

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 13, inclusive, answered orally.

Equality Proofing of Budgets

14. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the work of the equality budgeting expert advisory group; the progress under the nine equality budgeting themes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25631/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): To further guide the roll-out of equality budgeting, an Equality Budgeting Expert Advisory Group was established, holding its first meeting in September 2018. The group has to date met on five occasions. In line with the Transparency Code it is expected that the minutes of those meetings will be available on the gov.ie website shortly. This group is comprised of a broad range of relevant stakeholders and policy experts to provide advice on the most effective way to advance equality budgeting policy and progress the initiative. The more specific role and objectives of the Group are:

- to provide constructive, critical feedback on the Equality Budgeting initiative to date;
- to provide expert guidance and informed insights on the future direction and areas of focus for Equality Budgeting, including in light of international experience, lessons from other policy areas and from academia;
- to promote a coherent, cross-government approach to Equality Budgeting, to maximise equality impacts and avoid duplication of effort across various policy areas; and
- to identify existing strengths of the Irish policy-making system which can be leveraged in support of Equality Budgeting, along with potential shortcomings that need to be addressed in this regard.

To allow for a focused assessment of each area, an Equality Budgeting framework was developed in the context of the 2020 Estimates process. Nine themes were identified, informed by various Government strategies currently guiding policy development across many different equality dimensions, including strategies for women and girls and for people with disabilities. The themes identified allow for sectorial examination and highlight areas where it is recognised that special policy action is required.

An Equality Budgeting update was included in the recently published Public Service Performance Report 2018, which makes use of the nine equality budgeting themes. While gender equality was the primary area for attention in the early stages of Equality Budgeting, work has

been ongoing to broaden the scope of the initiative to include other dimensions of equality. Nine Government departments are now actively engaged with Equality Budgeting. Work is ongoing to expand Equality Budgeting across all Government departments and address further dimensions of equality. Indeed, the Department of Justice and Equality, in close collaboration with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, has recently invited experts from the OECD to conduct an “Equality Policy Scan” which will provide insights into how equality budgeting and equality policy mainstreaming can be further developed, including in light of best international practices.

Questions Nos. 15 and 16 answered with Question No. 10.

Public Spending Code

17. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to ensure robust and credible cost-benefit analysis reports by third parties are provided when assessing costs of projects and other costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25685/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Spending Code is the set of rules and procedures that are in place to support public bodies in achieving value for money as they implement all projects, including major projects, through the course of the project’s lifecycle. Each project works through a lifecycle from project identification, appraisal/business case, planning & design, procurement, implementation, to review.

The project is assessed by the Sponsoring Agency, i.e. the body delivering the project, throughout to ensure it represents value for money. At key designated stages in the lifecycle, the body funding the project, i.e. the Sanctioning Authority, is responsible for approving whether or not the project can move to the next stage.

For projects estimated to cost over €20 million, the Public Spending Code requires that the Sponsoring Agencies prepare an economic appraisal such as a cost benefit analysis or cost effectiveness analysis to inform their own consideration and the consideration of the project by the Sanctioning Authorities. The Public Spending Code also requires that the economic appraisals for such projects are submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform for technical review.

The Investment Projects & Programmes Office (IPPO) was set up in my Department to support the implementation of Project Ireland 2040. The IPPO conducts technical reviews as a further input for the Sanctioning Authorities. The review is policy neutral and its purpose is to support consistency in the application of the Public Spending Code.

As part of the ongoing reform of Ireland’s capital management systems, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is reviewing the Public Spending Code. The purpose of this review is to strengthen the existing guidance to better align with the realities of project delivery and with a particular focus on improved appraisal, cost estimation and management. The Office of Government Procurement is conducting a review of construction procurement which will align with the updated Public Spending Code.

The following reforms will be considered and implemented as part of the review:

- Strengthen and harmonise capital appraisal guidance;
- Greater clarity on governance and roles and responsibilities, particular in terms of who is

the Sanctioning Authority and who is the Sponsoring Agency for major projects;

- Introduce new mechanisms to improve the accuracy of cost estimates;
- Improve project life cycle to better reflect the realities of project delivery; and
- Complement the Project Ireland 2040 Capital Tracker in monitoring projects and costs.

The revised central elements of the Public Spending Code relating to the appraisal and management of public capital projects will be published this summer. Further technical guidance building upon these central elements will follow in the second half of 2019 and in 2020.

Public Service Pay Commission Reports

18. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress on the Public Service Pay Commission as it relates to Defence Forces pay and allowances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25819/19]

25. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the report of the Public Service Pay Commission will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24588/19]

36. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the Public Service Pay Commission report on recruitment and retention in the Defence Forces will be published in full; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25619/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 18, 25 and 36 together.

The Public Service Pay Commission was established to advise Government on public service remuneration policy. In the current phase, the second phase of the Commission's work, it was tasked by its Terms of Reference to undertake an examination of whether, and to what extent, there are difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff in key areas of the public service identified in its first report. The Public Service Pay Commission has adopted a modular approach to its work programme for its present exercise.

As the Deputy will be aware, the first module was published by the Commission in August 2018 and deals with issues relating to Nursing and Midwifery, Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors and Hospital Consultants.

The Commission engaged on work in relation to the Defence Forces in accordance with its terms of reference. I understand that written submissions have been received from both the Employer and relevant staff associations and more recently, in March, oral presentations were also made to the Commission by both parties.

The Commission has now completed its examination of recruitment and retention matters in the Defence Forces and has submitted its Report to me for consideration.

This Report will be submitted to Government and published in due course and will then fall to be considered by the parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement, 2018 - 2020 (as per section 3 of that Agreement).

Flood Relief Schemes

19. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will meet with a group (details supplied) and public representatives to address ongoing flood defence concerns and the lack of information regarding the timeline for the building of flood defences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25647/19]

37. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the OPW will announce the next list of capital works flood schemes under the ten year programme of investment; if Buncrana, County Donegal will be part of the list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25646/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 19 and 37 together.

I am happy to say that the Office of Public Works and Donegal County Council have been working constructively to address flooding issues across Donegal and I am very satisfied with the progress that has been made on the implementation of new flood relief schemes in the County since I announced, in May 2018, 29 Flood Risk Management Plans for all the main river basins. A total of 118 flood relief projects were identified in these Plans to protect the main flood risk areas throughout the country. 15 of these projects are in County Donegal, including a proposed project to address flooding in Buncrana..

These Plans and projects are a key part of the overall flood risk management strategy set out in the National Development Plan 2017 - 2028 involving total investment of almost €1 billion over the ten year time frame of that Plan. As I have mentioned in replies to previous questions on this matter, there is a significant resource commitment involved in the delivery of such an ambitious programme of investment nationally and it is not possible to implement all of the 118 projects at the one time. Therefore it has been necessary to prioritise a total of 57 projects across different Counties for the initial tranche of investment based on the level of risk and number of properties to be protected.

Following consultation and discussions between the OPW and Donegal County Council, six of the 15 Donegal projects have been identified to be progressed in the first phase of implementation. Steering Groups for the projects have been established and much work is being done to make preparations for the appointment of consultants over the coming months for these projects.

The proposed project for Buncrana is not in the initial tranche of projects to be advanced but I can assure the Deputy that the OPW and Donegal County Council will work closely to ensure that the project will be progressed as early as possible in the coming years and within the 10 year timeframe for the national programme of investment.

I am always happy to meet with residents and community groups in relation to flooding issues and I am sure that suitable arrangements can be made in that regard for Buncrana.

Civil Service Management

20. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to ensure appropriate reasonable accommodations are made for visually impaired members of the Civil Service carrying out their day-to-day work; his plans to review information technology systems in order to assist visually impaired civil servants in the performance of their duties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25688/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Civil Service

employers must and do consider their obligations under the Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2015 to provide reasonable accommodation. Reasonable accommodation is about meeting the needs of people with disabilities, including visual impairment, so that they can have access to and can participate and advance in employment. The intention of the provisions dealing with reasonable accommodation is to create a level playing field between individuals with and without a disability.

Employers across the civil service provide reasonable accommodations to staff who have a disability so they can participate and advance in their employment.

There are a range of supports available to staff and employers that can help with reasonable accommodation.

- Disability Liaison Officers (DLOs) are appointed across government departments. A key part of the DLO role is to support staff with disabilities. The DLO can work in conjunction with other sections, e.g. Human Resources (HR), and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Division to assist staff with disabilities.

- The Civil Service Employee Assistance Service provides a wide range of free and confidential supports to all staff and management of the Irish Civil Service.

- My own Department has increased training and support aimed at ensuring civil service employers are aware of their duty of care as an employer. For example, DPER has provided:

- Training on Reasonable Accommodation for over 150 people who work with staff with disabilities.

- Guidelines on the provision of reasonable accommodation.

In relation to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) has developed a range of applications that are used across Civil Service departments and offices for handling routine functions. These include systems for managing parliamentary questions, processing internal submissions, electronic records management, and so on. These applications are built to be accessible for visually impaired users from the ground up. The applications undergo accessibility testing, including the use of screen readers, the primary tool used by visually impaired users to interface with their PC. This testing, is carried out during both the development and maintenance of the applications and involves working groups with visually impaired members. This allows the OGCIO to gather direct experience and feedback from visually impaired staff in order to continuously improve the user experience of the applications.

While provision of reasonable accommodation for any individual staff member is a matter for each Department my own Department provides devices and office productivity software with industry leading screen reading software that provides text-to-speech outputs for visually impaired and blind staff.

Flood Risk Management

21. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the provision in 2019 for flood prevention and coastal protection works to be funded by the OPW; the amount spent to date in 2019 on such work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25626/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The capital allocation for Flood Risk Management in the 2019 Vote of the Office of Public Works (OPW) was originally €76.127 million, but was subsequently reduced to €73.127 million in a reallocation in relation to the National Children's Hospital. Expenditure on this particular subhead is currently running at just over €11million. This figure does not take into account expenditure incurred by local authorities on flood relief projects where they are the lead implementation and contracting authority but where the OPW is funding the project and where funding drawdown requests in respect of this expenditure has not been submitted by the local authorities. Capital expenditure on flood relief projects at construction stage would normally increase over the Summer months.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

22. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of the agreement reached in September 2018 on the equalisation of public pay for post-2011 entrants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25832/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 (PSSA), it was agreed by all parties that there would be an examination of remaining salary scale issues in respect of post January 2011 recruits at entry grades.

The discussions were informed by a Report, of March 2018 to the Houses of the Oireachtas in accordance with Section 11 of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017. A copy of the report and relevant data can be accessed at the library of the Oireachtas.

The Report shows that there was strong recruitment since 2011 to the estimated 237 recruitment grades across the public service, with over 60,500 new entrants hired. This includes over 16,000 teachers, nearly 5,000 Special Needs Assistants and almost 10,000 nurses.

The report also quantified the cost of a two point adjustment as approximately €200m and the potential benefit to the individual as €3,301 on average.

Since the publication of the Report, my Department, in support of the discussions between the parties, engaged in further work to assess and model the potential budgetary implications and impacts through phasing of the overall quantum.

Discussions on the issue with public service trade unions and representative associations, commenced in October 2017 and agreement was reached, in September 2018, between the parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement on a measure which provides a credible pathway to addressing the concerns of those recruited to our public service since 2011 in a balanced and sustainable way. It provides a fair and affordable path to managing the cost associated with the issue.

The cost of this measure as agreed during the remaining term of the PSSA is approximately €75m (€27m in 2019 and €48m in 2020). The full cost of the measure based on the end 2017 data in the report is approx. €190m out to 2025. It is estimated some 58% (35,750) of 'new entrants' will benefit from this measure in year 1 rising to 78% (47,750) by year 2. Provision for the additional cost will be provided for in the upcoming budget 2019 and subsequent years.

In general, the agreement provides for two separate interventions which will take place at point 4 and point 8 of pay scales. The practical effect of this is that for 'new entrants' the relevant points on the scale will be bypassed thereby reducing the time spent (by bypassing two

increment points) on the scale for progression to the maximum point.

This was brought to the Unions and Associations and their members to consider the measure in accordance with the procedures and processes provided for within those bodies and subsequently agreed upon.

The benefits under the measure became effective from 1 March 2019, and will be applied to each eligible new entrant as they reach the relevant scale points on their current increment date, and will be restricted to Parties adhering to the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020.

Performance Management Systems

23. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the Public Service Performance Report 2018; his further views on criticism by the Parliamentary Budget Office that the report is an activity report rather than an actual performance report consistent with performance budgeting concepts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25627/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In recent years, significant reforms have been implemented to Ireland's budgetary framework to embed sound expenditure management practice that maintains a focus on the results being achieved across the public service and the extent to which public spending is delivering on key policy objectives. Performance budgeting is a key element of this suite of expenditure reform measures.

A key aim of the performance budgeting initiative is to maximise the reporting of relevant quantitative metrics capable of being used to assess trends over time in order to underpin the scrutiny and appraisal of expenditure programmes. The performance budgeting initiative also supports another important aim: transparency and accountability to the Houses of the Oireachtas and to facilitate budget oversight by the Oireachtas.

The Performance Report provides timely information on what was delivered with public funds in the previous year. Performance targets are published in the Revised Estimates Volume (REV) each December. However, the timing of the publication of the REV means that outturn information for the current year is not yet available and only performance targets can be published.

The Performance Report is intended to supply that performance data, aiming to enhance the focus on performance and delivery by presenting relevant performance indicators in a dedicated and focused document.

The 2018 Public Service Performance Report, published in May 2019, was the third of its kind. In addition to the Performance metrics for each Vote group, the Performance Report also includes a chapter updating on the work regarding Equality Budgeting.

As this is the third edition of the Report, I have decided that this is an opportune point at which to take stock of how the Performance Budgeting initiative is developing and how it might be refined and improved. This process of internal review and reflection is currently underway and will inform how information is presented in next year's report. As part of this exercise, the recommendations of the Parliamentary Budget Office will be taken into consideration and my Department will further engage with stakeholders to identify other areas for development.

24. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to ensure new recruits in the public service are equipped to work in an increasingly automated work environment; his plans to ensure older workers receive help to adapt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25687/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Our Public Service 2020 which I launched in December 2017 establishes the overall strategy for development and innovation in the Public Service to 2020 and beyond. This framework for driving development and innovation will build a stronger public service to deliver better quality services for everyone over the period from 2018 to 2020 and beyond.

As set out in that strategy in order to build agile and resilient public service organisations, public servants need opportunities for career development including increasing expertise and skills in areas such as leadership and management, HRM, ICT, finance, languages, evaluation, data analysis and data management. The Strategic Human Resources Management Leadership Group, supported by the Public Service Reform Programme Management Office (PMO) in my Department and the Public Appointment Service, with input from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation on skills needs, lead on this action.

One of the 3 main pillars of the People Strategy for the Civil Service 2017-2020, which I launched in October 2017, is to 'build the workforce of the future'. As recognised in that strategy, strategic HR requires a highly co-ordinated and integrated view of the entire workforce over a 5 to 10 year period. The workforce composition, timing of resourcing and learning and development supports will be aligned with the strategic priorities of all Civil Service Bodies. In the main this will be achieved via the development of an aggregated Civil Service Workforce Plan (informed by workforce plans of the individual Civil Service Bodies).

A key enabler of the on-going management of the performance of current and future Civil Service reform is the PMDS system. PMDS is designed to be a meaningful and useful support to all Staff and Managers in the management and improvement of individual performance. PMDS allows us to strategically align performance management and learning & development to facilitate the matching of skills, expertise and experience to roles.

As a result of Action 9 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan 2014, to establish a new shared model for delivering learning and development in the Civil Service, OneLearning the Civil Service Learning and Development Centre was established in September 2017. OneLearning, which is based in my Department, will enable Civil Servants regardless of their organisation or location access to training and development opportunities and are responsible for all training that is common across the Civil Service. To date there have been over 20,000 attendances at a OneLearning course session from 44 Civil Service Bodies across 25 counties. A new Learning Management System, will be rolled out across the Civil Service in 2019.

OneLearning will continue to work with Civil Service Bodies to identify current and future learning and development requirements and develop appropriate learning solutions to equip civil servants at all levels with the knowledge and skills required to discharge their roles.

In addition, Civil Service Bodies continue to meet the unique learning and development requirements within their own organisations in relation to individual process obligations and challenges.

Question No. 25 answered with Question No. 18.

Question No. 26 answered with Question No. 8.

Brexit Preparations

27. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated cost of preparing for Brexit, in particular for a hard Brexit, in 2018 and to date in 2019; if he anticipates additional resources to be required should a hard Brexit materialise in October 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25683/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government's Contingency Action Plan, published at the end of last year and updated at the end of January, sets out the comprehensive, cross-Government preparations for Brexit. All Departments have sector-specific plans in place identifying key challenges associated with Brexit and associated mitigation approaches. We have also taken important steps to prepare our economy, including the Action Plan for Jobs 2018, our Trade and Investment Strategy and Project Ireland 2040, while dedicated measures to prepare for Brexit were announced in Budgets 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Budget 2019 was prepared based on the "central scenario" that the UK will make an orderly exit from the EU. In aggregate, a gross voted allocation of €66.6bn is provided across all Government Departments. This includes additional expenditure of approximately €115m specifically related to Brexit and follows the dedicated measures to prepare for Brexit announced in Budgets 2017 and 2018. This funding will enable the implementation of necessary measures including in the areas of customs and food safety controls.

Furthermore, a €300 million Future Growth Loan Scheme is targeted at providing a longer-term facility to support strategic capital investment by business at competitive rates in a post-Brexit environment. With a further view to the impact Brexit will have on the business sector, supports were also provided to the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation to expand its Departmental and regulatory agency capacity.

Additional funding was also provided to the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine and its agencies to further strengthen the agriculture sector's ability to become more resilient in addressing the challenges of Brexit. Also, the OPW has spent in the region of €15.6 million to date on acquiring and developing physical infrastructure for use at Dublin Port, Rosslare Europort and Dublin Airport as a consequence of Brexit.

The impact of Brexit upon the economy and the public finances continues to remain uncertain given that the timing and nature of the UK's exit remains unclear. Indeed, given this uncertainty, it became necessary to take action to prepare for a potential no-deal exit at end March. This included, the recruitment of additional staff by the Revenue Commissioners, with over 400 staff appointed over the period September 2018 to 12 April 2019.

With uncertainty remaining the Government must continue to plan for the contingency of a disorderly exit. In this context spending plans will be kept under review to identify the potential resources required to deal with the impact of such a scenario this year. This uncertainty will also have implications for Budget 2020. While the SPU maintained an orderly Brexit as the central scenario, a greater likelihood is now being assigned to a no-deal or disorderly Brexit outcome. In this event, it is imperative that the automatic stabilisers are allowed to operate freely. This would include potentially higher social welfare spend as a result of increased unemployment or reduced tax revenue as a result of weaker employment. Further to this, the Government will also provide targeted, temporary, and effective support to the hardest hit sectors of the economy.

National Broadband Plan Expenditure

28. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the assessment of his Department of the national broadband plan, the credibility of its cost-benefit analysis and its value for money to the taxpayer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25834/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I value the independent and strong advice of the officials in both of my Departments. It is for this reason that the advice provided by officials in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform regarding the National Broadband Plan was made public on 8 May 2019.

However, on this occasion, I formed a different view to that of my Department. As I have previously stated, this is for two main reasons. Firstly, there are an array of benefits not captured in the Cost Benefit Analysis, with immense value for citizens and the economy in the future. Secondly, having looked at the other options provided, none would deliver against the objective of achieving 100% coverage while guaranteeing lower cost.

Rolling out a form of technology like this across the country is an inherently complex activity and therefore one which must involve risk. While I accept that there is complexity and risk involved in the decision taken by Government, I believe that on balance, the National Broadband Plan will provide value for money.

Regarding the question of the Cost Benefit Analysis, the Public Spending Code requires that Sponsoring Agencies prepare an economic appraisal such as a cost benefit analysis or a cost effectiveness analysis for projects with an estimated cost in excess of €20 million before the relevant Sanctioning Authority makes a decision on whether to approve the project. The Public Spending Code further requires that this project appraisal is continually updated as the procurement process evolves and as actual tender costs (as opposed to cost estimates) become available. Responsibility for complying with all of the requirements of the Public Spending Code is a matter for each Sponsoring Agency and Sanctioning Authority.

In the case of the National Broadband Plan, the Department of Communications Climate Action and Environment has conducted a cost benefit analysis and updated it on a number of occasions. Taking account of that analysis and the cascade of further future benefits that I believe will flow from the project, I am convinced that the project is justified.

Heritage Sites

29. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to promote heritage sites under the auspices of the Office of Public Works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25825/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is highly conscious that the iconic heritage sites in State care play a significant role in attracting tourists to Ireland and accordingly the Office already has a strong focus on a multifaceted approach to the promotion of these sites in partnership with other stakeholders including the Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht, Fáilte Ireland and Local Authorities.

The OPW uses a number of methods currently to provide information to intending visitors and increase awareness of the estate both among tourists and citizens:

- The sites are generally marketed by the OPW under the Heritage Ireland brand with a website of the same name providing all information relating to the properties. This site is being

renewed with a new design and layout before the end of 2019;

- Maps, publications and flyers on visitor sites are widely available to intending visitors through a national distribution contract covering hotels, train and bus stations, tourist offices etc

- A range of complementary initiatives such as Free Wednesday and U-12's Go Free and Free Disabled Entry also help raise the profile of the heritage estate in State care and prove popular with visitors.

- In recent years the OPW has negotiated agreements with partner organisations abroad such as English Heritage and Manx Heritage to grant their members free access to the sites here to encourage more visitors from the UK area;

- In addition to some limited traditional advertising in magazines etc, the OPW also makes extensive use of digital technologies with over 50 Facebook pages and Instagram accounts which see very good engagement with users on an ongoing basis.

- The OPW also produces an electronic magazine Heritage Ireland which is widely distributed online and showcases the sites in greater detail.

- Online booking is used as a promotional tool and an active programme is underway to extend its availability: it was first introduced at Kilmainham Gaol in 2016 and is now in place at a further six sites with up to 3 more locations targeted for 2019.

- OPW sells visitor heritage cards at all sites, facilitating tourists who wish to visit multiple properties during their stay. These are available at all locations in Adult, Family Senior and Child categories and will shortly be available to purchase online.

- OPW participates at tourism industry events such as Meitheal where we interact with industry partners and tour operators and also attends at other promotional events such as Holiday Fair, Active Retirement, Over 55s etc.

- OPW participates with stands at gardening and agricultural shows such as Bloom, the Tullamore Show, the Ploughing Championships etc;

- Allowing the use of sites for filming can have promotional benefits both as film locations and also for tourism magazine programmes. Sites have therefore been used as locations for productions including Star Wars, Penny Dreadful and Ripper Street and access granted for programmes such as Nationwide, Tracks & Trails and It's a Park's Life

In broad terms, OPW is quite conscious of the role Culture and Heritage plays in tourism marketing terms and engages in continued co-operation with Fáilte Ireland in promoting the sites within its brand architecture of Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East, Dublin: Surprising by nature and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. OPW will therefore remain open to future possibilities in marketing the heritage estate, particularly where these synchronise with the core conservation mission. Thus, for example, OPW will be conscious of the need to develop second and third tier locations as alternative visitor possibilities as a way to lessen visitor pressure at the more crowded sites, understanding that this will also assist Fáilte Ireland in its objective of spreading visitor activity more broadly throughout the country.

Health Services Expenditure

30. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has instituted new or amended structures in the monitoring of health services expenditure in order

to ensure that budgets have a reasonable chance of meeting their targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25682/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As you are aware managing expenditure within the overall fiscal parameters has been a key factor in ensuring that our fiscal targets have been achieved. A key responsibility of each Minister and Department is delivering public services efficiently and effectively within their budgetary allocations. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is in regular contact with all other Departments and Offices including the Department of Health to ensure that expenditure is being managed in line with not only Departmental allocations but also within the overall fiscal parameters.

In addition to the normal monitoring structures, I have put in place a Health Budget Oversight Group which includes senior officials from the Department of Health, the HSE and my Department. This meets on a monthly basis and provides me with the up-to-date expenditure position.

At end-May, the Gross current expenditure of €6.9 billion by Health is €559 million or 8.9% higher than the same period in 2018. This is compared to the overall increase of 5.8% budgeted for the full year and illustrates the challenge and the need for staffing and savings measures to be proactively managed by the Department of Health if the requirement for a Supplementary Estimate in the sector is to be avoided this year.

Heritage Promotion

31. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to promote the Office of Public Works heritage card scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25826/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Currently, the OPW sells Heritage Cards through a number of channels, the primary ones being by telephone from its Visitor Services administration centre and at its Guided visitor sites around the country. Cards are valid for 1 year from the date of first use and are offered in a number of categories:

- Adult (€40)
- Senior (€30)
- Child (12 - 18) (€10)
- Family. (€90)

The Heritage Card is very popular, regarded as good value for money by visitors and has sold in the region of approx. 14,500 units annually over the past few years.

The OPW considers that there is a continuing place for the Annual Heritage Card, particularly among the domestic visitor group and has no plans at this stage to discontinue offering it. However, understanding that some visitors regard the Annual Card as excessive for their needs, OPW is currently developing a product more suited to the short stay visitors coming from abroad in particular. This version, entitled the Holiday Heritage Card, will be valid for 4 weeks only and will be sold at a lower price point than the annual card. OPW expects that this will be of more interest to those visitors who are in the country for a limited duration and who will perhaps feel that they are not getting the maximum value out of the current 52 week offering.

It is intended that the Holiday Heritage Card will continue to be offered through the usual channels alongside the annual version. It will also be marketed and retailed online on the OPW's newly relaunched *heritageireland.ie* website when that is complete later in the year. Additionally, it will be marketed through the print advertising channels and social media sites employed by the OPW to raise awareness of Heritage sites in its care and to promote them as visitor destinations.

Freedom of Information Data

32. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of freedom of information requests made to his Department and bodies under his aegis that were granted, part-granted and refused in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25831/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information which has been requested by the Deputy in respect of my Department and the bodies under its aegis is set out below:

Organisation	Number of FOI Requests Granted in 2018	Number of FOI Requests Part Granted in 2018	Number of FOI Requests Refused in 2018
Department of Public Expenditure and Reform	60	68	67
Office of Public Works	29	36	39
Office of the Ombudsman	3	2	13
Public Appointments Service	59	23	13
National Shared Services Office	21	0	4
Office of the National Lottery Regulator	0	4	4

More generally, the Deputy may wish to note that the Annual Report of the Office of the Information Commissioner includes Freedom of Information statistics for all public bodies. I understand that the Office of the Information Commissioner's report for 2018 will be available in the coming weeks and will be found at the following link: <https://www.oic.ie/publications/annual-reports/>

Departmental Budgets

33. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the potential overspend at the Department of Health; his further views on whether there will be a supplementary estimate for the Department in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25801/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Managing expenditure within the overall fiscal parameters has been a key factor in ensuring that our fiscal targets have been achieved. A key responsibility of each Minister and Department is delivering public services efficiently and effectively within their budgetary allocations. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is in regular contact with all other Departments and Offices including the Department of Health to ensure that expenditure is being managed in line with not only Departmental allocations but also within the overall fiscal parameters. Each month, the drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is reported on against published expenditure profiles in the Fiscal Monitor, published by the Department of Finance.

As set out in the most recent Fiscal Monitor, published by the Department of Finance, total

gross voted expenditure at end-May 2019 was just over €26 billion. This is €145 million, or 0.6% below profile. Gross voted current expenditure of €24.2 billion, is €65 million, or 0.3% below profile. Of the 17 Ministerial Vote groups, 12 are below profile on current expenditure for end-May. Gross voted capital expenditure of €1.8 billion, is €98 million, or 4.1% below profile.

In year-on-year terms total gross expenditure is 8.2% or nearly €2 billion higher than the same period in 2018. Of this increase, gross current expenditure is up just over €1.5 billion. A key driver of this year-on-year increase in current expenditure is day to day Health spending. Gross current expenditure of €6.9 billion by Health is €559 million or 8.9% higher than the same period in 2018. This is compared to the overall increase of 5.8% budgeted for the full year and illustrates the challenge and the need for staffing and savings measures to be proactively managed by the Department of Health if the requirement for a Supplementary Estimate in the sector is to be avoided this year.

National Development Plan

34. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which County Donegal will benefit from the National Development Plan 2018-2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25829/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Public Expenditure & Reform I am responsible for setting the overall capital allocations across Departments and for monitoring monthly expenditure at Departmental level. The responsibility for the management and delivery of the individual investment projects, within the allocations agreed under the NDP, rests with the individual sponsoring Department in each case.

Under the umbrella of Project Ireland 2040, the Government has allocated capital funding for the national priorities set out in the National Planning Framework (NPF). The three Regional Assemblies are responsible for co-ordinating, promoting and supporting the strategic planning and sustainable development of their regions, by formulating Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). The strategy for the Northern and Western Region provides the opportunity for the priorities for Donegal, for example the priorities included in the existing County Development Plan, to be integrated into a regional investment plan which is expected to be a major driver of the implementation of the NPF.

A regional report on the North West has been published on the Project Ireland 2040 website. The report details the specific regional projects and programmes which are being planned and delivered in the North-West as part of the public investment detailed in Project Ireland 2040-the Government's National Planning Framework and National Development Plan.

I might also add that my Department publishes a major capital projects tracker, which sets out details of the key projects and programmes being implemented under the NDP, including the location of the projects where possible. The Tracker includes a number of major projects directly related to Donegal. The tracker currently focuses on projects and programmes with costs greater than €20 million. While it does not provide an exhaustive list of all capital expenditure, the list of projects serves to highlight the diverse range of infrastructural demands competing for the resources of the State.

Public Spending Code

35. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he has taken to improve oversight and control of expenditure on major national capital infrastructure including the national children's hospital and the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25630/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Spending Code is the set of rules and procedures that are in place to support public bodies in achieving value for money as they implement all projects, including major projects, through the course of the project's lifecycle. Each project works through a lifecycle from project identification, appraisal/business case, planning & design, procurement, implementation, to review.

The project is assessed by the Sponsoring Agency, i.e. the body delivering the project, throughout to ensure it represents value for money. At key designated stages in the lifecycle, the body funding the project, i.e. the Sanctioning Authority, is responsible for approving whether or not the project can move to the next stage in the lifecycle.

As part of the ongoing reform of Ireland's capital management systems, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is reviewing the Public Spending Code. The purpose of this review is to strengthen the existing guidance to better align with the realities of project delivery and with a particular focus on improved appraisal, cost estimation and management. The Office of Government Procurement is also conducting a review of construction procurement which will align with the updated Public Spending Code.

The following reforms will be considered and implemented as part of the review:

- Strengthen and harmonise capital appraisal guidance;
- Greater clarity on governance and roles and responsibilities, particular in terms of who is the Sanctioning Authority and who is the Sponsoring Agency for major projects;
- Introduce new mechanisms to improve the accuracy of cost estimates;
- Improve project life cycle to better reflect the realities of project delivery; and
- Complement the Project Ireland 2040 Capital Tracker in monitoring projects and costs.

The revised central elements of the Public Spending Code relating to the appraisal and management of public capital projects will be published this summer. Further technical guidance building upon these central elements will follow in the second half of 2019 and in 2020.

Question No. 36 answered with Question No. 18.

Question No. 37 answered with Question No. 19.

Disability Act Employment Targets

38. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department co-ordinates overall responsibility for ensuring 6% of the Civil Service are persons with disabilities; the number of persons with disabilities that have been employed by the Civil Service in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; his plans to conduct research and produce a report on career progression of persons with a disability in the Civil Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25684/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Com-

prehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) proposes to increase the existing disability employment target of 3% to 6% incrementally by 2024.

I understand from my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality that the legislation increasing the employment target from 3% to 6% in the Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill has not been enacted yet.

Compliance with Section 47 of the Disability Act 2005 requires that, unless there is a good reason for not doing so, more than 3% of staff employed in public bodies, for which the relevant Minister is responsible, are people with a disability.

As the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I am required to report on the numbers of civil servants with a disability working in Government Departments and Offices staffed. This report is made on an annual basis to the National Disability Authority, who in turn make a report to the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Copies of these reports can be located on the National Disability Authority website:

<http://nda.ie/Publications/Employment/Employment-of-people-with-disabilities-in-the-public-service/Reports-on-compliance-with-public-sector-jobs-target/>

The latest published report is for 2017. The overall Civil Service figure at end 2017 is 4.5% - the same as the end 2016 figure. The figure was 4.2% in 2015. It is important to note that these figures are based on self-declaration.

My Department is currently finalising the report for 2018 for submission to the National Disability Authority.

Information is not available of the number of people with disabilities employed in the Civil Service in the years from 2015 to 2019 apart from the overall figures above although I understand that the Public Appointment Service will voluntarily collect information on a number of areas including disability to better understand the numbers applying and their success rates through competitions.

Employers across the Civil Service will continue to provide reasonable accommodations to staff who have a disability so they can participate and advance in their employment.

Budget Targets

39. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he remains satisfied that expenditure and budgetary targets remain achievable, notwithstanding concerns raised by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council; if the economy has grown sufficiently to withstand potential threats; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25817/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As set out in the recent Stability Programme Update (SPU), the Irish economy is in an unusual position at the moment, with a slowdown in key export markets on the one hand and possible domestic overheating and capacity constraints on the other. In addition, Brexit is of course a significant risk and source of major uncertainty. While this is challenging, it is important to note that we are in a strong position from which to meet that challenge. Provisional figures indicate that Ireland's GDP grew by 6.7 per cent in 2018. This is a healthy pace of growth, which is being reflected in our labour market. Indeed, according to latest CSO figures, the seasonally adjusted

unemployment rate for May 2019 was 4.4%, down from 5.9% compared to same point in 2018. However, given the risks I have noted, now is the time for sustainable expenditure policy that is affordable now and into the future.

A key challenge is to ensure that Departments manage expenditure each year within the allocations voted by Dáil Éireann. In this regard, measures are in place to ensure that our expenditure and budgetary targets are being achieved on an ongoing basis. Managing the delivery of public services within budgetary allocations is a key responsibility of each Government Minister and Department. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is in regular contact with all other Departments and Offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters. There is regular reporting to Government on expenditure levels and expenditure profiles are published for each month. The drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is monitored throughout the year and reported on against profile on a monthly basis in the Exchequer Statement.

As set out in the most recent Fiscal Monitor, published by the Department of Finance, total gross voted expenditure at end-May 2019 was €26,066 million. This is €145 million, or 0.6% below profile. Gross voted current expenditure of €24,184 million, is €65 million, or 0.3% below profile. Of the 17 Ministerial Vote groups, 12 are on or below profile on current expenditure for end-May. Gross voted capital expenditure of €1,833 million, is €81 million, or 4.1% below profile and up €454 million, or 31.8% on the same period last year. While this is encouraging, there is a particular challenge in the Health sector, where the year-on-year increase to the end of May illustrates the challenge and the need for staffing and savings measures to be proactively managed by the Department of Health.

Work is underway on the Summer Economic Statement (SES) 2019. In setting out the Government's overall fiscal strategy in the SES, I will take into account recent developments, in particular in the external environment, and will consider the points raised by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council in its recent fiscal assessment report.

National Broadband Plan Funding

40. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the financial provision in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 for the roll-out of rural broadband; the adjustments that will have to be made to the plan over the next five years to provide for the current projected cost of the roll-out of the national broadband scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25625/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I should first say that responsibility for the National Broadband Plan rests with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. However, I can say that the Government's decision to proceed with the National Broadband Plan (NBP) was taken on the basis that additional expenditure that may be required, beyond that already allocated within the National Development Plan (NDP) framework, will be funded by future revenues and will accordingly not have funding repercussions for other planned projects within the NDP.

Based on preliminary assessments, current indications are that the NBP roll-out will require c. €1.6bn in additional funding over the period of the NDP out to 2027. €800 million has already been allocated for this purpose in the National Development Plan and therefore the additional funding now required by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment is €477 million over the period 2019-2022, and a total of €1.579 billion over the full period of the National Development Plan (2019 to 2027).

As I have already indicated, I intend to provide the additional capital required to fund the additional cost of proceeding with the project from future revenues - this will be done in the context of updating the overall multi-annual capital ceilings set out in Project Ireland 2040. This means that the decision to approve the appointment of the Preferred Bidder will have no repercussions for other planned projects within the National Development Plan. No other projects will be delayed or rescheduled, and no other changes will be made to the capital allocations for other projects as set out in the National Development Plan as a consequence of the Government's decision to proceed with the National Broadband Plan.

Public Service Pay Commission Reports

41. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason excerpts from the Public Service Pay Commission report on recruitment and retention in the Defence Forces were leaked following the delivery of the report to him in May 2019; and the reason the report was not immediately published in full further to these leaks in view of the effect of the leaks on Defence Forces morale. [25620/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Pay Commission was established to advise Government on public service remuneration policy. In the current phase, the second phase of the Commission's work, it was tasked by its Terms of Reference to undertake an examination of whether, and to what extent, there are difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff in key areas of the public service identified in its first report. The Public Service Pay Commission has adopted a modular approach to its work programme for its present exercise.

As the Deputy will be aware, the first module was published by the Commission in August 2018 and deals with issues relating to Nursing and Midwifery, Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors and Hospital Consultants.

The Commission engaged on work in relation to the Defence Forces. Written submissions were received from both the Employer and relevant staff associations and more recently, in March, oral presentations were also made to the Commission by both parties.

The Commission has now completed its examination of recruitment and retention matters in the Defence Forces and has submitted its Report to me for consideration.

This Report, following consideration by Government, will be published and will then fall to be considered by the parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement, 2018 - 2020 (as per section 3 of that Agreement). I do not propose to comment on speculative media commentary on a Report which is yet to be brought to Government.

Public Service Reform Plan Measures

42. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department or other Departments have undertaken automation pilot projects; if so, the cost of each of these projects; if staff and employee representatives have been consulted regarding these projects; if the likely impact on staff requirements has been assessed by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25686/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): To stay relevant within a changing world, public service organisations, including Government depart-

ments, must continue to evolve and change. An important goal of the current framework for Public Service reform - Our Public Service 2020 - which became operational during 2018, is to encourage innovation across the public service and to promote different service delivery options. This notably includes supporting the use of Business Process Automation, as referred to in the Deputy's question, to help public service organisations to deliver leaner, faster and cheaper back-office functions.

Automation of the rules-based and repetitive processes that are a necessary and unavoidable feature of the work of most public service bodies has the potential also to add significant value to our workforce by freeing up individuals to concentrate on more value-add as well as interesting and engaging work.

In this context, my Department funded a pilot project in 2016 to examine the potential of Business Process Automation in the delivery of public services. Government Departments and Offices were invited to propose suitable processes that would be amenable to such automation. The Revenue Commissioners, the Public Appointments Service, the Property Registration Authority and the National Shared Services Office participated in this pilot under which a total of 14 processes were automated at a total cost of approximately €110,000.

The results of this pilot suggest that the solution can work very well in the right circumstances. However, it takes time to embed the technology, to generate support from the IT function, to train staff and, crucially, to find the right processes to automate.

On foot of this, my Department worked with the Office of Government Procurement during 2018 to publish a procurement framework for Business Process Automation. This framework will allow public service bodies to rapidly deploy automation within their organisations and train their own staff to automate suitable processes. It clearly provides that a key aspect of the service to be offered to public service bodies is staff development and training in Business Process Automation, in order to help establish a centre of excellence within the Civil and Public Services so that we are not reliant on external consultancy in this area.

Employee representative bodies have been kept informed of these developments through the established industrial relations channels and I am aware, in particular, that the Fórsa Union's Civil Service Division has detailed its position on automation in the Civil and Public Service in general principles submitted to my Department earlier this year. While the impact on staff requirements is a matter to be assessed by individual Departments and bodies on a case-by-case basis, the Revenue for example, foresees no impact on overall staffing levels on foot of its participation in the automation pilot study as the staff involved are reassigned to higher value work elsewhere within the organization.

Fiscal Policy

43. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the proposals by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council in the fiscal assessment report June 2019 that a prudent medium-term fiscal strategy should include three-year expenditure ceilings and a speed limit, that is, a statement of sustainable growth rate limits for net policy spending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25628/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Estimates process and the determination of expenditure ceilings now takes place as part of a whole-of-year budgetary cycle. The Summer Economic Statement sets out the broad fiscal position and the National Economic Dialogue facilitates engagement between the Government and

stakeholders. The pre-Estimates Departmental expenditure position is provided in the Mid-Year Expenditure Report (MYER). This sets the baseline for examination of budgetary priorities by the Government and the Oireachtas. Following detailed consideration, Ministerial Expenditure Ceilings are published in the Budget day Expenditure Report.

Expenditure Report 2019 sets out the revised baseline for current expenditure out to 2021 after taking account of pre-commitments in relation to demographic pressures in Health, Social Protection and Education, public service pay agreements, and the estimated carryover impact of certain budget measures. Planned capital investment levels out to 2027 have been set out under the National Development Plan. The allocation of these resources at a departmental ceiling level are set out in the Revised Estimates Volume 2019, out to 2022.

The Ceilings also include an amount of unallocated resources in 2020 and 2021, based on the fiscal projections at Budget time last year. These can be utilised to meet the carryover impact of Budget 2019 measures or for new expenditure measures. Indeed, the flexibility provided within the ceilings allow Government to direct available additional resources towards key services at a time of increased demand and to new priorities. In addition, at Budget time each year Government can decide to allocate additional resources for spending increases by either introducing revenue raising measures and/or redistributing resources allocated for taxation measures.

While this approach has been the subject of comment, it has been informed by the experience in the years leading to the fiscal crisis and is targeted at ensuring that the overall increase in expenditure each year is set at a level that is affordable both now and in the future. This necessitates an approach to expenditure management in which a systematic programme of expenditure reviews and efficiency-generating reforms is underway in each sector to ensure that priority initiatives can be supported and developed in a sustainable manner. The Summer Economic Statement, which will be published in the near future, will set out the Government's updated medium-term economic and fiscal strategy, and in this context I will be giving careful consideration to the inputs and advices of the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council.

Summer Economic Statement

44. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the revisions which will be made to the expenditure projections in the summer economic statement in view of the recent fiscal assessment report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25833/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In setting out expenditure projections and associated expenditure ceilings, it needs to be recognised that such projections and ceilings can play a significant role in creating expectations for future increases in expenditure. Consequently, the approach currently adopted has been informed by the experience in the period leading up to the fiscal and economic crisis.

In the years preceding the crisis, large increases in expenditure were implemented on an annual basis, which ultimately proved to be unsustainable. Reflecting on this, there are clear risks to the expenditure position associated with restating expenditure ceilings and for example applying inflationary increases as a revised baseline for any new expenditure. This can lead to the expenditure 'ceiling' becoming a 'floor' from which further expenditure increases are negotiated, which in turn can lead to unsustainable trends that are not affordable on a long-term basis.

To mitigate against this, the Summer Economic Statement (SES) 2016 set out an expenditure strategy for 2016 to 2021 in which current expenditure would grow by an annual average

of 2 ½ per cent, while capital expenditure would grow at 12 ½ per cent on average. There have been variations from these expenditure growth rates, largely driven by policy decisions, such as additional funding for our Health Service and increased investment in public capital infrastructure.

Work is underway on the Summer Economic Statement (SES) 2019. In setting out the Government's overall fiscal strategy in the SES, I will take into account recent developments, in particular in the external environment, and will consider the points raised by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council in its recent fiscal assessment report.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

45. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of Defence Forces members referred to the HSE for psychiatric services and placed on a waiting list to see a psychiatrist since 26 July 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25903/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The number of Defence Forces personnel availing of psychiatric services through the HSE since July 2018, is not readily available. Personnel in need of psychiatric assessment are referred through their primary carer. To ascertain if a referral had been made for psychiatric assessment would involve each individual primary carer conducting a review of all their patients' records.

Defence Forces Medical Services

46. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the mental health supports and services available for ex-servicemen and ex-servicewomen for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25904/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Deputy will be aware that a range of both medical and non-medical services are provided to serving members of the Defence Forces who experience traumatic events in the line of duty. These include:

- Access to Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) in the event of a traumatic incident;
- A network of Personnel Support Service (PSS) Officers and occupational social workers at formation, unit and barrack level, which also provides some limited support to veterans;
- A 24-hour confidential counselling, referral and support helpline;
- Primary medical care from a dedicated team of Defence Forces Medical Officers and contracted civilian GPs, whose role it is to assess, diagnose, treat and refer individuals for psychiatric and psychological assessment, as appropriate;
- Clinical psychiatric and psychological treatment, as necessary; and
- For those personnel deploying overseas, a rigorous programme of training which includes briefing by qualified PSS staff on critical incidents and their effects, stress management and wellness.

All efforts are made to ensure that any serving personnel who experience traumatic events, avail of access to all available supports.

I recognise the valued contribution made by ex-service personnel to the State. As with other members of society, former members of the Permanent Defence Force can experience difficulties. In such circumstances they have access to the range of supports available to all citizens.

My Department works with the recognised Veterans Associations to help them deliver services to their members who may experience difficulties post-retirement. In recognition of their ongoing valuable work in representing veterans, an annual subvention is made to in the order of €100,000 to ONE and €11,000 to IUNVA. This is to assist them in their support work and branch and drop-in centre networks across the country.

State Claims Agency Data

47. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of cases lodged with the State Claims Agency for a condition (details supplied) in each of the past ten years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25943/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The State Claims Agency (SCA) manages personal injury claims of this nature on behalf of the Minister for Defence. The information sought by the Deputy could not be compiled by the SCA within the timeframe allowed to answer this Parliamentary Question. I will revert to the Deputy as soon as the information is provided to me.

Civil Defence

48. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the role of the auxiliary fire service has been impacted as a result to the issues in relation to the pre-hospital emergency care council issue; if a circular has been issued on the role of the auxiliary fire service in the Civil Defence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25947/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In September 2018, I announced a review of the existing roles and activities of Civil Defence. The intention of this review is to set out a road map for the Civil Defence organisation over the next 10-15 years. The outcome of this review will be a policy document, titled “Towards 2030”, which I intend to publish in the coming months.

As part of the review, there has been a wide ranging consultation process with all stakeholders, including Local Authority management, Civil Defence Officers and Assistant Civil Defence Officers, volunteers, and the Principal Response Agencies.

To inform the consultation process, a draft document has been prepared setting out proposals for consideration in relation to future roles.

In terms of the auxiliary fire service, this has been an integral part of Civil Defence since its establishment in 1951. However Civil Defence have had limited involvement in fire fighting in recent years with their role focused on wild land fires in a small number of counties. Frontline fire fighting has become increasingly professionalised in recent years and it requires significant investment in both training and equipment because of the inherent dangers involved. My Department will continue to engage with the relevant stakeholders to ensure that all views are considered in mapping the way forward.

The Pre Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) issue is a different issue and unrelated to the review of the roles and activities of Civil Defence that I launched last September. There

has and continues to be on going contact between my officials, the County and City Management Association and PHECC with a view to finalising licensing arrangements for Civil Defence.

I can assure you that I am committed to ensuring that the excellent emergency medical service provided by Civil Defence volunteers continues.

Civil Defence

49. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of the matter regarding the pre-hospital emergency care council issue in respect of the Civil Defence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25948/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Pre Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) is the regulator for emergency medical services in Ireland and their role is to protect the public. PHECC is an independent statutory agency with responsibility for standards, education and training in the field of pre-hospital emergency care.

Organisations who wish to be operational and deliver emergency medical services, and use the PHECC Clinical Practice Guidelines must apply to PHECC for an annual licence to operate.

In advance of Civil Defence renewing its operating licence last October, my officials reviewed the Statutory Declaration that must be signed by organisations who wish to provide emergency medical services. That review identified that some assurances and details required as part of the licensing process are not within the control or remit of the Department of Defence, as responsibility for local Civil Defence operations rests with the relevant Local Authority.

Since then, my officials have been engaging with PHECC and with local authorities through the County and City Management Association (CCMA).

Following a three way meeting between my officials, the CCMA and PHECC on the 15 May 2019, there is now a process in place which will involve local authorities providing assurance for some of the elements in the Statutory Declaration. The Department of Defence should then be in a position to sign the Statutory Declaration for Civil Defence.

It will take a period of time to put in place the necessary processes and collate the required assurances. In that context, my officials have applied to PHECC for an extension of Civil Defence's current licence which expires on 30 July 2019. That extension request will be considered by the PHECC Council at its June monthly meeting.

Such an extension will allow Civil Defence to continue to provide emergency medical services in their communities. I can assure you that I am committed to ensuring that the excellent emergency medical service provided by Civil Defence volunteers continues.

My officials will continue to keep Civil Defence Officers in the Local Authorities abreast of developments.

Defence Forces Remuneration

50. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the cost of restoring all allowances to the Defence Forces to pre-FEMPI levels; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [25949/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The cost of restoring Defence Forces allowances (excluding Military Service Allowance) to pre-FEMPI levels could cost in the region of €7 million. This figure is based on estimates for 2019. As many of the duties are demand led and the number of duties can fluctuate year on year, this variable must be taken into consideration in comparing any actual figures with speculative amounts.

Employment Rights

51. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the additional whole-time equivalent that would be required to give effect to the working time directive for the Defence Forces; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25950/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Working Time Directive has been transposed into national legislation by way of the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997. The Government has committed to amending the Organisation of Working Time Act and bringing the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána within the scope of its provisions.

The Organisation of Working Time Act sets out the requirements to be met by employers in regulating working time and allows for derogation and exemptions from some of those provisions. These issues and others are currently the subject of discussions between civil and military management and the Representative Associations and will shape the manner in which the work of the Permanent Defence Force is organised.

Defence Forces Recruitment

52. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the additional cost of restoring fixed period promotion in the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25951/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Fixed Period Promotion in the Permanent Defence Force was previously part of the terms and conditions of Special Service Officers.

The Defence Sector Action Plan of the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014, (the Croke Park Agreement), contained a commitment to review promotion procedures to ensure merit based competitive promotion policies are the norm. The policy of fixed period promotions was at variance with a competitive merit based promotion system. Following discussions under the Conciliation and Arbitration (C&A) Scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force, in September 2015, the policy was discontinued and new arrangements put in place.

There are no plans to restore the policy of fixed period promotions for Special Service Officers in the Defence Forces, outside of the arrangements agreed through the C&A scheme and in this regard a costing exercise has not been conducted.

Defence Forces Pensions

53. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to implement a review of pension age for the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25952/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) carried out a review in relation to the retirement ages of Public Servants in 2017. It was agreed at that time with DPER, that the retirement age for members of the uniformed fast accrual group, which included members of the Permanent Defence Force along with the Gardaí, Firefighters and Prison Officers, was best dealt with at sectorial level. The detailed policy, operational and manpower issues relevant to these groups could be appropriately considered at that level.

The White Paper on Defence (2015) contains a commitment to conduct, in the medium term, a review of HR policies which includes retirement policies and age profiles for personnel across the Defence Forces.

Defence Forces Allowances

54. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the estimated cost of increasing the military service allowance by 10%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25953/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): It is estimated that the cost of increasing Military Service Allowance by 10% would be approximately €4.8 million in a full year.

Defence Forces Allowances

55. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the allocation for the military service allowance to serving members of the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25954/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The allocation for Military Service Allowance (MSA) is included within the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) Pay allocation of the Defence Vote. In 2019, the PDF Pay allocation is €446.7 million. Total expenditure on MSA in 2018 was €46.5 million. MSA is paid to all ranks from Private up to the level of Colonel.

Defence Forces Allowances

56. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the estimated cost to restore the Saturday and Sunday premium rates for the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25955/19]

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

The contribution from the Defence sector included a further reduction of 10% on the rate of certain allowances payable to the Defence Forces. As part of the cost saving measures to be secured under the agreement, it was also agreed with the Representative Associations that the Saturday and Sunday rates for Security Duty Allowance would be flat rated.

The cost of restoring the premium rates and the 10% cut to SDA introduced in the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2016, would be in the region of €2 million per annum. This figure is based on the 2018 payments of SDA. As security duties are demand led and the number of duties can fluctuate year on year, this variable must be taken into consideration in comparing any actual figures with speculative amounts.

It should be noted that the representative associations for the Permanent Defence Force, PDFORRA and RACO have made claims for the restoration of the premium rates which is being processed through the Conciliation and Arbitration (C&A) Scheme. As discussions under the C&A scheme are confidential to the parties involved, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter at this time.

Defence Forces Training

57. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of recruits and personnel undergoing three star training in the Defence Forces in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25956/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The following table, provided by the military authorities, sets out the number of General Service inductions that took place in each of the five years from 2014 to 2018.

General Service Recruits undertake initial training to qualify as two star Privates before proceeding to further training to qualify as three star privates. On average, over 20% of General Service recruits leave the Defence Forces before completing their initial training and qualifying as two star Privates.

Year	Total
2014	444
2015	307
2016	588
2017	607
2018	492

Defence Forces Allowances

58. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the allowances paid to members of the Naval Service; the value of each; the number of those eligible; the amount paid for each allowance in each of the past five years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25957/19]

59. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the allowances paid to members of the Air Corps; the value of each; the number of those eligible; the amount paid for each allowance in each of the past five years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25958/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take

Questions Nos. 58 and 59 together.

The specific information sought by the Deputy is not maintained in the format requested and it is not possible to prepare the material in the timeframe given. I will write to the Deputy with the information requested at the earliest opportunity.

Defence Forces Allowances

60. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the estimated cost of providing rent allowance to the Defence Forces similar to that provided to An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25959/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There are no plans to introduce a Rent Allowance similar to that provided to An Garda Síochána for members of the Defence Forces, I can therefore not speculate on the cost of providing it.

Foreign Policy

61. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the recent protests in Hong Kong against an extradition Bill (details supplied) that would allow the authorities in Hong Kong to extradite persons to mainland China; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25923/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the protests which have been taking place in Hong Kong over recent weeks. The Consulate General in Hong Kong has been monitoring and reporting on the developments in relation to the demonstrations and on the proposed extradition bill to which the Deputy refers. The Consul General, along with the EU Office and representatives of other EU Member States, has also engaged directly with the Hong Kong authorities on the proposed bill. I note that the passage of this legislation has now been suspended indefinitely by the Hong Kong authorities.

Ireland fully supports the right to assembly and freedom of expression, as provided for under Hong Kong's Basic Law, and I welcome the peaceful passing of the most recent demonstration on the 16 June. In this House on 18 June, I urged the security forces to respect these rights and to exercise restraint in their response, and called upon the demonstrators to express these rights in a peaceful manner.

Ireland also fully supports the EU statement on this matter, which was issued by the Spokesperson for High Representative Mogherini on the 12 June.

An updated travel advice notice alerting people to the demonstrations and advising that areas of potential unrest be avoided has been issued by my Department. We will continue to monitor the situation closely, and, together with our EU partners, will engage with the Hong Kong authorities and others on this issues as it develops.

Economic Policy

62. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he continues to make comparisons with other economies throughout Europe, including those within and without the European Union, with a view to ensuring the maximisation of opportunities for

the economy while maintaining accord with European colleagues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26022/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I regularly monitor the latest economic developments. My Department continually analyses and prepares briefing on short and medium-term macroeconomic trends in European and international economy. This includes informing me of the latest forecasts from the international institutions for the global economy, and for our key trading partners.

At European level, through both the ECOFIN and Eurogroup meetings, Ministers work alongside the European Commission and the European Central Bank (ECB) to take stock of the latest economic situation, including the risks and opportunities for European economies in the short to medium-term.

As published in the Stability Programme Update (SPU) 2019, my Department has forecast economic growth to moderate to a more sustainable rate of 3.9 per cent in 2019, and to continue at the broadly similar pace of 3.3 per cent for 2020. Although growth rates have moderated from 2018, they still compare very favourably to other EU, and significant non-EU, trading partners.

Growth in the Irish economy is expected to come from both modified domestic demand, which is set to increase by 4.0 per cent in 2019, and an expansion in Irish exports – which are set to grow by 5.2 per cent this year. Modified domestic demand excludes the volatile components of investment spending – giving a more accurate picture of the health of domestic economic activity.

The SPU sets out the principal economic risks facing the Irish economy (e.g. domestic overheating and capacity constraints, trade disruptions, Brexit), along with an assessment of their relative likelihood and economic impact. The balance of risk is firmly tilted to the downside, both in the short-term and over the medium-term.

Ireland's economic data compare favourably to those of our main trading partners – with growth, unemployment, and inflation performing better than the Euro Area and EU averages – as the data in Table 1 below illustrate.

The European economy is projected to grow for the seventh year in a row in 2019, albeit moderately, with expansion forecast in all Member States. The pace of growth is expected to ease compared to the high rates of recent years – to 1.4 per cent this year and picking up slightly to 1.6 per cent in 2020. For the Euro Area, the Commission is forecasting growth of 1.2 per cent this year, strengthening slightly to 1.5 per cent in 2020.

Annual UK GDP growth slowed from 1.8 per cent in 2017 to 1.4 per cent in 2018 due to a range of factors including falling business investment and slowing external demand. In the light of Brexit, projections for 2019 and 2020 of 1.3 per cent are based on a purely technical assumption of status quo in terms of trading patterns between the EU27 and the UK. Growth in the US economy will slow but remain relatively strong at 2.4 per cent for 2019, easing further to 1.9 per cent in 2020.

In common with Ireland, unemployment continues to fall in the EU and US, with the US labour market set to tighten further as it approaches full employment. In the UK, unemployment will remain stable as employment growth slows in the context of subdued GDP figures.

The Government has taken significant action to ensure Ireland is aware of, and ready for developments in major partner countries. We have worked hard to rebalance our economy from where it was in the previous decade, before the global financial crisis. Growth in our economy today is evenly spread across a range of sectors, equipping us to better withstand the challenges

ahead. The Government will continue to work to strengthen the resilience of the economy, to maximise opportunities while working in accordance with our EU partners.

Table 1

	Real GDP			Inflation			Unemployment		
	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020
Ireland (SPU 2019 forecasts)	6.7	3.9	3.3	0.7	0.9	1.1	5.7	5.4	5.2
UK	1.4	1.3	1.3	2.5	2.0	2.1	4.0	4.1	4.2
Euro Area	1.9	1.2	1.5	1.8	1.4	1.4	8.2	7.7	7.3
EU28	2.0	1.4	1.6	1.9	1.6	1.7	6.8	6.5	6.2
US	2.9	2.4	1.9	2.4	2.0	2.0	3.9	3.8	3.7

Source: European Commission Spring 2019 forecasts and Department of Finance SPU 2019 forecasts for Ireland

Brexit Staff

63. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of additional Revenue Commissioners' staff who have been recruited to meet the challenges posed by Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25888/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that since the start of 2019, Revenue has appointed over 550 staff from open recruitment and interdepartmental competitions, the majority of these have been assigned to customs roles or to backfill positions from which existing Revenue staff have been assigned to customs duties. As serving staff take up their new Brexit-related roles, Revenue is back-filling the vacancies created, from panels established in its general recruitment activity. Additional staff recruited in preparation for Brexit are deployed across a number of functions with approximately half on import and export trade facilitation activities. To date, Revenue has trained over 450 staff in preparation for Brexit.

The impact of the decision to extend the deadline on Brexit to 31 October 2019 is being assessed by Revenue having regard to resources, infrastructure and trader engagement including additional recruitment and training requirements.

Carbon Tax Collection

64. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance if VAT is charged on carbon tax that is included on domestic gas bills; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25889/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that what constitutes consideration for a supply of goods or services is defined in EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply, and consists of everything which the supplier is entitled to receive in return for goods or services supplied including taxes, duties, levies and charges, excluding the VAT itself. Therefore, VAT is chargeable on the carbon tax element of domestic gas bills.

Property Tax Exemptions

65. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to include property owners affected by mica and registered for the mica redress scheme in the list of properties exempt from the payment of the local property tax as opposed to only accepting acknowledgement of devaluation of properties due to mica; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25927/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The legislation governing the administration of Local Property Tax (LPT) provides for a limited number of exemptions from LPT. There is no specific exemption for properties affected by Mica and there are no plans to introduce such an exemption.

LPT operates on a self-assessment basis and it is a matter for the property owner in the first instance to file an LPT Return, if they have not already done so, and to calculate the tax due based on his or her assessment of the market value of the property as at 1 May 2013. When making an assessment, issues such as the presence of Mica would be one of the factors that a property owner should take into account in valuing their property.

Further information and assistance in regard to valuations is available via the Revenue LPT Helpline on 01-738 36 26.

Banking Sector Data

66. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the number of payment accounts with basic features that have been created in each of the years since the inception of SI No. 482 of 2016 by the financial institution providing same. [25944/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Payment Accounts Directive, transposed in September 2016 by the European Union (Payment Accounts) Regulations 2016 (S.I. No. 482 of 2016), contains a right to open a payment account with basic features with a credit institution.

The Central Bank is the designated competent authority for the purposes of the European Union (Payment Accounts) Regulations 2016. The most recent information that I have available to me from the Central Bank indicates that in the period from September 2016 to the end of June 2018, 69,182 accounts that met the criteria of a payment account with basic features were opened across all six Irish credit institutions.

The Central Bank collects this data from firms for the purposes of evaluation of the Payment Accounts Directive, and I do not have a further breakdown of the number of payment accounts by institution.

Motor Insurance Costs

67. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence from a person (details supplied) on driver insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25945/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, the Deputy should note that the legal framework governing insurance regulation is determined at EU level through the Solvency II Directive. This is transposed into Irish law by the European Union (Insurance and Reinsurance) Regulation 2015 (SI No. 485 of 2015). Solvency II provides the basis for how insurers can operate in the EU and amongst other things prohibits interference by me or the

Central Bank of Ireland 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. It also precludes models such as the fuel tax one proposed in the attached correspondence. The second proposal to establish a national insurance scheme for under 25s would also be problematic as any such arrangement would have to comply with the standard prudential rules that apply to private insurers. Because of the concentration of such a high risk category in one company, such insurance would likely be very expensive. In relation to the third option, of a cross-subsidisation of younger drivers, it is difficult to see that there would be much support from already hard pressed motorists for this proposal as it could add significantly to their existing premiums.

In pricing insurance, I understand that motor insurers use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply. Factors include those such as the age of the driver and the relevant driving experience, as well as the age and type of vehicle, how the vehicle is used, the claims record, and the number of drivers. Insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices vary across the market. In addition, insurance companies also price in accordance with their own past claims experience. I acknowledge the point that it would be helpful if insurers provided appropriately anonymised actuarial data to support their case with regard to pricing policy for younger motorists, however insurers argue that such information is commercially sensitive and unfortunately I am not in a position to compel them to disclose such information.

Notwithstanding the above, the Cost of Insurance Working Group was established in July 2016 and undertook an examination of the factors contributing to the increasing cost of insurance. The initial focus of the Working Group was on motor insurance premiums. The *Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance* was published in January 2017 and makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, which are set out in an Action Plan. In January 2018, the Working Group published the *Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance*. This Report makes a further 15 Recommendations with 29 associated actions.

There has been significant work to date in implementing the recommendations of the two aforementioned reports, including the following:

- the establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission, and its subsequent recommendations relating to addressing award levels for soft tissue injuries – this has provided the objective evidence we need to be able to address award levels;

- the establishment of the National Claims Information Database in the Central Bank to increase transparency around the future cost of private motor insurance;

- reforms to the Personal Injuries Assessment Board through the *Personal Injuries Assessment Board (Amendment) Act 2019* ;

- amendments to Sections 8 and 14 of the *Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004* to make it easier for businesses and insurers to challenge cases where fraud or exaggeration is suspected;

- the reform of the Insurance Compensation Fund to provide certainty to policyholders and insurers; and,

- various reforms of how fraud is reported to and dealt with by An Garda Síochána, including increased co-ordination with the insurance industry, as well as the recent decision by the Garda Commissioner to develop a divisional focus on insurance fraud which will be guided by the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) which will also train Gardaí all over

the country on investigating insurance fraud, and the recent success under *Operation Coatee*, which targets insurance-related criminality.

I believe that these reforms are having a significant impact with regard to private motor insurance (CSO figures from May 2019 show that the price of motor insurance is now 24.5% lower than the July 2016 peak). It is acknowledged however that this is an average figure and young drivers may not be benefitting to the same degree.

Undoubtedly the single most essential challenge which must be overcome if there is to be a further sustainable reduction in insurance costs for motorists 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 Ireland and other jurisdictions, 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.

It should be noted that work is progressing as a matter of priority on the Judicial Council Bill, and it is due to complete Report and Final Stages in the Seanad this week, prior to being submitted to Dáil Éireann shortly thereafter. I would hope that members of both Houses of the Oireachtas can collectively work together to ensure that the Judicial Council Bill is enacted by the summer.

Finally, I would advise younger drivers who are quoted increased premiums to consult the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission website (<https://www.ccpc.ie/>), which has an informative section regarding the purchase of car insurance generally. One of the key tips listed to help cut costs is to “shop around” and “always get quotes from several insurance providers when you need to get or renew insurance”. Insurance Ireland also 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 or 01-6761914.

Tax Reliefs Data

68. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the tax reliefs or schemes that are due to end in the next 12 months; the annual cost of the relief or scheme in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25936/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can advise the Deputy that there are four tax reliefs that are scheduled to terminate within the next 12 months. Whether a relief or scheme is to be extended will be considered as part of the deliberative process in relation to Budget 2020. The four reliefs are a capital allowance scheme, known as the Living City Initiative, a farm restructuring scheme allowing relief from capital gains tax, a Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) refund scheme for hybrid electrical vehicles and the Help to Buy scheme for first time owners of residential property.

The Living City Initiative, a scheme of property tax incentives that was enacted in Finance Act 2013 and commenced on 5th May 2015, is due to terminate on 4th May 2020. The scheme provides tax relief for qualifying expenditure incurred on the refurbishment and conversion of both residential and commercial buildings and is aimed at the regeneration of certain areas in the historic centres of Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick and Waterford. There are three types of relief available; owner occupier residential relief, rented residential (landlord) relief and commercial or retail relief. The rented residential relief was introduced with effect

from 1 January 2017. Owner occupier relief is given by writing off expenditure incurred at a rate of 10% per annum over ten years. Rented residential and commercial/retail relief is given by way of capital allowances (expenditure incurred is written off over a 7 year period at a rate of 15% per annum over 6 years and 10% in the final year).

The most recent statistics available for this scheme are as follows:

2016 Amount claimed €M	2016 Minimum tax cost assumed @ 40% for IT and 12.5% for CT €M	2016 Number of claimants
0.5	0.2	15

Section 604B of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides relief from capital gains tax for farm restructuring by individuals where the sale, purchase or exchange of agricultural land takes place on or before 31 December 2019. To qualify for relief under that section, Teagasc must certify that the sale and purchase or the exchange of the land is carried out for farm restructuring purposes.

Information in relation to this relief was only first included in the tax returns for 2018 and therefore there is no current information available from Revenue sources as to the cost of this relief.

Finance Act 1992 provides for a remission or repayment of Vehicle Registration Tax on both series production hybrid and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles up to a maximum of €1,500 in the case of hybrid electrical vehicles and €2,500 in the case of plug-in hybrid electrical vehicles. These reliefs are due to expire on 31 December 2019.

I am informed by Revenue that the annual cost of providing a remission or a repayment of Vehicle Registration Tax for plugin hybrids and hybrid electric vehicles for 2018 and to 31 May 2019 is provided in the following table.

Year	€ Costs Millions
2018	€22.5
2019 (End of May 2019)*	€17.7

The Help to Buy (HTB) Scheme was introduced with effect from 1 January 2017 and is due to end in December 2019. It was introduced to assist first-time purchasers with the deposit required to buy or build a new house or apartment. The incentive gives a refund of Income Tax and Deposit Interest Retention Tax (DIRT) paid over the previous four years, subject to certain limits applying, as set out in the legislation.

It is open to HTB claimants to select any or all of the previous 4 tax years for the purposes of calculating the HTB refund. The maximum refund is calculated at the lowest of:-

(1) €20,000,

(2) income tax and DIRT paid in the previous 4 years, or

(3) 5% of the purchase price, or valuation in the case of a self-build, up to a maximum of €500,000 (a €600,000 maximum applied where, in the period from 19 July 2016 to 31 December 2016, a contract for the purchase of a new house was entered into, or in the case of a self-build, the first tranche of a qualifying loan was drawn down by the claimant).

The HTB scheme provides for the registration of building contractors with Revenue for participation in the scheme and for clawback of tax relief given in certain circumstances. The scheme applies where, in the period from 19 July 2016 to 31 December 2019, an individual enters into a contract with a qualifying contractor for the purchase of a qualifying residence or has drawn down the first tranche of a qualifying loan in respect of the individual's self-build

qualifying residence.

Revenue has provided me with the following information in relation to the annual cost of this scheme.

2018 Number of claims	2018 Tax cost €m
4,957	73.1

Knowledge Development Box

69. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies by size, that is SME or larger companies, that have availed of the knowledge development box tax scheme to date; the cost to the Exchequer by these categories; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25937/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the annual cost of the Knowledge Development Box (KDB) and the number of claimants that availed of the credit are published in Revenue's paper on 2018 Corporation Tax payments and 2017 tax returns, which is available on the Revenue website at <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/research/ct-analysis-2019.pdf> The table referencing the KDB is extracted below:

Year	Number of Claimants	Cost €m
2016	12	9.4
2017 (preliminary)	10	13.9

With regard to the figures for 2017, a claimant company has a period of up to 24 months to make a claim for KDB relief. The KDB is available only to companies that carry out R&D within the meaning of Section 766 TCA 1997. It is anticipated that more companies will make use of the 24 month time frame available. As such, more claims in respect of the year ended 31 December 2017 may be made by September 2019.

Due to the small numbers of taxpayers claiming KDB, Revenue cannot comment further on the size of the claimant companies.

Tax Reliefs Data

70. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost increasing to each of €3, €5 and €10 million the lifetime gains eligible for the entrepreneur relief 10% CGT rate. [25938/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that estimated costs of increases to the lifetime gains limit for Entrepreneur Relief from Capital Gains Tax are available on page 14 of the Revenue Ready Reckoner, which is available at <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf>. While not all of the increases proposed by the Deputy are included in the Ready Reckoner, these can be estimated on a straight-line or pro-rata basis from those shown.

Universal Social Charge Data

71. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of abolishing the additional 3% USC rate payable by some self-employed taxpayers. [25939/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the cost of abolishing the 3% USC surcharge that applies to non-PAYE income over €100,000 is estimated at €70 million in the first year and €125 million in a full year.

These estimated figures are based on projected 2019 incomes, calculated on actual data for the year 2016, and may be revised. The estimates do not account for any behavioural effects that might result from abolishing the USC surcharge.

Tax Reliefs Data

72. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he has considered the introduction of an industrial or commercial site conversion tax relief; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25940/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I understand that the “conversion” the Deputy is referring to is from industrial or commercial (i.e. non-residential) use into residential use.

In Budget 2018, I increased the rate of stamp duty on the purchase of non-residential land and buildings from 2% to 6% while leaving the rate of duty on residential buildings at 2%. I also introduced a related measure intended to further incentivise the supply of housing in Section 61 of the subsequent Finance Act (Finance Act 2017). This scheme provides that land chargeable at the 6% rate on its acquisition and subsequently developed for residential purposes can qualify for a refund of the difference between the 6% and 2% rates, subject to certain conditions designed to ensure that the land is optimally utilised to deliver residential property within a reasonable timeframe.

This applies to the development of single one-off houses as well as to multi-unit developments.

I can confirm that the introduction of any other such tax reliefs is not currently being considered by my Department.

Tax Credits

73. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of indexing personal, PAYE and married person tax credits based on forecasts available such as the stability programme update with price inflation and wage inflation in each of the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25974/19]

74. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of indexing the threshold at which a worker enters the lower and higher rate of tax based on forecasts available such as the stability programme update to wage and price inflation. [25975/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 73 and 74 together.

The projected cost/yield from indexation of income tax credits and bands for Budget 2020 will not be finalised until Revenue has completed and published its *Pre-Budget 2020 Ready Reckoner*, which is expected to be published in early Quarter 3 2019.

The most up-to-date information available at present is the *Post-Budget 2019 Revenue*

Ready Reckoner . This includes a table showing the estimated cost of a 1% indexation of credits, rate bands and exemption limits for Income Tax and the Universal Social Charge. As per this document the total full year cost of a 1% increase in all the tax credits and thresholds shown is estimated at €187 million.

I am advised by Revenue that the full year cost of a 1% increase in the threshold at which workers enter the 40% income tax rate is €79 million.

Revenue have advised that these figures are based on projected 2019 incomes as calculated on the basis of actual data for the year 2016, the latest year for which returns are available, adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. The figures are provisional and may be revised. Revenue does not provide cost estimates beyond the tax year 2019.

Increases greater than 1% can be estimated on a straight-line or pro-rata basis from the information given.

The 2019 Stability Programme Update was finalised and published in April this year. It sets out the Government's updated macroeconomic and fiscal forecasts for the period 2019-2023, including price developments that impact price and wage inflation. As this document sets out, there are a number of different metrics that could be used for indexation, such as "core" inflation which is forecast to be 1.1% for 2019.

Utilising a purely technical calculation, by using this figure and the most recent *Revenue Ready Reckoner* , the estimated full year cost of indexing in the tax credits would be €205.7 million and the cost of indexing the standard rate cut off point would be €87 million.

Credit Union Regulation

75. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the Central Bank signalling its intention to significantly increase the industry funding levy which applies to credit unions; his views on whether this is an unfair and disproportionate increase on credit unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25984/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, credit unions are regulated and supervised by the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank who is the independent regulator for credit unions. Within his independent regulatory discretion, the Registrar acts to support the prudential soundness of individual credit unions, to maintain sector stability, and to protect the savings of credit union members.

Since 2004 the amount of the Industry funding levy payable by each credit union has been capped at a rate of 0.01% of total assets.

Consultation Paper 95 'Joint Public Consultation Paper - Department of Finance and the Central Bank of Ireland - Funding the Cost of Financial Regulation' (CP95) was published in 2015 and set out proposals to move from partial industry funding of financial regulation towards full industry funding, noting the proposal set out in an earlier consultation conducted by the Central Bank (CP61 'Consultation on Impact Based Levies and Other Levy Related Matters') to move credit unions to fund 50% of the cost of regulating the credit union sector.

The Central Bank indicated, in its Funding Strategy and 2018 Guide to the Industry Funding Levy, that it intended to seek my approval to increase the proportion of financial regulation costs to be recovered from credit unions on a phased basis setting out an initial target of 50%

to be reached by 2021.

In response to the Central Bank's request I recommended that credit union contributions should not increase beyond the 50% target until:

a. The levy trajectory has reached the planned 50% rate, at which time the impact on the viability of the sector will be better understood; and

b. A public consultation regarding increasing the levy rate for credit unions beyond 50% is undertaken, which would include a regulatory impact assessment of such a change on the sector.

In contrast to this recovery rates in 2018 for all other industry categories ranged from 65% to 100% and the Central Bank intends to increase all to 100% funding over the next number of years.

The Deputy might also wish to note, that the Department of Finance, in collaboration with the Central Bank, is currently preparing a public consultation paper on potential changes to the Credit Institutions Resolution Fund Levy, which is expected to reduce materially from 2020. This consultation, which will be published on the Department of Finance website very shortly, will be open to all persons and I would strongly encourage all stakeholders to submit feedback.

It is also important to note that as Minister for Finance I have reduced the Stabilisation Scheme Levy materially and that since 2017 no further levies have been charged by the Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo).

Motor Insurance Costs

76. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance the status of work done to date on the reduction of motor insurance premia; the interactions he has had with the sector to date; his planned actions on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25992/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, the Deputy should note that 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 price or the level of cover to be provided to motorists.

As the Deputy is aware, the Cost of Insurance Working Group was established in July 2016 and undertook an examination of the factors contributing to the increasing cost of insurance in order to identify what short, medium and long-term measures could be introduced to help reduce the cost of insurance for consumers and businesses. The initial focus of the Working Group was the issue of rising motor insurance premiums and as part of that exercise, there was and has been extensive interaction with the insurance industry and its representative bodies. The *Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance* was published in January 2017 and makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, which are set out in an Action Plan. In January 2018, the Working Group published the *Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance*. This Report makes a further 15 Recommendations with 29 associated actions. While this Report is focussed on addressing issues linked to busi-

ness insurance, the implementation of recommendations from both reports will have a positive impact for all consumers and businesses including motorists.

There has been significant work to date in implementing the recommendations of the two aforementioned reports, including the following:

- the establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission, and its subsequent recommendations relating to addressing award levels for soft tissue injuries – this has provided the objective evidence we need to be able to address award levels;

- the establishment of the National Claims Information Database in the Central Bank to increase transparency around the future cost of private motor insurance;

- reforms to the Personal Injuries Assessment Board through the *Personal Injuries Assessment Board (Amendment) Act 2019* ;

- amendments to Sections 8 and 14 of the *Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004* to make it easier for businesses and insurers to challenge cases where fraud or exaggeration is suspected;

- the reform of the Insurance Compensation Fund to provide certainty to policyholders and insurers; and,

- various reforms of how fraud is reported to and dealt with by An Garda Síochána, including increased co-ordination with the insurance industry, as well as the recent decision by the Garda Commissioner to develop a divisional focus on insurance fraud which will be guided by the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) which will also train Gardaí all over the country on investigating insurance fraud, and the recent success under *Operation Coatee* , which targets insurance-related criminality.

I believe that these reforms are having a significant impact with regard to private motor insurance (CSO figures from May 2019 show that the price of motor insurance is now 24.5% lower than the July 2016 peak).

Undoubtedly the single most essential challenge which must be overcome if there is to be a further sustainable reduction in insurance costs for motorists 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 Ireland and other jurisdictions, 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.

It should be noted that work is progressing as a matter of priority on the Judicial Council Bill, and it is due to complete Report and Final Stages in the Seanad this week, prior to being submitted to Dáil Éireann shortly thereafter. I would hope that members of both Houses of the Oireachtas can collectively work together to ensure that the Judicial Council Bill is enacted by the summer.

Summer Economic Statement

77. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the potential impact on the economy if foreign capital and credit supplied to property developers here were to cease or be significantly curtailed will be assessed in the summer economic statement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26029/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Ireland has seen a strong level of international investment in its commercial real estate sector since 2013. More recently, there has been significant investment in the residential sector. Much of this investment has been in the form of non-bank lending and equity financing.

Notwithstanding the increase in foreign investment in the construction sector, the Central Bank of Ireland's (CBI) recent Systemic Risk Pack, published in March this year, stated that "Property-related lending accounts for 68 per cent of Irish banks loan book, highlighting a concentration risk amongst Irish resident banks. This compares to a long run average of 62 per cent and a European average of approximately 60 per cent measured at 2018 Q2".

The domestic banks' need to reduce their exposure to the property sector in the aftermath of the economic crisis meant that the absence of international investment would have resulted in somewhat lower levels of activity in the commercial and residential sectors. Access to foreign capital, whether through direct investment, equity, or lending played an important part in the recovery of the construction sector. Given the relatively high level of property-related exposure that remains on the domestic bank's balance sheets, foreign capital will continue to play an important role in the Irish construction sector.

The presence of foreign investors can expose the domestic market to international financing conditions and overseas asset market corrections. The propensity for international investors to diversify across different markets, including Ireland, may see these markets becoming more synchronised with global real estate cycles. With more globally synchronised markets, the potential for spillovers is higher and the scope for loss mitigation through diversification is diminished.

The Department's assessments of the principal economic and fiscal risks are set out twice yearly in the Stability Programme Update (SPU) in April and in the Budget Economic and Fiscal Outlook in October. The Stability Programme Update 2019, identifies a number of external risks of which two - 'External demand shock' and 'Bond market conditions' - implicitly encompass risks of this nature. The Summer Economic Statement forms a key element of the reformed budgetary process by providing a policy background for the discussions in the Dáil and, at the National Economic Dialogue which takes place later this month. It complements the SPU.

Construction Industry

78. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank gathers data on the way in which the construction sector here is funded; the amount of funding to developers provided by banks in each year since 2016; the amount of funding provided by international funds in the same years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26030/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Central Bank that its Statistics division collect data on the outstanding stock of Credit Advanced to Irish Resident Private-Sector Enterprises by Irish banks relating to the Construction and Real Estate Sectors.

This information can be found on the Central Bank's website in Table A.14 -Credit advanced to Irish resident- private enterprises. (Link below)

The annual outstanding stock since 2016 is summarised below in Euro millions.

Lending for the purpose of:	2016	2017	2018
Construction*	755	764	683

Lending for the purpose of:	2016	2017	2018
Real Estate, Land and Development Activities**	15,447	14,334	12,647

* *Construction* constitutes: Construction of buildings carried out on contract; Civil engineering activities carried out on contract; Other construction activities.

** *Real Estate, Land and Development Activities* constitutes: Property investment/development of residential/ commercial/mixed real estate; Investment in unzoned land; Other real estate activities.

<https://www.centralbank.ie/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/sme-large-enterprise-credit-and-deposits>

Financial Services Regulation

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the procedures followed when credit servicing firms are seeking to be regulated by the Central Bank; if past performance or instances of past performance have a weighting on the assessment of the Central Bank of such firms; if the Central Bank considers previous issues such as the miscalculation of mortgage arrears when it is granting a licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26031/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank is independent in the performance of its authorisation functions. During the assessment phase of the authorisation process, I understand that the Central Bank will assess each application for authorisation to determine whether the applicant has demonstrated that it meets the requirements set out in Part V, Chapter 3 of the Central Bank Act 1997, which include a requirement that the organisation of the applicant's business structure is such that it is capable of being supervised adequately by the Central Bank and meeting the Authorisation Requirements and Standards for Credit Servicing Firms. These were published by the Central Bank in December 2015 and subsequently amended to reflect the changes required following the enactment of the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2018.

I understand that the Central Bank will also assess whether key persons in senior positions within the applicant have demonstrated that they meet the Fitness and Probity Standards. The Central Bank has confirmed to me that it considers all relevant information available to it during the assessment phase of the authorisation process.

Once the assessment phase of the authorisation process is completed, an applicant will either be granted or refused authorisation and the public register of Credit Servicing Firms will be updated to reflect those firms who have been granted an authorisation. Fuller details of the Authorisation Process are available on the Central Bank's website.

Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman Remit

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if a credit servicing firm, which is currently in a transitional authorisation status, falls under the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman; if past instances that originated before the firm began the process of being regulated is appealable to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26032/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The 21st of January 2019 was appoint-

ed as the day on which the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2018 came into operation by Statutory Instrument 3 of 2019. Persons had three months from that date to avail of the transitional provisions in the Act. As I previously confirmed in reply to a Parliamentary Question yesterday (PQ 25649), persons who are taken to be authorised pursuant to the transitional provisions provided for in Section 34 FA(1) of the Central Bank Act 1997 are considered to be ‘regulated financial service providers’ for the purposes of financial services legislation and the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman may investigate complaints against these transitionally authorised firms.

Actions by an unregulated firm which were undertaken prior to the commencement of the 2018 Act would not be subject to investigation by the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman. It is my understanding that only the conduct of those firms, from the date when the firms became taken to be authorised, will fall within the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman.

However, section 34 G(1) of the Central Bank Act 1997 as amended by the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 provides

“A credit servicing firm shall not, on its own behalf or on behalf of, or on the instructions of, a person who holds the legal title to credit granted under a credit agreement, take or fail to take an action, if the taking of or the failure to take the action would otherwise be a prescribed contravention if a retail credit firm took or failed to take that action.”

While the holding of legal title only became regulated recently, other credit servicing firms which acted on behalf of loan owners were regulated under the 2015 legislation and their actions can be subject to investigation by the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman.

I should also point out that section 34 G of the Central Bank Act 1997 also provides that

“(2) A person who holds the legal title to credit granted under a credit agreement shall not instruct a credit servicing firm to take or fail to take an action, if the taking of or the failure to take the action would otherwise be a prescribed contravention if a retail credit firm took or failed to take that action.

(3) A person who contravenes subsection (2) commits an offence and is liable -

(a) on summary conviction, to a class A fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, or both, or

(b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine not exceeding €250,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years, or both.”

Revenue Commissioners Data

81. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of tax defaulters detected by the Revenue Commissioners in each year since 2011 in circumstances which the failure to pay income tax or corporation tax wholly or partially on rental income for residential properties; the value of the tax not paid in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26033/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it is not possible to provide the information requested by the Deputy because the relevant data is not captured or maintained in a manner that allows segregation of rental income related tax liabilities.

Since 2015, Revenue records details of all compliance interventions on its case management system. However, the information is captured at tax head level (i.e. Income Tax, Corporation Tax etc.) and does not breakdown the recoveries or settlements into the component parts that gave rise to the additional liabilities (it is not uncommon for additional liabilities to arise from more than one area of default).

The Deputy may be interested to note that Revenue's recently published Annual Report for 2018, which is available at link <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/press-office/annual-report/2018/ar-2018.pdf>, includes details of audit and compliance activity with comparative figures for 2017. The tables included in pages 88 and 89 of the report might be of particular interest to the Deputy.

VAT Exemptions

82. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance his views on proposals (details supplied); and the estimated full year cost of such a proposal. [26044/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The VAT rating of goods and services is subject to EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply. In accordance with Irish VAT legislation, slurry spreading equipment is liable to VAT at the standard rate, currently 23%, and there is no discretion, under the EU VAT Directive, to exempt these goods from VAT.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that farmers may elect to register for VAT or be treated as flat-rate farmers for VAT purposes. Farmers that are registered for VAT have an entitlement to reclaim VAT charged on costs incurred in relation to the farm business, including VAT borne on the purchase of agricultural equipment. Farmers that are not registered for VAT are compensated for the VAT incurred on goods and services used in the course of their farming business, including purchases of agricultural machinery, through the flat rate addition they receive on payments for their supplies of agricultural produce and services.

With regard to increased funding for low emissions slurry spreading equipment that is a matter for my colleague, Michael Creed TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Wildlife Data

83. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department maintains a comprehensive inventory of wildlife and biodiversity in the Phoenix Park; if so, if it has provided this information to the relevant stakeholders to ensure the draft Phoenix Park visitor experience strategic review does not include plans that infringe on protected species and habitats; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24277/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): As part of the Phoenix Park Conservation Management Plan, published in 2011, a habitat survey was undertaken on behalf of the Office Public Works. This Conservation Management Plan, along with various surveys are available on the Phoenix Park website <http://phoenixpark.ie/research/>

A variety of surveys have been undertaken in the Phoenix Park on behalf of the OPW over the years generating detailed inventories of wildlife and biodiversity in the Park. These include surveys of birds, bats, bees, deer, mammals, flora, habitats, trees and aquatic species. The OPW maintains these records and shares this information with the relevant stakeholders including the

National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC).

OPW staff in the Phoenix Park work with many organisations including Birdwatch Ireland, the School of Biology & Environmental Science at University College Dublin and the National Parks & Wildlife Service in relation to the protection of species and their habitats within the Park.

I can confirm that the Phoenix Park Conservation Management Plan and associated surveys were provided to the consultants who produced the Draft Phoenix Park Visitor Experience Strategic Review. I can also confirm that all draft recommendations and proposals contained therein are fully cognisant of the protected species and habitats in the Park and do not infringe on same.

It should be noted that any developments or conservation projects which might arise out of this draft review would be subject to the full statutory planning processes and must comply with the relevant environmental and habitats directives.

Economic Policy

84. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which the recent issued advice of the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council reflects a need for change in capital or current spending with particular reference to the need to ensure that Ireland stays within international norms in regard to economic performance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25573/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is important to note that the approach currently adopted in relation to setting out multi-annual expenditure ceilings is informed by lessons learned in the lead up to the fiscal and economic crisis. In the years preceding the crisis, large increases in expenditure were implemented on an annual basis, which ultimately proved to be unsustainable. Reflecting on this, there are clear risks to the expenditure position associated with restating expenditure ceilings, and for example applying inflationary increases, as a revised baseline for any new expenditure. This can lead to the expenditure ‘ceiling’ becoming a ‘floor’ from which to negotiate, which in turn can lead to unsustainable increases that are not affordable on a long-term basis.

To mitigate against this, the Summer Economic Statement 2016 set out an expenditure strategy for 2016 to 2021 in which current expenditure would grow by an annual average of 2 ½ per cent. This approach has been adopted in each annual Summer Economic Statement produced since. While there have been variations from the expenditure targets set out in the publications, these have been largely driven by policy decisions to support key Government programmes. For example, additional funding has been provided for our Health Service and increased investment in public capital infrastructure reflecting the allocation of additional resources set out in the National Development Plan.

Work is underway on the Summer Economic Statement (SES) 2019. In setting out the Government’s overall fiscal strategy in the SES, I will take into account recent developments, in particular in the external environment, and I will consider carefully the points raised by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council in its recent fiscal assessment report.

Heritage Sites

85. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the

progress of work at the Hill of Tara, County Meath. [25862/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): It is assumed that the Question relates to the planned works on the graveyard perimeter wall.

Works at the north- west section at the entrance to the graveyard are now complete as is most of the west wall section. Conservation works on the south wall are due to commence shortly.

Garda Stations

86. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána on new Garda premises and facilities in County Meath. [25863/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works, together with the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána are working closely in delivering the Government approved Garda Capital Plan 2016-2021.

While no new premises are listed for Co. Meath, significant works are in the development stage for Navan Garda Station to include a new cell block, custody facilities and additional accommodation.

Works at Ashbourne Garda Station have been completed under the cell upgrade programme and there are similar cell upgrade works planned for Kells Garda Station.

The Office of Public Works also provides a full maintenance service at all seventeen Garda Stations in County Meath to the highest standards possible bearing in mind the availability of funding and priorities agreed with An Garda Síochána.

Office of Public Works Projects

87. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of submissions received by the Office of Public Works regarding its strategic review of the Phoenix Park; the expected timeline to publish a report on the consultations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25885/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): During the observation period, which ran from 19th March 2019 until 31st May 2019, one thousand, five hundred and twelve (1,512) comments were submitted to the Office of Public Works in respect of the Draft Phoenix Park Visitor Experience Strategic Review. OPW is now engaged in a detailed process of reviewing all of these comments and observations. It is not possible at this stage to say when this will be completed.

It ought to be appreciated that the draft review is not a formal development plan or strategy for the Phoenix Park. It is not a formal statutory document of any kind or part of a statutory public consultation process. OPW remains open to, and indeed welcomes, any further observations and comments from any party.

Shared Services

88. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason his Department has not responded to a request (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25965/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): This query relates to the National Shared Services Office (NSSO), which is an independent Civil Service Office under the aegis of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

I have asked the NSSO to respond to the Deputy directly. The matter concerns personal information and I understand that the NSSO has been in contact with the requester on a number of occasions about the response.

I am advised by the NSSO that this matter is being dealt with and that the requester will get the full response within the next ten days.

Flood Relief Schemes Applications

89. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position on an application by Cork County Council to the OPW for funding for a project (details supplied) in County Cork; the timeline for adjudication on the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25986/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I have been advised by the Office of Public Works (OPW) that an application has been submitted by Cork County Council under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for a project at the location mentioned in the deputy's question.

This application is currently being assessed and the Council will be advised of the outcome when complete.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the degree to which controls exercised by his Department continue to contribute in a meaningful way to national guidelines in respect of pay and conditions throughout the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26018/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Important measures are in place to ensure that our expenditure and budgetary targets are being achieved on an ongoing basis. Managing the delivery of public services within budgetary allocations is a key responsibility of each Government Minister and Department. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is in regular contact with all other Departments and Offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters.

There is regular reporting to Government on expenditure levels and expenditure profiles are published for each month. The drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is monitored throughout the year and reported on against profile on a monthly basis in the Exchequer Statement.

Public service pay expenditure is a function of two key drivers:

1. the numbers of public servants employed, and

2. the rate at which they are paid.

As of 2019 there are over 330,000 full time equivalent public servants with an exchequer pay bill of €18.7 billion, or approximately 1/3 of current expenditure. In this context, the objective of public service pay policy is to manage pay expenditure at a sustainable level, which allows for the recruitment and retention of appropriately skilled staff.

As the Deputy is aware, pay and conditions of public servants are managed through collective agreements, of which the current agreement is The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 -2020. This Agreement, the terms of which have been implemented through the provisions of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act, 2017, provides for the dismantling of the financial emergency legislation through fair and sustainable increases in public service pay.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which reform remains an integral part of the policies administered by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26019/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As mandated by Government, my Department's statutory functions include responsibility to formulate, develop, and coordinate the implementation of policies to further modernise and develop the public service and enable the efficient and effective provision of services by public service bodies. I can therefore assure the Deputy that this reform agenda will continue to be an integral part of the policies administered by the Department.

The Deputy will be aware that a new phase of public service reform is already underway, as set out in the framework document *Our Public Service 2020*, which I launched at end 2017. *Our Public Service 2020* seeks better outcomes for the public, to support innovation and collaboration and to build public service organisations that are resilient and agile. It contains an added focus in particular on evaluation and on the importance of building a reform evaluation culture. A newly established Reform Evaluation Unit within my Department will work closely with units focused on performance budgeting and spending reviews to strengthen the links between expenditure and reform. A Public Service Leadership Board comprising Secretary General and CEO level participants from across the civil and public service has been established to drive this reform agenda and lead on its implementation and it has already met on six occasions since it was established in March of last year.

In the case of the Civil Service, the Deputy may also be aware of the ambitious programme of reform under the Civil Service Renewal Plan aimed at creating a more unified, professional, responsive, open and accountable Civil Service providing a world-class service to the State and to the people of Ireland. The fourth Progress Report on the Plan, which I published recently, shows the important steps that have been taken since 2014 and the range of reforms that have been put in place to improve the service for those who work in the Civil Service and those who depend on it. Work is now underway on developing a refreshed plan for the next phase of Civil Service Renewal which will align with *Our Public Service 2020*.

The Department's People Strategy for the Civil Service 2017-2020 sets the strategic direction for Human Resource Management across the Civil Service (while recognising that each organisation is unique and has its own challenges) while the Department's Office of the Government Chief Information Officer leads the implementation of the Public Service ICT Strategy in cooperation with departments and agencies across the Public Service.

At the same time, the Department is progressing a far-reaching programme of reforms aimed at delivering open, accountable and ethical government. Key initiatives completed or underway under this programme include the second Review of the 2015 Lobbying Act, progression of the Public Sector Standards Bill and transposition of the EU's Open Data and Whistleblowing Directives.

As Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, I must ensure that our fiscal and public expenditure policy is prudent and sustainable. There are a number of budgetary reforms introduced in recent years to guide my decisions on overall fiscal policy in this regard, including fiscal rules, expenditure ceilings and spending reviews. The actions in *Our Public Service 2020* will ensure that the focus of the public service is very much on delivery of quality public services, while operating within these prudent limits.

I am confident that the implementation of the actions contained in *Our Public Service 2020*, as well as the other elements of my Department's broader reform agenda that I have outlined, will have an ongoing positive impact on economic performance and improved service delivery to the public in the future.

Economic Policy

92. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he remains satisfied that policies of his Department continue to reflect well on economic performance with particular reference to competitiveness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26020/19]

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he views necessary to correct imbalances emerging in the economy in the context the responsibility of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26021/19]

94. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reforms he views as most preferred or appropriate with particular reference to the degree to which his Department makes a positive contribution to the well-being and economic performance of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26023/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 92 to 94, inclusive, together.

Overall our economy is in good shape and is expected to grow this year and next. Indeed modified domestic demand, an underlying measure of growth in the economy, grew by 4.5 per cent for 2018 as a whole.

One of the best barometers of the health in the economy is the labour market. The strong growth in employment over the last number of years has continued into this year, with total employment increasing by 81,200 (+3.7 per cent) in the year to Q1 2019. As a result, there are now more people working in Ireland than ever before.

At the cornerstone of our recovery, has been the improvement in our competitiveness. Since 2008, the Central Bank's real harmonised competitiveness indicator has improved by approximately 22 per cent. The improvement in our competitiveness reflects the hard-won productivity gains made over the last number of years, alongside wage and price moderation.

Importantly, the robust economic growth in recent years has not yet given rise to significant inflationary pressures. In the first four months of 2019, average annual inflation of just 1.1 per

cent was recorded.

On wage developments, while average annual earnings grew by over 3 per cent in 2018, this came on the back of a near decade of low or negative growth in earnings. The rise in household incomes is a welcome development, however it needs to be monitored closely to avoid a significant acceleration in wages, which may undermine Ireland's relative competitiveness to other European countries.

Over the medium term, the domestic economy is expected to act as the primary driver of growth. In this context, we must remain cognisant of the potential upward pressure this will place on both prices and wages, that could give rise to a loss of competitiveness.

Indeed, as we approach full employment, the economy is in an unusual position, with possible domestic overheating and capacity constraints on one hand and a slowdown in key export markets on the other. Brexit also represents a significant risk and is part of a wider environment of global uncertainty. In order to mitigate against these risks, it is important that the economy is in a strong position to retain competitiveness and resistant to external shocks. Taking this into account, the National Development Plan (NDP) includes a more than doubling of capital investment from €4.2 to €8.6 billion between 2016 and 2021. This increase reflects the Government's commitment to addressing bottlenecks which could hinder the economy going forward.

These risks mentioned above highlight the need for a cautious approach to expenditure policy, which is sustainable now and into the future. In contrast to the increases in expenditure seen in the years leading up to the crisis, recent expenditure increases have been based on sustainable growth underpinned by predictable revenue sources. It is crucial that this approach is maintained in the medium term in order to mitigate against emerging risks in the domestic and global economy. As such, the expenditure ceilings set out in the forthcoming SES will be based on the expenditure strategy set out in the SPU, published by the Department of Finance.

Ireland still has a significant level of public debt following the global financial crisis. While debt-to-GDP ratio has been declining over recent years, this is primarily due to the increase in GDP, rather than a reduction in the debt itself, which remains at over €200 billion. At the end of 2018, our debt ratio as a percentage of GDP was 64.8 per cent. Maintaining sustainable expenditure policy is an important element of ensuring that our economy is performing well and that our debt-to-GDP and debt-to-GNI* ratios continue to decline. This includes ensuring that we are delivering public services in the most efficient and effective way possible. To this end, a number of reforms have been put in place in recent years, including the Performance Budgeting Initiative, the Equality Budgeting Initiative, the National Economic Dialogue and the Spending Review.

Public Expenditure Policy

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he continues to meet targets in public expenditure and reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26024/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department has recently published its Annual Report for 2018 on the Gov.ie website (<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/da1589-dper-annual-reports-2013-16/>). This report provides a comprehensive overview of the work of the Department in 2018 across a broad range of areas of public expenditure management and reform of the Civil and Public Service, as it continues to implement its Statement of Strategy 2016-2019.

The report includes sections on managing public expenditure better; proactively addressing issues that arose as a consequence of Brexit; continuing to oversee the management of the 2014-2020 EU Structural Fund Programmes; working to maintain a stable industrial relations climate across the Public Service; driving Civil Service Renewal and wider Public Service Reform; leading the implementation of the Public Service ICT Strategy; and implementation of the Public Procurement Reform Programme.

Brexit Preparations

96. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which the various potential outcomes in respect of Brexit continue to include the role of his Department as a means of ensuring the best possible performance in any situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26025/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Within my Department and across the public service, preparations for Brexit have been underway since before the UK referendum in 2016. The Government's Contingency Action Plan, published at the end of last year and updated at the end of January, sets out the comprehensive, cross-Government preparations for Brexit. All Departments have sector-specific plans in place identifying key challenges associated with Brexit and associated mitigation approaches.

Central to the Government's preparation for Brexit is the prudent management of the public finances so as to ensure the economy remains competitive in the face of future economic headwinds. Dedicated measures to prepare for Brexit have been announced in Budgets 2017, 2018 and 2019, to ensure that Ireland is in the best possible position to respond to the challenges that Brexit will bring.

Most recently, Budget 2019 ensures that the economy is prepared for the challenges of Brexit through continued prudent management of the public finances: by balancing the books; reducing the debt burden; improving the competitiveness of our personal taxation system; and continuing to invest in infrastructure.

The impact of Brexit upon the economy and the public finances continues to remain uncertain given that the timing and nature of the UK's exit remains unclear. With uncertainty remaining, the Government must continue to plan for the contingency of a disorderly exit. In this context spending plans will be kept under review to identify the potential resources required to deal with the impact of such a scenario this year. This uncertainty will also have implications for Budget 2020.

Public Expenditure Policy

97. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which he continues to monitor expenditure throughout all Departments or the agencies under their remit with a view to ensuring adherence to budgetary strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26026/19]

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if indicators are providing an estimation of the need to curtail expenditure of specific areas to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26027/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to

take Questions Nos. 97 and 98 together.

Managing the delivery of public services within allocations is a key responsibility of each Minister and Department. Important measures are in place to ensure that our expenditure targets are being achieved. Officials in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform are in regular contact with all other Departments and offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters and there is regular reporting to Government on expenditure levels. Expenditure profiles are published for each month and the drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is monitored throughout the year and reported on against profile on a monthly basis in the Exchequer Statement.

As set out in the most recent Fiscal Monitor, published by the Department of Finance, total gross voted expenditure at end-May 2019 was €26,066 million. This is €145 million, or 0.6% below profile and €1,967 million, or 8.2 % up in year-on-year terms. Gross voted current expenditure of €24,184 million, is €65 million, or 0.3% below profile and €1,513 million, or 6.7% up in year-on-year terms. Of the 17 Ministerial Vote groups, 12 are on or below profile on current expenditure for end-May. Gross voted capital expenditure of €1,833 million, is €81 million, or 4.1% below profile and up €454 million, or 31.8% on the same period last year.

A key driver of the year-on-year increase in current expenditure to end-May is day-to-day spending on Health. While gross current expenditure of €6.9 billion by Health is below profile for May, in year-on-year terms it is an increase of €559 million or 8.9% compared to the same period in 2018. Given that the budgeted increase for the full year is 5.8%, this demonstrates the need for careful management in the remainder of the year and the requirement for staffing and savings measures to be proactively managed by the Department of Health.

Public Sector Staff Expenses

99. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the procedures in place to regulate and monitor general expenses for employees in Departments, State companies and semi-State companies; the accountability structures that exist; the role the Comptroller and Auditor General has with general expenses for employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26046/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): All Government Departments and public bodies in receipt of public funding must comply, as appropriate, with the relevant requirements of Public Financial Procedures, the Public Spending Code, Government Procurement Rules and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform relevant Circulars.

The rules governing travel and subsistence, both domestic and foreign, in the civil and public service are set out in Circulars which are issued, from time to time, to Departments and Offices and to agencies under the aegis of each Department. Policy in respect of air travel is contained in the Foreign Travel Guidelines 2009. It is a matter for each accounting officer or accountable person in the case of non-vote expenditure to ensure the rules in respect of travel and subsistence are followed so as to ensure value for money.

With regard to State bodies, as set out in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, 2016 the Board has a key role in setting the ethical tone of a State body, not only by its own actions but also in overseeing senior management and staff. The board should ensure a culture of claiming expenses only as appropriate to business needs and in accordance with good practice in the public sector generally and introduce controls to prevent fraud including

adequate controls to ensure compliance with prescribed procedures in relation to claiming of expenses for business travel.

The accounting officer or accountable person has a key role in the system of accountability for public moneys. It is, of course, a matter for each individual Department and public body concerned to ensure that there are appropriate oversight arrangements and governance structures in place to ensure that where any misspending takes place, there are internal controls and internal audit systems in place to ensure, in as far as possible, that these are detected and are addressed.

The core duties of the C&AG, in conducting a financial audit are to ensure the financial statements properly present the transactions and balances, and that transactions have been “regular”. The latter essentially means establishing that the State’s money was properly used or handled in accordance with lawful authority. In addition, his audits have regard to the standards of propriety set out in the relevant codes of practice. He reports publicly where he identifies material matters relating to the manner in which public business has been conducted, including material instances of excess spending, or spending without a clear business purpose.

The C&AG’s remit covers central Government Departments and Offices and non-commercial State bodies. He does not have a role in respect of commercial State bodies.

School Curriculum

100. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has considered the appropriateness of junior certificate mathematics classes being provided five days per week instead of four; if he has received concerns about the number of students availing of grinds in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25858/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Under the Framework for Junior Cycle, the new specification in Mathematics sets a minimum time allocation for the subject of 240 hours over the three years of Junior Cycle. Schools who provide 4 periods a week for each of the three years will meet the minimum requirement of the specification.

The earlier Junior Certificate mathematics syllabus (2016) which the new specification replaced was also designed as a 240 hour course of study.

The decision as to whether to provide mathematics over 5 days or 4 days is a school decision but my Department’s position is that the course can be completed in a 4 period per week timeframe.

The Junior Cycle programme is designed to be delivered over a full three years with a considerable degree of flexibility available to schools in how and when the full range of specification material is covered. Where loss of class time occurs for any exceptional reason, schools and teachers will seek to ensure that their students are supported in covering all of the necessary course material in to order prepare adequately for examinations. The commitment of our teachers and schools to their students is acknowledged and appreciated in this respect.

While I respect the right of parents to make choices for their children’s education, I do not believe that it should be necessary that students undertake grinds. I recognise that in certain circumstances, such as a prolonged illness, additional tuition may be useful for a child. I also recognise that revision courses, whether organised within schools or outside, can help children with their study, if they build upon previous work.

The institutions which give grinds are private commercial enterprises and they do not come under the jurisdiction of my Department. In addition, the right of parents to make choices for their children in relation to their education must be respected.

Universities Legislation

101. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of borrowing, underwriting and guaranteeing activities notified to him under the borrowing framework provided for in section 38 of the Universities Act 1997 for each university since the institution of the framework in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25876/19]

102. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the aggregate of funding borrowed by the university and education and training board sectors in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25877/19]

103. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the working of the borrowing framework outlined in section 38 of the Universities Act 1997; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25878/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 to 103, inclusive, together.

Universities are independent and autonomous bodies under the statutory framework set out in the Universities Act, 1997 and on that basis are responsible for the conduct of their day-to-day affairs, including in relation to borrowing activities. The performance of this role is subject to appropriate governance, oversight and accountability requirements. In this context, section 38 of the Universities Act, 1997 contains specific provision for a university to borrow within a framework agreed with the Higher Education Authority (HEA). This framework, which was agreed with my Department and the now Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, has been in operation for some time.

The function of the framework is:

- That a university can engage in borrowing, underwriting and guaranteeing activities provided that they impose no threat to, and do not create any contingent liabilities for the public purse.

- To ensure that the capacity of a university to function effectively is not endangered.

- That advanced approval by the HEA, or the Ministers for Education and Skills and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, of individual instances of borrowing, underwriting or guaranteeing by a university is not required.

Accordingly, a university is not required to notify my Department of borrowings or obtain prior consent from my Department, or the HEA, to engage in borrowing, underwriting or guaranteeing activities. In addition there is no recourse, implied or otherwise, to the Exchequer for any liabilities matured or maturing by these institutions.

The aggregate amount of monies borrowed by the universities in the 2016/17 accounting year was €637 million.

With regard to the Education and Training Boards (ETBs), section 49 of the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 states that ETBs may, with the consent of the Minister, accept a

proposal, and borrow by means specified in the proposal, for the purposes of carrying out the functions of the board.

I can confirm that there are currently no moneys borrowed by any of the 16 ETBs. Some ETBs have sanction in place for an overdraft facility. The ETBs with that sanction have confirmed to officials in my Department last month that no overdraft facility is currently being utilised.

Third Level Data

104. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the date of construction, the university, the building or project name, the area and the cost of each university building programme costing in excess of €5 million in the past fifteen years in tabular form. [25879/19]

105. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the date of construction, the institute, the building or project name, the area and the cost of each institute of technology building programme costing in excess of €5 million in the past fifteen years in tabular form. [25880/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 104 and 105 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department has had a process underway with the higher education sector to compile information on projects delivered for the period since 2008.

This process has recently concluded on foot of consultation with the universities and Institutes of Technology.

In the context of the above, I am now attaching the requested updated information for projects completed during the period since 2008 which was previously forwarded to the Deputy on 15 May last. The Deputy will note one minor change (highlighted in red) in respect of the final project cost for one completed building following recent clarifications received from the Institution in question.

As you will be aware, a significant number of projects, particularly in the university sector, were delivered without funding from my Department. In all cases, the higher education institutions are the responsible bodies for project delivery and ongoing management.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2019-06-20_pq104-105_en.xlsx

>Graduate Medical School Details]

Third Level Data

106. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the area of land owned or in the possession of each university and institute of technology in each year in the past fifteen years in tabular form. [25881/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy will be aware, Universities, Technological Universities and Institutes of Technology are autonomous bodies as

set out in the Universities Act 1997, the Institutes of Technology Act 2006 and the Technological Universities Act 2018.

In that regard, the bodies in question are responsible for their day to day operations, including the procurement of goods and services; provision of services for students; and allocation of all of their income (both public and private). Records in these matters are not held by my Department.

Similarly, the records requested by the Deputy in relation to the area of land owned or in the possession of each institution over each of the past fifteen years are not held by my Department.

Third Level Funding

107. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the results of the economic analysis of the Cassells report on third-level funding referred to the European Commission will be made available; the provisions for institutions which reach a funding crisis point in the interim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25890/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Following a request from the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills for an economic examination of the three policy options proposed by the report on future funding of higher education (Cassells report), my Department engaged with the European Commission Structural Support Service throughout 2018 to ascertain the scope for the economic evaluation to be carried out with support from the European Commission Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP). The SRSP provides tailor-made support to all EU countries for their institutional, administrative and growth-enhancing reforms to carry out the analysis of the three policy options identified by the Expert Group.

A formal application for support under the SRSP was submitted in October 2018 and subsequently approved by the Commission. Officials of my Department are currently working with officials from the European Commission to assist in finalising the detailed terms of reference for the review which will commence thereafter. It is currently expected that it will be completed in Q2 2020.

Having this evaluation undertaken through the Commission's SRSP will provide access to the type of independent international expertise and analysis that will be very beneficial to a major evaluation of this nature.

The Higher Education Authority closely monitors the financial position of higher education institutions and in particular works closely with any institution that experiences financial difficulties in order to ensure appropriate mechanisms are put in place to eliminate any deficit as quickly as possible.

The Government's commitment to higher education is clearly demonstrated by the increase in current spending on higher education of almost €350m since 2015. This amounts to an increase approaching 25% over the period. In addition, the Government has already committed to a five year programme of increased investment amounting to €300m, commencing next year, under the Human Capital Initiative. It represents a significant response to projected demographic pressures impacting on the sector over the next five years, as highlighted in the report on future funding.

School Admissions

108. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the procedures available to a family who are seeking secondary school facilities for their son for first year tuition and who have been unable to secure a place due to the local schools indicating that they have no room available to accommodate the child; the steps available to the family to secure a place for their son; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25909/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that in relation to schools admission parents can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available, the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available, a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice. The Deputy will note however that the selection process procedures and enrolment policy are the responsibility of the individual school authorities.

Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to disclose its enrolment policy and to ensure that as regards that policy that principles of equality and the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parent's choice are respected.

Under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 where a board of management make a decision to refuse enrolment, a parent/guardian can appeal that decision to the Secretary General of my Department. Where the appeal involves an Education and Training Board (ETB) school, the appeal must be made to the local ETB in the first instance. Further information on the Section 29 Appeals process is available on my Departments website at the following link:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Appeal-against-Permanent-Exclusion-Suspension-or-Refusal-to-Enrol/>

In addition, the Educational Welfare Service (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) is the legal body which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school placement for their child. The EWS can be contacted at 01-7718815.

State Examinations

109. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if provisions to assist leaving certificate students who suffer bereavement of a close relative during exam period will be extended to those who become ill, including those who have gone under general anaesthetic during or just before the exam period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25941/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As Minister for Education and Skills, I was delighted to announce the extension by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) of the provisions of the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations (RACE Scheme), under which the SEC introduced a limited provision for supporting Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied candidates who experience the death of a close relative during the period of the written examinations. The SEC has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations

Under this new arrangement, if a close relative of a Leaving Certificate or Leaving Certificate Applied candidate dies, the candidate will be allowed to defer up to three days of their examinations and to take the examinations that they defer at an alternative sitting of the examinations in July.

This arrangement has been brought in on an interim, pilot basis and will be subject to re-

view. As part of that review, the SEC will conduct extensive consultation regarding the existing RACE scheme provisions for Leaving Certificate candidates experiencing other forms of trauma and adversity at examination time. Any extension to the current arrangement needs to take account of, not only the difficult life circumstances in which individual candidates find themselves, but also the need to be fair to the body of candidates taking examinations generally and to maintain the integrity of the examinations process.

Insurance Industry Regulation

110. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 61 of 13 June 2019, the number of instances in each year since 2011 in which the Legal Services Regulatory Authority found cases in which claims harvesters were in breach of the legislation and regulations in advertising for personal injury claims by online and offline breaches; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26037/19]

111. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 61 of 13 June 2019, the number of instances in each year since 2011 in which an organisation (details supplied) found cases in which claims harvesters were in breach of the legislation and regulations in advertising for personal injury claims by online and offline breaches; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26038/19]

128. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of instances in each year since 2011 in which the Legal Services Regulatory Authority found cases in which claims harvesters were in breach of the legislation and regulations in advertising for personal injury claims by online and offline breaches; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26034/19]

129. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of instances in each year since 2011 in which an organisation (details supplied) found cases in which claims harvesters were in breach of the legislation and regulations in advertising for personal injury claims by online and offline breaches; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26035/19]

130. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons in each year since 2011 who have been prosecuted for advertising personal injury claims in contravention of the legislative and regulatory prohibitions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26036/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 110, 111 and 128 to 130, inclusive, together.

Further to the relevant Written Replies made by myself and the Minister for Finance, Pádraig Kirby TD, on 13 July 2019, I have sought additional information on those regulatory breaches involving insurance ‘claims harvesters’ as sought under today’s Questions by Deputy McGrath. In response the Law Society has provided statistics to my Department in respect of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date for 2019 as set out in the table below.

In 2014 responsibility for the regulation of solicitors’ advertising transferred from the Complaints and Client Relations Committee of the Law Society to its Regulation of Practice Committee. At that time, the Society also employed a dedicated advertising regulations executive to pro-actively enforce the regulation of this area. Accordingly, the Law Society has been able to provide statistics relating to its enforcement, of primary legislation and the Solicitors (Advertising) Regulations 2002, from 2014. As can be seen from the figures provided, in all, some 28

websites owned by solicitors or other operators have now been removed or have become inoperable. This, I understand, includes some removed since the end of last year and two websites that are dormant following liquidation of the company concerned. It should also be noted, as set out in the table, that a further 15 solicitor-owned websites have been brought into regulatory compliance by the Law Society in this regard.

Websites	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 (to date)	Current Total
Solicitor owned and removed	3	2	3	3	1	0	12
Non-solicitor owned and removed	0	3	4	4	3	2	16
Solicitor owned and brought into compliance	1	2	0	3	5	4	15

As I have set out in my Written Reply to Question No. 114 of 13 June 2019, the current regulatory approach to advertising by solicitors will be replaced under section 218 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015. Under that section, such advertising will no longer be regulated by the legal professional bodies as happens at present but by the Legal Services Regulatory Authority. This new regime, which will apply to both solicitors and barristers, will come into effect early next year including in terms of the provision of any relevant statistical data. The Authority will be carrying out its required public consultations later this year in preparation for the introduction of the new legal services advertising regulations in Q1 of 2020 supported, of course, by my commencement of the relevant provisions of the 2015 Act.

It is important to note that both the Law Society and the Legal Services Regulatory Authority are responsible, under the respective legislative provisions concerned, solely for the regulation of legal practitioners including the advertising of their services. As I have conveyed in my Written Reply of 13 June 2019 and as has been discussed by the Cost of insurance Working Group, the specific regulation of ‘claims harvesters’, who use notoriously evasive tactics while operating on-line both nationally and internationally, is a complex challenge which remains for possible resolution as part of the wider regulation of the insurance sector.

Insurance Fraud

112. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on establishing a central Garda resource specifically tasked with investigating fraudulent cases involving insurance claims; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25873/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that it is the Garda Commissioner who is solely responsible for organisational matters, such as the establishment of individual Garda units, the remits of any such units, and the resourcing of units.

The Commissioner is of the view that a Divisional focus on insurance fraud is preferable to the establishment of a centralised investigation unit. This approach is aligned with the Divisional-focussed Garda model. It is the intention of the Commissioner that the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) will guide Divisions and provide training in the investigation of insurance fraud.

The Deputy will be aware that the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) specifically called for An Garda Síochána to explore the potential for further cooperation between it and the insurance sector in relation to insurance fraud investigation. An industry-funded Garda insurance fraud unit was one option considered in this regard. While the Commissioner has indicated that he does not support industry funding of Garda units, he is open to considering other industry-funded proposals to combat insurance fraud, for example, IT projects and/or the appointment of analysts.

Naturalisation Applications

113. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for naturalisation by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25875/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy has entered the final stage of processing and the applicant will be informed of my decision shortly.

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

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

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

Immigrant Investor Programme Applications

114. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding a submission by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25891/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person in question made an application under the Immigrant Investor Application in October 2018.

INIS introduced a number of enhanced control mechanisms which has led to a temporary increase in processing times, as the new processes are bedded in. All applications from 2018 have been subject to detailed examination and a final decision on this application is expected shortly.

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.

Execution of Wills

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the Law Reform Commission has made recommendations to protect persons making wills in order to deter unscrupulous parties from posing as friends of the person and, thereafter, exerting undue influence from which they benefit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25893/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position is that Part VII of the Succession Act 1965 sets out the legal requirements for the making of a valid will and provides robust safeguards in relation to the validity of wills.

It is, of course, possible for a person to commence legal proceedings challenging a will on the grounds of either the diminished capacity of the testator to make a valid will, or the testator's ability freely to make decisions in disposing of their property by will.

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

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

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

The Law Reform Commission has not made recommendations for changes in this aspect of succession legislation. I consider that current legislation and associated case law provides strong safeguards in this area of succession law and, consequently, I have no current plans to amend existing legislation.

Assisted Human Reproduction Legislation

116. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015. [25977/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 provide for the regulation of donor-assisted human reproduction ("DAHR") procedures carried out in the State, including the legal parentage of children born as a result of DAHR procedures. Parts 2 and 3 of the 2015 Act specifically relate to DAHR procedures carried out in the State where the intending mother is also the birth mother and the child is born in the State. Parts 2 and 3 contain provisions relating to the consent of parties to DAHR procedures (both donors and intending parents); the parentage of donor-conceived children born after the commencement of Parts 2 and 3; the rights of donor-conceived people to access information about their genetic heritage through the establishment of a National Donor-Conceived Person Register; and the use of non-anonymous gametes and embryos in assisted human reproduction involving donated material. Provision is also made for the granting by a court of a retrospective declaration of parentage in relation to a child born in the State as a result of a DAHR procedure (where the donor is unknown) before commencement of Parts 2 and 3, subject to certain conditions. No provision of Parts 2 and 3 has yet been commenced.

The Minister for Health is responsible for the commencement of Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 and associated regulations. He has informed me that his officials are continuing to work, alongside the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, on completing the outstanding elements necessary to enable commencement of Parts 2 and 3.

Part 9 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 provides for a number of amendments to the Civil Registration Act 2004. Most of these amendments are for the purpose of enabling the registration of the birth of a child born as a result of a DAHR procedure, as defined under Parts 2 and 3 of the 2015 Act. Part 9 amends the 2004 Act to include a definition of “parent” in relation to a child born as a result of a DAHR procedure to which Parts 2 and 3 apply.

The Civil Registration Act 2019, which was signed into law on 23 May 2019, provides for amendments to the Civil Registration Act 2004, including some amendments to address technical issues regarding the wording of some sections of Part 9 of the 2015 Act.

No provision of Part 9 of the 2015 Act has yet been commenced. Section 1(7) of the 2015 Act, as amended by section 12 of the Civil Registration Act 2019, provides that Part 9 shall come into operation 54 months from enactment or on such earlier day or days as the Minister for Justice and Equality may, after consulting with the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, appoint by order. Different days may be appointed for the commencement of different provisions of Part 9. The provisions of Part 9 of the 2015 Act relating to the registration of the birth of donor-conceived children are so closely interlinked with and dependent on Parts 2 and 3 that those provisions of Part 9 cannot be operated until Parts 2 and 3 are brought into operation by the Minister for Health.

Citizenship Applications

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the appropriate procedure to be followed in the case of a person (details supplied); if a sworn affidavit may be of assistance in authenticating a relationship to their late parent; if they can retain their British citizenship or apply for Irish citizenship; if a sworn affidavit may be of assistance in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26003/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements, not only within the State but also at European Union level, and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

All persons making an application for a certificate of naturalisation are required to provide satisfactory documentary evidence of their identity and nationality. This is usually in the form of a currently valid passport and may include other original supporting documents, such as a previously held or out of date passport, birth certificate or register of birth and marriage certificate.

Ireland currently allows dual citizenship. However, the acquisition of Irish citizenship may have implications for other citizenship(s) held by the person concerned, including automatic loss of those citizenships. Accordingly, applicants for Irish citizenship are advised to check the position with the relevant authorities of the State(s) concerned.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship is governed by specific legal provisions and an assessment as to whether an application is eligible or not can only be made after an application has been submitted.

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.

Immigration Status

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when an appointment to facilitate upgrading of stamp 4 will be arranged in the case of a person (details supplied); if the matter will be satisfactorily concluded at an early date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26004/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy currently has no current permission to be in the State, however, a request for permission to reside is under active consideration. The Deputy will appreciate that cases are dealt with in chronological order and I understand that a decision will issue in the coming weeks. In the event that the person concerned is granted permission to reside, it will be necessary for them to make an appointment with their local immigration office to register that permission.

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.

Residency Permits

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to facilitating an application for a work permit or other residency facility in the case of a person (details supplied) in view of the fact that they have an ongoing offer of employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26007/19]

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 persons 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, in advance of a final decision being made.

I am advised that the INIS would be prepared to review the cases of the persons concerned in circumstances where they presented documentary evidence to show that they had a concrete offer of paid employment available to them. The Deputy will appreciate that any such offer of paid employment must be on the prospective employer's headed paper; it must describe the specific position being offered; it must set out the proposed salary or salary scale; it must provide

an indication that any such position is available immediately, is whole-time and is not subject to seasonal factors. Upon receipt of documentary evidence of the nature described, the INIS will undertake a review of the case of the person concerned.

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

Residency Permits

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when consideration will be given to awarding appropriate residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26008/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned applied for a residence card as a family member of an EU citizen, in this case a spouse, on 07/09/2012 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.

Following a review of the original decision of 08/03/2013 to refuse to approve a residence card, the person concerned was granted a residence card under EU Treaty Rights on 06/02/2014 valid for a period of 5 years.

The person concerned subsequently applied on 04/07/2018 for a permanent residence card as a family member of an EU citizen under the provisions of the aforementioned Regulations and Directive. This application is under consideration.

In light of information that became available to the Minister, the residence card granted to this person in 2014 was revoked for the reasons set out in the letter that issued to the person concerned on 21/01/2019. The person concerned submitted a request for a review of that decision on 07/02/2019. The review is under consideration.

A decision in respect of the application for a permanent residence card and the request for review will issue to the person concerned in due course. 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.

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.

Residency Permits

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current or expected position in regard to residency status and eligibility for stamp 4 in the case of a person

(details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26009/19]

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 for a residence card as a family member of an EU citizen, in this case a stepchild, on 07/09/2012 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. Following a review of the original decision of 08/03/2013 to refuse to approve a residence card, the person concerned was granted a residence card under EU Treaty Rights on 06/02/2014 valid for a period of 5 years.

The person concerned subsequently applied on 19/11/2018 for a permanent residence card as a family member of an EU citizen under the provisions of the aforementioned Regulations and Directive. This application is still under consideration. Applications are dealt with in chronological order, and a decision will issue to the person concerned in due course. 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.

In light of information that became available to the Minister, the residence card granted to this person in 2014 was revoked on 21/01/2019. The person concerned was afforded an opportunity to seek a review of that decision. However, a request for review of the decision to revoke the residence card was not received within the allocated 15 days or since.

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.

Residency Permits

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26010/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned applied for a right of residency, accompanied by a right to work, based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child on 15 October 2018. The Deputy will appreciate that applications are dealt with in chronological order. I understand that the application is under consideration at present and INIS will be in contact with the person concerned in due course.

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.

Deportation Orders Re-examination

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a proposed deportation order will be set aside in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26011/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order issued on 12 June 2019. This Order requires the person concerned to remove themselves from the State and remain outside the State. The enforcement of Deportation Orders are a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

It is open to the person concerned to submit representations requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked, pursuant to Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). However, I wish to make clear that such an application would require substantial grounds to be successful.

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.

Residency Permits

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current or expected residency position in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26012/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, if an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant or his legal representative should contact either the International Protection Office (IPO) or the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) directly, as appropriate.

The IPO may be contacted either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2. The International Protection Appeals Tribunal may be contacted either by email to info@protectionappeals.ie, by telephone at 01-4748400 (or Lo-Call 1890 201 458), or in writing to Corporate Services Division, The International Protection Appeals Tribunal, 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin D02 W320.

Following the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 on 31 December 2016, new arrangements for the investigation and determination of applications for international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and cases involving permission to remain in the State have been introduced. Such applications are now processed, as part of a single application procedure, by the International Protection Office (IPO) which has replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) from that date. The staff of that Office (the Chief International Protection Officer and International Protection Officers) are independent in the performance of their protection functions.

For your information, on 27 February 2017, the Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications under the International Protection Act

2015 which is available on the website of the International Protection Office (www.ipd.gov.ie).

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

Residency Permits

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26013/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, who currently has permission to reside in the state until 27 December 2019, is ongoing. On completion of the necessary processing the application will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. Should further documentation be required it will be requested from the applicant in due course.

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

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

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

Residency Permits

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26014/19]

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, in advance of a final decision being made.

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

Residency Permits

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when temporary or extended residency will be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26015/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of correspondence from the person concerned in relation to a request for temporary or extended permission to remain in the State.

I also understand that it would appear the person's presence in the State may be unlawful as they do not appear to hold a current permission to remain in the State. The Deputy will appreciate that, under the relevant provisions of the Immigration Act, 2004, a non-national may not be in the State other than within the terms of a permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality.

I am, however, further informed that it is open to the person concerned to contact Unit 2, Domestic Residence and Permissions Division, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2, in writing, setting out their particular circumstances. Any such request will be given detailed consideration by INIS upon receipt of the relevant information from the individual concerned.

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

Court Accommodation Provision

131. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the OPW has carried out a recent assessment of Carndonagh Court House, Carndonagh, County Donegal; if issues have been identified; his plans to remedy same; the timeframe involved; if the OPW will work with the Courts Service to ensure a temporary venue is made available and that court sittings continue to be held in Carndonagh; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26049/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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 been advised by the Courts Service that immediate health and safety issues were identified by the Office of Public Works following an inspection of Carndonagh Courthouse. Unfortunately, court hearings could not continue at the courthouse in the short term. I have also been advised that a review is still being carried out on the future viability of the courthouse.

As to future sittings, I understand Carndonagh District Court sits once per month. While the court sat earlier this week (18 June) in Buncrana, no decision has yet been made regarding the location of the July sitting. There will no sitting in August.

Work Permits Applications

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if an application for a work permit will be considered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26006/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There does not appear to be current employment permit applications for either of these persons.

Applications for an employment permit by the persons concerned will be considered should such applications be made, subject to those applications fulfilling all relevant criteria.

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 my Department's website at the following link - <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/>

In order to assist with the application process, the Department has produced a suite of information including various checklist documents, a 'User Guide' to our online application system and a comprehensive FAQ Document which answers the most common queries received regarding employment permits. All this information can be found in the Employment Permit section of my Department's website at www.dbei.gov.ie

Respite Care Services Data

133. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of respite hours provided for adults with an intellectual disability in County Donegal in each of the years 2008 to 2018, in tabular form. [25968/19]

156. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of respite hours provided for children with an intellectual disability in County Donegal in each of the years 2008 to 2018, in tabular form. [25969/19]

157. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of respite hours provided for adolescents in County Donegal with an intellectual disability in each of the years 2008 to 2018, in tabular form. [25970/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133, 156 and 157 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.

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 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.

Home Help Service Provision

134. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of home help for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25859/19]

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.

Home Help Service

135. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the meeting between the Minister of State with special responsibility for mental health and older people and HSE CHO managers on the delivery of home help hours; if the €18.3 million home support hours committed to in the service plan will be delivered in 2019; the cost of compliance with a decision (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25864/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Home supports enable older people to remain in their own homes and communities, as well as facilitating timely discharge from hospital. The Government has made improved access to home support services a priority. This is reflected in the ongoing additional investment made in these services in recent years with the budget growing from €306 million in 2015 to almost €446 million in 2019. That is about a 45% increase in the annual budget for home support. In 2018, the total budget for the service was €416.8 million, providing over 17.5 million hours. In 2019 almost €30 million has been added to the home support budget. This year the HSE intends to provide over 18.2 million home support hours, including intensive home care packages, to over 53,000 people. When one looks at the year-on-year targets, this means that this year's National Service Plan aims to deliver about 800,000 more hours than the 2018 target. I expect the HSE to deliver on this service plan commitment. The allocation of funding for home supports, though significant, is finite and services must be delivered within the funding available. The Home Support Service is not demand led and is therefore operated in line with agreed budgetary limits and targets as set out in the HSE National Service Plan. To achieve compliance with its funding allocation, the HSE must ensure that the value of the total number of hours provided does not exceed the budget. This means that the HSE has to manage its service delivery over the course of the year to align with the total funding available. It also has a responsibility to ensure that activity is planned so as to anticipate critical demand pressures, most particularly emergency pressures in the initial and latter parts of the year.

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As the Deputy is aware, I am meeting senior HSE representatives this week to further discuss the delivery of home support in the context of the National Service Plan and I am happy to keep colleagues updated on the issue.

The cost of compliance with the decision referred to by the Deputy is a service matter and I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services Staff

136. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to concerns involving allegations of assault by staff working for an organisation (details supplied) and the apparent failure of the HSE to investigate and deal with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25865/19]

137. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on concerns regarding an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25866/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 and 137 together.

As this are a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Lists

138. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined. [25872/19]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

139. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the services available for children with cerebral palsy in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25892/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will

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

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

Hospital Staff Data

140. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff working in Ballina hospital by position, that is, nurses, agency staff, consultants, contract and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25895/19]

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.

Home Help Service

141. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding conditions for home help workers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25896/19]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

142. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by a person (details supplied). [25902/19]

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

143. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if, in view of the unacceptable delays for cataract surgery and limited services for children with ophthalmology issues, he will consider the roll-out of the Sligo cataract scheme nationally with optometrists and hospital eye departments working together and further permit the roll-out of a national scheme to enable children that do not need medical or surgical management to be examined in the community by optometrists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25907/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Home Care Packages Provision

144. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health when home support will be in place for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25910/19]

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.

Disabilities Assessments

145. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health when an assessment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25928/19]

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.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

146. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if a distribution breakdown of the recent announcement of an extra €450,000 allocated to fund sexual health services will be provided; the extra services this will fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25929/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Addressing and preventing HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is a priority area under the National Sexual Health Strategy.

The €450,00 funding referred to by the Deputy has been provided to support Ireland's participation in an international HIV initiative, Fast Track Cities, and to fund early implementation of relevant actions.

The HIV Fast Track Cities initiative is a global partnership between almost 300 cities in collaboration with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (IAPAC) and was launched in Paris in 2014.

Ireland's participation in HIV Fast Track Cities was launched on 13th June, 2019, by An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, Minister for Health, Simon Harris and Minister of State for Health Promotion, Catherine Byrne.

The €450,00 funding provided will kick start Ireland's participation in this initiative, which is intended to boost current HIV prevention and intervention work. The funding will support community HIV awareness and testing in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway, as well as a national stigma reduction campaign, to be delivered by the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Preg-

nancy Programme with HIV organisation partners in each city. In addition, a campaign to promote the forthcoming pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) programme for populations at substantial risk of sexual acquisition of HIV, will also be funded.

The community HIV testing programme will be expanded further and will incorporate other at risk populations, such as migrants. Across the four partners in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick being funded for rapid community HIV testing for at risk populations, the target is to conduct 3,250 tests in 2019.

The full breakdown of funding allocation is as follows:

- Community based HIV testing and outreach - Dublin (HIV Ireland) - €158,000
- Community based HIV testing - Cork (Sexual Health Centre) - €68,000
- Community based HIV testing -Galway (AIDS West) - €35,400
- Community based HIV testing - Limerick (Red Ribbon Project) - €38,500
- Monitoring of community based HIV testing by Health Protection Surveillance Centre - €40,000
- MSM (Men who have sex with men) - Outreach Service (Gay Men's Health Service) - €27,450
- Stigma reduction campaign - €50,000
- PrEP campaign - €32,000

Hospital Appointments Status

147. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if an outpatient appointment will be arranged in the case of a person (details supplied). [25930/19]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

148. **Deputy Darragh O’Brien** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application

for day service funding by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25931/19]

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.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

149. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the pathways for a patient from Northern Ireland to see a consultant here regarding medical cannabis. [25933/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My understanding is that the Deputy is referring to access to healthcare in Ireland for a patient from another EU Member State, under the terms of the Cross Border Directive (CBD). The Directive provides that patients who are entitled to a particular health service in the public healthcare system in their home Member State are also entitled to be reimbursed by their home country if they choose to receive such treatment in another Member State. The patient should contact their own UK National Contact Point (NCP) to check their eligibility for CBD healthcare in any particular circumstance and the particular pathway they should take to avail of such healthcare. With regard to accessing the service in another Member State, the Cross Border Directive obliges Member States, through their own NCP, to ensure that information about healthcare providers is available, or accessible, to oversea patients. The patient may contact the Irish NCP in writing at HSE National Contact Point (NCP), St Canices, Laken, Dublin Road, Kilkenny, R95 P231 or by phone on 056 7784546. The choice of healthcare provider is an individual choice for the patient. Once the patient has chosen a healthcare provider for receipt of the cross border healthcare it is a requirement for individual healthcare providers to give them the relevant information to assist them in making an informed choice as to whether or not to avail of cross border healthcare.

Hospital Appointments Status

150. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [25934/19]

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.

Respite Care Services Data

151. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the number of respite hours provided for adults with an intellectual disability in Galway city and county in each of the years 2008 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25960/19]

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

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

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

Respite Care Services Data

152. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the number of respite hours provided for children with an intellectual disability in Galway city and county in each of the years 2008 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25961/19]

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.

Respite Care Services Data

153. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the number of respite hours provided for adolescents with an intellectual disability in Galway city and county in each of the years 2008 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25962/19]

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 servic-

es 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

Disability Services Data

154. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for residential care for adults with an intellectual disability in Galway city and county in each of the years 2008 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25963/19]

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.

Disability Services Data

155. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the number of adults with intellectual disabilities in residential care in Galway city and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25964/19]

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.

Questions Nos. 156 and 157 answered with Question No. 133.

Disability Services Data

158. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for residential care for adults with an intellectual disability in County Donegal in each of the years 2008 to 2018, in tabular form. [25971/19]

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

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

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

Disability Services Data

159. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of adults with intellectual disabilities in residential care in County Donegal. [25972/19]

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 Remuneration

160. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the reason pay increments were not provided to a person (details supplied) by the HSE when other employees doing the same hours on the same contract were approved and described as full-time employees; if he will request an independent person to examine the paperwork relative to the person and others and rectify the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25976/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

161. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health his views on the waiting list for a routine outpatient appointment for ENT of four years at the Midlands Regional Hospital, Tullamore, County Offaly; his further views on the routine orthopaedic clinic waiting times of two years; and his plans to reduce the waiting times. [25978/19]

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, the Government is committed to improving waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures.

The joint Department of Health/HSE/National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) Sched-

uled Care Access Plan 2019 was published in March and sets out measures to improve care for patients waiting for scheduled care in 2019 by reducing waiting times for inpatient/day case treatment and outpatient appointments.

A key element of the Plan is the stabilisation of the Outpatient Waiting List. Under the Plan the HSE, in line with the National Service Plan, will aim to deliver 3.3 million outpatient appointments, of which approximately 1 million will be first appointments. For its part the NTPF will aim to deliver 40,000 first Outpatient appointments.

The plan includes a target to reduce the number of patients waiting for and Inpatient/Day Case procedure from just over 70,000 in December 2018 to 60,000 by year end and to reduce the number of patients waiting for a first Outpatient appointment from over 516,000 at the end of 2018 to under 509,000 by the end of 2019. The latter target takes into account the fact that more than 800,000 new patients will be added to the Outpatient waiting list in 2019, a figure that is based on trends for the previous two years.

The NTPF advise that over recent months they have placed a particular focus on engaging with hospital groups and individual hospitals to identify outpatient waiting list proposals. While the NTPF have already approved over 38,000 outpatient appointments, they advise that the impact of these initiatives may not be seen until the end of the year. Approximately 75% of outpatient appointments approved to date relate to 4 high-volume specialties, specifically Ophthalmology, ENT, Orthopaedics, and Dermatology.

In addition, my Department is working with the HSE and NTPF, under the Access Plan, with the objective of developing medium-long term improvement initiatives for patient access to hospital procedures. This will include moving care to more appropriate settings and providing care at the lowest level of complexity such as providing ophthalmology in the community; maximising the use of Advanced Nurse Practitioner led clinics; and physiotherapists to manage orthopaedic clinics.

In relation to the plans to reduce waiting times at Midlands Regional Hospital, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Primary Care Centres Provision

162. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide an upgraded primary health facility at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25979/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare services and infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

Medical Card Eligibility

163. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) who is employed on a rural social scheme was requested again to provide a notice of assessment in respect of employment and or self-employment when they are entitled to retain their medical card for the duration of participation on the scheme; if the HSE will issue the medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25987/19]

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

ferred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Proposed Legislation

164. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if the wording of the Treatments of Cancer (Advertisements) Bill 2018 will be reconsidered (details supplied). [25994/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is not the intention that there be any unintended consequences of the Bill. It is not disputed that people can access various therapies. The aim of the Bill is to ensure no false linkages are made between accessing those therapies and a claim that something is a treatment for cancer. People suffering from cancer can be in a very vulnerable position and open to false claims or manipulation. The intention of the Bill is about safeguarding our citizens and making sure they have accurate information regarding medical and scientific advice on how to cure and treat cancer.

Hospital Appointments Status

165. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26028/19]

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

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

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

Home Help Service Expenditure

166. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the amount the HSE requested for home help hours; the amount it received for 2019; the amount of the funding which was for extra hours; the amount for mileage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26047/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The HSE National Service Plan 2019 sets out the type and volume of services to be provided by the HSE in 2019. The NSP provides that over €1.8 billion is available to support Older Persons Services this year.

Home supports enable older people to remain in their own homes and communities, as well as facilitating timely discharge from hospital. The Government has made improved access to home support services a priority. This is reflected in the ongoing additional investment made in these services in recent years with the budget growing from €306 million in 2015 to almost

€446 million in 2019. That is about a 45% increase in the annual budget for home support. In 2018, the total budget for the service was €416.8 million, providing over 17.5 million hours. In 2019 almost €30 million has been added to the home support budget. The additional funding provided this year recognises additional cost in providing existing levels of service and the provision of additional support hours. This year the HSE intends to provide over 18.2 million home support hours, including intensive home care packages, to over 53,000 people. When one looks at the year-on-year targets, this means that this year's National Service Plan aims to deliver about 800,000 more hours than the 2018 target. The allocation of funding for home supports, though significant, is finite and services must be delivered within the funding available. The Home Support Service is not demand led and is therefore operated in line with agreed budgetary limits and targets as set out in the HSE National Service Plan. To achieve compliance with its funding allocation, the HSE must ensure that the value of the total number of hours provided does not exceed the budget. This means that the HSE has to manage its service delivery over the course of the year to align with the total funding available. It also has a responsibility to ensure that activity is planned so as to anticipate critical demand pressures, most particularly emergency pressures in the initial and latter parts of the year.

I have asked the HSE to reply directly in relation to the operational aspects of the Deputy's question.

HSE Staff Remuneration

167. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) is entitled to a HSE pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26050/19]

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

Fish Farming

168. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if salmon farm escapes have been reported from 1 June 2018 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25898/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's records do not indicate any reports of fish escapes from salmon farms during the period referred to by the Deputy.

Re-introduction of Grey Wolf

169. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider examining the feasibility of reintroducing the grey wolf species as a cost effective alternative or additional measure to the BTB eradication programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25899/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (the IUCN) have developed Guidelines on Reintroductions and Conservation Translocations. These guidelines were developed by conservation experts and practitioners and they provide the benchmark for international best practice in this field.

The IUCN document sets out an initial checklist for those considering a reintroduction project such as the grey wolf. One of the first requirements is that: *“There should be strong evidence that the threats that caused any previous extinction have been removed.”*

The National Parks & Wildlife Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht have advised my Department that any feasibility assessment for the reintroduction of the grey wolf to Ireland would fall at this first hurdle as there is limited evidence that the causes of its previous extinction have been removed.

Research carried out on TB in deer in Ireland had found that in certain areas where there are high densities of deer, cattle and badgers living alongside each other, the same strains of TB can circulate between them. However, there is currently no evidence that deer play a significant role in the spread of TB to cattle in most parts of Ireland.

Greyhound Industry

170. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the Indecon Report will be available; if a stadium (details supplied) is included as part of the industry footprint in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25908/19]

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.

Bord na gCon have informed me that, in September 2018, they announced a comprehensive strategic review into the future needs of its 16 licensed stadia, including Mullingar Greyhound Stadium, was to take place. In January 2019, following a competitive tender process, Indecon Economic Consultants were chosen to undertake the independent review and a completed overall report is expected later this year.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

171. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when decisions will be made on aquaculture licence applications by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25985/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy is aware, my Department considers applications for aquaculture licences in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation. The licensing process involves consultation with a wide range of scientific and technical advisers as well as various Statutory Consultees. The legislation also provides for a period of public consultation.

In addition, the legislation governing aquaculture licensing provides for an appeals mechanism.

Appeals against licence decisions are a matter for the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) which is an independent statutory body. Full details of the appeals process can be obtained at: www.alab.ie/appealsprocess/.

In accordance with the applicable legislation, the Statutory and Public Consultation phase in respect of the applications referred to by the Deputy is now concluded. Every effort is being made to expedite determinations in respect of these applications having regard to the complexities involved.

As these licence applications are under active consideration as part of a statutory process, it would not be appropriate to comment further on the matter at this time.

TAMS Data

172. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications received under TAMS 2 by each tranche in tabular form; the number of approved applications; the number of payment claims logged; the number of payment claims that have been approved for payment; the funds allocated to the scheme under the 2014-2020 RDP; the amount expended to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26041/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 provides for an indicative budget of €395m across the seven TAMS measures. A total of 9,502 applications have been approved for payment to date with expenditure totalling over €149m which includes transitional expenditure of €11m. Payments continue to issue at an average of €1.5m per week.

As the following table outlines, there are approximately 10,000 outstanding payment claims which have yet to be submitted. Details are set out below on approved applications and those on which payments have been made:

Tranche No.	Applications Approved	Payment Claims Received
1	2,597	1,795
2	1,945	1,249
3	1,664	842
4	1,468	726
5	1,439	673
6	937	619
7	1,598	1,046
8	1,449	916
9	2,087	1,213
10	1,641	573
11	1,297	325
12	1,881	231
Total	20,003	10,208

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

173. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the actions for emissions reduction for the agricultural sector in the climate action plan published recently; the annual savings in emissions and annual net cost; and the total savings over the period covered by the plan. [26042/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The All-of-Government Plan to tackle climate breakdown sets out a target of cumulative abatement of between 16.5 and 18.5 Mt CO₂ eq over the period 2021 to 2030 for the agriculture sector. In

addition, the sector will also deliver an additional 26.8 Mt CO₂ eq through better land use management such as afforestation and improved management of peaty grasslands.

The plan identifies 34 actions for the sector that will contribute to our transition to a low carbon economy and society across abatement measures, carbon sequestration measures and displacement of fossil fuels and reflects our three pillar policy approach to achieving carbon neutrality without comprising sustainable food production of:

1. Reducing agricultural emissions;
2. Increasing carbon sequestration; and
3. Displacing and substituting fossil fuel and energy intensive materials.

These actions in the plan are informed by the recent Teagasc Marginal Cost Abatement Curve report (MACC) - *An Analysis of Abatement Potential of Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Irish Agriculture 2021-2030* as an identifiable suite of actions for delivery. These actions include both efficiency measures such as the Dairy EBI programme and technical measures such as changes in fertiliser type or low emissions slurry spreading as well as a series of forestry and bioeconomy measures.

Marginal Abatement Cost Curves (MACCs) are very beneficial in terms of identifying the most cost-effective ways of meeting the targets both within and between sectors and also in identifying options that cost less than the marginal benefit from abatement. MACCs provide a useful framework to engage stakeholders on opportunities to reduce emissions. However, the total amount of abatement achieved will be highly dependent on the uptake of mitigation innovations. These innovations have been well researched and proven under Irish conditions and are now considered to be best practice by our Farm Advisory Service.

While the target for the sector is challenging, immediate action and early adoption is key and there are three important actions that can be advanced immediately.

- Deepening engagement with farmers and other stakeholders to promote the necessary deployment of new technologies and changes in farming practices.
- Improving nitrogen use efficiency such as widespread adoption of low emissions slurry spreading or introduction of clover in grassland swards; and
- Continuing our support for research and innovation such as the potential of novel feed additives in grass based production systems.

I will work to ensure that the next Common Agriculture Policy is aligned with this ambition and that climate action is mainstreamed in the development of our CAP strategic plan to ensure the delivery of this target. While the mitigation potential for agriculture is limited, agriculture can and must play a key role in contributing to Ireland's climate change and energy targets in the years ahead.

The Teagasc MACC identified an abatement potential (annual savings in emissions) of 1.85 Mt CO₂ eq per year from agriculture between 2021 to 2030 (including those measures at a cost of over €50 per tonne), 2.97 MtCO₂eq from land use change (carbon sequestration), and energy saving and fossil fuel displacement of 1.37 MtCO₂ eq which combined delivers a 6.19 Mt CO₂e per annum saving for the periods 2021-2030 at a net cost (including efficiency savings) of circa €34 million per annum.

Food Industry Data

174. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the latest international data and reporting on forecasted global increase in food demand by 2050 will be provided. [26043/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): One of the most referenced forecasts for food demand to 2050 is work carried out by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), 'World Agriculture Towards 2030/2050, The 2012 Revision'. This report predicted that if consumption patterns do not change, agricultural production will need to increase by 60% relative to 2005/2007 to meet food demand in 2050.

A further piece of research by the FAO, 'The Future of Food and Agriculture – Alternative Pathways to 2050' (FAO, 2018), analysed food demand to 2050 in more detail. This research, using a scenario approach, forecast an increase of between 25% to 75% in the demand for, and production of, agricultural products to 2050.

The ten year OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook, published annually, gives a more short-medium term forecast of food demand. It brings together the commodity, policy and country expertise of both organisations and input from collaborating member countries to provide a consensus assessment of the ten-year prospects for agricultural and fish commodity markets at national, regional and global levels. The 2019-2028 Outlook is due for publication in early July.

While almost all forecasts of food demand growth indicate it will be driven by population growth, urbanisation, increasing per capita incomes, dietary patterns and consumer preferences, the Deputy will appreciate that projections and forecasts for markets and food demand are based on past information and assumptions about what will happen in the future. As a result, they are subject to substantial uncertainties.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

175. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on proposals (details supplied); and the estimated full year cost of such a proposal. [26045/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The interest in the Low Emissions Slurry Spreading (LESS) measure of TAMS II has been very strong with over 2,000 farmers approved to purchase machinery. In relation to payments, over 850 applicants have already been paid over €10m under the LESS Scheme. In addition, a further 495 Young Farmers have invested in this equipment bringing the total spend under TAMS II on LESS to date to €15.2m. The adoption of dribble bar, shallow injection and trailing shoe technology is making an important contribution in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the Irish livestock sector.

The TAMS II Scheme, is co-funded by the EU and approved by the EU Commission as part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014 -2020. Under these provisions, there is no scope to offer an increased grant rate over and above the existing 40% standard rate and 60% rate for Young Farmers.

Policy on VAT is matter for my colleague the Minister for Finance.

Re-introduction of Grey Wolf

176. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if Inland Fisheries Ireland has considered examining the feasibility of reintroducing the grey wolf species as a measure to improving salmon stocks as a result of the trophic cascade effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25901/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The remit of my Department and of Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) as regards wildlife is confined to inland fisheries species. The Department and IFI have no remit in relation to the matter raised by the Deputy. The feasibility of reintroducing the grey wolf is a matter for consideration by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

That Department has advised that the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (the IUCN) have developed *Guidelines on Reintroductions and Conservation Translocations*. These guidelines were developed by conservation experts and practitioners and they provide the benchmark for international best practice in this field. The IUCN document sets out an initial checklist for those considering a reintroduction project. One of the first requirements is that: *“There should be strong evidence that the threats that caused any previous extinction have been ... removed.”*

Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht have further advised my Department that any feasibility assessment for the reintroduction of the wolf to Ireland would not meet this requirement.

Inland Fisheries Ireland

177. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the fact Inland Fisheries Ireland is refusing to communicate with an association (details supplied) and is refusing to allow members of the association attend meetings of the fish farms working group and that no IFI officers attended the AGM of the association in February 2019 for the first time in many years; and if he has discussed the issue with IFI and the association. [25925/19]

178. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that an association (details supplied) has deep concerns over the increased costs in purchasing trout from Inland Fisheries Ireland facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25926/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 177 and 178 together.

I am advised by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) that communication with the National Anglers Representative Association (NARA) is on-going.

In addition, I am advised that, shortly after the establishment of the Fish Farm Working Group from across a range of disciplines within IFI, angling federations, including NARA, were invited to nominate two representatives to participate in the Group’s deliberations. IFI have never refused to facilitate attendance by any nominated representative and the NARA representatives have attended when the meetings of the Group have been held.

The group last met on 29 April, a meeting I attended with senior officials of both my Depart-

ment and IFI, and the Group collectively agreed to meet again when a number of matters under discussion have been progressed.

As regards recent modest increases in the cost of trout provided from IFI Fish Farm, this matter was discussed within the Group including with angling representatives. It would be preferable if the operations were entirely self financing covering their costs on a fully allocated basis.

However, the fact is that even with the modest price increases, the cost of fish supplied remains significantly below production cost and this represents a substantial subsidy from public funds for a select number of clubs who avail of the service.

IFI advise that internal consultations with its senior leadership which includes Divisional Managers and Regional Directors has not revealed any invitation to attend the NARA AGM for 2019.

Exploration Licences

179. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 180 of 13 June 2019, the details of the companies in two lease undertakings identified in his reply; the standard exploration licence the applications are related to; when an application for a lease undertaking was first made; and when his Department was first notified of a discovery at the site. [25980/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney): My Department is currently considering applications for two Lease Undertakings. The first application was received in October 2012 in respect of Standard Exploration Licence 2/07 (Hook Head) operated by Providence Resources Plc. The discovery of oil on the acreage encompassed by the Licence was first notified to the Department in 1971 by Marathon Petroleum Ireland Ltd. Providence Resources Plc was awarded Standard Exploration Licence 2/07 on this acreage on 1 February 2007, undertook drilling on this Licence in 2007 and 2008 and communicated the results to my Department.

The second application was received in April 2019 and is currently being validated and as such remains commercially sensitive at this time.

Exploration Licences

180. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the two lease undertakings identified in correspondence are for sites (details supplied); when these lease undertakings were first issued; and the licensing terms under which they were issued, that is, 1992 or 2007. [25981/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The two Lease Undertakings referenced in my letter of 8 May 2018 to the Ceann Comhairle are the Dunmore Lease Undertaking and the Helvick Lease Undertaking operated by Providence Resources PLC. The Lease Undertakings were issued on 1 March 2016 and are subject to the Licensing Terms for Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration, Development and Production 2007.

Exploration Licences

181. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is considering an application for a lease undertaking at Hook Head under a site (details supplied); when the application was first made; and when a decision will be made. [25982/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Section 57 of the Petroleum and Other Minerals Development Act, 1960 requires the Minister to lay before the Houses of the Oireachtas every six months a report detailing all exploration activities including petroleum exploration authorisations granted during the period of the report. The last such report laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas was in respect of the six-month period ending 31 December 2018. In addition, a report on the status of all petroleum authorisations is published on a quarterly basis on my Department's website. The most recent such report was published on 31 March 2019. This report referenced that my Department is in receipt of an application for a Lease Undertaking in respect of the remaining aspect (Hook Head) of Standard Exploration Licence 2/07 Operated by Providence Resources Plc. This application was first received in October 2012 and remains under consideration by my Department.

National Transport Authority

182. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request the NTA to respond to queries raised in correspondence regarding cycling infrastructure (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25861/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am informed that it appears from the information supplied by the Deputy that recent reminders issued to the National Transport Authority (NTA) used an incorrect email address.

I have now 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.

Light Rail Projects

183. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost estimate for the proposal within the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035 of the NTA to extend the Luas cross city northwards towards Finglas. [25867/19]

185. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of new carriages purchased for the Luas network in each year since 2009, in tabular form; and his plans regarding the purchase of additional carriages. [25869/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 183 and 185 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including Luas infrastructure and fleet.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the

NTA for a direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Rail Network

184. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the city centre resignalling project. [25868/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for ensuring the development and delivery of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area including, in consultation with Iarnród Éireann, the City Centre Resignalling Project.

Noting the role of the NTA in the matter, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for a direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Question No. 185 answered with Question No. 183.

National Transport Authority

186. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request the NTA to respond to a previously submitted query (detail supplied). [25870/19]

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. I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

The issue raised is an operational matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA). In relation to the specific question, I have been informed that the NTA has no record of receiving it. I have, however, since 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.

Ports Development

187. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has been consulted regarding the cost-benefit analysis study that Dublin Port Company commissioned to examine if an investment in berths at North Wall Quay is made; his plans to make a contribution to the cost-benefit analysis in the context of making Dublin a cruise destination as a home port or stop over destination; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25942/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I met with Dublin Port Company recently regarding its capital development plans and rationale for prioritisation in the context of Brexit, as well as the specifics with regard to cruise berths. At the meeting, Dublin Port outlined the ambitious development programme underway to provide additional cargo handling capacity at the port to cater for the growing economy.

Dublin Port Company advised that they are currently carrying out an economic cost benefit analysis study on a proposal to extend the North Wall Quay to provide berths suitable for the largest cruise ships. They intend to publish this study as part of a wider public consultation.

In line with National Ports Policy Dublin Port Company receives no State funding and my Department will not be providing any monetary contribution towards the cost benefit analysis.

Parking Regulations

188. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the eligibility for a disabled parking permit or European parking cards will be extended to provide for persons with dementia and Alzheimer's; his views on whether persons with invisible disabilities should be able to apply for the permit in order to travel with greater ease and live more independent lives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25993/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Disabled Parking Permit (also known as the European Parking Card or Disabled Parking Badge) is available to people living in Ireland whose mobility is severely restricted, whether they are drivers or passengers, and also to those who are registered blind. In 2010 the Department conducted a review of the Disabled Parking Scheme, in consultation with various stakeholders and one of the issues examined was eligibility for the scheme. As a result of the review the scheme was revised so that permits are now given on the basis of mobility impairment rather than the diagnosis of a particular condition or illness. This is in line with the original intention of the scheme.

The possibility of extending the eligibility criteria for the scheme to include people with invisible disabilities such as those mentioned by the Deputy has been raised on a number of occasions and the Department has consulted extensively with the joint issuing authorities of the scheme, the Disabled Drivers Association of Ireland (DDAI) and the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWC), on this matter. In light of this consultation there are currently no plans to change the criteria.

I would particularly emphasise to the Deputy that issuing a large number of extra permits by extending the eligibility criteria would in fact put the existing scheme under significant additional pressure and compromise the availability of disabled parking spaces in general.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

189. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the chair of the collaborative forum of former residents of mother and baby homes and related institutions will be replaced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25989/19]

190. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of vacancies on the collaborative forum of former residents of mother and baby homes and related institutions; when the vacancies will be filled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25990/19]

191. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the report of the collaborative forum of former residents of mother and baby homes and related institutions will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25991/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 189 to 191, inclusive, together.

Following the receipt of the Collaborative Forum's first report, I signalled the opportunity to take some time to reflect upon the learning from the process to date. In this way the mandate of the Forum can be refined to further enhance the State's engagement with former residents. The

Forum itself also suggested a revisiting of these matters.

I am currently examining how best to conduct a focused interim evaluation which involves the Forum members and considers important issues relating to the Forum's composition and mandate.

Delivering its first report within 6 months was a significant achievement and reflected the strong commitment and dedication of Forum members to this task. It was understandable therefore that the former Chair and a small number of members signalled their intention to step down when the first report had been finalised and they have subsequently done so. I am actively considering a suitable appointments to these current vacancies to ensure the continuity of the process.

As the Deputy will be aware, Government Ministers regularly seeks legal advice from the Attorney General in the context of decisions on the publication of any report. Following its consideration of the Attorney's advices, the Government decided that the full report of the Collaborative Forum could not be published ahead of the Commission of Investigation's final report. Instead, as an initial step, I published the full set of recommendations made by the Forum in its report.

The Commission is due to deliver its final report by February 2020. At that time, I will reconsider publication of the Forum's report subject to any further advices of the Attorney General. I have sent a copy of the full report to the Commission of Investigation for its appropriate attention and consideration in the context of its statutory investigations.

The Government has committed to advancing consideration of the report and a comprehensive analysis of the recommendations by relevant Departments continues to be developed.

Dormant Accounts Fund Deposits

192. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the net amount of funding that has come into to the Dormant Accounts Fund to date in 2019 after repayments to the banks of reclaimed funds; the amount he plans to spend on projects out of the fund in 2019; the spend to date; the amount of uncommitted funds on hand not including the statutory reserve; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26048/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): With regard to transfers to and from the Dormant Accounts Fund for 2019, the most recent information available to me from the NTMA covers the period to the end of May 2019. At that point €61.8 million had transferred into the fund from dormant accounts within relevant financial institutions and a total of €10.6 million had been reclaimed from the fund. Therefore, the net value of transfers into the fund for 2019 to the end of May was €51.2 million.

With regard to expenditure on measures approved in Dormant Account Fund Action Plans, as the Deputy is aware, measures approved in Action Plans subsequently require voted Government expenditure to be made available. For 2019 the total voted expenditure dedicated to Dormant Accounts measures across relevant Government Departments was €39 million. The delivery of these measures is a matter for each relevant Department. Within my own Department the total voted allocation for Dormant Accounts measures in 2019 is €12.057 million and, to date, expenditure of €1.76 million has been incurred. As in 2018 my Department intends to spend the full allocation in 2019.

Finally, at the end of May 2019, the balance in the fund was €340.87 million and the reserve

fund stood at €94.62 million. Commitments made in Dormant Accounts Action Plans have a total liability of €60.67 million. Therefore, the amount of uncommitted funds at the end of May 2019 stood at €185.57 million. I have recently commenced the process of developing the next Action Plan which will increase the level of commitments on the fund.

Social Welfare Benefits Applications

193. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of social welfare payments for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25860/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned has made an application for One Parent Family Payment and Supplementary Welfare Allowance and has been refused both. The claim for One Parent Family Payment has been refused on two grounds:

1. she has failed to satisfy the Habitual Residence Condition and
2. she has failed to show that her means are below the maximum applicable rate (€342.00)

The person concerned has currently appealed the decisions and a submission from the Deciding Officer has been forwarded to the Appeals Office.

The claim for Supplementary Welfare Allowance has been disallowed on the Habitual Residence Condition and a submission by the Deciding Officer has subsequently been submitted to the appeals office. The Appeals Office will issue their decision in due course.

The person concerned has received exceptional needs payments and should she wish to make further claims they will also be considered.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

194. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25871/19]

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 25 April 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.

Carer's Allowance Applications

195. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason carer's allowance was refused to a person (details supplied); if the decision is being reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25882/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 10 September 2018. The application was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

It is a condition for receipt of CA that every claimant shall furnish such certificates, documents, information and evidence as may be required for the purposes of deciding the claim. The person concerned failed to provide the SWI with information that was required to determine if her means were below the statutory limit.

The outstanding information requested by the SWI was 3 months financial statements for all financial accounts held including a Credit Union account.

As the requested information was not supplied it was decided that the person concerned was not entitled to CA.

The person concerned was notified on 22 May 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

To date no request for a review or an appeal has been received by my Department from the person concerned.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance

196. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; the way in which the allowance was calculated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25883/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following a review of the entitlement of this lady, it was found that she had an increase in her means from her previous assessment. The means were from her spouses employment. Based on the information provided to my department, a reduced rate of disability allowance (DA) was awarded. The reduced rate became effective from 29 May 2019.

Notification of this decision issued on 5 June 2019. The person concerned was given the right to appeal this decision within 21 days to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. No appeal was received in this case.

When assessing means for DA we have to establish an acceptable average pattern of earnings which takes account of fluctuations in earnings. In this case we have taken the average earnings over a period of time by taking the cumulative gross and dividing it over the weeks worked less any applicable deductions.

If there has been a change to the circumstances of the person concerned, she may forward any relevant documentation that she deems relevant and the case will be reviewed.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Treatment Benefit Scheme Eligibility

197. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a treatment benefit application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25884/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned has the required number of PRSI contributions paid to qualify for the treatment benefits scheme. As a result she will be entitled to a free optical examination and a contribution towards the cost of Optical appliances. She should contact her Optician who will make the application on her behalf and provide her with the necessary treatment that she requires.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

198. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the basis on which an appeal for a carer's allowance was disallowed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25894/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that the appeal by the person concerned was against a decision of a Deciding Officer that they had failed to supply all requested information in relation to their entitlement to carer's allowance and, therefore, they had not fully disclosed their means. An Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence including that adduced at the oral hearing, decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned.

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.

JobPath Programme

199. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) will now have to undertake a process for a third year in a row without success; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25905/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection provides a range of activation supports catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant from the labour market to secure and sustain full-time paid employment. These supports include the JobPath service, the primary purpose of JobPath is to provide a case management based, employment advice and counselling service to long term unemployed jobseekers. This is the group of jobseekers facing the most significant barriers to entering full-time employment.

My Department selects clients for the JobPath service by means of a random selection process. Protocols for selection currently preclude the selection of anyone who has already completed 52 weeks with the JobPath service within the previous four months. If, however, at the end of this period the jobseeker has not engaged in other activation supports and services, they

then become eligible for selection for a subsequent period of activation on the JobPath service. This is necessary to ensure that they continue to receive a case management service.

Jobseekers referred for a 2nd or 3rd time to any of the contracted public employment services, including JobPath will start working with an assigned Personal Advisor to review their development during their previous engagements with the service and together they will prepare a new personal progression plan to build on that progress. The actions and tasks agreed will be based on their previous engagements, with particular focus on any remaining barriers preventing the person from moving into full-time suitable employment.

The person concerned has been unemployed for over 15 years, he has already completed two years with the JobPath service - the most recent period of engagement ended in January 2019. He had made some progression during his previous engagement with JobPath, however I understand that he needs additional support in his efforts to find sustainable full time employment. He now has the opportunity to avail of further assistance from the JobPath service which will hopefully result in a full time suitable job for him.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Data

200. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of abolishing the means test for carer's allowance; if in calculating same, an account will be taken of the significant savings that would arise from no longer having to devote resources to administering and evaluating such applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25906/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Government acknowledges the important role that family carers play and is fully committed to supporting carers in that role. This commitment is recognised in both the Programme for a Partnership Government and the National Carers' Strategy.

My Department provides a range of supports to those who are caring for family members, friends or neighbours. These measures aim to recognise the needs of carers through the provision of appropriate income supports, to enable carers to remain in touch with the labour market to the greatest extent possible and to empower carers to participate fully in economic and social life.

These income supports include the following:

- Carer's Allowance
- Carer's Benefit
- Carer's Support Grant
- Domiciliary Care Allowance

Carers may also (subject to certain conditions) qualify for the Household Benefits Package and a Free Travel Pass.

Spending on these payments in 2019 is expected to exceed €1.2 billion.

Carer's Allowance is a means-tested payment for carers who look after certain people in

need of full-time care and attention on a full time basis. The means test for Carer's Allowance is now one of the most generous means tests in the social welfare system, most notably with regard to spouse's earnings. Since April 2008, the income disregard has been €332.50 per week for a single person and €665 per week for a couple. This means that a couple with two children can earn in the region of €35,400 and qualify for the maximum rate of Carer's Allowance. A half-rate carer's allowance is also payable with other welfare payments e.g. pensions and disability payments.

The conditions attached to payments of Carer's Allowance are consistent with the overall conditions that apply to social assistance payments generally. This system of social assistance supports provides payments based on an income need with the means test playing the critical role in determining whether or not an income need arises as a consequence of a particular contingency - be that illness, disability, unemployment or caring. Carer's Allowance acts as an income support for those who cannot earn an income in the open labour market due to their caring responsibilities. The continued application of the means test not only ensures that the recipient has a verifiable income need but that resources are targeted to those with greatest need.

Based on the number of carers identified as part of Census 2016, it is estimated that a universal carer's payment could cost up to €1.2 billion per annum.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

201. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a review of a claim for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25932/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 18 July 2018. The first payment will be made by her chosen payment method on 10 July 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.

Citizens Information Services Funding

202. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the funding provided to the Citizens Information Board in each of the past three years. [25935/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Citizens Information Board is the national agency responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice and advocacy on social services, and for the provision of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service.

The funding provided to the Citizens Information Board in the years 2016-2018 was:

2016: €49.2 million

2017: €53.1 million

2018: €54.8 million (this figure is provisional)

The 2019 allocation for the Citizens Information Board is €59.3 million.

Disability Allowance Applications

203. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and if a decision will be expedited. [25973/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this gentleman on 1 April 2019.

On 17 June 2019 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on his eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made on his DA application and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

204. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the entitlements of a person (details supplied) to a pension will be reviewed. [25983/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Since late September 2018, my Department has been examining the social insurance records of approximately 90,000 pensioners, born on or after 1 September 1946, who have a reduced rate State pension contributory entitlement based on post Budget 2012 rate-bands. These payments are being reviewed under a new Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pension calculation which includes provision for homecaring periods.

All of the HomeCaring Periods applied for by the person concerned have been awarded. The person has 1,105 reckonable paid contributions which when combined with 734 Home-Caring Periods and 128 reckonable credits results in a payment rate of 94.57% of maximum pension (or €234.90). This represents an increase on the person's previous pension payment rate of €223.20.

A review outcome letter issued on 16 May 2019 to the person concerned, detailing their new rate of payment under the new arrangements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

205. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) can avail of credits for the period which they stayed at home to mind children. [25996/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Since late September 2018, my Department has been examining the social insurance records of approximately 90,000 pensioners, born on or after 1 September 1946, who have a reduced rate State pension contributory entitlement based on post Budget 2012 rate-bands. These payments are being reviewed under a new Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pension calculation which includes provision for homecaring periods.

A Deciding Officer has examined the entitlement of the person concerned under the new arrangements and determined that even if all gaps in their social insurance record were filled with HomeCaring Periods no increase in rate would result. An advisory letter to this effect has issued to the person concerned. This letter encourages them to contact the dedicated helpline if they want this outcome explained to them in more detail. If the person concerned wants a formal review decision, this will be provided to them, on request, together with an associated right of appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Free Travel Scheme Eligibility

206. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the criteria and rules for entitlement to free travel; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25997/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The 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 almost 80 private transport operators. There are currently approximately 948,000 customers with direct eligibility to free travel with an annual allocation of €95 million.

The scheme is available to all people aged over 66 living permanently in the State. To qualify for the scheme, applicants who are under age 66 must be in receipt of a qualifying payment. These are invalidity pension, blind pension, disability allowance, carer's allowance or an equivalent social security payment from a country covered by EC Regulations or one with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement.

The general criteria and rules for entitlement to the free travel scheme can be found on my Department's website www.welfare.ie and clicking on the "Other Supports" link. If the Deputy has a specific query or information that he needs clarification on, my officials will be happy to provide the required information.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Redundancy Payments

207. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which it is expected a person (details supplied) can repay liability on the sum of €7,503.66 under the redundancy and insolvency payments schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26002/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Redundancy Payments Act 1967, as amended, provides for the making of payments by employ-

ers to employees in respect of redundancy. It is the employer's responsibility to pay statutory redundancy payments to all eligible employees. In the event that an employer is unable to pay due to financial difficulties, an application for payment from the Social Insurance Fund may be submitted to the Department.

When such a redundancy payment is made from the Social Insurance Fund, a debt is immediately raised against the employer. The Department is obliged to make every effort to recover the debt owed to the Social Insurance Fund, in accordance with Section 32 of Act.

If the employer is a sole trader or partnership, the Department engages directly with the employer to ascertain their current financial situation and their capacity to repay the debt. Where appropriate, an agreed repayment plan can be put in place to minimise financial hardship; for example, the debt can be recovered by way of instalments over a period of time.

I note that correspondence issued from the Debt Management Unit in my department to the person named. However, no response was received from that person. It is important that the matter is discussed between the person and the Department. Further correspondence will issue on the matter and I recommend that the employer engages with the Department accordingly.

I would also like to remind the Deputy that any person who is experiencing difficulties with their mortgage repayments can avail of the Government's *Abhaile* service which is run by MABS (www.mabs.ie/abhaile.ie). Borrowers who qualify for this scheme will incur no charge for using this service.

I trust that this clarifies the matter.

Home Loan Scheme

208. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has received authorisation to obtain more finance for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; if so, the amount that has been authorised including the amount to be allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26039/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland home loan (RIHL) scheme was launched on 1 February of last year.

When the scheme was initially being developed, it was estimated that the drawdown of loans would be approximately €200 million over three years. The RIHL has proven to be more successful than initially anticipated, with some €140 million drawn down to the end of May. The first tranche of funding has not been exhausted.

My officials have been engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform since October 2018 when higher lending and drawdown volumes were beginning to materialise.

I informed the Dáil on 29 January 2019 of the scheme's success and of the need for additional funding and indicated that my Department was in discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Finance with regard to the allocation for 2019.

At all times, the scheme remained open and all local authorities were advised to continue to receive and process applications up to and including the issuing of loans.

My Department has consulted in detail with each Local Authority as to the anticipated demand in its area, and the likely level of approvals expected. This information has been submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with request for sanction for addi-

tional borrowing by the Housing Finance Agency. The HFA have an ongoing borrowing facility for when sanction is given so that they are in a position to proceed to borrow this second tranche of funding immediately.

The first tranche of funding has not been exhausted, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan remains open to new applicants, and local authorities are to continue to receive, process and issue loans.

Home Loan Scheme

209. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loans drawn down in County Louth; if funding for Rebuilding Ireland home loans has been exhausted in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25897/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland home loan (RIHL) scheme was launched on 1 February of last year.

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 Q1 2019 is available on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>, and this information will be updated on a quarterly basis as additional data is compiled.

When the scheme was initially being developed, it was estimated that the drawdown of loans would be approximately €200 million over three years. The RIHL has proven to be more successful than initially anticipated, with some €140 million drawn down to the end of May. The first tranche of funding has not been exhausted.

My officials have been engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform since October 2018 when higher lending and drawdown volumes were beginning to materialise.

I informed the Dáil on 29 January 2019 of the scheme's success and of the need for additional funding and indicated that my Department was in discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Finance with regard to the allocation for 2019.

At all times, the scheme remained open and all local authorities were advised to continue to receive and process applications up to and including the issuing of loans.

My Department has consulted in detail with each Local Authority as to the anticipated demand in its area, and the likely level of approvals expected. This information has been submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with request for sanction for additional borrowing by the Housing Finance Agency. The HFA have an ongoing borrowing facility for when sanction is given so that they are in a position to proceed to borrow this second tranche of funding immediately.

The first tranche of funding has not been exhausted, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan remains open to new applicants, and local authorities are to continue to receive, process and issue loans.

Water Charges

210. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason Irish Water treats householders as if they are businesses and charges them for all water used in their property in cases in which the householder has a rain water harvesting system which they rely on exclusively for agricultural purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25946/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Water Service (No. 2) Act 2013 includes provision that Irish Water shall collect charges from its non-domestic customers in receipt of water services provided by it in accordance with a water charges plan, as approved by the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities. If a customer considers that his or her charges are not in line with the regulatory regime this should be raised with Irish Water in the first instance.

In its statutory role the Commission also has the power to investigate a complaint made by a registered customer of Irish Water and to issue a decision that is legally binding on Irish Water. These are responsibilities that are assigned to Irish Water and to the CRU and in respect of which I have no role.

It may also be helpful to note that Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

211. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is in receipt of an application from Mayo County Council for the provision of a water scheme (details supplied) under the multi-annual rural water programme 2019-2021; when a decision will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25988/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 8 February this year, I announced details of the measures being funded through my Department under the Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021. Local authorities were invited to submit their bids for the funding of schemes or projects in their functional areas, with the deadline for receipt of proposals set as 14 March 2019.

Mayo County Council has included the scheme in question in its application to my Department under the new Programme.

My Department is currently considering local authorities' bids for funding allocations. An Expert Panel has been put in place to support the evaluation process. In addition to providing an expert perspective, the Panel brings independence, openness and transparency to the bids evaluation process which is done on a national prioritised basis. The Expert Panel's membership includes Departmental, stakeholder and independent representation.

The Expert Panel will make recommendations to my Department on the suitability of schemes and projects for funding based on objective criteria which are set out in the framework document issued to local authorities when requesting proposals. My Department will then consider the recommendations of the Panel, and based on these, will propose allocations for my consideration as Minister. I expect this process to be completed in the coming weeks.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

212. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social houses built in circumstances in which the State is leasing the house from a private developer in each of the past five years; the number of social houses funded through housing agencies that are leased from private development companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25995/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) supports the delivery of social housing by providing financial support to local authorities for the leasing of houses and apartments from private owners and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs). Dwellings may be leased from private owners by either local authorities or AHBs. Dwellings owned by AHBs, including those constructed or acquired with an element of capital funding support under the Capital Advance Loan Facility (CALF), are also funded under SHCEP. Where a dwelling is leased from a private owner, the Department does not record whether that property was newly built or details of the ownership structure.

The number of dwellings leased by local authorities and AHBs from private owners, each year from 2014 to 2018, is set out in the Table below. This includes dwellings leased under long term leases and availability arrangements, Part V leases and the Repair and Leasing Scheme. Data for 2014 and 2015 is only available on a cumulative basis and represents the total number of dwellings leased by both local authorities and AHBs in those years.

Table: Dwellings Leased from Private Owners 2014-2018

Year	Leased from Private Owner by LA	Leased from Private Owner by AHB	Total
2014	N/A	N/A	504
2015	N/A	N/A	518
2016	493	10	503
2017	329	173	502
2018	586	159	745

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Data

213. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number mortgage to rent agreements put in place in each year since the establishment of the mortgage to rent scheme and each month to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26040/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): From the introduction of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) scheme in 2012 to the end of 2018, 445 MTR cases have been completed.

A breakdown of these completed cases by year is detailed in the table below.

Number of MTR transactions completed per year 2012 to 2018

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Number of MTR transactions completed	1	21	29	96	70	91	137	445

A further 75 MTR cases were completed in the period January to end May 2019, a monthly breakdown of which is detailed in the table below. At the end of May 2019, there were 1,034 MTR applications being actively progressed by the Housing Agency.

Number of MTR transactions completed per month in 2019

Month	Number of MTR transactions completed
January	4
February	6
March	4
April	38
May	23
Total	75

The Housing Agency who administer the MTR scheme on my Department's behalf publishes, on a quarterly basis, detailed statistical information on the operation of the MTR scheme. This information is available on the Agency's website at the following link: <https://www.housingagency.ie/our-services/housing-supply-services/mortgage-to-rent.aspx> .

A Review of the MTR scheme, published on 8 February 2017, introduced a range of amendments to the eligibility criteria and administration of the scheme in order to improve its operation. The Review, which is available at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/changes-in-mortgage-to-rent-scheme/>, explored the avenues and impediments to participation in the scheme and recommended a number of actions to make the scheme work better for borrowers. My Department and the Housing Agency are working with all stakeholders to ensure that the actions set out in the Review are being effectively implemented to benefit a greater number of households. The eligibility requirements of the scheme were widened to include a greater number of borrowers and a larger number of property types. Increasing awareness and understanding of the scheme has been a priority and a new website, www.mortgagetorent.ie , dedicated to guiding and advising borrowers has been developed. In addition, new structures and arrangements have been put in place to encourage a greater number of entities to take part in the scheme.

While it will continue to be the case that not all MTR applications will develop into completed transactions for varied reasons, the implementation of the resulting actions from the Review means that MTR is available to provide a long-term solution for more households in mortgage distress, where appropriate.

The Abhaile service is a national mortgage arrears resolution service, provided free of charge to mortgage holders in arrears and its aim is to help these borrowers to find the best solutions and keep them, wherever possible, in their own homes. The unique element of Abhaile is that it brings together, for the first time, the full range of supports and services required by borrowers in home mortgage arrears. A dedicated adviser will work with the borrower and their lender to find the best solution for their particular situation. The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) acts as the gateway for the service and can be contacted by telephoning (076)1072000 or by accessing their website at: www.mabs.ie/abhaile.

National Concert Hall

214. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the timeline for the renovation works at the National Concert Hall; her plans to secure an alternative venue for the National Symphony Orchestra during the course of these works; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25886/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): As part of Project Ireland 2040 - the National Planning Framework - the Government has approved a ten year plan - Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018 to 2027 - which sets out the Government's objectives for capital investment in Ireland's culture, language and heritage. The plan provides for an investment of €725m in the Culture sector of which €460m relates to investment in our National Cultural Institutions and of which €78m relates to the re-develop-

ment of the National Concert Hall.

Together with the Office of Public Works, the National Concert Hall (NCH) has prepared a development plan for the Earlsfort Terrace Complex which is scheduled to be completed between now and 2027.

The plan provides for the complete refurbishment, upgrading and extension of the main auditorium, together with improved and extended back-stage and public spaces, and the conversion of an existing space into a dedicated rehearsal hall for the resident National Symphony Orchestra. It is planned that this phase of the work will be completed over a three year period commencing no sooner than September 2021, subject to compliance with public procurement procedures, and will entail the closure of the Hall and possible re-location to another site. The question of securing an alternative venue for the National Symphony Orchestra during this period is also being examined.

National Orchestras

215. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the timeline for the proposed transfer of the National Symphony Orchestra to the National Concert Hall; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25887/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Following the publication of the report by RTÉ that it commissioned from independent consultants Helen Boaden and Mediatique on the RTÉ Orchestras entitled RTÉ Orchestras Ensuring a Sustainable Future, the Government agreed in principle that the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra (RTÉ NSO) should come within the remit of the National Concert Hall (NCH). The Government also authorised the initiation of discussions on the implementation of the recommendations of the report.

The overall aim of the Government decision in relation to the proposed transfer of the RTÉ NSO is to enable the orchestra to be established as a world class orchestra which would, with the NCH, provide a creative and imaginative programme strategy that would greatly enhance the offering of the combined organisation to the public.

An Oversight Group and Working Group have been established with formal terms of reference, with a view to identifying and addressing the relevant issues to be addressed to enable the successful transfer of the NSO from the remit of RTÉ to the remit of the NCH.

The work of the Oversight Group is continuing. At this point, it is considered that 2020 would be the earliest date for the completion of the proposed transfer.

Re-introduction of Grey Wolf

216. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department or an agency under her remit will carry out a feasibility assessment on the re-introduction of the grey wolf species, utilising the criteria provided by an organisation (details supplied) in view of the number of potential benefits to ecosystems and endangered species and arresting biodiversity loss; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25900/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department has no plans to reintroduce wolves to Ireland.

Reintroducing a species back into its former range is fraught with difficulties. The reintroduction of a large predator which has been absent for almost 250 years is particularly challenging: the wolf is a large, mobile and adaptable predator. Wolves travel in packs and require vast home ranges.

As the Deputy has noted, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (the IUCN) have developed Guidelines on Reintroductions and Conservation Translocations. These guidelines were developed by conservation experts and practitioners and they provide the benchmark for international best practice in this field.

Before going into the details of what a reintroduction programme might entail, the IUCN document sets out an initial checklist for those considering a reintroduction project. One of the first requirements is that:

“There should be strong evidence that the threats that caused any previous extinction have been ... removed.”

The National Parks & Wildlife Service of my Department have advised me that any feasibility assessment for the reintroduction of the wolf to Ireland would fall at this first hurdle.

The wolf became extinct in Ireland towards the end of the 18th century. Its demise was brought about by a number of factors including deforestation, the expansion of agriculture, and persecution. There is limited evidence that those causes of its previous extinction have been removed.

While the area under forestry in Ireland has been expanding, at approximately 11% it remains amongst the very lowest in Europe. Meanwhile, the area under agriculture has continued to expand and has also become more intensive and less hospitable to wildlife.

In addition, our urban and suburban areas have expanded significantly since the end of the 18th century. The current challenges faced by the native pine marten, a relatively small and unthreatening predator compared to a wolf, as well as the ongoing poisoning and shooting of reintroduced birds of prey, indicate that the threat of persecution, particularly for a large predator, remains a concern.