week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11731/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The increase for living on a specified island (Island Increase) is an increase to certain weekly payments from this Department to people who are ordinarily resident on an island off the coast of Ireland. The objective of the scheme is to compensate for the additional costs of living on these specified islands when compared to people resident on the mainland.

The full year cost of raising the Island Increase by €2.80, from €12.70 per week to €15.50 per week, would be approximately €81,000.

### **Public Services Card Authentication**

657. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to a recent opinion of the European Data Protection Supervisor (details supplied) in the context of the ongoing controversy in relation to the roll-out of the public services card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11733/19]

658. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address matters relating to the General Data Protection Regulation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11738/19]

663. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address matters (details supplied) in relation to SAFE II; and if she will make a

statement on the matter. [11859/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 657, 658 and 663 together.

Completion of registration to SAFE Level 2 - which is the process used by my Department to establish and verify a person's identity to a substantial level of assurance - is the minimum requirement for a Public Services Card (PSC) to issue.

The Department uses facial image matching software to strengthen the SAFE registration process. A standard photograph is captured during this process and is inputted into and stored in the facial image matching software. It is then searched against the Department's photo database to ensure that the person in the photograph has not already been registered using a different identity.

While the PSC does store a person's photograph, it does not store the biometric or arithmetic template of that photograph. The collection and printing of a simple JPEG image on the PSC does not, therefore, constitute the collection or processing of special category data, as set out in the GDPR.

To be clear, the photograph in addition to being printed on the PSC, is processed, in a separate process, via facial imaging software to create an arithmetic template which is used to detect potential identity fraud. This arithmetic template is not stored on the PSC, does not form part of the public service identity set and is not shared with any other third party.

My Department's position is, therefore, that the SAFE2/PSC photo is not itself biometric in nature – it is simply a photograph. My Department is also clear that it does not collect or share biometric data but that it does create such data for its own use, to enable it to carry out its functions in relation to the PSC, as set out in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005. In this context, the Department also acts in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and Article 9 of the GDPR.

Article 9(1) of the GDPR prohibits the processing of special categories of personal data, including biometric data. However, recital (51) of the GDPR provides that the 'processing of photographs should not systematically be considered to be processing of special categories of personal data as they are covered by the definition of biometric data only when processed through a specific technical means allowing the unique identification or authentication of a natural person'.

Article 9 (2) of the GDPR sets out exceptions to the prohibition on processing in Article 9(1). These exceptions are further transposed into Irish law by way of the Data Protection Act 2018 and in particular Part 3, Chapter 2 and Part 5 of that Act.

Where the Department makes considerable efforts to authenticate identity, in part through facial matching, this should be regarded as a positive measure which protects an individual's identity.

It is the Department's firm view that these measures are necessary, prudential and of benefit to individuals by protecting against identity fraud and theft and that this processing is proportionate to the outcome in ensuring personal data is appropriately protected.

The European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) Opinion 7/2018 - referred to by the Deputy - relates to the Proposal for a Regulation strengthening the security of identity cards of Union citizens and other documents. The EDPS is an independent institution of the EU for advising Community institutions, bodies and data subjects on all matters concerning the pro-

cessing of personal data. The Commission is required - when adopting a legislative Proposal relating to the protection of individuals' rights and freedoms with regard to the processing of personal data - to consult the EDPS.

In summary, this opinion paper supports the objective of the European Commission to enhance the security standards applicable to identity cards and residence documents. At the same time, the EDPS considers that the Proposal does not sufficiently justify the need to process two types of biometric data (facial image and fingerprints), while the stated purposes could be achieved by a less intrusive approach. It specifically states that "The EDPS understands that using biometric data might be considered as a legitimate anti-fraud measure, but the Proposal does not justify the need to store two types of biometric data for the purposes foreseen in it.

The opinion paper refers on numerous occasions to dactyloscopic/dactyloscopy which is identification by comparison of fingerprints. The Deputy should note that my Department does not collect or store fingerprints.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

659. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on an invalidity pension application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11742/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for the gentleman concerned on 13 December 2018. This claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. He was notified on 06 March 2019 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

660. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11777/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Following the submission of further medical evidence by the person concerned, their case has been reviewed and they have been awarded disability allowance with effect from 31 October 2018. The first payment will be made on 27 March 2019.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

### **Carer's Support Grant**

661. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full-year cost if the carer's support grant was increased from €1,700 to €2,000. [11817/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Carer's Support Grant is an annual payment made by my Department to carers. It is paid automatically to carers who are in receipt of Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit or Domiciliary Care Allowance.

The estimated full year cost of increasing the Carer's Support Grant from €1,700 to €2,000 is €35.2 million.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

662. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason it has taken over three months to review an invalidity pension application by a person (details supplied); when a decision will be made on the review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11845/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for this lady on 27 September 2018. Her claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on 19 November 2018 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review or appeal.

She requested a review and appeal of this decision and submitted further medical evidence on 03 December 2018 in support of her request. Following a review of all the information available it has been decided that there is no change to the original decision and a submission is being prepared by the department and will be forwarded to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) for determination. She was notified on 08 March 2019 of the outcome of the review.

The SWAO will be in touch with her directly in relation to the progress of her appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 663 answered with Question No. 657.*

### **Public Services Card Provision**

664. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which a person (details supplied) in County Cork can obtain a public services card while the person's original passport is being held by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11887/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Public Services Card (PSC) enables individuals to gain access to public services more effi-

ciently and with a minimum of duplication of effort, while at the same time preserving their privacy to the maximum extent possible. A PSC is currently issued following a registration process which involves the verification of the person's identity, the capture of an individual's photograph and signature and the verification of data already held by the Department.

The document requirements to prove identity depend on the nationality of the person concerned. EEA nationals must provide a current valid National ID card or passport. Persons from outside the EEA must provide a current valid passport. More information is available on the Department's website here:

[http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Public-Services-Card\\_holder.aspx](http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Public-Services-Card_holder.aspx)

My Department understands that the passport for the person concerned is currently held by the Repatriation Unit of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service while her continued presence in the State is being considered under section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended. As soon as she is in a position to produce her passport as proof of identity, the allocation of a PSC to her can be considered.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Departmental Programmes**

665. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the stage at which the national action plan for social inclusion 2019 to 2025 is at; the reason it is not yet published; the date it will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11913/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My department is currently finalising the new Social Inclusion Strategy for the period 2019 – 2025. It will have a 'whole of government' approach which recognises the shared responsibility across Government to achieve improved outcomes for the most vulnerable and marginalised in our society.

The most up to date poverty data from the 2017 Survey on Income and Living Conditions was released by CSO in mid-December 2018. This data was examined and is being incorporated into the draft document which is now the subject of consultations with other departments. The data showed that the consistent poverty rate had decreased to 6.7% in, from 8.2% in 2016. The percentage of the population experiencing deprivation also significantly decreased, falling to 18.8% from the 2016 figure of 21%. These figures demonstrate that the Government's approach to tackling poverty through the provision of income supports, access to quality services and supports for people in taking up employment is working.

My department is currently in discussions with other Government departments to agree the final text of the new strategy. It is my intention that it will be published at the earliest opportunity, most likely in Q2 2019.

### **One-Parent Family Payment Eligibility**

666. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to increase the cut-off age of seven years for lone parents in receipt of the one-parent family payment in order to revert back to making it payable for a child up to 18 or up to 22 years of age for those in full-time education; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

[11914/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department spent over €500 million on the one-parent family payment (OFP) scheme in 2018. The scheme currently supports over 39,000 recipients and almost 73,000 children.

The OFP scheme has played an important role in providing income support to lone parents since its introduction in 1997.

Research shows that being at work reduces the at-risk-of-poverty rate for lone parents by three-quarters, compared to those who do not work. This highlights that the best way to tackle poverty among lone parents is to assist them into employment. Access to activation supports is vital to achieve this objective and it is therefore imperative that my Department continues to engage with lone parents to assist them into employment.

The lack of conditionality on the OFP payment, which was unique in Europe, coupled with its very long duration, has, over time, contributed to long-term social welfare dependency and associated poverty among many lone parents and their children. The reforms to the OFP scheme were introduced to address this issue. The reforms provide enhanced access to the Department's Intreo service to lone parents once their youngest child turns 7 years of age. Access to the Department's range of education and employment support services is essential to facilitate lone parents to progress into sustainable employment and financial independence.

Budget 2019 contained a number of measures to support lone parents, including working lone parents. There was an increase in the weekly rates of payment for OFP. The income disregard for one-parent family payment and jobseeker's transition payment recipients will increase to €150 per week with effect from the week commencing 25/03/19 (the highest income disregard level to date). The weekly rates of the Increase for Qualified Children (IQC) in 2019 will also increase the same week by €2.20 per week (from €31.80 to €34) for children under 12, and by €5.20 per week (from €31.80 to €37) for children aged 12 and over. This measure will benefit over 370,000 children and will help to tackle child poverty.

Any change to the OFP as mentioned by the Deputy would have to be considered in the overall budgetary context.

### **Jobseeker's Transitional Payment**

667. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of extending the cut-off age for the jobseeker's transition payment until the youngest child reaches 18 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11915/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The cost of increasing the age limit for a qualified child for the jobseeker's transitional payment (JST) to when the youngest child turns 18 years of age is not easily estimated.

There are significant barriers to undertaking such an exercise. For example, customers may no longer be within the welfare system, while others could seek to move from alternative payments such as Jobseekers Allowance (JA), the Working Family Payment (WFP) and the Back to Work Family Dividend (BTWFD) back to JST. It would be difficult for my Department to estimate the magnitude of this flow into and between schemes with any degree of accuracy.

As these unknown factors are critical to providing a reliable costing my Department is not

in a position to provide the costing requested.

### **Working Family Payment Eligibility**

668. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if consideration has been given to reducing the number of hours necessary to qualify for the working family payment from 19 to 15 hours per week in order to support more workers engaged in low hour and low paid work and their families; the additional costs involved in such a change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11916/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Working Family Payment (WFP) is an in-work support which provides an income top-up for employees on low earnings with children. WFP is designed to prevent in-work poverty for low paid workers with child dependants and to offer a financial incentive to take-up employment. Estimated expenditure on WFP in 2018 is approximately €430 million and it is currently paid to almost 54,000 families in respect of some 122,000 children.

To qualify for WFP, a person must be engaged in full-time insurable employment which is expected to last for at least 3 months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. A couple may combine their hours of employment to meet the qualification criteria. The applicant must also have at least one qualified child who normally resides with them or is supported by them. Furthermore, the average family income must be below a specified amount which varies according to the number of qualified children in the family.

The “hours worked” eligibility criterion has been reduced significantly since the introduction of the scheme in 1984, from 30 hours per week to 19 hours per week in 1996. Indeed, a recent review of in-work supports found that the current range of supports works very well for the vast majority of families and facilitates an element of choice which allows them to select the option which best suits their needs.

For low income workers with less than the minimum hours of employment for WFP and working on a casual basis up to and including 3 days per week, jobseeker’s schemes provide in-work income support through daily disregards and tapered withdrawal of payments.

Further reducing the “hours worked” requirement would have potentially significant expenditure implications which are difficult to quantify. The number of families working between 15-18 hours and are earning below the relevant WFP thresholds is currently unknown. Also, reducing the numbers of hours worked required to access WFP from 19 to 15 could have a number of behavioural effects the increased cost of which would be difficult to predict. These effects include:

- reducing the incentive to increase part-time hours, resulting in recipients on the minimum 19 hours threshold reducing their hours of work;
- attracting new recipients currently on higher wages above the WFP threshold, who might decide to reduce their hours in order to qualify.

It is crucially important that WFP does not inadvertently subsidise unsustainably low earnings or encourage employers to offer minimal hours of employment. The longer term goal of WFP, as an incentive to take up and remain in work, could be compromised if the nature of the work taken up is not ultimately sustainable without ever-increasing and perhaps ultimately unsustainable levels of subvention.

Any plans to reduce the WFP hours-worked threshold below 19 hours would have to be considered in the overall budgetary context.

### **One-Parent Family Payment**

669. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to a report by an organisation (details supplied) into the employment and living conditions of one-parent families here; if so, her views on same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11917/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I note the report referred to by the Deputy.

The policy goal of the changes to the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) scheme were to tackle long-term social welfare dependency - and its associated poverty risks - through a tapering of income supports and a more active engagement process offering enhanced educational, training and employment supports for lone parents via the Department's Intreo service.

Budget 2019 raised the weekly rates of payment for working age schemes and also increased the income disregard for one-parent family payment and jobseeker's transition payment recipients to €150 per week with effect from 25/03/19 (the highest disregard level to date). The weekly rates of the IQC in 2019 will also increase: by €2.20 per week (from €31.80 to €34) for children under 12; and by €5.20 per week (from €31.80 to €37) for children 12 and over. This measure will benefit over 370,000 children and will help to tackle child poverty.

With regard to increases introduced in Budget 2019 alone, for example, a lone parent working 15 hours per week at the National Minimum Wage is now better off by almost €1,000 per year.

The Department's social impact assessments of Budgets 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 are an indicator of the improvements over that time for lone parents. These show a cumulative increase of €43.75 in the average weekly household income of employed lone parents (and €45.00 for unemployed lone parents). This compares favourably with a weekly increase of €39.25 for the average household.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is in the final stages of drafting the new Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy which will assemble in one place the range of policy measures across government departments that are designed to address the different aspects of poverty and social exclusion. It is intended that it will include targeted actions to improve supports that allow lone parents to take up education, training and employment opportunities. The new strategy will include a programme of work to identify the actions and services that have the most significant impact on reducing poverty and deprivation for different groups, including children.

### **Working Family Payment Data**

670. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of the working family payment, formerly the family income supplement, in each of the years 2008 to 2018, in tabular form. [11918/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly in-work payment which provides additional finan-

cial support to employees on low earnings with children. WFP is designed to prevent in-work poverty for low paid workers with child dependents and to offer a financial incentive to take up employment.

The number of persons in receipt of WFP for years 2008 to 2018 were as follows:

Year	WFP Recipients
2008	27,798
2009	25,963
2010	28,223
2011	28,876
2012	32,307
2013	44,159
2014	50,306
2015	55,913
2016	55,567
2017	57,745
2018	54,116

It should be noted that the above figures refer to the number of families in receipt of WFP at the end of the relevant year. The figures fluctuate from week to week.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### One-Parent Family Payment

671. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to introduce a comprehensive strategy of the long-term vision for lone parent families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11919/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** While social transfers play a crucial role in alleviating poverty, and Ireland is among the best performing EU States for reducing poverty through social transfers, tackling poverty in one parent families is not just about income supports and welfare. Rather it is also about supporting parents to make the transition into employment and assisting families through the provision of quality affordable services in areas such as education, health, housing and childcare. The diverse nature of these challenges demonstrates why the adoption of the whole of government approach is absolutely essential in order to tackle poverty and deprivation among one-parent families effectively.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is in the final stages of drafting the new Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy which will support and build on the Whole of Government Approach to tackling poverty adopted under the Better Outcome Brighter Futures Framework. The new strategy will assemble in one place the range of policy measures across government departments that are designed to address the different aspects of poverty and social exclusion.

It will include a programme of work to identify the actions and services that have the most significant impact on reducing poverty and deprivation for different groups, including lone parent families.

It is intended that it will include targeted actions to improve supports that allow lone parents

to take up education, training and employment opportunities.

### **Proposed Legislation**

672. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the Social Welfare Commission Bill 2018; her views on the objective of the Bill; if consideration has been given to the provisions and measures contained therein; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11920/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I am aware of the Social Welfare Commission Bill 2018, sponsored by the Deputy, which seeks to, among other things, establish a Commission to monitor and make recommendations on social welfare rates at least once per year.

The Deputy will be aware that the issue of benchmarking and indexation of social welfare rates is not new. For example, previous studies were conducted by the Commission on Social Welfare in 1986 and the Social Welfare Benchmarking and Indexation Group in 2001.

The Roadmap for Pension Reform, published last year, commits the Government to examine and develop proposals to set a formal benchmark target of 34% of average earnings for the State Pension (Contributory) and to institute a process whereby future changes in pension rates of payment are explicitly linked to changes in consumer prices and average wages. My Department is currently considering options to progress this commitment.

I welcome the Deputy's engagement with the issue which we discussed during the passage of the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2018. In that context, Section 19 of the Act provides that I, as Minister, will arrange to "consult with stakeholders on examining ways in which social welfare rates are increased with the aim of ensuring adequacy for all recipients and will do so in quarter 1 of 2019". My Department will solicit the views of interested stakeholders and I look forward to seeing the outcome of these consultations.

As the Deputy is aware, any change to the current process of setting social welfare rates of payment would require Government approval and would have to be considered in the overall policy and budgetary context.

### **Illness Benefit Applications**

673. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if all correspondence from her Department will be provided to a person (details supplied) who has had an ongoing case regarding an application for an illness benefit. [11952/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Department will arrange for the information requested to be provided to the person concerned.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Public Sector Staff Grades**

674. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social

Protection if a person who has worked in a section 39 funded position for the past 12 years but who was not directly paid by the HSE will qualify for an analogous grade if that person commences work within her Department (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11987/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I understand that the question of the recruitment, grading and status of people appointed to the Civil Service is a matter for the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Commission for Public Service Appointments.

I further understand that it is not possible for a person appointed from an open competition to rely on prior status in another employment for the purpose of grading in the civil or public service.

This is a matter that the Deputy may wish to clarify with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

### **Small and Medium Enterprises Supports**

675. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the impact the abolition of training rates is having upon small businesses that are under pressure due to significant rates of VAT, PRSI, rates and other costs in their attempt to employ young persons as an apprentice; if training grants will be restored in such circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12041/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Legislation governing the national minimum wage is set down in the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 and the National Minimum Wage (Low Pay Commission) Act 2015. These Acts provide for the setting of a national minimum wage (NMW) and also provide that in specified circumstances, such as younger workers and trainees, a reduced, sub-minimum rate may be applied.

In September 2015, the then Minister requested the Low Pay Commission to examine the appropriateness of the sub-minimum rates as provided for in the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 with regard, in particular, to their impact on youth unemployment rates and participation in education.

The Commission undertook a consultation process on this subject in line with its evidence based approach to making recommendations to Government and received 15 submissions in total. The Commission's final report was published on 20 February 2018.

Having examined all available evidence and submissions, and considered a range of options, the Commission recommended the abolition of training rates. The Commission had heard evidence in submissions of the training rates being paid in order to reduce wage costs rather than as part of a structured training programme. The Commission found that the lack of clear definitions around training rates left them open to abuse. In light of these considerations and the low usage of the training rates the Commission was of the view that training rates should be abolished. The Commission encouraged sectors to register for state approved apprenticeship programmes, which are under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills, if they felt that a period of structured training was required.

In its report the Commission also recommended simplifying the rates of minimum wage for those aged under 18 to 20 as follows:

12 March 2019

- Employees under 18 would receive a minimum of 70% of the NMW
- Employees aged 18 would receive a minimum of 80% of the NMW
- Employees aged 19 would receive a minimum of 90% of the NMW
- Employees aged 20 and over would receive the full NMW.

These recommendations were accepted by Government and the amendments to make the necessary legislative changes to the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 were implemented via the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018. The changes came into effect on 4 March 2019.

The Low Pay Commission is an independent authoritative body on matters relating to the national minimum wage and I am confident that the Commission gave consideration to the impact of any recommendations it made in regard to training rates.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Citizens Information Board**

676. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost in a full year if the budget for Citizens Information Services increased by 8%. [12043/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is the statutory body responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice (including money and budgeting advice) and advocacy on a wide range of public and social services. It provides some services directly to the public and directly funds and supports an extensive range of services through its delivery partners including the Citizens Information Services (CIS’s), the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS), the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS), and the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS).

CIB is allocated an annual budget from which it funds all of its services. In 2019, CIB’s overall budget allocation is €59.26 million. From this, CIB has allocated €16.9 million for citizens’ information services, comprising €14.1m allocated to the 8 regional Citizens Information Services, €1.5m allocated towards central supports provided to these companies, e.g insurance costs, advertising, training and other overheads and, €1.3 million allocated to the Citizens Information Phone Service, which provides a comprehensive and confidential national telephone service.

If the allocation of €16.9m for the citizens’ information services were to increase by 8%, CIB would require an increased allocation from central Government funds of €1.35 million.

### **Social Insurance**

677. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount that would be generated if the 2.6% PRSI rate of classes B, C or D increased to 3% or a minimum of €300. [12044/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):**

Low rate voluntary contributors (those formerly insured at Classes B, C and D) currently pay a 2.6% PRSI contribution rate (subject to a minimum annual payment of €250) to maintain their entitlement to widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory) pension and guardian's payment.

There were 17 low rate contributors in 2017 and it is estimated that increasing their contribution rate from 2.6% to 3% with an increased minimum payment of €300 would yield €3,000.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Tús Programme**

678. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans under development to extend the Tús scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12056/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** It is recognised by Government that Tús is a positive initiative that enables the long-term unemployed to make a contribution to their communities whilst up-skilling themselves for prospective future employment.

Tús provides work placements for a twelve month period for those who are on the Live Register for a year or more. This initiative helps break the cycle of long-term unemployment by providing a work routine and valuable work experience. At present, there are no plans to change the eligibility criteria for participation on Tús or the duration of the placements. It is considered that the existing criteria is adequate to meet the programme's objectives.

If a person is interested in pursuing a work placement with training and development opportunities, it is open to them to apply for a placement on a Community Employment (CE) scheme.

The Department keeps all aspects of its activation programmes under review to ensure the best outcomes for participants and communities whilst also having regard to the, thankfully, much reduced number of people claiming jobseeker's payments. The Government is very mindful of the large number of work programme places involved in service delivery and other valuable services to individuals and communities across Ireland.

### **Poverty Data**

679. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the recent report from an organisation (details supplied), which found that the rate of in-work poverty among lone parents more than doubled between 2012 and 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12063/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I note the report referred to by the Deputy.

The policy goal of the changes to the OFP scheme were to tackle long-term social welfare dependency - and its associated poverty risks - through a tapering of income supports and a more active engagement process offering enhanced educational, training and employment supports for lone parents via the Department's Intreo service.

A recent review of in-work supports found that the current range of supports works very

well for the vast majority of families and facilitates an element of choice which allows them to select the option which best suits their needs.

A working lone parent on OFP and working 15 hours per week is raised significantly above the poverty line. This parent is currently incentivised to work additional hours to qualify for Working Family Payment (WFP). Even at the WFP minimum 19 hours per week and on the National Minimum Wage, a lone parent on WFP is lifted significantly above the poverty line.

The SVP report uses the 2012 EU-SILC in-work poverty figure for single parents as the base line for its assertion that lone parent in-work poverty in Ireland has more than doubled from 8.9% to 20.8% since 2012. As the table below shows, the relevant EU-SILC figure for 2008 was 26.2%, so compared to the 2017 figure of 20.8% there has been a reduction of in-work poverty for single parents over the last decade, which puts a different perspective on this matter.

In-Work at-risk-of-poverty rate by household type - Single Person with dependent children

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Ireland	26.2%	18.0%	10.0%	10.9%	8.9%	10.5%	11.8%	14.0%	20.3%	20.8%

Source: EU-SILC Data

Budget 2019 raised the weekly rates of payment for working age schemes and also increased the income disregard for one-parent family payment and jobseeker's transition payment recipients to €150 per week with effect from 25/03/19 (the highest income disregard level to date). The weekly rates of the IQC in 2019 will also increase: by €2.20 per week (from €31.80 to €34) for children under 12; and by €5.20 per week (from €31.80 to €37) for children 12 and over. This measure will benefit over 370,000 children and will help to tackle child poverty.

With regard to increases introduced in Budget 2019 alone, for example, a lone parent working 15 hours per week at the National Minimum Wage is now better off by almost €1,000 per year.

The Department's social impact assessments of Budgets 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 are an indicator of the improvements over that time for lone parents. These show a cumulative increase of €43.75 in the average weekly household income of employed lone parents (and €45.00 for unemployed lone parents). This compares favourably with a weekly increase of €39.25 for the average household.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is in the final stages of drafting the new Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy which will assemble in one place the range of policy measures across government departments that are designed to address the different aspects of poverty and social exclusion. It is intended that it will include targeted actions to improve supports that allow lone parents to take up education, training and employment opportunities. The new strategy will include a programme of work to identify the actions and services that have the most significant impact on reducing poverty and deprivation for different groups, including children.

### Rent Supplement Scheme Data

680. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of rent supplement at a location (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12087/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Rent supplement continues to play a 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 9 residents in the facility referred to by the Deputy, in appropriate accommodation of their choosing.

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 Housing Assistance Payment (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.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer’s Allowance Appeals**

681. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made regarding an appeal for a carer’s allowance by a person (details supplied) that was appealed in August 2018.; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12097/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 10th August 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 12th February 2019. On 19th February 2019 the case was referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Jobseeker’s Benefit Eligibility**

682. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when jobseeker’s benefit will be extended to self-employed persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12157/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** In Budget 2019, I announced a new scheme which will provide a PRSI insurance based benefit to self-employed people who pay class S contributions and lose employment. This measure builds on other recent significant improvements for the self-employed such as access to invalidity pension and treatment benefits. It is part of the Government’s aim of creating a supportive

environment for entrepreneurship, including providing an income safety net to employees and self-employed alike.

Applicants will have to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the new scheme including satisfying a PRSI contribution requirement. The statutory conditions and requirements for the scheme are being worked through by officials at this time as part of the legislative process and the measure will be introduced towards the end of this year.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Child Benefit Applications**

683. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person who fails on an appeal in respect of a payment (details supplied) can further appeal or opt for a mediation process; if there is a sunset clause regarding when a person can make an application in respect of a payment; if she will further review a case in view of the fact that there is a series of mitigating factors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12255/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned submitted an application for child benefit to my Department in April 2018 in respect of her son who was born in April 2015. I understand from the Appeals Office that child benefit was awarded from May 2018 as it was decided that the person concerned had not shown good cause for not submitting her application within the prescribed time. The person concerned appealed the Deciding Officer's decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all the available evidence, decided that the person concerned had not shown good cause for not submitting her application within the prescribed time and, therefore, disallowed the appeal.

Under the legislation the decision of an Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed under Section 317 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 by an Appeals Officer in the light of new evidence or new facts. If there is any new evidence or new facts pertinent to this case that were not brought to the attention of the Appeals Officer during the determination of the appeal, they may be submitted to the Social Welfare Appeals Office for consideration.

The Chief Appeals Officer has power under Section 318 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 to revise any decision where it appears to her that the Appeals Officer's decision was erroneous by reason of some mistake having been made in relation to the law or the facts. A request for such a review by the Chief Appeals Officer may be made by writing to her at the Social Welfare Appeals Office, D'Olier House, D'Olier Street, Dublin 2.

If it is decided to take this course of action, it will be necessary that the person concerned sets down specifically the reasons which she believes renders the Appeals Officer's decision incorrect having regard to his/her interpretation or application of the law or the facts.

The Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (Section 327) also provides that any person who is dissatisfied with either the decision of an Appeals Officer or of a revised decision made by the Chief Appeals Officer may appeal that decision or revised decision, as the case may be, to the High Court on any question of law.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Free Travel Scheme Applications**

684. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the case of a person (details supplied) in County Leitrim will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12302/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The current free travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approximately 937,000 customers with direct eligibility with an annual allocation of €95 million.

Persons resident in Ireland who are over 66 and persons in receipt of certain social welfare payments are eligible for the scheme. The social welfare payments that allow persons aged under 66 to a free travel pass include disability allowance, invalidity pension, carer's allowance and partial capacity benefit. While medical evidence will be required to determine eligibility for these schemes, it does not, of itself, entitle a person to free travel.

A person in receipt of an Invalidity Pension receives the pass on the basis of the primary benefit they are paid, and not on the basis of their underlying medical condition. If the free travel scheme was to be extended to all people who had a disability and/or significant health issues, regardless of whether they receive a qualifying payment, a medical assessment process would be required for all such applications, significantly changing the nature of the scheme.

Any suggestion to change or review the eligibility criteria of the free travel scheme to include all people who had a disability and/or significant health issues, regardless of whether they receive a qualifying payment, would have significant costs, would require additional significant administrative processes to be put in place, and could only be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Domiciliary Care Allowance**

685. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if discriminatory elements (details supplied) of the domiciliary care allowance scheme will be addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12324/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) is an allowance established as a recognition of the extra care and attention that is provided by parents in their home for a child with a severe disability requiring continual or continuous care and attention which is substantially in excess of that normally required by a child of the same age.

I wish to confirm for the Deputy that the issue he raises has now been addressed. Until

recently a child had to be resident with a parent for a minimum of five days per week in order for that parent to qualify for the allowance. Minister Doherty recently introduced a change to the legislation governing Domiciliary Care Allowance which is set out under the Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) (Amendment) (No. 1) (Domiciliary Care Allowance – Normal Residence of Qualified Child) Regulations, S.I no.11 of 2019.

These Regulations provide for an exception to the 5-day residence condition set out in the main Regulations to allow for the award of DCA in cases of joint custody, allowing for the payment of DCA in circumstances where the child is resident with both parents, who are living apart. Where there is agreement between the parents concerned, the DCA will be payable to the nominated parent. Where there is no such agreement, the default position will be that DCA will be paid to the parent who is in receipt of child benefit in respect of the child.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

686. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12371/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 4 March 2019. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Property Registration**

687. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps which should be taken when a folio regarding a derelict property is registered in a now deceased person's name and following their death, the person had no family to transfer it to. [11765/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Property Registration Authority can amend the ownership, registered on a folio, upon receipt of an application for registration. In the event of the death of the registered owner an application would typically be received from a solicitor acting on behalf of the estate of the deceased person. Arrangements have been put in place by all bodies under the aegis of my Department to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for the Property Registration Authority is [reps@prai.ie](mailto:reps@prai.ie).

### **Building Regulations**

688. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment if the use of electric vehicles has given rise to reassessment of health and safety in design, construction and operation of underground, multistorey or enclosed car parks and parking areas generally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12090/19]

714. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the changes that have been made to planning and building regulations with respect to enclosed, multistorey or underground car parks in terms of fire prevention in which electric cars are to be parked; the position in relation to the parking and storage of electric vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12128/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 688 and 714 together.

To date no issues have been brought to the attention of my Department that require changes to building or planning regulations in respect of fire prevention in car parks in which electric vehicles are to be parked.

In relation to planning, the current planning system supports the roll out of electric vehicles. The development of charging infrastructure for electric vehicles is exempt from planning permission under Section 4(1)(h) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, where development does not materially affect the external appearance of the structure and must be installed by an undertaker authorised to provide an electricity service. The exemption relates to removing the requirement to obtain planning permission only. Works being undertaken to install infrastructure for LEV charging/refuelling also must comply with the requirements of the building regulations.

The building regulations are subject to ongoing review in the interests of safety and the well-being of persons in the built environment and to ensure that due regard is taken of changes in construction techniques, technological progress and innovation. Part B – Volume 1 of the Fire Safety Technical Guidance Document (TGD) which deals with buildings other than dwellings is currently under review and will be the subject of a public consultation process in the coming months. Provisions in respect of buildings comprising or containing car parking will form part of the review.

The revised EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) contains new provisions which aim to accelerate deployment of electric vehicles. Article 8 requires the provision of appropriate infrastructure, to enable the installation at a later stage of recharging points for electric vehicles, for new residential buildings and residential buildings undergoing major renovation, by 2020. It also requires Member States to lay down requirements for the installation of a minimum number of recharging points for all non-residential buildings with more than 20 parking spaces, by 2025. This will be implemented in regulation by my Department by March 2020. The draft regulations required will be the subject of a public consultation process in the coming months.

The national specification for installation of recharging points is being developed by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) and a draft specification is undergoing a public consultation process at present.

### **Property Tax Data**

689. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the revenue received by each county from the local property tax each year since its introduction, in tabular form; the amount of that money each year spent locally by each county;

the amount of that money each year paid into the equalisation fund by each county; the amount of money received from the equalisation fund each year by each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12367/19]

690. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of local property tax collected by local authority each year since its introduction; the amount spent each year locally by local authority from the tax either from revenue or the equalisation fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12553/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 689 and 690 together.

Local Property Tax (LPT) is administered and collected by the Revenue Commissioners and is remitted into the Local Government Fund. The Revenue Commissioners publish detailed information on LPT collected annually, broken down by local authority, on its website at the following web link: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/local-property-tax/index.aspx>.

The current local retention regime for LPT began in 2015 and since then 80% of the estimated LPT liability in each local authority area for a given year is retained in that area to fund public services, notwithstanding any local variation decisions. The remaining 20% of LPT is re-distributed to provide equalisation funding to those local authorities that have lower property tax bases, due to, inter alia, the variance in property values and density in different locations across the State. Detailed information on the LPT retention regime including equalisation funding and allocations is published by my Department on an annual basis and is available at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current/category/housing/sub-topic/local-property-tax/sub-type/funding-allocation/topic/chargestaxes/type/publications?Query>.

### **Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding**

691. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the provision of funding in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11467/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of public water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. Connection applications are therefore a matter for Irish Water.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to [oireachtasmembers@water.ie](mailto:oireachtasmembers@water.ie) or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Alternatively, the Rural Water Programme may be of relevance in relation to the matter referred to by the Deputy. On 8 February 2019, I announced a new investment programme for the period 2019- 2021 for the provision of water services in rural areas. The Programme consists of eight funding measures. Local authorities have been invited to submit their proposals for the funding of schemes or projects in their functional areas.

The funding measures under the Programme include Measure 6 - Community Connections (Water and Wastewater). This measure facilitates the continued expansion of the coverage of

piped water supplies and central wastewater collection systems by extension off the public (Irish Water) network. The deadline for receipt of proposals to my Department is 14 March 2019.

The Programme also includes a measure (Measure 8) targeted at Domestic Wastewater Treatment Systems (septic tanks), which allows householders obtain funding support for their improvement. The terms and conditions of the revised funding scheme under this measure are currently being finalised by my Department and details will be issued to local authorities shortly.

Both Measure 6 and 8 may be of interest to the community at the location indicated by the Deputy in which case it is a matter for them to consider applying through the local authority for funding.

### **Planning Issues**

692. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if legislation will be introduced to make it compulsory to keep leylandii trees under control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11477/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Planning legislation places no specific restrictions on the height of trees or hedges, nor does it make any particular provision for remedy from any other nuisance which may be caused by trees in an urban residential area. However, a civil remedy is available through the Courts concerning branches or roots of neighbouring trees encroaching on a person's property.

The possibility of providing a broader civil law remedy for parties affected by high trees and hedges on adjoining properties was raised previously with the Minister for Justice and Equality. In this regard, advice was sought on the possibility of legislative provision being made, whereby a person substantially deprived of the enjoyment of their property, such as the deprivation of light caused by high trees on a neighbouring property, could apply to the Courts for an order, and that the Courts could make an order as they see fit, for example, to cut the trees back to an appropriate height. Safety considerations relating to overhanging trees could also potentially be addressed in any such provisions.

In response, the Minister for Justice and Equality suggested that disputes of this nature between neighbours could perhaps be more appropriately dealt with through mediation, which is being increasingly used internationally as a tool for the resolution of civil disputes, rather than through the Courts. Legislation subsequently introduced by the Minister for Justice and Equality has been enacted as the Mediation Act 2017.

The Act, which came into operation on 1 January 2018, contains provisions to underpin a comprehensive statutory framework to promote the resolution of disputes through mediation as an alternative to court proceedings which should ideally be only used as a last resort. In essence, the underlying objective of the Act is to promote mediation as a viable, effective and efficient alternative to court proceedings, thereby reducing legal costs, speeding up the resolution of disputes and reducing the stress and acrimony which often accompanies court proceedings, including those involving adjoining property owners.

### **Local Authority Functions**

693. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the associated regulations on the holding of plebiscites for place names will be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas in view of the fact that the Local Government Act 2019 has been enacted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11488/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** Following enactment of the Local Government Act 2019, in January 2019, the Regulations to prescribe how ballots to change a place-name are to be conducted by a local authority or municipal district are at an advanced stage of preparation and should be complete shortly.

### **Local Authority Housing**

694. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the schemes and supports in place to help a person to relocate from a Dublin to a rural local authority house; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11524/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Under the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, a household may apply to one housing authority only for social housing support at a time. Currently it is not possible for a household on the waiting list of one housing authority to transfer its application to another authority and to carry the time spent on the previous list.

A commitment has been given to examine the possibility of introducing a “housing passport”. The basic premise is that households in receipt of, or qualified for, social housing support in one local authority area could potentially transfer to, or be allocated, social housing in another local authority area. My Department is currently developing proposals in relation to this matter, details of which will be outlined when the work involved is complete.

### **Local Authority Housing Eligibility**

695. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the working family payment will be re-examined as part of assessable means when determining a rent review, HAP or a social housing application by a local authority (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11534/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** A review of income eligibility for social housing supports in each local authority area is under way, and this review will encompass issues such as the one referred to. The Housing Agency is continuing to carry out the detailed statistical work, which will underpin this review, on behalf of my Department.

The review will also have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

In relation to local authority rents, the power of local authorities to set and collect rents on their dwellings is laid down in section 58 of the Housing Act 1966. The making or amending of such schemes is a local authority function and is subject to broad principles set out by my Department, including that rent levels should be based on income and reflect tenants’ ability to pay.

Different approaches are taken to rent charging and setting across the country, which can

mean that various sources of income are treated differently in different local authority areas. Considerable work has been carried out by my Department in developing a draft national differential rents framework for the purposes of section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009. Such a framework has as its main aim the harmonisation of local authority rents, including a set of standardised income disregards, while retaining the general principle of rents being related to household income. I expect that the review will be completed in the near future.

### **Home Loan Scheme**

696. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when funding for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme will be made available to Meath County Council. [11588/19]

711. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps taken in order to reopen the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; the proposed date for the reopening of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11873/19]

719. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason he has instructed Dublin and Fingal county councils to cease taking in new applications for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; if his attention has been drawn to the stress and worry that this is causing persons hoping to take up the loan; when the matter will be resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12261/19]

725. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there will be no delay in approving Rebuilding Ireland home loan applications due to funding shortages for the scheme in view of his clarification that councils can continue to accept and process applications for the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12333/19]

726. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the local authorities that have reached their spending limit under the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; and when further funds will be allocated. [12348/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 696, 711, 719, 725 and 726 together.

The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme was launched in February of last year to replace the existing local authority mortgage schemes, which were funded through loans that local authorities obtained from the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) for that purpose.

When the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan was initially being developed, it was estimated that the drawdown of loans under the scheme would be approximately €200 million over three years. The scheme has proven to be far more successful than originally anticipated, and the level of funding issued by local authorities to end January 2019 is approximately €106m, which is ahead of initial estimates for the scheme. As a result, to date, a number of local authorities have issued loans to a level which has used up their approved allocations for lending for mortgage and home improvement. Based on the latest information available, these are Fingal County Council, Kildare County Council, Meath County Council, Tipperary County Council, Waterford City & County Council, Wicklow County Council and Wexford County Council.

I am currently in discussions with the Minister for Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform regarding further funding for the scheme. Specific allocations to local authorities for 2019 will

be finalised when those discussions have concluded. In the meantime, the scheme remains open and all local authorities should continue to receive and process applications.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

697. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason Clare County Council has been informed that it can no longer purchase private dwellings for its social housing programme; the number of social houses or apartments built directly by the council that will be completed in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11683/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Clare County Council has not received a notification from my Department that it can no longer acquire private dwellings for its social housing programme. Contact between my Department and Clare County Council has been around the imminent issuing of social housing targets for 2019 and the fact that, while the Council is likely to undertake further acquisitions, the priority for its social housing delivery programme needs to be its construction programme.

Clare County Council already has a number of acquisitions in train for 2019 and further activity in this area will be reviewed with the Council once they have received their 2019 targets. I will support the Council in the blend of delivery they undertake to meet the Rebuilding Ireland targets for the county. However, it is critical that their programme in 2019 has a heightened focus on construction delivery.

### **Home Loan Scheme**

698. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he was first informed that the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme was over-subscribed and that local authorities were unable to process application forms due to a lack of funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11690/19]

704. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the reports of the discontinuance of the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; the reason this information was not put in the public domain; and his plans to enable persons who sought to benefit from it to gain access to the scheme. [11771/19]

705. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11774/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 698, 704 and 705 together.

The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme was launched in February of last year to replace the existing local authority mortgage schemes, which were funded through loans that local authorities obtained from the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) for that purpose.

When the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan was initially being developed, it was estimated that the drawdown of loans under the scheme would be approximately €200 million over three years. The scheme has proven to be far more successful than originally anticipated, and the level of funding issued by local authorities to end January 2019 is approximately €106m, which is ahead of initial estimates for the scheme.

My officials have kept me informed regarding the progress of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan on a regular basis and have been engaging with officials from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the scheme since October 2018, when it became clear that the rate at which loans were being approved was higher than was originally anticipated. However, at that stage it was not yet clear that these approvals were being translated into actual loans issued by the local authorities. In fact much of the criticism at the time was that insufficient loans were being approved and/or drawn down. However, as Minister I had made a commitment on launching the scheme that I would seek further funding for it at an early stage, if necessary, given my belief in its potential. It was clear from data gathered towards the end of the year that drawdowns were happening at an increased rate. Indeed, by the end of January €106m had been drawn down, which accounted for some 53% of the available funding, at which point €66m would have been more consistent with the expectation of funds being drawn down over a three year period. I informed the Dáil on 29 January 2019 that the scheme had proven to be more successful than initially anticipated, as a result of which it would require a further tranche of funds to be borrowed by the Housing Finance Agency in order to enable its continuation. I further indicated that my Department was in discussions with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Finance with regard to an extension of the scheme and that when these discussions were concluded I would make an announcement on the matter.

A meeting with the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform was scheduled for 4 February 2019. However, this had to be rescheduled and took place on 5 March 2019. At no time was the first tranche of funding depleted and, following the meeting on 5 March 2019, I informed the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government that local authorities could continue to accept applications as discussions had commenced on further funding. As of the end of January 2019, €106m has been lent, supporting 575 individuals and families to buy their first home.

I am currently in discussions with the Minister for Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform regarding further funding for the scheme. Specific allocations to local authorities for 2019 will be finalised when those discussions have concluded. However, in the meantime the scheme remains open and all local authorities should continue to receive and process applications.

### **Home Loan Scheme**

699. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of applications to the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme processed by the Housing Agency; the number recommended by the Housing Agency; the number refused; the number sent back for further information; the amount recommended; the number of loans under the scheme drawn down to date; the value of such loans; the corresponding data for all information requested by local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11691/19]

706. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of applications made under the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme in County Tipperary; the number that were approved; the overall loan allocation under the scheme on a county basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11778/19]

710. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of applications made under the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme for south County Dublin. [11871/19]

712. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment the number of persons in County Clare assisted in buying their first home by availing of the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; the number of applicants in County Clare who have been approved but have not drawn down the funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12034/19]

727. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of loan applications to the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme in County Mayo; and the number approved. [12349/19]

728. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount the local authority in County Mayo has been allocated under the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; and the amount spent or drawn down. [12350/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 699, 706, 710, 712, 727 and 728 together.

The Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses applications for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan on behalf of local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities to approve or refuse applications. Each local authority must have in place a credit committee and it is a matter for the committee to make the decision on applications for loans, in accordance with the regulations, having regard to the recommendations made by the Housing Agency.

The most recent figures, as at the end of February 2019, indicate that the Housing Agency had assessed 4,153 applications since the scheme began. Of these, 674 were deemed invalid, 1,772 were recommended for approval, and 1,682 were recommended for refusal. The data provided does not include figures on the number of applications returned for further information.

The Housing Agency compiles figures on the number of applications it has assessed and subsequently recommended to approve on a county-by-county basis, and the available figures as of the end of February 2019 are as set out in the following table.

Local Authority	Applications Assessed	Recommended to Approve
Carlow County Council	48	17
Cavan County Council	18	8
Clare County Council	54	19
Cork City Council	125	63
Cork County Council	282	159
Donegal County Council	34	20
Dublin City Council	395	241
Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council	92	49
Fingal County Council	490	264
Galway City Council	74	34
Galway County Council	123	46
Kerry County Council	97	41
Kildare County Council	173	87
Kilkenny County Council	30	16
Laois County Council	79	42
Leitrim County Council	11	4

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Local Authority	Applications Assessed	Recommended to Approve
Limerick City & County Council	97	55
Longford County Council	33	16
Louth County Council	89	37
Mayo County Council	57	23
Meath County Council	227	142
Monaghan County Council	25	9
Offaly County Council	44	15
Roscommon County Council	31	13
Sligo County Council	44	22
South Dublin County Council	247	128
Tipperary County Council	95	37
Waterford City & County Council	60	21
Westmeath County Council	29	19
Wexford County Council	101	54
Wicklow County Council	150	71
Total	3,454	1,772

In addition to this, my Department publishes information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Information up to the end of Quarter 3 2018, including in relation to number and value of mortgage drawdowns, is available on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>.

As part of the Review of the operation of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme, my Department obtained information from the local authorities on loans drawn down to the end of January. These details are set out in the following table.

Local Authority	Loans issued to end January 2019	Value of loans issued to end January 2019
Carlow County Council	5	€510,000
Cavan County Council	1	€180,000
Clare County Council	14	€1,708,622
Cork City Council	1	€120,000
Cork County Council	25	€4,058,900
Donegal County Council	3	€204,875
Dublin City Council	111	€23,525,855
Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council	5	€1,264,500
Fingal County Council	82	€18,254,259
Galway City Council	11	€1,679,000
Galway County Council	17	€2,263,781
Kerry County Council	6	€812,600
Kildare County Council	68	€14,973,597

Local Authority	Loans issued to end January 2019	Value of loans issued to end January 2019
Kilkenny County Council	6	€803,240
Laois County Council	12	€1,836,100
Leitrim County Council	0	€0
Limerick City & County Council	2	€343,800
Longford County Council	5	€356,875
Louth County Council	10	€1,829,500
Mayo County Council	8	€793,100
Meath County Council	57	€11,051,630
Monaghan County Council	1	€67,500
Offaly County Council	0	€0
Roscommon County Council	2	€242,000
Sligo County Council	8	€869,000
South Dublin County Council	29	€6,671,918
Tipperary County Council	15	€1,524,950
Waterford City & County Council	14	€2,039,292
Westmeath County Council	6	€971,500
Wexford County Council	33	€3,771,100
Wicklow County Council	18	€3,992,475
Total	575	€106,719,969

In relation to the allocations of funding to individual local authorities under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan to individual local authorities, the final allocations assigned to each local authority for mortgage and home improvement loans in 2018 are detailed in the below table. These final allocations are reflective of an internal rebalancing exercise carried out by my Department in respect of the approved allocations notified to the local authorities based on estimated drawdowns for 2018 as notified by the authorities.

County Councils	Final Allocation 2018 (€)
Carlow	5,200,000
Cavan	2,100,000
Clare	4,500,000
Cork	6,000,000
DL/Rathdown	10,020,000
Donegal	2,000,000
Fingal	19,276,000
Galway	3,924,000
Kerry	3,075,000
Kildare	8,000,000
Kilkenny	6,080,000
Laois	5,500,000
Leitrim	500,000

County Councils	Final Allocation 2018 (€)
Longford	1,200,000
Louth	4,300,000
Mayo	5,456,036
Meath	9,300,000
Monaghan	5,000,000
Offaly	1,700,000
Roscommon	1,500,000
Sligo	3,375,000
South Dublin	25,000,000
Tipperary	1,978,470
Westmeath	4,576,000
Wexford	7,000,000
Wicklow	4,000,000
City Councils	
Cork	1,520,000
Dublin	50,000,000
Galway	3,000,000
City & County Councils	
Limerick	2,545,916
Waterford	2,000,000
TOTAL	209,626,422

Since its launch in February 2018, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan has proven to be more successful than was initially anticipated. Discussions are ongoing with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Finance with regard to further funding for the scheme, and once these discussions have concluded my Department will be in touch with local authorities regarding their specific allocations for 2019. However, in the meantime the scheme remains open and all local authorities should continue to receive and process applications.

### Home Loan Scheme

700. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the process for Rebuilding Ireland home loan mortgage applications; if county council approval should be obtained before a deposit is paid; if the 2019 capital loan amounts have issued to each local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11696/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme is administered by local authorities in their areas of responsibility. Each authority has a credit committee which makes the final decision on whether a loan is approved. The Housing Agency provides a central assessment service for the local authorities. Based on a rigorous financial analysis, the Housing Agency make a recommendation for approval or rejection to the local authorities on each application made under the scheme.

The assessments carried out by the Housing Agency and the decisions made by local authority credit committees are made in accordance with the credit policy issued under the Regulations establishing the scheme. The credit policy sets out strict criteria for determining the eligibility of a person to qualify for loan approval and the Housing Agency has recommended that applications be rejected in 49% of the cases it has assessed. With regard to when a person

should pay a deposit on a property, that is a matter for individuals themselves to decide.

I am currently in discussions with the Minister for Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform regarding further funding for the scheme. Specific allocations to local authorities for 2019 will be finalised when those discussions have concluded. In the meantime the scheme remains operational and all local authorities should continue to receive and process applications.

### **Traveller Accommodation**

701. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding Traveller accommodation that is lying idle at Cabragh, Thurles, County Tipperary; the expenditure on same under the Traveller-specific accommodation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11762/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

As part of the allocation process, local authorities submit a programme of capital works for individual Traveller-specific projects and developments, which are assessed in my Department, in advance of allocations being made. My Department provided a total of €2,228,669 to Tipperary County Council in respect of the development at Cabragh Bridge. I understand that a mediation process is ongoing in relation to the occupancy of the accommodation at this site and the Council is hopeful of resolution to the current situation.

### **Residential Tenancies Board**

702. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government where a complaint can be directed regarding poor customer service by a client that had a very negative experience in dealing with them in view of the fact that the Office of the Ombudsman will not hear complaints regarding the Residential Tenancies Board other than in connection with Part 7 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11763/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 regulate the landlord-tenant relationship in the residential rental sector and set out the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants. The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Acts to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants. The RTB has a quasi-judicial role and it would be inappropriate for me, as Minister, to comment on, or to interfere in, the specifics of any case.

Complaints regarding the RTB's Dispute Resolution Service are outside of the remit of the Office of the Ombudsman, as the Dispute Resolution Service is a quasi-judicial process and case outcomes are decided by independent adjudicators and mediators. If a case party is unhappy with the outcome of their mediation or adjudication hearing, they may appeal the case to a three-member Tribunal within the RTB. The determination order of the Tribunal may be

appealed within 21 days to the High Court on a point of law.

The RTB provides a customer complaint service in line with its Customer Charter, which is published on their website, *www.rtb.ie*. The RTB is committed to providing excellence in customer service and seeks to continuously improve its services based on customer feedback. The RTB has recently further invested in its customer service resources to improve all aspects of customer services and training in this area.

### **Traveller Accommodation**

703. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the regulations for the specific parking on local authority owned property of so-called touring caravans under the Traveller specific accommodation scheme; when the policy and regulations were introduced; the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11768/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. Local authorities are responsible for the management and maintenance of Traveller-specific sites. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing safe, culturally appropriate Traveller accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

The parking of touring caravans on local authority property is not addressed under this legislation. Issues in this regard in relation to a particular site should be directed to the relevant local authority.

*Questions Nos. 704 and 705 answered with Question No. 698.*

*Question No. 706 answered with Question No. 699.*

### **Social and Affordable Housing Provision**

707. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce an affordable housing scheme; the likely principles of such a scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11785/19]

717. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the schemes which are available to support persons who wish to purchase their own home; the criteria of the schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12187/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 707 and 717 together.

Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 provides a new statutory basis for the delivery of affordable housing for purchase. The new affordable purchase scheme is based on local authorities providing, directly or indirectly, below market price housing.

The main tenets of the Scheme are as follows:

- It will be targeted towards low- to middle-income first-time buyer households;
- Discounts of up to 40% of the market price of the property will be provided;
- The local authority will place a charge against the property equal to the discount provided;
- The charge is repayable and the proceeds will be placed into a centralised affordable housing fund giving the scheme long-term sustainability;
- The affordable dwellings fund will be administered by the Housing Finance Agency.

In terms of the priority areas for operation of the scheme, this will be influenced by the economic assessments which local authorities were asked to carry out in relation to the affordability issues in their areas.

The Act itself contains significant detail on the new arrangements, reducing the extent to which regulations are required. Insofar as regulations are necessary, the most immediate requirement is for regulations dealing with the making of schemes of priority by local authorities. I will be signing regulations which will deal with that issue shortly, which will allow local authorities to finalise their schemes of priorities by June 2019, as required. Further regulations and detailed guidance will issue to local authorities thereafter.

The affordable housing scheme will be open to applications according as projects are delivered. In that regard, significant delivery is to be achieved through the €310 million Serviced Site Fund (SSF), under which at least 6,200 affordable homes are to be supported over the next three years. An initial 10 projects have been approved for €43m of funding under the first call for proposals under the SSF. A second call will issue shortly and the first homes are expected to be delivered in 2020.

In addition, some 2,350 affordable homes will be delivered on mainly publicly owned lands being supported through the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), while 5,600 further homes will benefit from a LIHAF-related cost reduction. The work of the Land Development Agency (LDA) will also be of crucial importance in terms of delivering more affordable housing; the initial portfolio of sites that the LDA has access to will have the potential, over the short to medium term, to deliver 3,000 affordable homes in line with the Government policy of achieving 30% affordable housing on State lands generally.

In parallel with this, the Dublin local authorities continue to progress a number of other significant housing projects on publicly owned lands, including the redevelopment of O'Devaney Gardens, St. Michael's Estate and a site at Oscar Traynor Road in Dublin city, yielding over 550 affordable homes. The timing of delivery under these projects is contingent on the completion of planning and procurement in the first instance, but the local authorities are working to achieve delivery as quickly as possible.

### **Defective Building Materials**

708. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to carry out a survey of homes to examine if persons are living in unsafe properties as highlighted in a report (details supplied); his further plans for a redress scheme for purchasers of houses and apartments that were not properly constructed and that are non-compliant with building and fire regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11854/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** In the first instance, I would like to acknowledge the stressful circumstances which the owners and residents of buildings face when defects occur in their homes.

However, in general, building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved: the homeowner, the builder, the developer and/or their respective insurers, structural guarantee or warranty scheme. It is important to note that while my Department has overall responsibility for establishing and maintaining an effective regulatory framework for building standards and building control, it has no general statutory role in resolving defects in privately owned buildings, including dwellings, nor does it have a budget for such matters.

Local authorities have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003, the Housing Acts and the Planning and Development Acts, all of which may be relevant where fire safety concerns arise in residential developments. Fire services may inspect buildings in cases of defects or complaints in respect of fire safety. They work with building owners to ensure immediate risks are addressed, and put a plan in place for works to bring buildings into compliance. They have enforcement powers for cases where co-operation is not forthcoming, or progress cannot be made on an agreed basis.

In the interest of supporting owners and residents living in developments where concerns regarding non-compliance with fire safety requirements arise, it was agreed that a review be undertaken by an independent fire expert to develop a framework for general application. In August 2017, the Framework for Enhancing Fire Safety in Dwellings was published, which is intended to be used as a guide by the owners and occupants of dwellings where fire safety deficiencies have been identified, or are a cause for concern. The Framework will also be of assistance to professional advisors, both in developing strategies to improve fire safety and in developing strategies to enable continued occupation in advance of undertaking the necessary works to ensure compliance with the relevant Building Regulations. The framework contains the following:

- an explanation of the statutory provisions in respect of fire safety, namely the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014 and the Fire Services Acts 1981 & 2003, and the respective responsibilities of owners, designers, builders, occupants, local authorities;
- a range of actions that may reduce risk and improve the level of fire safety where deficiencies arise in dwelling houses, apartments and/or the common areas of apartment buildings; and
- a fire risk assessment methodology for professional advisors to prioritise the remedial actions, if any, that may need to be carried out on a dwelling.

The Framework is available on my Department's website at the following link: [https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/framework\\_for\\_enhancing\\_fire\\_safety\\_in\\_dwellings.pdf](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/framework_for_enhancing_fire_safety_in_dwellings.pdf).

In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy in June 2017, and in recognition of fears expressed for fire safety, my Department's National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management was asked to convene a Task Force to lead a re-appraisal of our approach to fire safety in Ireland. In its report, the Task Force acknowledges the importance of fire safety in apartment buildings and makes a number of recommendations in this regard and I have tasked the Directorate's Management Board with implementation of the recommendations within its remit, and oversight of the implementation of other recommendations. The Task Force Report is available on my Department's website at the following link: [https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/fire\\_safety\\_in\\_ireland\\_-\\_report\\_of\\_the\\_fire\\_safety\\_task\\_force.pdf](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/fire_safety_in_ireland_-_report_of_the_fire_safety_task_force.pdf).

Additionally, in response to the building failures that have emerged over the last decade, my Department has advanced a robust and focused Building Control Reform Agenda, including:

- Amendments to the Building Control Regulations;
- Establishment of a shared services National Building Control Management Project; and
- The ongoing development of new legislation through the Building Control (Construction Industry Register Ireland) Bill.

These reforms have already brought, and will continue to bring, a new order and discipline to bear on construction projects, creating an enhanced culture of compliance with the Building Regulations.

### **Social and Affordable Housing**

709. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 673 of 22 January 2019, if he has finalised the regulations for the affordable purchase scheme; when the regulations will be published and circulated to local authorities; the reason for the ongoing delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11860/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 provides a new statutory basis for the delivery of affordable housing for purchase. The Act itself contains significant detail on the new arrangements, reducing the extent to which regulations are required. Insofar as regulations are necessary, the most immediate requirement is for regulations dealing with the making of schemes of priority by local authorities.

A draft of the relevant regulations for this purpose has been prepared and I expect that these will be finalised and submitted to me for signature shortly. Further regulations and detailed guidance will issue to local authorities thereafter.

*Question No. 710 answered with Question No. 699.*

*Question No. 711 answered with Question No. 696.*

*Question No. 712 answered with Question No. 699.*

### **Property Registration**

713. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to a backlog in registrations in the Land Registry; if such a delay is holding up the sale of a property; if there is a system of expediting a particular case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12072/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Property Registration Authority (PRA) is the State organisation responsible for the registration of property transactions in Ireland. In 2018, the PRA completed 226,111 land registry transactions, an increase of 17% on 2017. Over 80% of cases that were in order for registration and did not require a change to the map or examination of title were completed within ten days or less. At the end of 2018, there were 101,938 applications on hand.

Of the cases on hand, some 18% relate to first registration applications and such cases often take longer to resolve as the applications are legally complex and generally require queries with the lodging party. In addition, notice must be served on all interested parties and appropriate time allowed for objections. The PRA must also be fully satisfied that a case is fully grounded, the nature of the title proven and that all interested parties' concerns have been fully considered before registering a State guaranteed title.

The number of first registration cases on hands is reflective of a large intake of such cases since the extension of compulsory first registration to the entire country in 2011. The PRA has put an action plan in place, including targeted resources and business process improvements, to tackle the first registration case-load. Importantly, it has put in place a number of initiatives to enhance its engagement with solicitors aimed at improving the quality of applications received. In particular cases, for example, where processing is required to facilitate a sale, a request to expedite can be submitted directly to the PRA, in accordance with its customer service policy.

Arrangements have been put in place by all bodies under the aegis of my Department to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for the Property Registration Authority is [reps@prai.ie](mailto:reps@prai.ie).

*Question No. 714 answered with Question No. 688.*

### **Housing Regeneration**

715. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the final cost of a regeneration project in Ballymun, Dublin 11; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12177/19]

716. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the cost of works to date on dwellings which were new builds as part of the Ballymun regeneration project and have since required remediation works (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12178/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 715 and 716 together.

The Ballymun regeneration programme spanned a long number of years, with Departmental funding first arising in 1999. This substantial programme, which comprised 24 projects, is now complete. The overall programme is estimated to have cost approximately €972 million. Funding of €775.3 million was provided via my Department.

Largely completed by the end of 2013, the Ballymun programme represents the largest regeneration initiative undertaken in the State. The State's investment resulted in almost 2,000 new replacement homes being constructed for the former residents of the original flat blocks. An additional 1,350 homes were provided via private sector investment.

In addition, the programme provided state-of-the-art community facilities, such as the Axis theatre, along with neighbourhood centres to improve services. In recent years the regeneration activity has focused on improving the area's environmental performance with various green initiatives, new parks and playing pitches. Enterprise and employment generation has focused on the main street and retail parks, with many new employment opportunities created for residents of the area.

In relation to the maintenance of dwellings, it is very important that local authority housing

stock is maintained to an appropriate standard. Under the Housing Acts, such management and maintenance is, in the first instance, a matter for each individual local authority, in this case Dublin City Council. Separately, my Department has provided exchequer funding to support the remediation of pyrite-affected projects. This was in respect of 124 units at Sillogue 4 (€9.3 million), 52 units at Carton Estate (€3.2 million) and 4 units at Owensilla Terrace (€400,000).

An enduring regeneration project must extend beyond physical redevelopment alone. In order to be successful and sustainable over the long term, a regeneration project requires the rebuilding of a community and a strengthening of community bonds. Taken together, the provision of state-of-the-art community facilities, large-scale housing regeneration and new development, and support for local enterprise and employment, have enabled the Ballymun regeneration programme to be completed on a sustainable basis.

*Question No. 717 answered with Question No. 707.*

### **Local Authority Housing**

718. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to respond to correspondence issued to him on 13 February 2019 regarding concerns about procurement of contractors in the housing section of Wicklow County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12192/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** A reply to the correspondence referred to was issued on 7 March 2019.

*Question No. 719 answered with Question No. 696.*

### **Local Authority Housing Eligibility**

720. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the review of income eligibility for social housing supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12318/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. It is important to note that the limits introduced at that time also reflected a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn, both promoting sustainable communities and also providing a degree of future-proofing.

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports in each local authority area is underway. The Housing Agency is continuing to carry out the detailed statistical work, which will underpin this review, on behalf of my Department.

The review will also have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

### Local Authority Housing Data

721. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of all new home turn-key purchases and costs by each local authority in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12325/19]

722. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of all new home builds and costs by each local authority in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12326/19]

723. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of all new home regeneration builds and costs by each local authority in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12327/19]

724. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of all new home rapid build and costs by each local authority in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12328/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 721 to 724, inclusive, together.

A detailed breakdown of the construction programme of new social housing build is set out in the Social Housing Construction Status Report, which is published on a quarterly basis by my Department. The report covering the period up to end Quarter 4 of 2018 is now available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-for-q4-2018/> .

This report provides information on the social housing construction programme underway for each local authority area, including those construction schemes completed in 2018. This information includes completions through standard local authority construction, rapid build, turn-keys and regeneration. The report is available in a format that allows for interrogation at any time, to identify details of projects by local authority, or by delivery programme.

The cost of delivering the projects that were completed in 2018, broken down by local authority area, is set out in the table. It should be noted that further funding was also provided to local authorities in respect of other capital projects that reached project milestones in 2018, but did not complete in that year.

Local Authority	Cost
Carlow	€5.0m
Cavan	€2.4m
Clare	€0.4m
Cork City	€30.6m
Cork County	€33.1m
DLR	€37.8m
Donegal	€9.5m

Local Authority	Cost
Dublin City	€69.8m
Fingal	€46.7m
Galway City	€4.6m
Galway County	€6.4m
Kerry	€18.3m
Kildare	€17.7m
Kilkenny	€8.8m
Laois	€4.8m
Leitrim	€1.1m
Limerick	€15.9m
Longford	€9.9m
Louth	€3.6m
Mayo	€9.0m
Meath	€16.4m
Monaghan	€4.0m
Offaly	€2.3m
Roscommon	€1.9m
Sligo	€2.8m
South Dublin	€61.1m
Tipperary	€3.2m
Waterford	€22.8m
Westmeath	€2.3m
Wexford	€12.8m
Wicklow	€7.0m
Total	€471.9m

*Questions Nos. 725 and 726 answered with Question No. 696.*

*Questions Nos. 727 and 728 answered with Question No. 699.*

### **Home Loan Scheme**

729. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average wait time for approval for an applicant to the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme from the time the application is submitted to the local authority. [12351/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department does not routinely collect the information referred to. However, towards the end of last year, for the purposes of a review of the operation of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme that has been undertaken by my Department, a request was made to a number of local authorities for information regarding processing times for loan applications. Based on the information from those local authorities, and from the Housing Agency with regard to its assessment of applications, it is estimated the average time taken to process applications last year was seven weeks. This is in line with the expected timeframe of 6-8 weeks as set out on the RIHL website.

**An Bord Pleanála**

730. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the delays being experienced in respect of decisions by An Bord Pleanála by which decisions are being deferred on a number of occasions without a final date; the number of appeals that have been submitted in July and August 2018 on which no decision has been made to date; the reason for continuous deferrals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12352/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Under section 126 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, An Bord Pleanála (the Board) has a statutory objective to determine planning appeals within 18 weeks. Where the Board does not consider it possible or appropriate to reach a decision within 18 weeks (e.g. because of the particular complexities of a case or the requirement to hold an oral hearing), it will inform the parties of the reasons for this, and will indicate when it intends to make its decision.

It is acknowledged that there has been a reduction in the Board's compliance rate with the statutory objective period over the past year due to a number of factors, including an increase in the number of cases it has received. Total case intake in 2018 was 2,734, up 6% on 2017. At end January 2019, the compliance rate for determining normal planning appeals within the statutory objective period stood at 39%, and for all planning cases, the rate stood at 42%.

A range of measures have been taken to address the situation, including the appointment of additional Board members and the provision of additional resources. Ongoing and planned recruitment processes will see staffing levels increase further in the months ahead.

I am satisfied, taking account also of the increased Exchequer grant of €18.5m for the Board in 2019, a 7% increase on 2018, that the measures involved will enable the Board to significantly improve its compliance rate over the coming months. Indeed, the number of cases decided by the Board in 2018 was up 32% on 2017 and the Board's output is now at circa 250 cases per month.

The Board has a complement of 11 members, including a new Chairperson who took up duty on 30 October 2018, and an extra Board member engaged in June 2018 to supplement the normal complement of 10 members. While a vacancy have recently arisen on the Board within that complement, this is due to be filled shortly. The Board also employs over 150 staff members including 10 additional dedicated staff engaged in 2017 to support the Strategic Housing Division.

My Department will continue to liaise closely with the Board to ensure that it has appropriate resources to support it in the performance of its functions

**Local Government Reform**

731. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when details of the powers and functions to be assigned to directly elected mayors will be published; if it will be ensured there is adequate time and information for the public to consider these issues in advance of the proposed plebiscites; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12434/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** Plebiscites for directly elected mayors, with executive functions,

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will be held at the same time as the local elections, in respect of Cork City Council, Limerick City and County Council and Waterford City and County Council. Detailed proposals regarding the plebiscites, including the proposed functions of the mayor, will be submitted to Government for approval shortly and a public information campaign will be finalised and launched as soon as possible thereafter.

### **Deer Hunting**

732. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a licence to shoot deer will be granted to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11507/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** An application dated 4th February 2019 for a licence under Section 42 of the Wildlife Acts, in respect of the person referred to in the Question was received in my Department on 7th February last. However, as the application form was incomplete, the applicant was contacted in writing on 22nd February to clarify certain information. Further correspondence dated 4th March was received by my Department on 5th March and it is hoped that a decision on the matter will issue shortly.

### **International Conventions**

733. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if Ireland is a signatory of the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe, Granada, 1985; and if Ireland complies with its legal obligations under that EU convention. [11591/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Ireland is a signatory to the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe, known as the 'Granada Convention'. The Convention was ratified by Ireland on 20 January 1997 and entered into force on 1 May 1997.

In fulfilment of its obligations under the Granada Convention, Ireland legislated for the increased protection of the architectural heritage with the enactments of the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 1999 (later superseded by Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000) and the Architectural Inventory (National Inventory) and Historic Monuments (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1999.

### **Arts and Culture Capital Scheme Funding**

734. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will seek an update from Fáilte Ireland and the Chief State Solicitor's Office with regard to the ongoing problems with a theatre (details supplied) in County Sligo drawing down its capital funding grant; if these problems have since been resolved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12248/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The Theatre to which the Deputy refers was awarded substantial funding under the Arts and Culture Capital Scheme 2016-2018 in February 2017 to refurbish and enhance the existing facility.

All capital grants exceeding €300,000, require a legal charge on the property being developed for the amount of the grant for a period of 15 years. This charge is to protect the taxpayer's investment in the property if it was to undergo a change of use or in the event of its sale. The Chief State Solicitors Office is seeking to complete the legal formalities in order that the grant can be paid to the theatre to which the Deputy refers. The Chief State Solicitors Office's is awaiting the signature of the relevant documents by solicitors representing the theatre and the theatre's landlord.

On completion of the legal formalities it is hoped that the theatre can make progress on the project.

### **Údarás na Gaeltachta**

735. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad é an líon iomlán de chliantchomhlachtaí de chuid Údarás na Gaeltachta i ngach contae a bheadh incháilithe don deontas "Bí Réidh" de réir na gcoinníollacha (sonraí tugtha), cén líon iarratas atá ceadaithe agus cén líon atá ar lámh acu faoi láthair. [12301/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne):** Dirím aird an Teachta ar an bhfreagra a thug mé ar Cheist Dála Uimhir 609 an 5 Márta 2019 maidir leis an ábhar seo. Mar a thug mé le fios sa bhfreagra sin, fuair an tÚdarás trí iarratas ar chúnaimh faoin scéim Bí Réidh agus ceadaíodh maoiniú de €15,000 san iomlán ina leith.

Mar is eol don Teachta, is é an aidhm atá leis an scéim Bí Réidh, atá á riar ag Údarás na Gaeltachta, tacaíocht a chur ar fáil do chliantchomhlachtaí de chuid an Údaráis ar mhaithe leis na rioscaí a bhaineann le Breatimeacht a laghdú agus ar an lámh eile, an leas is fearr is féidir a bhaint as deiseanna a d'fhéadfadh eascairt as chomh maith.

Tá curtha in iúl ag Údarás na Gaeltachta go raibh os cionn 1,100 cliaint ar bhunachar cliaint an eagrais ag deireadh 2018, ag áireamh trádálaithe aonair, micreachomhlachtaí, chomh maith le comhlachtaí beaga agus meán mhéide. Tá os cionn 150 cliantchomhlacht de chuid Údarás na Gaeltachta a fhostaíonn 10+ daoine agus bheadh na comhlachtaí sin ar fad incháilithe chun cur isteach ar thacaíocht na scéime seo. Is iad na comhlachtaí seo is mó a bheadh ag easpórtáil chuig an Ríocht Aontaithe agus a mbeadh tionchar ar an mBreatimeacht orthu dá réir.

Ós rud é go bhfuil íogaireacht tráchtála agus rialacha cosanta sonraí i gceist nach foláir a bheith ar an airdeall fúthu, tá curtha in iúl ag an Údarás nach mbeadh sé inmholta, dar leo, sonraí de réir contae a chur ar fáil - ó tharla go bhféadfaí na comhlachtaí a aithint i gcásanna áirithe.

Agus é sin ráite, tá 25 comhlacht aitheanta ag an Údarás ó anailís nua mar na comhlachtaí is leochailí ó thaobh an Bhreatimeachta de agus tá teagmháil déanta arís leo chun na tacaíochtaí atá ar fáil ón Stát a chur ar a súile dóibh.

Ní miste a lua go bhfuil an líon beag iarratas a fuarthas faoin scéim go dtí seo ar aon dul leis an treocht atá le sonrú mar a bhaineann sé leis an laghad éilimh go ginearálta atá ar an macasamhail den scéim dar teideal Be Prepared atá á riar ag Fiontraíocht Éireann.

É sin ráite, tuigim go bhfuil leas agus spéis bainte ag cliaint an Údaráis as scéimeanna eile atá ar fáil dóibh agus ceadaíodh €1.8m de thacaíocht in iomlán in 2018 do scéimeanna i leith Taighde & Forbairt, Rochtain ar Mhargáí, Tacaíocht d'Eochair Phostanna agus an Scéim Céimithe.

## Hedge Cutting Season

736. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to extend the burning season (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12307/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts 1976, as amended, prohibits the cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation, with certain strict exemptions, from 1 March to 31 August.

Following a review of Section 40, which included consideration of submissions from interested parties, proposals were announced in December 2015 to introduce legislation to allow for managed hedge cutting and burning at certain times within the existing closed period on a pilot two year basis. The relevant legislation was included in the Heritage Bill 2016, which was enacted in July last year.

Section 7(1) of the Heritage Act 2018 provides that I may make Regulations to allow the burning of vegetation during such periods in the month of March and in such parts of the country as specified in the Regulations.

I recently made a decision not to make Regulations to extend the season for the burning of vegetation into March. This decision was taken as there would have been no basis for me to do so given the fact that the relatively dry weather during the six month period when the burning of vegetation could have been undertaken under the law (September to February inclusive) would not have precluded landowners from burning vegetation. Therefore, the existing provisions in the Wildlife Acts on burning remain in force.