24 September 2019

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].

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Questions Nos. 1 to 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Question No. 11 answered with Question No. 6.

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Defence Forces Strength

12. Deputy Seán Crowe asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the current strength of the Defences Forces is 8,724; his views on the fact that this is below the minimum strength of 9,500 that it is supposed to have (details supplied); his further views on the contention that this is a retention and recruitment crisis that is undermining the very viability of the Defence Forces; and the measures he is taking to tackle same. [38462/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The military authorities have advised that the strength of the Permanent Defence Force (whole time equivalent), across all services, at 31st August 2019, was 8,653 personnel. Whilst I am very much aware that there continues to be a shortfall between the current strength figures and those of the establishment I remain committed to restoring the strength of the Defence Forces to 9,500.

The Government have acknowledged that there are recruitment and retention issues in the Defence Forces that must be addressed. It is a fact that members of the Permanent Defence Force are being attracted to jobs elsewhere in a buoyant labour market.

In light of the particular difficulties being faced by the Defence Sector, the Government tasked the Public Service Pay Commission to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of recruitment and retention issues in the Permanent Defence Force (PDF).

The Commission’s Report, which has been accepted by Government, contains a broad range of recommendations which will provide immediate benefits to members of the Permanent Defence Force as well as initiatives that can lead to further improvements, these include:

- a 10% increase in Military Service Allowance,
- the restoration to pre-Haddington Road levels of certain specific Defence Forces allowances,
- the return of an incentive scheme to address pilot retention issues in the Air Corps.

These measures will be implemented swiftly on confirmation of acceptance by the Permanent Defence Force representative associations.

The Report also contains a range of recommendations aimed at improving work-force plan-
The Government has prepared a detailed implementation plan setting out the timelines and objectives, indicating the commitment to deliver on the Pay Commission’s recommendations. The plan also provides for an examination of core pay in the PDF and to identify further retention measures within the context of the Public Service Stability Agreement and future public sector pay negotiations. Work on implementing the plan is underway and, under my direction, is being prioritised by Civil and Military Management.

I am confident that the implementation of the PSPC’s recommendations, in tandem with pay benefits being delivered by the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the most recent being a 1.5% increase on 1st September, will ameliorate current recruitment and retention challenges being experienced by the Permanent Defence Force. These measures will build upon a range of recruitment and retention actions already in train.

**Industrial Relations**

13. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will request amendments to the Industrial Relations Act 1990 to ensure representative rights for Army personnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38547/19]

17. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if an amendment to the Industrial Relations Act 1990 will be supported in order to allow Defence Forces personnel the right to be represented by a representative organisation of their choice and have full access to the industrial relations machinery of the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38532/19]

20. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will meet with representatives of the Defence Forces, specifically an organisation (details supplied), to discuss its campaign for representative rights in view of ongoing concerns on issues of pay, conditions and retention in the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38533/19]

26. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the progress which is being made in affording Defence Forces representative organisations affiliation with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions as a means to advance the interests of its members in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38549/19]

30. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to deal with the recruitment and retention crisis in the Defence Forces; his views on whether granting the right to representation including the right of bodies (details supplied) to join an organisation and have access to the industrial relations machinery of the State could help in dealing with the current crisis in the forces in terms of retention of members; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38534/19]

34. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the move by an organisation (details supplied) to affiliate with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38552/19]

36. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on whether the conciliation and arbitration scheme to address issues regarding the pay and conditions of Defence Forces personnel does not address or adequately deal with concerns of members of the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38531/19]
Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 13, 17, 20, 26, 30, 34 and 36 together.

I am aware of the longstanding desire of PDFORRA to associate with ICTU.

In 2017, in a non-binding ruling, the European Committee of Social Rights concluded that prohibiting military personnel from the right to strike was not in breach of the European Social Charter, but that the Charter was breached by prohibiting the representative associations from affiliating with a national employee organisation, such as ICTU, and in respect of the right to bargain collectively.

This case related to a complaint made by EUROMIL, a European umbrella body for military associations, on behalf of PDFORRA, concerning the lack of certain rights for military representative associations in Ireland.

The complainant claimed that Ireland was in breach of the European Social Charter by prohibiting military personnel from the right to strike, prohibiting the Permanent Defence Force representative associations from affiliating with a national employee organisation such as ICTU and an alleged restriction on the Permanent Defence Force representative associations at negotiations on national pay agreements.

The Government welcomed the conclusion of the European Committee of Social Rights that the prohibition on the right to strike for members of the Defence Forces is not a violation of the European Social Charter. It is critically important that the Defence Forces are fully operational at all times. The taking of any form of industrial action is irreconcilable with military service.

It should be noted that the basis for complaint pre-dated a number of significant Government initiatives. In relation to collective bargaining, the Government established an independent Public Service Pay Commission in 2016, to provide objective analysis and advice on the most appropriate pay levels for the public service, including the Defence Forces.

Following the publication of the Report of the Public Service Pay Commission, the Government initiated negotiations on an extension to the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations were invited to the negotiations on the agreement which were held under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission. They were afforded equal standing to other public sector trade unions and representative associations during the negotiations.

Both PDFORRA and RACO accepted the terms of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 which provides for increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the agreement, with the focus on the lower paid. The increases in pay are being implemented on a phased basis with the most recent increase being a 1.75% increases on annualised salaries with effect from 1 September 2019.

Section 2(3) of the Defence (Amendment) Act 1990, prohibits the Defence Forces representative associations from being associated with or affiliated to any trade union or any other body, without the consent of the Minister.

To compensate for these limitations there are a range of statutory redress mechanisms available to serving members, including redress of wrongs, a Defence Forces Ombudsman and a Conciliation and Arbitration scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force.

The Conciliation and Arbitration scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force provides a formal mechanism for the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations, that is PDFORRA and RACO, to engage with the Official side.
Having regard to commitments made under pay agreements, members of the Permanent Defence Force can make representations in relation to their pay and conditions of service through their representative bodies.

In light of the many changes in the industrial relations landscape since the establishment of the scheme, I initiated a fundamental review of the scheme in 2018.

While the majority of the recommendations arising from the review of the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force are aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the C&A scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force, there are no recommendations relating to the amendment of Industrial Relations legislation.

Instead, the Reviewer recommended that the Departmental and Representative sides agree a revised scheme implementing the recommendations in the Review. The reviewer recommended that the revised scheme be reviewed after a three-year period as this would afford the parties an opportunity to assess the schemes performance. The parties to the scheme are in the process of developing and agreeing a revised scheme. It is not intended to make any legislative amendment that will pre-empt the outcome of the revised scheme.

The terms of reference for the review included consideration of the findings of the European Committee of Social Rights in the case of the European Organisation of Military Associations (Euromil) v Ireland. One of the recommendations from that review was that the official side should, with the consent of the Minister, engage in discussions with the ICTU to explore the practicalities of a PDF representative association forming association/affiliation with the ICTU, while giving due consideration to any likely conflict that might arise between such an arrangement and the obligations of military service.

This is in the context of a statement which the European Committee of Social Rights took into consideration in their deliberations where EUROMIL claimed that ICTU had stated that PDFORRA could be affiliated to ICTU with whatever conditions the Government deemed necessary and that this remains the position of ICTU.

I asked my officials to examine this matter further and in this regard Defence management (civil and military) have engaged in discussions with ICTU.

Association with ICTU poses complex questions for the Defence Forces from a legal, operational and management perspective. The feasibility of association is the subject of ongoing discussion and engagement with ICTU.

I have recently met both RACO and PDFORRA and this matter was discussed in the course of the meetings.

The implications of any possible decision around association or affiliation are being carefully considered.

*Question No. 14 answered with Question No. 8.*

**Defence Forces Personnel Data**

15. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the estimated number of persons likely to leave the Defence Forces in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38422/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As at 31st August
24 September 2019

2019, 558 personnel had discharged from the Permanent Defence Force. The term ‘discharges’ encompasses personnel who left for a variety of reasons including on age grounds, at end of contract and voluntary discharges and also includes a number of trainees who exited prior to completion of their initial training. There will be additional discharges in 2019 for various reasons and the majority of personnel who discharge do so prior to the mandatory retirement age and at a time of their own choosing.

In 2018 the overarching turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force was 8.1%. While the overall average departure rate since 2002 is 6.3% this peaked in 2012 at 8.58%. This departure rate, or turnover rate, is comparable to, and in some cases more favourable than, other military organisations worldwide. However, the overarching turnover level does not illustrate important underlying trends. As the rate of turnover within a military organisation can differ across functional areas, the impact of turnover can vary accordingly. Headline turnover figures do not reflect this complexity.

The issue of a fluctuating high turnover rate is also a feature of other military organisations.

Nevertheless, this does not detract from the Governments goal of restoring the Permanent Defence Force to a strength of 9,500 personnel and, in that regard, I have previously acknowledged that there are recruitment and retention issues in the Defence Forces which is reflective of the current buoyant economic environment and jobs market.

I brought these issues to the attention of the Public Service Pay Commission and the recommendations contained in their recent report have been accepted by Government. These recommendations are being progressed through a detailed implementation plan that is driving a number of projects to implement specific recommendations.

The recommendations relating to increases in certain allowances and the re-introduction of a service commitment scheme for Air Corp pilots in the Air Corps are currently being considered by the Defence Forces Representative Associations.

As I have said already today, while it is clear that there is and has been a significant amount of work undertaken in this area, I continue to work closely with the Secretary General of my Department and the Defence Forces Chief of Staff to further enhance the responses to the issues facing the Defence Forces at this time.

*Question No. 16 answered with Question No. 9.*

*Question No. 17 answered with Question No. 13.*

**Defence Forces Medical Services**

18. *Deputy James Browne* asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on mental distress in the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38223/19]

*Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):* The health and welfare of the men and women of the Defence Forces is a high priority for me and my Department. Mental health supports are part of a range of medical and non-medical services provided to ensure that Defence Forces personnel are medically fit to undertake the duties assigned to them.

Medical mental health services available to personnel include access to clinical psychology and psychiatry services. The Psychology service assesses, diagnoses, treats and advises on strategies to prevent mental health disorders and there are currently two Clinical Psychologists
employed by the Defence Forces. Psychiatry services specialise in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of mental illness.

Deputies will already be aware of the ongoing efforts made by my Department to fill the vacancy left by the previous in-house military psychiatrist, who retired in May 2018. In this regard, a direct entrant competition for the position of military psychiatrist, which closed on 30th September 2018, yielded no applications.

To continue to provide an interim in-house service until such time as the military psychiatrist position could be filled, attempts were made to secure a locum psychiatrist but these also proved unsuccessful.

In order to explore every option to facilitate an in-house appointment, I gave approval for my Department to conduct a competition for a contracted civilian consultant psychiatrist on a temporary 24-month contract at pay rates equivalent to those available in the HSE. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) sanctioned the competition.

The Public Appointments Service is currently conducting a competition to fill the position. The closing date for the competition is 26 September 2019 and I am informed that there has been interest expressed in the vacancy.

Until this vacancy is filled, interim services are being provided through a combination of external public and private services. I wish to stress again that there is no delay in referring Defence Forces personnel requiring immediate psychiatric care or assessment. Patients presenting to Defence Forces Primary Carers (Medical Officers or contracted civilian GPs) with a requirement for urgent psychiatric assessment are referred to HSE Accident & Emergency Departments. Those requiring hospitalisation are admitted immediately.

Furthermore, in order to provide Defence Forces Primary Carers (Medical Officers or contracted civilian GPs) with the broadest range of options possible in dealing with the spectrum of cases that present to them, they have also been authorised to refer cases to local external private psychiatrists for outpatient treatment where deemed appropriate.

As I have outlined in the past, there is a nationwide shortage of trained psychiatrists, with recruitment issues in a number of sectors of the health service. The difficulty with recruitment for such a position is not unique to the Defence Forces.

In addition to the clinical supports I have outlined, non-medical mental health services are provided by the Defence Forces Personnel Support Service. The Defence Forces Personnel Support Service provides a welfare, information, psycho-social support and referral service to serving members of the Defence Forces and their families.

The service is also available to civilian employees, and in a limited role to veterans. This service sustains and enhances the individual well-being of personnel, and promotes a safe and positive work culture, in order to support the effectiveness of the Defence Forces.

The service is delivered through a network of military Barrack Personnel Support Service Officers and civilian Occupational Social Workers. This network of professionals is prepared to provide immediate help to service personnel and their families in a routine environment or at a time of crisis. This assistance can range from the simple provision of information to counselling or, if required, signposting and referral to specialist help and assistance.

Furthermore, the assistance may include providing psychosocial support, counselling and information & assistance services on a variety of issues, including relationships, general finances, addiction, retirement (including pensions and gratuities), housing, taxation and PRSI
and much more.

In addition, my Department funds a confidential counselling, referral and support service for serving members of the Defence Forces, civilian employees and Civil Defence volunteers. The service provides confidential counselling on a wide range of personal and work related issues, including but not limited to health, relationships, addictions, financial, bereavement, stress, conflict, critical incident and trauma.

In the case of relationship counselling, the spouse or partner may also attend the counselling sessions.

A Freephone confidential helpline is available on a 24/7 basis 365 days a year. The helpline provides for referral to appointment-based telephone or face-to-face counselling.

While I am satisfied that the available medical services offer comprehensive supports to Defence Forces members, I can assure the Deputy that they are kept under constant review.

Defence Forces Medical Services

19. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 30 of 26 February 2019, if a psychiatrist for the Defence Forces has been appointed following the retirement of the in-house psychiatrist in May 2018; the number of personnel awaiting referral to a psychiatrist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38544/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Deputies will already be aware of the ongoing efforts made by my Department to fill the vacancy left by the previous in-house military psychiatrist, who retired in May 2018. In this regard, a direct entrant competition for the position of military psychiatrist, which closed on 30th September 2018, yielded no applications.

To continue to provide an interim in-house service until such time as the military psychiatrist position could be filled, attempts were made to secure a locum psychiatrist but these also proved unsuccessful.

In order to explore every option to facilitate an in-house appointment, I gave approval for my Department to conduct a competition for a contracted civilian consultant psychiatrist on a temporary 24-month contract at pay rates equivalent to those available in the HSE. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) sanctioned the competition.

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Until this vacancy is filled, interim services are being provided through a combination of external public and private services. I wish to stress again that there is no delay in referring Defence Forces personnel requiring immediate psychiatric care or assessment. Patients presenting to Defence Forces Primary Carers (Medical Officers or contracted civilian GPs) with a requirement for urgent psychiatric assessment are referred to HSE Accident & Emergency Departments. Those requiring hospitalisation are admitted immediately.

Furthermore, in order to provide Defence Forces Primary Carers (Medical Officers or contracted civilian GPs) with the broadest range of options possible in dealing with the spectrum of
cases that present to them, they have also been authorised to refer cases to local external private psychiatrists for outpatient treatment where deemed appropriate.

As I have outlined in the past, there is a nationwide shortage of trained psychiatrists, with recruitment issues in a number of sectors of the health service. The difficulty with recruitment for such a position is not unique to the Defence Forces.

*Question No. 20 answered with Question No. 13.*

**Defence Forces Training**

21. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the degree to which he remains satisfied that all military personnel including reserves receive ongoing upgraded training in military techniques and communications with particular reference for the need to communicate with other defence forces throughout Europe in the case of emergency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38457/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** In accordance with the Framework for Major Emergency Management, primary responsibility for responding to emergencies caused by severe weather events, such as storms and flooding, rests with the three designated principal response agencies, namely, the relevant Local Authority, An Garda Síochána, and the Health Service Executive. The Defence Forces provide the fullest possible assistance to the appropriate Lead Department in the event of a natural disaster or emergency situation in its Aid to the Civil Authority role.

At National level, representation on the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, by both the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces, ensures the fullest coordination and cooperation in the event of an emergency and that the command structure within the Defence Forces is compatible with the requirements in this area.

Major Emergency Plans have been developed by local and regional authorities and these Plans identify the procedures for requesting assistance from the Defence Forces.

The Defence Forces retains a wide range of specialist skills which can be deployed in such circumstances, including for a natural disaster or terrorist incidents.

With regard to security threats, primary responsibility for the internal security of the State rests with the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) which, in practice, means to provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so.

There is ongoing and close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters, including ATCP deployments and a wide variety of military training activities are specifically designed to counter or respond to possible security emergencies. Regular coordination and liaison meetings also take place between the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána in relation to ATCP issues.

The full spectrum of Defence Forces personnel and equipment are available for deployment in response to any security and other emergencies that may arise.

In addition to training provided in Ireland, the Defence Forces have ongoing opportunities to avail of training techniques and facilities available to other forces throughout Europe. They
attend training courses run by the following organisations:

- NATO School Oberammergau
- Associated Centres of Excellence (COEs)
- Partner Training and Education Centres (PTECs); and,
- Other foreign militaries which offer courses of interest to the Defence Forces.

I can confirm that the Defence Forces keep their operational plans and response capabilities for dealing with a wide range of threats under constant review. It is my priority as Minister with responsibility for Defence to ensure that the operational capacity of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles both at home and overseas.

Brexit Preparations

22. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to reintroduce new Army barracks in counties Cavan and Monaghan or the greater Border region in view of Brexit and the possible reintroduction of a hard border; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38326/19]

31. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans for the reinstatement of troops in the Border counties in view of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38325/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 22 and 31 together.

As part of a whole of Government approach, my Department continues to engage in forward planning with the other Departments involved in addressing all issues relevant to the UK’s decision to leave the European Union. On 9th July last, the Government published the Brexit Contingency Action Plan Update. This reflects the extensive work which has taken place at EU level and on a whole-of-Government basis, including the Brexit Omnibus Act 2019, to prepare for a no deal Brexit. It sets out the next steps to be taken between now and 31st October.

While the UK’s decision to leave the EU does not of itself give rise to additional border control requirements, it remains the Government’s view that the best way to protect the Good Friday Agreement and avoid a hard border is for the Withdrawal Agreement, including the backstop, to be ratified.

The Government remains committed to the avoidance of a hard border and Ireland and the EU are at one on this. The Government is working closely with the European Commission to meet the shared twin objectives of protecting the Single Market and Ireland’s place in it, and protecting the Good Friday Agreement, including avoiding physical infrastructure at the border. This work is looking at necessary checks to preserve Ireland’s full participation in the Single Market and Customs Union.

In these circumstances, there are no plans for a new Army barracks in counties Cavan and Monaghan or the greater Border region. In terms of deployment of military personnel to the border, as I have said in the past, primary responsibility for the internal security of the State rests with the Minister for Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. Accordingly, responsibility for the security aspect of border control rests with An Garda Síochána, while the Revenue
Commissioners also have responsibilities relating to their particular mandate.

Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power which, in practice, means to provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Defence Forces also provide support to the Revenue Commissioners, again, when requested to do so.

There is ongoing close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters and regular coordination and liaison meetings take place. My Department continues to monitor the ongoing situation to ensure that both it and the Defence Forces are fully prepared to address any potential issues that might arise in the defence area as a consequence of Brexit.

Defence Forces Operations

23. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of times the Defence Forces have been called on to perform aid to the civil power duties at Shannon Airport to date in 2019; the nature of the activities carried out; the dates on which those duties were performed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38545/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána have primary responsibility for the internal security of the State. Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) which, in practice, means to assist An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. On each occasion that the support of the Defence Forces is required, An Garda Síochána issues a form C70 to the Defence Forces to request their assistance.

As of 18 September 2019, the Defence Forces have conducted 233 Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) deployments to Shannon Airport this year. The nature of the activities carried out was security assistance to An Garda Síochána. The duties were performed on various dates upon receipt of a request from An Garda Síochána.

I am satisfied that there is ongoing and close liaison between both An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces, and between my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality regarding security matters generally, including the Defence Forces ATCP roles.

Naval Service Staff

24. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the measures he is taking to tackle the retention and recruitment crisis in the Naval Service in view of issues (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38461/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I remain committed to maximising recruitment capacity and introducing measures to return to, and maintain, the establishment strength in the Naval Service and the Defence Forces as a whole.

There are a number of recruitment and retention difficulties in the Naval Service which are presenting ongoing challenges and the Government has acknowledged these. My main focus is returning the Naval Service to its full capacity. As you know, two ships LÉ Eithne and LÉ Orla were brought in for routine maintenance earlier this year and are now on Operational Pause. A number of their crew have been redeployed within the fleet.
A high level civil military team has been working on addressing the issues facing the Naval Service and has identified a number of specific HR options for consideration. I receive regular feedback on the work of the group. I met with them last week for a detailed brief. It goes without saying that as we deal with these issues, the safety of serving personnel must be the number one priority.

In light of the particular difficulties faced by the Defence Sector, the Government tasked the Public Service Pay Commission to undertake a comprehensive examination and analysis of underlying difficulties in recruitment and retention in the Defence Forces.

The Commission’s Report, which has been accepted by Government, contains a broad range of recommendations which will provide immediate benefits to members of the Permanent Defence Force as well as initiatives that can lead to further improvements, these include:

- a 10% increase in Military Service Allowance
- the restoration to pre-Haddington Road levels of certain specific Defence Forces allowances,
- the return of an incentive scheme to address pilot retention issues in the Air Corps.

These measures will be implemented swiftly on confirmation of acceptance of by the Permanent Defence Force representative associations.

The Report also contains a range of recommendations aimed at improving work-force planning, recruitment and conditions of service.

The Government has prepared a detailed implementation plan setting out the timelines and objectives, indicating the commitment to deliver on the Pay Commission’s recommendations. The plan also provides for an examination of core pay in the PDF and to identify further retention measures within the context of the Public Service Stability Agreement and future public sector pay negotiations. Work on implementing the plan is underway and, under my direction, is being prioritised by Civil and Military Management.

The implementation of the PSPC’s recommendations, in tandem with pay benefits being delivered by the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the most recent being a 1.5% increase on 1st September, are all intended to ameliorate current recruitment and retention challenges being experienced by the Permanent Defence Force, including the Naval Service.

Departmental Properties

25. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will consider allowing a premises in a location (details supplied) in the ownership of his Department to be used by UN veterans for housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38546/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I am advised that officials from my Department have met with representatives of Wicklow County Council to discuss the future of Rockbrae House and surrounding lands and are currently waiting for an updated position from the Council with regard to any potential proposals they have for the property. Until these considerations are advanced I am unable to provide a position on the future of Rockbrae House at this juncture.

I recognise the outstanding contribution veterans have made to the State and in that regard
my Department is committed to supporting IUNVA in recognition of their valued service.

Question No. 26 answered with Question No. 13.

Defence Forces Remuneration

27. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of the implementation of the Barry report in respect of the Defence Forces conciliation and arbitration scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38423/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force provides an established mechanism for the PDF representative associations, that is RACO (the representative association for commissioned officers) and PDFORRA (the representative association for enlisted personnel)to engage with the Official side. Having regard to commitments made under public service pay agreements, members of the PDF can make representations in relation to their pay and conditions through their representative associations.

The C&A scheme, since its inception in the early 1990’s has provided the framework to progress many successful negotiated agreements between Defence management and the PDF Representative Associations. In light of the many changes in the industrial relations landscape in the intervening period, I initiated a independent review of the scheme, and that report was published on 2 October 2018.

The report of the review contains a number of recommendations aimed at improving the efficiency of the scheme.

The parties to the scheme, including the Permanent Defence Force representative associations are developing, in a collaborative process, the terms for a revised C&A Scheme incorporating the recommendations in the Review. This work is ongoing.

Defence Forces Strength

28. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the way in which he has prioritised retention of suitable personnel as an essential factor in developing military capabilities in line with section 7.3 of the 2015 White Paper on Defence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38421/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** A range of factors influence an individual’s decision to stay in the Defence Forces. These include career progression opportunities, pay, personal development opportunities, work – life balance, job stimulation and work environment. There has been significant progress in all of these areas. There are significant opportunities for career progression in the Defence Forces.

Pay is being restored to members of the Defence Forces and other public servants in accordance with public sector pay agreements. The focus of these increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, provides for increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the Agreement. The focus of these increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay. The increases due to date under the Agreement have been paid to members of the Defence Forces, the most recent being a 1.75% increase on annualised sala-
ries from the 1 September 2019. Further increases in pay are scheduled in 2020.

By the end of the current Public Service Pay agreement the pay scales of all public servants (including members of the Defence Forces), earning under €70,000 per annum, will be restored to pre FEMPI levels. The restoration of the 5% reduction to allowances cut under FEMPI is also scheduled in the agreement.

As with many other areas of the public service, challenges in the recruitment and retention of personnel have arisen in a buoyant economy, with many personnel or potential personnel, including pilots, air traffic control staff and Naval Service technicians, having scarce and highly marketable skills.

In light of the particular challenges faced by the Defence Sector, the Government tasked the Public Service Pay Commission to undertake a comprehensive review of underlying difficulties in recruitment and retention in the Defence Forces.

The Commission’s Report, which has been accepted by Government in July, contains a broad range of recommendations which will provide immediate benefits to members of the Permanent Defence Force as well as initiatives that can lead to further improvements, these include:

- a 10% increase in Military Service Allowance,
- the restoration to pre-Haddington Road levels of certain specific Defence Forces allowances,
- the return of an incentive scheme to address pilot retention issues in the Air Corps.

These measures will be implemented swiftly on confirmation of acceptance of by the Permanent Defence Force representative associations.

The Report also contains a range of recommendations aimed at improving work-force planning, recruitment and conditions of service. The Government has prepared a detailed implementation plan setting out the timelines and objectives, indicating the commitment to deliver on the Pay Commission’s recommendations. The plan also provides for an examination of core pay in the PDF within the context of the Public Service Stability Agreement and future public sector pay negotiations.

Work on this plan is underway and, under my direction, is being prioritised by civil and military management

**Departmental Expenditure**

29. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which current expenditure of his Department for 2019 is off target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38425/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Defence Vote Group, comprising of the Defence and Army Pensions Votes, was provided with a current funding envelope of some €901 million in 2019. This allocation provides for the pay and allowances for over 10,400 public service employees, ongoing Defence Forces operational and standing costs, funding in respect of Civil Defence and the Irish Red Cross Society and funding for some 12,400 Army Pensioners and certain dependants.
Defence Vote Group current expenditure at end-August was €561 million, representing 62% of the total provision. This is broadly in line with expenditure trends in recent years. At end-August, overall Defence Group current expenditure was €26 million below the profile set out at the beginning of the year, mainly due to payroll numbers being below approved strength levels. Army Pensions expenditure was slightly above profile.

My Department will continue to monitor all expenditure across the Defence Vote Group very closely. It is intended that any savings arising within the Defence Vote at year-end would, in consultation and agreement with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, be used to address spending requirements elsewhere in the Defence Vote Group, including Army Pensions.

*Question No. 30 answered with Question No. 13.*

*Question No. 31 answered with Question No. 22.*

**Naval Service Operations**

32. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the role the Naval Service may have in the designation and protection of marine protected areas; and if the Naval Service would have capacity to ensure the integrity of such areas. [38500/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As the Deputy is aware, my colleague, Minister Murphy, the Minister for Housing Planning and Local Government, is responsible for marine environmental policy. This includes the overall co-ordination of Ireland’s network of marine protected areas. I understand it is Minister Murphy’s intention to bring forward a Bill to provide for the designation of further Marine Protected Areas in 2020.

The primary day-to-day tasking of the Naval Service in Ireland is to provide a fishery protection service in accordance with the State’s fishery protection legislation and our obligations as a member of the European Union. When on patrol Naval Service vessels are multi-tasked in the sense that they also undertake general surveillance, security and other duties. While the Naval Service has no role in relation to the designation of Marine Protected Areas, the Deputy can be assured that the Naval Service will continue to carry out the roles they have been assigned by Government.

**Army Barracks**

33. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if funding will be allocated to improve working and living conditions for soldiers in the Curragh camp; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38511/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** In order to ensure that the Defence Forces have the capability to deliver on all of the roles assigned by Government, I am committed to the development and improvement of the physical environment and living conditions in military installations throughout the country. The Defence Forces Built Infrastructure Programme, is compiled on a priority needs basis by my Department in conjunction with the Military Authorities.

This year some €28m was allocated towards the maintenance of and the development of new building projects for the Defence Forces. Over the period of 2016 to end 2018, some €17m was spent on various capital projects and ongoing maintenance of buildings and facilities in the
Defence Forces Training Centre, most notably this included the refurbishment of Blocks B and D of Pearse Barracks as well as the provision of a newly constructed ammunition storage facility. In 2019, it is intended that a further €3.5m will be expended by year end on ongoing maintenance and improvement works in the DFTC. One of the key projects being undertaken this year is the upgrading and refurbishment of Plunkett Block 7 in the Curragh Camp, Defence-Forces Training Centre. This project involves the refurbishment of the existing accommodation for 58 personnel to modern standards. These works will commence shortly.

Question No. 34 answered with Question No. 13.

Defence Forces Remuneration

35. Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the fact that the recruitment drive in 2017 for the Defence Forces yielded modest results; if he will consider pay and conditions of existing members being paramount in addressing the retention of members in place of costly recruitment policies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38420/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government remains committed to returning to the agreed strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500.

In that context there is ongoing recruitment and the Defence Forces recruitment process is subject to continuous monitoring and appraisal to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. In 2017, this resulted in the traditional annual General Service Recruitment Campaign being replaced by two campaigns annually to reduce waiting times on panels for aspiring entrants.

I have acknowledged that there are both recruitment and retention issues in the Defence Forces which is reflective of the current buoyant economic environment and jobs market.

For that reason, I brought these issues to the attention of the Public Service Pay Commission and their recent report contains a broad range of recommendations which will provide immediate benefits to members of the Permanent Defence Force as well as initiatives that can lead to further improvement. These recommendations are currently being progressed through the associated Implementation Plan.

Whilst it is clear that there is and has been a significant amount of work undertaken in this area, I continue to work closely with the Secretary General of my Department and the Defence Forces Chief of Staff to further enhance the responses to the issues facing the Defence Forces at this time.

Question No. 36 answered with Question No. 13.

Military Medals

37. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the medals being sought by the veterans and families of the siege of Jadotville will be awarded. [38359/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The siege of Jadotville was a prominent event that occurred during Ireland’s peacekeeping mission in the Congo in September 1961. “A” Company, 35th Infantry Battalion took responsibility for the UN post at Jadotville on 3rd September 1961. On the 9th September, a large force of Katangese Gendarmerie surrounded them and early on the morning of the 13th September “A” Company
came under attack. From the 13th to the 17th September they endured almost continuous attack. They were taken into captivity on the 17th September and remained in captivity until finally released on the 25th October 1961.

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

The issue of the award of medals to the men of “A” Company, 35th Infantry Battalion was comprehensively addressed in 1965. A properly constituted Medals Board considered the various cases presented. The board did not award any medals whose citations mention Jadotville. The Chief of Staff of the day considered the decision of the Board and was satisfied with the findings. Subsequently at that time, the question was raised again in a letter to a newly appointed Chief of Staff. He forwarded the letter to the original Medals Board and asked that they reconvene and review their decision. The Board indicated that the issues raised had received due consideration and that they were not prepared to alter their findings.

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

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

Recognition of their contribution over the years include:

A. A presentation of scrolls to “A” Company in 2006.

B. Portraits of Lt Col McNamee (35th Battalion Commander) and Comdt Quinlan (Company Commander “A” Company) were commissioned in 2006.

C. In July of 2010 the 50th anniversary of the first deployment to the Congo was commemorated in a highly publicised and well attended event in Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnel.

D. A nominal roll of “A” Company, printed in copper, was affixed to the monument in Costume Barracks and was unveiled as part of the 50th Anniversary of the Jadotville affair in September 2011.

E. On the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the Siege of Jadotville, I decided to issue a Unit Citation to honour the collective actions and bravery of the men of “A” Company. This was the first time a Unit Citation was awarded within the Defence Forces and I was delighted to be able to formally recognize the brave actions of these men.

Furthermore, on 13th June 2017, the Government decided, as an exceptional step, to award a medal known as “An Bonn Jadotville” or “The Jadotville Medal” to each member of “A” Company, 35th Infantry Battalion and to the family representatives of deceased members to give full and due recognition in honour of their courageous actions at the Siege of Jadotville.
This medal presentation ceremony took place on 2nd December 2017 in Custume Barracks, Athlone. This location is considered the spiritual home of “A” Company and it is from here that “A” company assembled in advance of their fateful deployment to the Congo.

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

Defence Forces Strength

38. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the strength of the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps remains sufficient to meet a situation emerging such as a natural disaster or international responsibility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38456/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My priority as Minister with responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service is maintained to the greatest extent possible.

The allocation of over €1 billion for the Defence Sector for 2019 emphasises the importance attached by the Government to ensuring that the Defence Forces have the resources necessary to deliver on all roles assigned, both at home and overseas.

In terms of personnel, the Defence Forces retain a wide range of specialist skills and equipment. The full spectrum of personnel and equipment are available for deployment in response to any emergencies that may arise. Between 2016 and 2018 over 2,000 personnel were inducted into the Permanent Defence Force while, in February 2019, the largest ever cadet class in the history of the State was commissioned. Nevertheless, I recognise that reaching a strength level of 9,500 personnel is a key challenge for the Defence Forces at present but I am committed to ensuring that the Defence Forces have the means to continue to carry out all of the roles assigned by Government.

At National level, representation of the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning by both the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces, ensures the fullest coordination and cooperation in the event of an emergency and that the command structure within the Defence Forces is compatible with the requirements in this area. In accordance with the Framework for Major Emergency Management, primary responsibility for responding to emergencies such as a natural disaster rests with three designated principal response agencies, namely, An Garda Síochána, the relevant Local Authority and the Health Service Executive. The Defence Forces provide the fullest possible assistance to the appropriate Lead Department in the event of a natural disaster or an emergency situation in its Aid to the Civil Authority and Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) roles. Major Emergency Plans have been developed by local and regional authorities and these Plans identify the procedures for requesting assistance from the Defence Forces.

In terms of overseas, at present there are close to 680 members of the Defence Forces serving in missions worldwide. In planning and supporting overseas operations, the combined engagement of the Defence Forces and Departmental staff is an essential element in the effective management of deployments. This includes reviewing potential operations, rotation planning, procurement planning and training. My Department and the Defence Forces work together to ensure the maximisation of options available to Government to meets its international obligations and I am satisfied this will continue in furtherance of Ireland’s foreign and defence policy.
objectives.

Civil Service Staff Data

39. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach the number of civil servants that have left and-or retired from his Department in the past ten years who were bound by a cooling-off period in respect of taking up new employment in the private sector by grade, year and sector the staff moved on to. [38219/19]

40. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach the number of civil servants that have left and-or retired from his Department in the past ten years who were not bound by a cooling-off period in respect of taking up new employment in the private sector by grade, year and sector the staff moved on to; and the reason for same. [38220/19]

  **The Taoiseach:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 39 and 40 together.

  The Regulation of Lobbying Act was enacted in 2015. Section 22 of the Act provides that specific categories of Designated Public Officials (“DPOs”) are subject to a one-year “cooling-off” period, during which they cannot engage in lobbying activities in specific circumstances, or be employed by, or provide services to, a person carrying on lobbying activities in specific circumstances.

  The relevant DPOs for whom a “cooling-off” period applies are Ministers of the Government and Ministers of State, Special Advisers appointed under section 11 of the Public Services Management Act 1997 and public servants prescribed as a DPO by the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure & Reform under section 6(2) of the Regulation of Lobbying Act. A list of the current DPOs in my Department is maintained on www.gov.ie/taoiseach.

  The cooling-off period is a statutory requirement and applies for the full one-year term unless the relevant DPO applies to the Standards in Public Office Commission for consent to waive or reduce their cooling-off period. It is the responsibility of the relevant DPO to seek consent prior to taking up an offer of employment (or to provide services). Statistics on the number of applications for consent under section 22 of the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 are included in the annual Regulation of Lobbying report published by the Standards in Public Office Commission.

  In addition civil servants are bound by their obligations under the Official Secrets Act 1963 and are also required to adhere to the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour, published by the Standards in Public Office Commission.

Living Wage

41. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Taoiseach the number of workers employed by his Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of his Department who earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour. [38238/19]

  **The Taoiseach:** The suggested wage at €12.30 per hour based on the Civil Service 37 hour standard net working week equates to an annual salary of €23,747. Public servants currently on an annual salary of less than €23,747 may be receiving remuneration in excess of the suggested living wage through additional premium payments in respect of shift or atypical working hours or are on salary scales that progress to the suggested living wage and above through incremental progression.
Following the application of pay adjustments with effect from 1 September 2019 as provided for in the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, there are 2 employees of my Department whose annual basic salary is currently less than the suggested living wage of €12.30 per hour.

The National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO) - the only body under my Department’s aegis, has no employees earning less than the suggested rate.

**British-Irish Council**

42. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach the date on which he will host the next British-Irish Council summit. [38510/19]

**The Taoiseach:** I will host the next British Irish Council summit meeting in Dublin in November. The date for the Summit has not yet been announced but will be issued in due course.

**Taoiseach’s Meetings and Engagements**

43. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meeting with Mrs. Arlene Foster of the DUP and the topics discussed relating to Brexit and the Northern Ireland Assembly. [38841/19]

44. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the way in which he responded to Mrs. Arlene Foster regarding her comments on the constitutional position of unionism when they met to discuss Brexit on 18 September 2019. [38843/19]

**The Taoiseach:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 43 and 44 together.

I met with Ms Arlene Foster MLA, Leader of the DUP, in Government Buildings on Wednesday, 18 September. We discussed issues relating to Brexit and ongoing efforts between the two Governments to restore the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive. We agreed to stay in touch on these important issues.

**Living Wage**

45. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of workers employed by his Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of his Department who earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38239/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My Department employs civil servants and also, civilian employees attached to military installations. The Army Pensions Board is an independent statutory body established under the Army Pensions Act, 1927 whose secretariat is provided from within my Department’s staff. Of the civil servants and civilian employees employed by my Department, 65 earn less than €12.30 per hour.

**Naval Service Equipment**

46. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if funding has been provided in 2019 for the upgrade of the fire detection and firefighting system at the
Oil Wharf naval base in Haulbowline; if so, when work will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38778/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In 2018, some €2.4m was allocated for the upgrade of the fire detection and firefighting system at the Oil Wharf, Naval Base in Haulbowline. Following a competitive tendering process, Foyles Engineering Ltd was appointed and works commenced on site in May 2018. It is expected that the works will be completed by end 2019.

Defence Forces Reserve Training

47. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which annual training is made available to members of the Reserve Defence Force; the number participating; the number that have participated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38900/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The White Paper on Defence sets out a map for the RDF and that their primary role is to support the PDF in crisis situations. As such, the RDF undertakes training in preparation to assist the PDF when required. Training across the Defence Forces is constantly measured against best military and academic practice. Training procedures are constantly reviewed in order to ensure that the men and women of the Defence Forces are fully prepared to meet the challenges of the ever-changing security environment.

With regard to RDF training for the current year, Subhead A.5 provides for a budget of €2.15 million of which €2.068 million is allocated for Paid Training Mandays for members of the Reserve. This allocation will provide seven days annual paid training for all effective members of the Reserve, fourteen days paid training for all additional personnel recruited to the Reserve in 2019 and provide for career and specialist courses for selected members of the Reserve in line with Reserve priorities. This provision is sufficient having regard to the existing strength of the RDF and the voluntary nature of Reserve training.

As of 31 August 2019, the effective strength of the RDF is 1698.

Overseas Missions Data

48. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number and proposed location for the expected deployment of Irish troops in overseas enmeshments over the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38901/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As of 4th September 2019, Ireland is contributing 678 personnel to 9 different missions throughout the world and also to a range of international organisations and National representations.

The main overseas missions in which Defence Forces personnel are currently deployed is the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with 461 personnel and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria with 132 personnel. The UNIFIL mission in Lebanon continues to represent Ireland’s largest overseas deployment.

Ireland deployed an additional contingent of approximately 106 Defence Force personnel to the UNIFIL mission following the departure of the Finnish/Estonian contingent. This additional 12 month commitment has continued throughout 2019 to date as Ireland assumed full
duties and responsibilities of IRISHBATT up to November 2019.

Plans are now in place for Poland to partner Ireland in UNIFIL from November 2019. It is proposed that Hungarian personnel would also deploy as part of the Polish contingent.

With regard to the deployment of Defence personnel to new military operations overseas, Government and Dáil approval was received in June of this year for the deployment of a contingent of the Permanent Defence Forces to participate in MINUSMA, the United Nations authorised operation in Mali. MINUSMA was established under UN Security Council Resolution 2100 of April 2013. The mission is tasked primarily with providing support to transitional governmental authorities in Mali, in efforts to stabilise the country.

Two officers deployed on the 7th September to Bamako where the MINUSMA Force Headquarters is located and an additional 11 personnel drawn from the Army Ranger Wing deployed with the German Armed Forces to Camp Castor in GAO, Mali on 12th September 2019.

All deployed personnel are currently embedding with the larger Germany company and are carrying out assigned tasks in accordance with the mission mandate.

The Department of Defence constantly reviews the deployment of Defence Forces Personnel overseas. Ireland receives requests, from time to time, in relation to participation in various missions and these are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Ireland has always been a strong supporter of the United Nations and UN Peacekeeping. Our commitment and support for the primary role of the United Nations, in the maintenance of international peace and security, is expressed in Ireland’s long-standing tradition of participating in UN peacekeeping operations. This commitment is also expressed in our engagement in the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

Full details of all personnel currently serving overseas are shown in the tabular statement beneath.

MEMBERS OF THE PERMANENT DEFENCE FORCE SERVING OVERSEAS

As of 4th September 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UN MISSIONS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon)</td>
<td>94448</td>
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<tr>
<td>HQUNIFIL 113th Infantry Battalion UNIFIL Sector West</td>
<td>94448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation) Israel &amp; Syria</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONUSCO (United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic of the Congo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDOF (COS Staff/FHQ Staff - Camp Faouar - Bravo side) UNDOF 58th Infantry Group (Camp Faouar - Bravo side)</td>
<td>6126</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>611</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN MANDATED MISSIONS</td>
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<tr>
<td>EUFOR (EU-led Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN MISSIONS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUTM Mali (EU-led Training Mission)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KFOR (International Security Presence in Kosovo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Naval Service EU Mission (Op Sophia) HQ</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH UN MISSIONS</strong></td>
<td><strong>651</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>ORGANISATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff Officer, High Level Planning Group, Vienna</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH OSCE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>EU MILITARY STAFF</td>
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<td>Brussels</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU BATTLE GROUP</td>
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<td>German Led Battle Group 202-2, FHQ, Stadtallendorf</td>
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<tr>
<td>MILITARY REPRESENTATIVES/ADVISERS/STAFF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military Adviser, Permanent Mission to UN, New York</td>
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<td>Military Adviser, Irish Delegation to OSCE, Vienna</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military Representative to EU (Brussels)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liaison Officer of Ireland, NATO/PfP (Brussels)</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU OHQ Operation Althea, Mons, Belgium</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL NUMBER OF DEFENCE FORCES PERSONNEL SERVING OVERSEAS</strong></td>
<td><strong>678</strong></td>
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**Defence Forces Personnel Data**

49. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of personnel in the Air Corps that have resigned or retired on full service in each of the past three years to date; the number of replacements through recruitment throughout this period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38902/19]

50. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of personnel in the Army that have resigned or retired on full service in each of the past three years to date; the number of replacements through recruitment throughout this period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38903/19]
51. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of personnel in the Naval Service that have resigned or retired on full service in each of the past three years to date; the number of replacements through recruitment throughout this period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38904/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 49 to 51, inclusive, together.

Discharges from the Defence Forces are recorded under a number of headings without a specific definition of retirement which can be either voluntary or involuntary. The table below shows the number of discharges in each of the past three years and as of 31st August in 2019:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRANCH</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>415</td>
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<tr>
<td>Air Corps</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Service</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>558</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table below shows the number of inductions that took place in each of the past three years and as of 31st August in 2019:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRANCH</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Corps</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Service</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>611*</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This figure does not include 15 PDF personnel awarded a Cadetship

** While inductions take place at various stages throughout the year, there is normally an accelerated intake of personnel in the last quarter.

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**Defence Forces Equipment**

52. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which he continues to ensure that Irish military personnel serving overseas on EU or UN deployments are equipped to the highest international standards in terms of communication and military hardware; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38905/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, is maintained to the greatest extent possible to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles as assigned by Government, including overseas deployments.

The acquisition of new equipment for the Defence Forces remains a clear focus for me. Future equipment priorities for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service are considered in the context of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment priorities planning process. The principal aim over the period of the White Paper will be to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements, including response to security risks and other emergencies, both at home and overseas.
The mid-life upgrade programme for the Army’s fleet of eighty MOWAG Armoured Personnel Carriers will extend the utility of the fleet and provide greater levels of protection, mobility and firepower. Additionally, twenty-four 4 x 4 Armoured Utility Vehicles were acquired in 2017, and in 2018 delivery was taken of ten new armoured logistic vehicles. These measures will provide essential force protection overseas.

There is also continuous investment in the non-armoured vehicle fleet. In 2018, 20 minibuses, 22 saloons, 61 logistics vehicles and 2 recovery vehicles were purchased for the Defence Forces, and funding is provided on an on-going basis for the required maintenance of vehicles in the military transport fleet, both at home and overseas.

The Government is currently investing in updating the Air Corps fleet of aircraft with the replacement of the existing five Cessna aircraft with three larger and more capable fixed wing utility Pilatus PC 12 aircraft which are being equipped for ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance). It is expected that the three aircraft will be delivered by 2020. Planning is also in progress to replace the CASA Maritime Patrol aircraft and a tender competition is currently underway in this regard.

The on-going Naval Service ship replacement programme is evidence of the Government’s commitment to investment in the Naval Service. Three new Offshore Patrol Vessels were delivered between 2014 and 2017 with the fourth, the LÉ George Bernard Shaw, delivered in late 2018. In addition, planning is ongoing for the replacement of the current Naval Service flagship LÉ Eithne with a multi role vessel.

With regard to Defence Forces communications systems, there is continued investment in the development of suitable network enabled communications in order to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex operational environment.

The examples given, whilst not exhaustive, demonstrate my commitment to update and upgrade the Defence Forces equipment and capability, within the financial envelope available. In accordance with the National Development Plan, the capital allocation for Defence was increased to €106 million for 2019, an increase of €29 million. The National Development Plan provides for a total of €541 million for Defence over the period 2018-2022. This level of capital funding will allow the Defence Organisation to undertake a programme of sustained equipment replacement and infrastructural development across the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service as identified and prioritised in the Defence White Paper and builds on the significant investment programme over recent years.

I am satisfied that the Defence Forces have the necessary modern and effective range of equipment available to them, including vehicles and communication systems, which is in line with best international standards in order to fulfil all roles assigned to them by Government.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

53. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of women serving in each branch of the Defence Forces; the number that have resigned and/or retired; the extent to which they have been replaced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38906/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The information requested by the Deputy is set out below:

Substantive strength of females in the Defence Forces as at 31 Aug 2019 -
The Government is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for men and women throughout the Defence Forces and to the full participation by women in all aspects of Defence Forces activities. This is underlined by a commitment in the Programme for Government to increase the level of female participation in the Defence Forces.

The participation by female personnel in all aspects of Defence Forces operations is further exemplified in the Defence Forces Equality Policy and the Defence Forces Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Statement and Action Plan, which outlines the Organisation’s commitment to gender equality and its proactive approaches to recruiting females.

Over the course of the White Paper on Defence 2015, which provides the current defence policy agenda over a ten year planning horizon, further initiatives and projects will be developed to encourage more women to apply for the Defence Forces and to increase female participation at all ranks.

### Defence Forces Strength

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Strength at year end</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>8,957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>9,173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>9,126</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>9,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>9,280</td>
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</tbody>
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I am very much aware that there continues to be a shortfall between the current strength figures and those of the establishment I remain committed to maximising recruitment capacity and introducing measures to return to, and maintain, the agreed strength of 9,500.

The recent report of the Public Service Pay Commission on recruitment and retention in the Defence Forces made a series of recommendations with a view to addressing the current recruitment and retention issues and these are being progressed through a detailed implementation plan. This work is being prioritised.

### Air Corps Equipment
55. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the training and working aircraft readily available to the Air Corps; the availability of upgrades if required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38908/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Defence Forces, including the Air Corps, is maintained to the greatest extent possible to enable them to carry out their roles as assigned by Government.

The Air Corps operate a fleet of fixed and rotary wing aircraft which provide military support to the Army and Naval Service, together with support for non-military air services such as Garda air support, air ambulance, fisheries protection and the Ministerial Air Transport Service.

Priorities for the Defence Forces, including the Air Corps, are considered in the context of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development, infrastructure and equipment planning processes. The principal aim over the period of the White Paper is to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements, both at home and overseas.

Work is well advanced in relation to updating the Air Corps’ fleet of aircraft with the replacement of the current Air Corps Cessna fleet with three larger aircraft which will be equipped for Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) as provided for in the White Paper. Following an open tender competition, a contract was placed with Pilatus Aircraft Ltd in December 2017 for the provision of three PC-12 fixed wing utility aircraft suitably equipped for ISTAR tasks which will replace the Cessna fleet. The contract is well underway and it is expected that the three aircraft will be delivered by 2020.

The White Paper also provides for the replacement of the two CASA 235 Maritime Patrol Aircraft with consideration of their replacement with larger more capable aircraft, which would enhance maritime surveillance and provide a greater degree of utility for transport and cargo carrying tasks. A public tender competition for the replacement of the CASA Maritime Patrol Aircraft is underway in my Department at present and it is expected to be completed shortly.

The existing fleet of eight (8) Pilatus PC9 training aircraft is not due for replacement until 2025. The current fleet of two (2) EC 135 and six (6) AW 139 helicopters will continue to deliver the required Defence Forces support and other support capabilities over the lifetime of the White Paper. The Air Corps also operates one (1) Lear LR45 aircraft which is used primarily in the provision of the Ministerial Air Transport Service.

In addition to the training and operational aircraft outlined above, the Air Corps operates one (1) Britten Norman Defender fixed wing aircraft and two (2) EC135 helicopters for An Garda Síochána.

In order to ensure their operational capability, all Air Corps aircraft must undergo regular maintenance and scheduled overhauls to ensure they are fully airworthy and meet the certification standards laid down for the aviation industry.

**Defence Forces Equipment**

56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the Naval Service and Air Corps have sufficient resources and equipment available to them to meet surveillance or other action missions along the Irish coast in the aftermath of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38909/19]
Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My priority as Minister with responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service is maintained to the greatest extent possible.

The allocation of over €1 billion for the Defence Sector for 2019 emphasises the importance attached by the Government to ensuring that the Defence Forces have the resources necessary to deliver on all roles assigned by Government, both at home and overseas.

In terms of equipment, priorities for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service are considered in the context of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development, infrastructure and equipment planning processes. The principal aim over the period of the White Paper is to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements, both at home and overseas.

Significant work is well advanced in relation to updating the Air Corps’ fleet of aircraft with the replacement of the existing Cessna fleet with three larger, more capable, fixed wing utility Pilatus PC 12 aircraft which are being equipped for ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance). It is expected that delivery of these new aircraft will commence in 2020. Planning is also well advanced to replace the CASA Maritime Patrol aircraft and a tender competition is currently close to finalisation in this regard.

The on-going Naval Service ship replacement programme is evidence of the Government’s commitment to investment in the Naval Service. Four new Offshore Patrol Vessels were delivered between 2014 and 2018. In addition, planning is now underway for the replacement of the current Naval Service flagship LÉ Eithne with a new Multi Role Vessel.

In terms of personnel, between 2016 and 2018 over 2,000 personnel were inducted into the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) while, in February 2019, the largest ever cadet class in the history of the State was commissioned. Nevertheless, I recognise that reaching a full strength of 1,094 Naval Service personnel and a full strength of 886 Air Corps personnel is a key challenge for the Defence Forces at present but I am committed to ensuring that the Defence Forces have the means to continue to carry out the roles assigned by Government. In this regard, a range of alternative recruitment approaches are being taken including the fact that the competition for General Service Recruits now remains open throughout the year to maximise the Defence Forces’ training capacity and to give applicants more opportunities to apply.

As I have previously outlined, the UK decision to exit from the EU does not of itself give rise to greater responsibilities for the Defence Forces. However, prudent planning in relation to all situations that may require a Defence Forces response, including by the Naval Service and the Air Corps, is undertaken by the Defence Forces in the normal course. Furthermore, my Department continues to monitor the ongoing situation to ensure that both it and the Defence Forces are fully prepared to address any potential issues that might arise in the defence area as a consequence of Brexit.

Brexit Negotiations

57. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the EU ministers discussed extending the longer period of transition by consent instead of a hard Brexit on 31 October 2019. [38266/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement, the transition period runs to December 2020. It can be extended once, by mutual agreement of the EU and the UK, for up to two years. The decision to
extend must be decided by the Joint Committee, established under the Withdrawal Agreement, before 1 July 2020.

As the transition period is provided for under the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement, it will not apply in the case of a no deal Brexit. In this context, such an extension has not been discussed by Ministers.

**Brexit Negotiations**

58. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there have been written proposals circulated from Prime Minister Johnson in relation to alternatives to a disorderly Brexit. [38267/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Contacts between the UK and Commission Taskforce are continuing. Michel Barnier met Steve Barclay in Brussels on 20 September where they had a discussion on the state of play of the ongoing Brexit talks, both in relation to the backstop to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland and the Political Declaration on the Future Relationship. Following the meeting the Commission reiterated their position that it is essential that there is a fully workable and legally operational solution included in the Withdrawal Agreement and that the EU remain willing and open to examine any such proposals that meet all the objectives of the backstop.

The UK side submitted a series of documents to the Commission Task Force on 18 September, characterised as confidential technical ‘non-papers’ they do not constitute formal proposals as such. Technical work on the basis of the documents will continue next week.

**Brexit Negotiations**

59. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the request made by the Prime Minister of Finland to the UK to submit its written alternatives on Brexit to the European Commission and Council by 30 September 2019; if the matter was discussed with him beforehand; and his views on same. [38842/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** We note the call, on 18 September, by the Finnish Prime Minister Antti Rinne to Prime Minister Johnson to produce his proposals in writing to facilitate discussions, by the end of September.

It remains the EU’s position that the best way to ensure an orderly Brexit remains through the Withdrawal Agreement and that the backstop is the only viable solution on the table that avoids any physical infrastructure and related checks and controls, fully protects the Good Friday Agreement and North-South cooperation, and preserves the all-island economy, as well the integrity of the EU Single Market and Ireland’s place in it.

The EU is however, willing and open to examine any such proposals that meet all the objectives of the backstop. This point was reiterated by Michel Barnier on 20 September following his meeting with UK Brexit Secretary Steve Barclay.

As I have stated on a number of occasions, the onus is on the UK to bring forward workable and legally operational solutions as soon as possible, if a deal is to be reached.
60. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of workers employed by his Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of his Department who earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38240/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The remuneration of directly employed staff in my Department is sanctioned by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in line with Government policy. Our assessment is that there are currently 322 officers within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade who earn less than the living wage. This excludes temporary seasonal staff. There are no State Agencies under the aegis of my Department.

**Human Rights**

61. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the input and involvement of Ireland in the draft international treaty on business and human rights to be discussed at the fifth session of the open-ended intergovernmental working group in Geneva in October 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38282/19]

62. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 147 of 26 March 2019, if Ireland will be represented at the fifth intergovernmental conference of the open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights which takes place in October 2019 in Geneva; his views on a treaty regarding human rights and transnational corporations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38293/19]

67. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the international treaty on business and human rights; if a representative will attend the fifth session of negotiations in Geneva in October 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38298/19]

72. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to engage with the fifth session of the open-ended intergovernmental working group in Geneva in respect of its discussions on a proposed international treaty on business and human rights; the stance Ireland plans to take if attending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38886/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 61, 62, 67 and 72 together.

The question of a legally binding treaty to regulate the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises has been under consideration by the Inter-Governmental Working Group on Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises. The Group was established on foot of a Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council in 2014, led by a number of developing countries, including Ecuador and South Africa. Four sessions of the Group have taken place to date.

Notwithstanding our serious concerns about the way in which its work has been conducted, Ireland is among those countries which favours participation in the annual sessions of the Inter-Governmental Working Group. We also believe that all stakeholders, including civil society, trade unions and business, should be enabled to participate and are concerned by reports that they may be excluded from the next session which will take place in October in Geneva. Ecuador has circulated a revised draft treaty in advance of this meeting which contains some posi-
tive developments compared to an earlier version presented in 2018. At this stage it is foreseen that the EU will attend the forthcoming session and, while welcoming the improvements in the draft, will signal that it is not in a position to enter into detailed negotiations pending completion of a comprehensive analysis. It is likely however that the EU will avail of the opportunity to pose a number of questions on issues of concern.

Ireland is open to looking at options for progress on a legally binding treaty. With regard to its scope, we believe that all economic operators, whether transnational or purely domestic, should be treated in a non-discriminatory manner. We would also wish to see essential human rights principles reflected in any possible instrument, which should reaffirm the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights and stress the primary responsibility of States under existing human rights obligations to protect against human rights violations.

Ultimately, if it is to achieve its objectives, any legally binding instrument should enjoy broad support among UN Member States to ensure its effectiveness as well as international coherence in the framework of business and human rights. On this point, I would note that of the 22 countries which to date have adopted National Plans on Business and Human Rights, 16, including Ireland, are EU Member States. We would like to see any new initiative build on, rather than duplicate, existing measures such as the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy. Above all we believe that it should be rooted in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. In this regard, we are of the view that the UN Working Party on Business and Human Rights and the annual UN Forum on Business and Human Rights provide appropriate fora for consideration of any new initiatives.

**Foreign Conflicts**

63. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent decision by India to revoke the autonomy of Kashmir; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38294/19]

64. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on reports that all communication including Internet and mobile phones have been cut off in Kashmir; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38295/19]

65. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps that have been taken at EU and international level to ensure that the fundamental human rights of Kashmiri people are being upheld; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38296/19]

66. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the response of the EU to recent developments in Kashmir; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38297/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 63 to 66, inclusive, together.

I am aware of the ongoing situation in Kashmir and my Department is monitoring developments closely. I hope that the situation will be resolved peacefully, and support the EU’s position, which is in favour of direct dialogue between India and Pakistan.

Ireland also supports UN Secretary-General Guterres’ call for restraint from all parties, and continues to work within the EU and the UN to address concerns of human rights violations in
Kashmir. The EU’s recent statement at the UN Human Rights Council, which Ireland supports, encouraged the Indian Government to continue to lift remaining restrictions and to maintain the constitutional rights and freedoms of the affected population.

Officials in my Department, including in our Embassies in India and Ankara (which is accredited to Pakistan), will continue to monitor the situation.

Question No. 67 answered with Question No. 61.

Human Rights

68. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position of the Rohingya; the efforts being made at EU level to safeguard same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38299/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Since military operations in Rakhine State escalated in August 2017, an estimated 720,000, predominantly Rohingya, refugees have fled to Bangladesh. A significant number of Rohingya civilians were also internally displaced within Rakhine and 128,000 people remain in IDP camps having fled previous bouts of violence. Recent months have again seen an escalation of violence in Rakhine State and neighbouring Chin State due to ongoing conflict between the Myanmar Security Forces and ethnic armed groups. The situation remains unstable with increasing violence generating further displacement of civilians.

Ireland, together with our EU and UN partners, has consistently called for the accountability of those who are responsible for such crimes and we continue to advocate for, and support, actions at international level to address this crisis.

The EU has been at the forefront of the international response to the Rohingya crisis. Targeted restrictive measures have been put in place by the EU against senior military officers of the Myanmar Security Forces responsible for these acts and further measures are being kept under review. The EU Foreign Affairs Council has adopted a series of Council Conclusions addressing gross human rights violations in Myanmar’s Rakhine, Kachin and Shan States. These conclusions press for Myanmar to hold those responsible for these crimes to account and to take meaningful action towards the creation of conditions conducive to a safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of those displaced to their places of origin.

In addition, the European Commission is currently reviewing Myanmar’s trade preferences under the framework of the Everything But Arms (EBA) scheme.

The EU has also worked with our international partners to press for action at UN level including acting as pen-holder on several key initiatives including the establishment of both the UNHRC mandated Independent International Fact-Finding Mission and the recently operational Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar. These are important steps in ensuring accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims.

Furthermore, in January of this year, I attended the EU-ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Brussels, during which the crisis in Rakhine State was raised directly with Myanmar and with our ASEAN counterparts.

Ireland will continue to work with our EU colleagues, and wider partners to respond to the situation and to press for long term solutions to the crisis. Ultimately, the best long-term framework for a sustainable solution that addresses the concerns of the Rohingya, including the key
issue of securing citizenship rights, remains the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.

**Foreign Conflicts**

69. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the situation in Yemen; the response of the EU to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38300/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I continue to be gravely concerned about the ongoing crisis in Yemen. Over four years of conflict have resulted in the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, with the country’s economy decimated and millions on the brink of famine.

The EU has been clear from the beginning that the crisis in Yemen can only be solved by political means. Ireland and the EU fully support the efforts of the UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, to bring about a political resolution, including his efforts to ensure implementation of the 2018 Stockholm Agreement between the Government of Yemen and the Houthi de facto authorities. EU Foreign Ministers discussed the situation in Yemen twice this year, and our support for the UN process has been unequivocal. UNSE Griffiths has thanked the EU for its support in getting the parties to the table and sustaining the political pressure, saying it would not have been possible to reach agreement in Stockholm without the EU.

Despite the positive sign which the Stockholm conference last December represented, recent months have seen continued violence. The opening of a new front in August in the southern port city of Aden is a worrying development in what was already a multifaceted and extremely complex conflict. Coalition airstrikes in Dhamar province on 1 September killed dozens of people, and Ireland fully supports the EU statement in response to that attack. Ireland’s position on attacks against civilians and violations of international humanitarian law has been very clearly conveyed to Saudi Arabia.

The EU is the largest donor to the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM). UNVIM was established in May 2016 to facilitate more efficient verification that imports of commercial goods at Yemen’s ports do not contain arms. Following the Stockholm Agreement, UNVIM has also been assigned the role of supporting the Yemen Red Sea Ports Corporation in the management and inspection of ports. The UNVIM operation is making an important contribution to ensuring the continued flow of commercial goods to Yemen.

This conflict has had devastating humanitarian effects, with almost 80% of the population of Yemen in need of humanitarian assistance. The EU is a very significant donor to Yemen, and has contributed over €700 million in development and humanitarian assistance to the country since the crisis began in 2015, including €440 million in humanitarian aid alone. In addition to contributing our national share to these EU funds, on a bilateral basis Ireland has provided €21.5 million in humanitarian assistance in Yemen since 2012.

Ireland, the UN, the EU and the wider international community will continue to play an important role in attempting to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and facilitate a political solution for the people of Yemen.
70. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to deploy additional staff to the embassy in New Zealand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38390/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** As part of the Global Ireland strategy of investment in the broadening and deepening of the diplomatic and consular network of the state a new Embassy was opened in Wellington, New Zealand, in November last year.

The allocation of resources throughout the international mission network supports the effective and cost-efficient delivery of the goals of my Department. These include the provision of consular services to citizens, the advancement of Ireland’s economic and business interests, the promotion of our values and cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

The staffing complement in missions abroad, including in Wellington, are aligned closely with business goals and subject to regular review.

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**Public Services Card**

71. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason for ending the requirement for a public services card for applications to the Passport Office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38805/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Since March 29 2016, the Passport Service has required all first time passport applicants, aged 18 and above, who are resident in Ireland to submit a copy of their Public Services Card (PSC) with their passport application. This requirement also applies to adult applicants whose most recent passport has expired more than five years previously and to adult applicants whose passport was issued before 1 January 2006 and has been reported as lost, stolen or damaged.

Upholding the integrity of the Irish Passport is a key commitment of the Passport Service and the Passport Service believes that the presentation of the PSC is an important means of identity verification for applicants, particularly adult applicants making first time applications.

The PSC is the most efficient way for an applicant to verify their identify and ensure that their application can be processed quickly. The Passport Service will continue to accept a copy of an applicant’s PSC as valid identification for first time adult applications and other applicable categories of application.

In circumstances where the applicant does not present their PSC, an application can proceed if an applicant either presents original Government-issued photographic identification, such as a driver’s licence or a passport from another country, or attends for interview in person at the Passport Offices in Cork or Dublin.

*Question No. 72 answered with Question No. 61.*

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**VAT Rate Application**

73. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to a guidance issued by the Revenue Commissioners in May 2007 that advised that food supplements were allowed to be supplied at a zero VAT rate as they were defined under the Value-Added Tax Act 1972. [38222/19]
Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can confirm that my attention has been drawn to the document referred to by the Deputy as set out in my replies to previous PQs on the matter (35731/19 and 36296/19).

I am advised by Revenue that the document was an internal document prepared in 2007 and that it was never published on the Revenue website. The document has no legal value or authority over VAT legislation in place on 1 January 1991 or subsequently and has no legal effect. It does not mean that food supplement products were legally zero rated on 1 January 1991 or subsequently.

Irish VAT law does not provide a zero rate for food supplement products and under EU VAT law Ireland is precluded from introducing such a provision. A zero VAT rate for food and drink is provided for under a derogation from EU VAT law which allows Member States to retain certain zero rates for goods and services which were expressly covered in their national VAT legislation on 1 January 1991. The legislative provision for food and drink was in place on 1 January 1991; however, there was no legislative provision for food supplement products and therefore they cannot be legally zero rated.

Shortly after the introduction of VAT, Revenue allowed the zero rate to be applied to certain food supplement products (vitamins, minerals and fish oils). This concessionary approach expanded as the market developed over the years and resulted in the zero rating by Revenue of further similar products, including products other than vitamins, minerals and fish oils and references included on the VAT rates database and other information on the Revenue website simply reflected this practice. The evolution of the scope of the concessionary treatment of certain types of food supplement products was well understood by the industry and by agents representing clients in the food supplements sector and has never been disputed by Revenue.

Revenue has acknowledged that the scope of its zero rating concession had broadened progressively over time to the point that it had become increasingly difficult to maintain an effective distinction between food supplement products that could benefit from the zero rate and those that were standard rated. Revenue acknowledges that this concessionary approach was unsatisfactory and led to diverging and inconsistent practices. There were continuous efforts by elements in the industry to expand the zero rate to products that should be standard rated, including products claiming to enhance male fertility, promote hair growth, boost tanning, avoid a hangover and reduce stress.

Following complaints from the Irish Health Trade Association (IHTA), Revenue conducted a comprehensive review of the VAT treatment of food supplement products, including getting an expert report on the definition of food for the purposes of the VAT Consolidation Act. The expert prepared a detailed, scientific report that concluded that food supplement products are not conventional food. Based on the expert report and its own legal analysis, Revenue concluded that the status quo was no longer sustainable.

Following this review, Revenue engaged with my Department concerning policy options that might be considered in the context of Finance Bill 2018. The relevant legislation was not changed in Finance Act 2018 and therefore Revenue issued new guidance in December 2018 which removed the concessionary zero rating of various food supplement products with effect from 1 March 2019. Following representation from Deputies and from the industry, I wrote to Revenue outlining my plans to examine the policy and legislative options for the taxation of food supplement products in the context of Finance Bill 2019. Revenue responded by delaying the withdrawal of its concessionary zero rating of the food supplement products concerned until 1 November 2019. This will allow time for the consideration of any legislative changes in the context of Budget 2020.
Over the last few months, my Department carried out a public consultation on the taxation of food supplement products. The consultation sought input from a wide range of interested parties, including from health and nutrition experts and the Minister for Health. The results of the consultation were included in the recently published 2019 VAT Tax Strategy Group (TSG) paper as part of the Budget 2020 process, available here: https://assets.gov.ie/19123/083625ae43d948e88917c749a2ff6b57.pdf

The options outlined in the TSG paper will be considered in the normal way as part of the budgetary process.

Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General

74. Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Finance the yearly wage cost of a whole-time accountant at the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. [38691/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The majority of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General’s staff are either qualified accountants or are training to become qualified accountants (the exception being seven administration / corporate services staff members).

The Trainee Auditor pay-scale ranges from €33,630 to €52,519

All other employees’ salaries and wages are in line with the general civil service pay-scales as follows:

- The Auditor pay-scale is equivalent to Higher Executive Officer
- The Senior Auditor pay-scale is equivalent to Assistant Principal
- The Deputy Director pay-scale is equivalent to Principal Officer
- The Director of Audit is equivalent to Assistant Secretary

Living Wage

75. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Finance the number of workers employed by his Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of his Department who earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38241/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that 25 workers in the Department of Finance earn less than €12.30 per hour.

Of the 17 bodies under the aegis of my Department, I am informed that 8 currently have no staff earning less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour. These are the Credit Review Office, the Credit Union Advisory Committee, the Credit Union Restructuring Board, the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman, the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, the Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal, and the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council.

The number earning less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour in each of the remaining 9 Bodies under the aegis of my Department can be found in the table below.
### Eurozone Issues

76. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the suggestions by his EU colleagues to revamp the eurozone fiscal rules; if the matter is being considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38292/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The European Fiscal Board (EFB) recently published its assessment of the EU’s fiscal rules. This report will feed into the European Commission’s review of the Six- and Two-pack which is due to be published by the end of the year. The EFB’s report was also discussed at the recent Ecofin meeting in Helsinki.

The EFB’s report indicates that while compliance with the EU fiscal rules has improved across all Member States, the rules have become increasingly complex and this may have had a negative impact upon ownership. In particular, the current rules’ reliance on unobservable variables such as the output gap, which of course feeds directly through into the structural balance, has impacted upon the reliability and communicability of the framework. My own Department has highlighted this on several occasions.

For this reason, I support efforts to increase the transparency, predictability and simplicity of the fiscal rules. That said, I accept that there are difficult trade-offs involved. This means that finding agreement may be challenging.

My officials and I will continue to actively engage in these discussions.

### Budget Submissions

77. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider the issues raised in a budget 2020 submission (details supplied) taking into account the additional challenges facing the sector due to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38329/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, it is a
longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Insurance Industry

78. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that there is a competitive market for insurance here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26961/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Irish insurance sector is diverse, comprising life, non-life and reinsurance firms operating across a range of product and geographical markets. As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation of the sector. This framework is mainly governed by the EU Solvency II Directive, which provides for three ways in which an insurance undertaking can operate within the Irish market. These are to:

- establish a head office in Ireland (authorised by the Central Bank of Ireland);
- establish a branch in Ireland through Freedom of Establishment (FOE); or
- operate on a Freedom of Services basis (FOS), i.e. conduct business in Ireland from another country.

It should be noted that there are companies operating in each of these channels in the Irish insurance market. The Solvency II framework is designed to allow for a level playing field across the European Union for insurers, not only in terms of access to markets within the EU, but also with regard to the level of supervision and regulation. Therefore it plays an essential role in facilitating competition in the insurance sector across the EU.

However, there are other factors, beyond the legal and regulatory framework which also inform the decision making processes of insurance companies as to whether or not to operate or to continue to operate in any country. For example, the number of claims, the level of awards for personal injuries granted, the legal costs associated with settling/defending claims, and the time taken to settle claims will be important such considerations for insurers. In this regard, there has been some sectors of our economy such as the leisure, adventure and hospitality sectors where, because of these aforementioned factors, insurance cover has either become unavailable or prohibitively expensive. Indeed, I understand that in recent meetings in London between Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Michael D’Arcy TD, and a number of UK insurers/underwriters who have recently left the Irish insurance market, the reasons above were outlined as factors in their decision to leave the Irish market. Therefore for these parts of the Irish market there is undoubtedly an issue around its attractiveness and this consequently has impacted on competitiveness.

Consequently, in order to create a more competitive environment, the Government is focusing on implementing the recommendations of the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG), including those of the second Personal Injuries Commission (PIC) Report. That Report concluded that soft tissue injuries are significantly higher here than in England and Wales (4.4 times) and recommended that action be taken to address this disparity through the establishment of the Judicial Council. The recently enacted Judicial Council Act 2019 provides for the establishment of this Council, which will allow for the recalibration, by the Judiciary, of award levels for personal injuries. It is now a matter for the Judiciary to establish the Judicial Council and the subsequent Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee. While the Government cannot interfere in their deliberations due to the constitutional separation of powers, it is my hope that the Judiciary will recognise the importance of this issue and will prioritise it accordingly by
completing a first set of guidelines, which take account of the PIC’s benchmarking report, as soon as possible. At the same time, the Law Reform Commission (LRC) has begun a detailed analysis of the possibility of developing legislation to delimit or cap the amounts of damages which a court may award in respect of some or all categories of personal injuries, taking account of Constitutional considerations as part of its Fifth Programme of Law Reform.

I believe that the creation and implementation of the Personal Injuries guidelines by the Judiciary will result in the lowering of award levels. As importantly, I believe it should lead to a greater consistency in award levels for injuries of the same type. This therefore should mean that there will be less of an incentive for a person to litigate, as they should not be getting any more from a court award than a PIAB award, which in turn should have a significant impact on legal costs. In summary, I believe that over time the clearest signal that these changes are working is when there is an increase in the number of PIAB cases being accepted by claimants particularly for minor and moderate injuries. In addition, I believe that the cumulative effects of the completion of the CIWG recommendations will include increased stability in the pricing of insurance for consumers and businesses and a more competitive insurance market overall. Furthermore, Government expects that the market will adjust positively to these developments and thus competition and competitiveness throughout the market place should materially improve.

**Mortgage Interest Rates**

79. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that there is a competitive market for mortgages here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26960/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The financial crash and its immediate aftermath had a significant impact on the Irish mortgage market, with a steep increase in mortgage arrears, a sharp slowdown in the rate of new mortgage lending and the withdrawal of some lenders from the Irish market. While there has been a considerable improvement in the overall economy and mortgage market since then, for example overall arrears have fallen and new lending has increased, it is accepted that the financial crash continues to impact on the mortgage market and that problems still remain. Some of the legacy issues which remain are the current higher level of concentration in the Irish mortgage market compared to that which prevailed before the crash and higher capital requirements of banks for mortgages due in significant part to the high levels of losses incurred by banks on mortgages provided in the years leading up to the financial crash.

Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that there have been some improvements and increasing competition in the market for the provision of new mortgage credit. Some non-bank lenders have recently entered the market or expanded their product range to include primary dwelling mortgages. The Deputy will also be aware that over the recent past some of the main mortgage providers have reduced interest rates on different mortgage products or introduced new products, particularly in relation to fixed interest rate products, thus demonstrating that they are competing in the market. Also, enhancements have been made to the Central Bank Consumer Protection Code in order to better facilitate the mortgage switching process between lenders and also to require lenders to provide information to their borrowers on their other mortgage products that could provide savings to their customers.

**Tax Exemptions**
80. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kildare is paying tax on their State pension. [38432/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As previously advised to the Deputy in my reply to Parliamentary Question 27496-19, that where a person is in receipt of both a State pension and a private pension, any income tax that may be due in respect of the State pension is collected by reducing the income tax credits applied to the private pension.

Revenue has advised me that it has re-examined the person’s tax position and calculated that their overall income, including both their Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) pension and their private occupational pension, is below the annual exemption limit of €36,000. Consequently, the person is not liable for Income Tax and the information previously provided to the Deputy was incorrect.

Revenue has confirmed to me that following the re-examination, it applied exemption status to the person’s tax record. This will result in a refund issuing to them by their pension provider in respect of any tax paid in 2019. Revenue has also confirmed that it will issue refunds to the person in the coming days in respect of tax paid by them in 2017 and 2018.

Finally, Revenue has advised me that they have contacted the person directly to explain the revised position and to apologise for the error that occurred during the original review.

**National Economic Dialogue**

81. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on his attendance at the National Economic Dialogue. [29955/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The fifth National Economic Dialogue took place on June 26th and 27th this year. The Dialogue plays an integral part in the preparations for Budget 2020 and provided an opportunity to consider how best to optimise available resources in the interests of all citizens.

The Dialogue provided an opportunity to foster discussion between stakeholders on how to sustain and strengthen the recovery while taking into account the many competing economic and social priorities within the limited available resources.

As with previous years, this year’s Dialogue was attended by representatives from a wide variety of stakeholders, including the community, voluntary and environmental groups, business unions and the academic community. In addition a number of members of the Select Committee on Budgetary Oversight also contributed to the event.

My opening remarks on “Understanding the Context: Economic Perspectives” and my closing remarks at the Dialogue are available at www.budget.gov.ie. The Dialogue included thematic discussions at six breakout sessions, five of which were chaired by a government Minister and one was chaired by an Assistant Secretary General in the absence of the Minister and Secretary General. The Chair’s report including the reports of the six rapporteurs for the breakout sessions are available on the already mentioned website.

I believe the National Economic Dialogue is a very constructive exercise. It provides a valuable opportunity for the Government to engage with a wide range of stakeholders. The Dialogues of previous years have had a material effect on the choices made in the budget. I intend to reflect on this year’s discussion when formulating Budget 2020.
82. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the discussions at the June 2019 ECOFIN meeting on the reformed eurozone budget plan and the possibility of a fiscal stabilisation tool on same as requested by President Macron; the response it received; and the actions being taken in this regard. [27981/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** At a meeting of the Eurogroup in inclusive formation on 13 June, my Euro area colleagues and I agreed on a term sheet that outlines the general principles and features of a budgetary instrument for competitiveness and convergence. Its aim is to support reform and investment projects that strengthen competitiveness and convergence in the euro area. We also agreed that the size of financial envelope for the instrument would not be determined until it is discussed within the context of discussions on the financial envelope of the wider Multiannual Financial Framework.

Following this meeting, the Taoiseach, and Leaders of the other euro area Member States, participated in the Euro Summit on 21 June, as part of the European Council. The Euro Summit assessed the term sheet which had been agreed, and directed Finance Ministers to agree the remaining elements, particularly the financing, as quickly as possible. Finance Ministers have not discussed the possibility of fiscal stabilisation this year. A budgetary instrument for competitiveness and convergence was further discussed at the recent Informal Finance Ministers’ Council meeting in Helsinki. Discussions are ongoing.

**European Council Meetings**

83. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance if there was clarity or a decision taken following the June 2019 ECOFIN meeting regarding the intention of Italy to avoid falling into an EU disciplinary process. [28210/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** At the ECOFIN meeting on 14th June the discussion on the European Commission’s assessment of the compliance of Member States with the Stability Growth Pact (SGP), specifically for Belgium, Cyprus, France and Italy, was deferred to a future meeting.

On 2nd July Italy wrote to the European Commission setting out its updated projections for the public finances in 2019, advising the Commission of the expenditure-control measures being introduced and the commitment for the new Italian 2019 fiscal policy and 2020 Draft Budgetary Plan (DBP) to achieve broad compliance with the SGP.

On 3rd July the European Commission noted that the Italian response was sufficient at this stage to avert the opening of an Excessive Deficit Procedure for Italy in respect of its 2018 outturn.

Further, the European Commission committed to closely monitor the implementation of Italy’s Budget for 2019 and to assess the compliance of its 2020 DBP with the fiscal rules when submitted.

**National Economic Dialogue**

84. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on his address to the National Economic Dialogue conference and the competitiveness of Ireland.
Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The fifth National Economic Dialogue (Dialogue) took place on June 26th and 27th this year.

The dialogue is an important part of the budgetary process and aims to foster discussion on how best to sustain and strengthen the economy while addressing the many competing economic and social priorities within the limited resources available.

My opening remarks on *Understanding the Context: Economic Perspectives* and my closing remarks at the Dialogue are available at www.budget.gov.ie along with the Chair’s report on the discussions.

Overall our economy is in good shape and is expected to grow this year and next. 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 45,000 (+2.0 per cent) in the year to Q2 2019. As a result, there are now 2.3 million people at work in Ireland.

The cornerstone of our recovery, has been the improvement in our competitiveness. Since July 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 eight months of 2019, average annual inflation of just 0.9 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 labour income is a welcome development. However it needs to be monitored closely, as a significant acceleration in wages could 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 conscious of the potential upward pressure this will place on both prices and wages, that could give rise to a loss of competitiveness.

Despite the positive outlook for our economy, the risks over the coming years are numerous and primarily external in nature. The best way we can mitigate against these risks is through prudent budgetary policy, careful management of the public finances and by focusing on competitiveness-oriented policies. Through the National Development Plan in particular, we are investing significantly to address the bottlenecks to growth which emerged during the recovery, such as the need for housing and public infrastructure investment. This should ensure that our economy remains competitive and avoid the build-up of bottlenecks that could limit our growth potential.

National Economic Dialogue

85. Deputy Michael Moynihan asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on his ad-
dress to the National Economic Dialogue conference on 26 June 2019 and the external risks and the possibility of a disorderly Brexit. [27991/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The fifth National Economic Dialogue (Dialogue) took place on June 26th and 27th this year.

The dialogue is an important part of the budgetary process and aims to foster discussion on how best to sustain and strengthen the economy while addressing the many competing economic and social priorities within the limited resources available.

My opening remarks on *Understanding the Context: Economic Perspectives* and my closing remarks at the Dialogue are available at www.budget.gov.ie along with the Chair’s report on the discussions.

The *Stability Programme Update 2019*, published by my Department in April, sets out the principal economic risks facing the Irish economy, along with an assessment of their relative likelihood and economic impact. The *Economic and Fiscal Outlook*, due to be published with the Budget 2020 documentation, will update this assessment. At present the balance of risk is firmly tilted to the downside, both in the short-term and over the medium-term.

The Irish economy is in an unusual position, facing possible domestic overheating and capacity constraints on the one hand, and a slowdown in key export markets on the other. In addition to this, the nature and timing of the UK’s exit from the EU is causing uncertainty in terms of the EU, including Ireland’s, future trading relationship.

The Government’s consistent message has been that a no deal Brexit will have profound implications for Ireland on all levels. These include macroeconomic, trade and sectoral challenges, both immediately and in the longer term.

In March 2019, the Department of Finance and the ESRI published a comprehensive assessment of the potential impact of Brexit. This report shows that compared to a no Brexit baseline, the level of GDP in Ireland would be around 2.6 per cent lower in a ‘deal’ scenario, and 5.0 per cent in a disorderly ‘no deal’ scenario, ten years after Brexit compared to a no Brexit baseline.

The most recent Contingency Action Plan, published in July, set out in detail the Government’s analysis of the risks and impacts of a no deal outcome across 26 key areas. A no deal outcome will never be the EU choice but it remains a significant threat. Preparedness and contingency planning must continue at EU and Member State level.

Given the lack of clarity regarding the timing and format that the UK’s exit will take, I recently announced that Budget 2020 will be framed on the assumption of a ‘no deal’ Brexit. Three main factors influenced the Government’s approach:

Assuming a no-deal Brexit ensures the Government has the necessary resources at its disposal to meet the impact of this exceptional challenge, while preserving the longer-term sustainability of the public finances.

In a ‘no deal’ scenario, the Government will make the resources available to support those in need, and to introduce timely, targeted and temporary supports to the sectors of the economy most exposed to the impact of a no-deal Brexit.

Other than ‘Brexit’, the main short-term risks relate to a deteriorating international environment and an escalation of trade protectionism.

Over the medium-term, the principal risks relate to potential overheating as the economy
approaches full-employment, and changes in other jurisdictions that affect the competitiveness of Ireland’s corporate tax regime.

The economy is in a good position to meet these challenges. Economic growth, which resumed early this decade, has been consistently among the highest in the EU for a number of years, notwithstanding reservations about the headline data. The recovery is perhaps most clearly evident in the labour market. The unemployment rate has fallen to 5.2 per cent from the peak of 16 per cent in 2012.

The headline budget deficit was eliminated last year for the first time in a decade. The Government has been taking steps to build up the resilience of the economy so that we have the capacity to deal with adverse economic shocks. This includes building up our fiscal buffers by balancing our books, reducing our debt burden and establishing the Rainy Day Fund.

Our companies are being supported to prepare for Brexit, to diversify their markets and supply chains, to develop new skills and to explore new opportunities.

The Government will continue to work to strengthen the resilience of the economy, to maximise opportunities and to prepare our economy for the challenges ahead, including through the Ireland Connected Trade and Investment Strategy, the 10-year National Development Plan and Future Jobs Ireland 2019.

**Financial Services Regulation**

86. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated saving to be made from moving the entire cost of regulating the financial industry, with the exception of the credit union industry, from the State to the financial industry. [38493/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Section 32D of the Central Bank Act provides that, with the approval of the Minister for Finance, the Central Bank Commission may make regulations requiring regulated firms to pay a levy in respect of the cost of regulation.

The Central Bank is moving on a trajectory that will see all regulated financial firms, with the exception of Credit Unions, paying 100% of the cost of regulation by 2024. The paper outlining this approach “Funding the cost of regulation” is available at the following link. In order to achieve the move to full industry funding, I recently approved the Central Bank to increase the proportion of financial regulation costs to be recovered from firms on a phased basis to 100% by 2024.

In relation to the credit union sector, I approved an exception which will see the cost of the levy to that sector being increased on a phased basis to 50% to be reached by 2021, at which time a review of the impact on the sector and a public consultation regarding increasing the levy beyond 50% will take place. 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.

There is no estimate at present for the cost of regulation of the financial industry by the Central Bank for 2019, however, the 2018 cost was €213 million. Based on existing funding from industry for 2018, moving to 100% funding for that year, by reducing the subvention, would have meant estimated savings of €68 million for 2018. In 2018, Credit Unions paid €1.6 million towards the cost of their regulation under the Industry Funding Levy. Therefore, Credit Unions currently contribute approximately 8% to the cost of their regulation.

Full details of the Funding of Financial Regulation activities is available in the Central
87. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Finance if the anomaly will be rectified by which the Companies Registration Office is asking community-based organisations such as community employment schemes and community halls to specify a beneficial owner in cases in which no such owner exists in view of the fact that they are community and social enterprise companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38518/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Statutory Instrument 110 of 2019, the European Union (Anti-Money Laundering: Beneficial Ownership of Corporate Entities) Regulations 2019, was signed into law on 22 March 2019. These Regulations transpose Article 30 of the Fifth Anti-Money Laundering Directive and maintain the obligation, first established in 2016, for corporate entities to obtain and hold information on their beneficial ownership – that is, the people who ultimately own or control the company.

The Regulations also provide for the establishment of a central register of beneficial ownership information. This central register is operated under the aegis of the Companies Registration Office and began accepting filings on 29 July 2019.

The purpose of the Regulations is to prevent the use of corporate entities as vehicles for money laundering or terrorist financing and to provide competent authorities with access to information on the true ownership and control of corporate entities. Therefore, the obligation to file information with the central register applies to all companies formed under the Companies Act and societies registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts, with the exception of companies listed on regulated markets that are subject to disclosure requirements consistent with European Union law or subject to equivalent international standards which ensure adequate transparency of ownership information. The Regulations apply to community and social enterprises if they are created under the above Acts. In cases where no beneficial owner can be identified, companies are permitted to register the senior managing officials of the company instead. The scope of the Regulations is necessary in order to meet the State’s obligations on foot of the Directive.

While the relevant legislation was signed by myself as Minister for Finance, the register is maintained by a “Registrar of Beneficial Ownership of Companies and Industrial and Provident Societies”, as provided for under Regulation 18 of SI 110/2019, who has been appointed by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

88. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the amount forgone due to historic losses being used as tax deductions and exemptions for banks and insurance companies. [38523/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Corporation Tax Loss Relief is provided for by Section 396 of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997. It allows for losses incurred
in the course of business to be accounted for when calculating a business’ tax liabilities. Loss relief is a long standing feature of the Irish Corporate Tax system and is a standard feature of Corporation Tax systems in all OECD countries. Loss relief is not specific to any one business sector. It recognises the fact that a business cycle runs over several years and that it would be unbalanced to tax profits earned in one year and not allow relief for losses incurred in another. I am informed by Revenue that a research paper on Corporation Tax, including the most recent information in respect of losses forward, is published on its website at: https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/research/ct-analysis-2019.pdf. As shown in Figure 5 of the publication, the amount of losses forward used for all companies in the financial and insurance sector is €3.2 billion for 2017 with an estimated tax cost of €400 million. The Deputy may also be aware that in 2018 my officials produced a report for the Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach on the potential consequences of changes to the corporation tax loss relief, including in particular relief for losses carried forward for banks. This report, which contains further information on the rationale for loss relief and the technical considerations relevant to the operation of the relief, is published on my Department’s website.

Fuel Traders Licences

89. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners will grant permission to a business (details supplied) to sell diesel while awaiting approval of the fire officer. [38554/19]

116. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioner will grant permission for the sale of diesel at a location (details supplied) while awaiting approval of the fire officer. [38719/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 and 116 together.

A licence to sell diesel and marked gas oil can be granted in the absence of a ‘Dangerous Substance Licence’ being issued by the Local Authority. However, the licence can only issue where the conditions set down in Section 101 of Finance Act 1999 (as amended) are fully met. This includes a restriction on storing or selling petrol and can also include other specified conditions that Revenue may require.

Revenue wrote to the applicants on 1 March 2019 and again on 30 May 2019 setting out the information required before a licence to sell diesel and marked gas oil can be granted. To date the required level of information has not been provided by the applicants.

Revenue has assured me that the license application will be processed as soon as the required information is provided.

Property Tax Data

90. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance the amount and value of property tax collected in each local authority in each of the years 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [38597/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the amount of Local Property Tax (LPT) collected, broken down by Local Authority area since its introduction in 2013, for the years 2013 to 2018, is available on the Revenue website at link:

**Tax Data**

91. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised by an increase of the VRT surcharge on imported diesel cars new and second-hand from 1% to 5%, 10%, 15%, 20%, 40% and 50%. [38693/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the estimated additional revenue that could be raised in a full year from the proposed increases are shown in the following table. These estimates are based on the trends in diesel cars in 2019 and do not take into account any subsequent change in behaviour due to the increased duty on diesel cars. However, given the large increases proposed it is highly unlikely that the estimated revenue would be fully achieved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Rate</th>
<th>5%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>15%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
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<td>583</td>
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<td>1,504</td>
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**Tax Data**

92. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised by an increase of the fuel excise rate on diesel by €0.01, €0.02, €0.03, €0.04 and €0.05. [38694/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the estimated revenue in a full year from the proposed increases are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>€</th>
<th>0.01</th>
<th>0.02</th>
<th>0.03</th>
<th>0.04</th>
<th>0.05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>€m</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tax Data**

93. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised by the scrapping of the diesel rebate scheme. [38695/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The cost of the diesel rebate scheme in any given year is variable, depending on the volumes of claims and the quarterly rebate rates used. Therefore it is not possible to give an estimate of the additional revenue that would accrue were the diesel rebate scheme to be scrapped.

The highest annual cost of the scheme was €21m while the lowest annual costs of the scheme was zero.

**Tax Data**

94. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised
by a reduction in maximum payable under the diesel rebate rate to €0.03 per litre when the price, including VAT, is €1.54 per litre or more. [38696/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The savings generated would be entirely dependent on the volumes of claims and the quarterly rebate rates used, which is dependent on the retail price of diesel. All of these variables will likely fluctuate from quarter to quarter and from year to year.

Tax Data

95. Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised by an increase in the electricity tax for business use to the rates per megawatt hour (details supplied). [38697/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the estimated yield in a full year from the proposed increases are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New rate</th>
<th>€1</th>
<th>€2</th>
<th>€3</th>
<th>€4</th>
<th>€5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>€m</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>21.0</td>
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</table>

Tax Data

96. Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised by an energy surcharge on data centres at the rates per megawatt hour (details supplied). [38698/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that Revenue does not have data available to cost this proposal.

Tax Data

97. Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through the requirement of private and hired pleasure craft operating here to use auto-diesel from 1 January 2020. [38699/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since 1 November 2008, diesel used for private pleasure navigation is subject to Mineral Oil Tax (MOT) at the rate that applies to auto diesel, rather than the reduced rate that applies to Marked Gas Oil (MGO). No additional tax liability will arise for owners of private pleasure craft by a legislative amendment to prohibit the use of Marked Gas Oil in private pleasure navigation. It is not known if any additional revenue will be raised by a legislative amendment to prohibit the use of Marked Gas Oil in private pleasure navigation.

Tax Data

98. Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through a company car vehicle BIK rate of 66% of the original market value of the car for vehicle emission categories A to C with business mileage of between zero and 32,000 km. [38700/19]
99. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through a company car vehicle BIK rate of 68% of the original market value of the car for vehicle emission categories A to C with business mileage of between 32,001 and 48,000 kilometres. [38701/19]

100. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through a company car vehicle BIK rate of 70% of the original market value of the car for vehicle emission categories A to C with business mileage of 48,001 km and over. [38702/19]

101. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through a company car vehicle BIK rate of 75% of the original market value of the car for vehicle emission categories D and E with business mileage of between zero and 32,000 km. [38703/19]

102. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through a company car vehicle BIK rate of 78% of the original market value of the car for vehicle emission categories D and E with business mileage of between 32,001 km and 48,000 km. [38704/19]

103. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through a company car vehicle BIK rate of 80% of the original market value of the car for vehicle emission categories D and E with business mileage of between 48,001 km and over. [38705/19]

104. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through a company car vehicle BIK rate of 80% of the original market value of the car for vehicle emission categories F and G with business mileage of between zero and 32,000 km. [38706/19]

105. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through a company car vehicle BIK rate of 82% of the original market value of the car for vehicle emission categories F and G with business mileage of between 32,001 and 48,000 km. [38707/19]

106. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through a company car vehicle BIK rate of 85% of the original market value of the car for vehicle emission categories F and G with business mileage of between 48,001 km and over. [38708/19]

107. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through a company van vehicle BIK rate of 10%, 15%, 20%, 25%, 50%, 66%, 75% and 80% of the original market value of the van. [38709/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 to 107, inclusive, together.

I am advised by Revenue that tax remitted in respect of benefits-in-kind is not separately itemised by benefit type on employer returns. Instead, the total aggregated benefit-in-kind figure is declared to Revenue. Therefore, tax returns do not provide the data necessary to compile the costings sought by the Deputy.

**Tax Incentives**
108. Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full year cost of the domestic retrofit tax incentive. [38710/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There is currently no domestic retrofit tax incentive. As part of the annual Taxation Strategy Group (TSG) process undertaken by officials from my Department earlier this year, a proposal for an income tax incentive measure to encourage domestic retrofits was examined and published within the Climate Action and Tax paper. This examination was prompted by the publication of the All of Government Climate Action Plan in June 2019, where it was noted that the built environment accounted for 12.7% of Ireland’s Greenhouse Gases in 2017.

The paper sought to identify the potential cost of a domestic retrofit tax incentive and to explore the factors that might need to be taken into account in the event that such an incentive was to be considered. The design model used for this purpose was the Home Renovation Incentive (HRI) which expired on 31 December 2018 in accordance with its sunset clause.

Briefly, it was suggested in the TSG paper that the proposed incentive might operate as follows:

- The measure would be targeted at domestic properties with a BER rating of B3 or less;
- Participants in the scheme would be able to claim an income tax credit for expenditure on certain qualifying works;
- The credit would amount to a specified percentage (13.5%) of the total qualifying expenditure (excluding VAT) on the qualifying works, and would be claimed over a 2 year period subsequent to the year in which the works were paid for;
- These works would have to be carried out on a qualifying property by a qualifying contractor.

Qualifying works would include wall insulation, attic insulation, floor insulation, window/door upgrades, ventilation systems; renewable energy (heat pumps, solar panels), etc.

It was assumed that if an individual receives a grant for qualifying work, then the total ‘qualifying expenditure’ under the incentive would be reduced by an amount equal to the grant amount.

Among other things, the paper also examined the potential cost of meeting the target set out in the All of Government Climate Action Plan of completing 50,000 building retrofits per annum to achieve a B2 BER up to the year 2030. Using certain assumptions, it was estimated that the annual tax cost could be of the order of €40 million per annum.

The paper was published on my Department’s website and is available at the following link: https://assets.gov.ie/19116/c447474fea5e42080a6384b7a84fbed.pdf.

Tax Yield

109. Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through the application of the mineral oil tax to aviation fuel. [38711/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The tax exemption for jet fuel used for air navigation for international and intra-Community transport purposes is mandatory. There-
fore, save for the implementation of any bilateral arrangements provided under the Directive, any proposal to tax such fuel use would be in breach of Directive 2003/96/EC on the taxation of energy products and electricity.

The relief for heavy oil used for commercial air navigation is operated by way of remission and Revenue does not collate data on the overall tax forgone. With regard to light oil used in air aviation, for which there is no mandatory exemption, in 2018 repayments of Mineral Oil Taxation in respect of the partial relief for light oil used for commercial aviation totalled €1.07m.

Tax Yield

110. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised from an air travel tax of €3 per passenger on all aircraft capable of carrying eight or more passengers and to airports in which the number of passenger departures in the previous year was more than 100,000. [38712/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that Revenue has no data available to cost this specific proposal.

Tax Yield

111. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through a runway movement surcharge of €100, €500 and €1,000 on all non-commercial flights in which the aircraft is over one metric tonne and less than 20 seats. [38713/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that Revenue has no data available to cost this specific proposal.

Tax Yield

112. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through a frequent flyer levy of €5 per flight in which frequent flyer is defined as more than six, eight, ten, 12, 14, 16, 18 and 20 flights a year. [38714/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that Revenue has no data available to cost this specific proposal.

Tax Yield

113. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through a yearly levy on all private aircraft registered with the Irish Aviation Authority at percentages of the original market value (details supplied). [38715/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that Revenue has no data available to cost this specific proposal.

Tax Yield
114. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue raised through a yearly levy on all private helicopters at percentages of the original market value (details supplied). [38716/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that Revenue has no data available to cost this specific proposal.

### Tax Yield

115. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full-year saving from the scrapping of the tax exemption on profits or gains arising from the occupation of woodlands here managed on a commercial basis and with a view to the realisation of profits. [38717/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Section 232 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for an exemption from Income Tax (but not USC or PRSI) and Corporation Tax on the profits or gains arising from the occupation of woodland in the State, which is managed on a commercial basis and with a view to the realisation of profits.

I am advised by Revenue that the available data regarding the cost and uptake for this exemption is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Exchequer Cost €m</th>
<th>No of claimants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>9,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>8,858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>9,077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>8,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>7,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>6,679</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Revenue further advise me that it is not possible to estimate the potential additional tax yield that would arise if the exemption were no longer available, as it is not possible to predict the behavioural changes by taxpayers that might occur following abolition of the exemption.

*Question No. 116 answered with Question No. 89.*

### Interest Rates

117. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the equivalent interest rates in banks in which he is a majority shareholder; the reason they differ; the figures a mortgage holder would pay over 20 years on a €100,000 and a €200,000 loan, respectively (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38765/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, as Minister for Finance I have no role in setting the interest rates on lending products offered by the banks in which the State has a shareholding. The day to day operations of the banks are the sole responsibility of the boards and management teams and each bank must be run on an indepen-
dent and commercial basis. The banks’ independence is protected by Relationship Frameworks which are legally binding documents that cannot be changed unilaterally. These frameworks, which are publicly available, were insisted upon by the European Commission to protect competition in the Irish market.

In regards to your question about repayments, both AIB and PTSB have a wide range of mortgage products with differing rates. The Deputy can find the full breakdown of the various products and their applicable interest rates on the websites for the banks in question (https://aib.ie/our-products/mortgages/mortgage-interest-rates and https://www.permanenttsb.ie/mortgages/mortgage-interest-rates/).

You refer to both the ECB’s interest rate for deposits and its marginal interest rate in the context of where mortgage rates are in Ireland. First of all I think it is important to note that neither AIB nor PTSB fund their mortgage books via the ECB. However it is true that Irish mortgage rates are higher than the European average. Indeed the reasons for this were explored in a report published by my department in March (Risk Weighted Assets in Ireland: The Link to Mortgage Interest Rates).

This report shows that a large part of the difference between Irish mortgage rates and European mortgage rates is linked to how capital rules are applied. The very significant loss history from the last crisis mean that Irish banks now have to hold far more capital on mortgage loans than their European peers. This and other contributing factors are discussed in the report. The report is available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ff6c0a-risk-weighted-assets-in-ireland-the-link-to-mortgage-interest-rates/

Insurance Costs

118. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance the actions he is taking to address issues raised in a study conducted by an organisation (details supplied), which found that a significant number of community and voluntary bodies are at risk of closure due to increasing insurance costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38781/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am aware of the study referred to by the Deputy which was carried out between mid-June and the start of September 2019. It focused on employer and public liability insurance and was responded to by 770 Public Participation Networks members (which equates to just over 5% of total PPN membership). The survey indicated that 83% of respondents have seen their insurance increase over the last 3 years, 45% indicated that they may have to reduce events or services, and more worryingly, 47% indicated that they may have to close within the next year due to rising insurance costs.

This study confirms much of what we already know about there being a significant problem in relation to the cost and availability of public and employer liability cover. Unfortunately, as the Deputy is aware 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 either consumers or businesses. A further constraint is the fact that for constitutional reasons, I cannot direct the courts as to the award levels that should be applied. In summary, therefore there is unfortunately no quick fix solution to this matter.
Notwithstanding the above, I wish to reemphasise however that this issue remains a priority for the Government. The Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG), which was established in July 2016, and which produced two reports, is continuing to work to implement the recommendations of the *Cost of Motor Insurance Report* and the *Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance Report*. Its most recent Progress Update, the Ninth, was published in July 2019 and shows that the vast majority of recommendations and actions due by Q2 2019 have been completed. To that end, the key achievements to date from the two reports, including the following:

- The establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission and the publication of its two reports, which included a benchmarking of award levels between Ireland and other jurisdictions for the first time. This showed that award levels for soft tissue injuries in Ireland were 4.4 times higher than in England and Wales;

- The enactment of the *Judicial Council Act 2019* in July, which provides for the establishment of a Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee. It is now matter for the Judiciary to put in place the Judicial Council and to operationalise the Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee, which will introduce new guidelines to replace the Book of Quantum. While the Government cannot interfere in their deliberations, I would hope that the Judiciary will recognise the importance of this issue and prioritise it accordingly;

- The Law Reform Commission (LRC) has undertaken a detailed analysis of the possibility of developing constitutionally sound legislation to delimit or cap the amounts of damages which a court may award in respect of some or all categories of personal injuries, as part of its Fifth Programme of Law Reform;

- The establishment of the National Claims Information Database in the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI) to increase transparency around the future cost of private motor insurance. The CBI is due to make its first report by the end of 2019, and will also make recommendations regarding potentially expanding its scope to include employer and public liability insurance;

- Reforms to the Personal Injuries Assessment Board through the *Personal Injuries Assessment Board (Amendment) Act 2019* to strengthen the powers of PIAB around compliance with its procedures;

- Amendments to Sections 8 and 14 of the *Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004* to align the timeframes by which claims should be notified to businesses and organisations with GDPR time limits on the keeping of CCTV footage to make it easier for businesses, community groups and insurers to challenge cases where fraud or exaggeration is suspected, and;

- Various reforms of how fraud is reported to and dealt with by An Garda Síochána, including increased co-ordination with the insurance industry, a divisional focus on insurance fraud 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 August 2019 show that the price of motor insurance is now 24% lower than the July 2016 peak). However, I recognise there is still much work to be done in the public/employer liability insurance areas. In this regard, a big issue which the Government is trying to address is the level of awards as well as the inconsistent application of such awards. This problem is a significant part of the reason a number of UK insurers have left the Irish market, a point, which was confirmed to the Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Michael D’Arcy TD when he met a number of such companies in London recently.
Consequently, I believe that the single most essential challenge which must be overcome if there is to be a sustainable reduction in insurance costs particularly for small businesses and community groups is to bring the levels of personal injury damages awarded in this country more in line with those awarded in other jurisdictions, and the establishment of the Judicial Council in the near future is very important in this regard.

What will also be key is that insurers pass on the benefits of any reduction in award levels to policyholders. In this regard, Minister of State D’Arcy has been engaging with them in order to seek a commitment that they will reduce premiums and, even more importantly, widen their risk appetite to reflect savings made, in particular if there is a recalibration of award levels downwards. I am also encouraged by the comments made by a number of insurers at the Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and Taoiseach Oireachtas Committee in July about the passing on of savings arising from a recalibration of award levels downwards.

In conclusion, I am believe that the cumulative effects of the completion of the recommendations of the CIWG, including a reduction in award levels, will lead to reductions in pricing in particular for small businesses and community groups and also to a more competitive and stable insurance market.

**Ministerial Meetings**

119. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on his meeting with the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer; the issues that were discussed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38836/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I have met with my colleague the UK Chancellor Sajid Javid, on three occasions since he took office. On 6 August in London, on 13 September in Helsinki at the informal ECOFIN meeting, and most recently I hosted him in Farmleigh House for a bilateral meeting on 19 September.

My meetings with Chancellor Javid have provided an opportunity to engage constructively on the strong relationship between our countries, the importance of trade between the two economies, and on the many areas of common interest shared by Ireland and the UK.

Whilst of course Article 50 negotiations are a matter for the EU Commission, through the Article 50 taskforce, led by M. Barnier, this meeting was also an occasion to exchange perspectives on Brexit and provided a useful opportunity to better understand the UK Government perspective in the negotiations and to outline the Irish Government position.

In our discussion, the Chancellor set out the current position of the UK Government and I in turn outlined the Irish Government and EU 27’s well-stated position that, while we are open to considering detailed, credible and legally-operable UK proposals, unless and until it is shown that any alternative arrangements can achieve the same aims as the backstop, the EU position remains that the Withdrawal agreement, including the backstop is the only way forward. I welcomed the intensification of discussions between the European Commission and the UK. I also outlined the importance of protecting the integrity of the Single Market and Ireland’s place in it.

**Duty Free Sales**

120. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he has discussed the introduction of duty free in the event of a hard Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The UK Chancellor announced, on the 10th September, that the UK Government intends to reintroduce duty-free shopping for passengers travelling to EU countries, if the UK leaves the EU without a deal on 31 October next.

If the UK leaves without a deal, the UK will assume the status of a ‘third country’ in terms of their trading relationship with the European Union. Earlier this year, the Oireachtas passed extensive legislation covering contingency arrangements in relation to the exit of the UK from the EU under these circumstances. The Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Bill 2019 was published on 22 February. It completed all Oireachtas stages on 13 March and was signed into law by the President on 17 March 2019.

The legislation introduced a specific measure relating to Duty Free sales between Ireland and the UK in the event of the UK leaving the EU without a deal. The provision, contained in the Act, was designed as a contingency measure as it was anticipated that a solution to such matters would form part of a future relationship agreement between the EU and UK.

In the Act, I made provision to impose restrictions on duty-free sales in Ireland to UK bound travellers, which I planned to implement if the UK introduced similar restrictions in respect of Ireland bound travellers in the UK. As the UK has now decided, in the event of a no deal Brexit, to apply an unrestricted duty-free scheme, in line with this reciprocal policy Ireland will not now commence the relevant legislative measure. Therefore, European Union Duty Free rules, in relation to passenger travel between the EU and third countries, would apply from 31 October.

This policy is in compliance with EU law and Ireland’s international obligations.

Budget Timetable

121. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Finance the options open to considering European semester requirements and other conventions of a second budget once the outcome of Brexit negotiations is known. [38868/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Regulation (EU) 473/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council (part of the so-called ‘two-pack’) introduces a common budgetary timeline for euro area Member States. Specifically, Draft Budgetary Plans for the forthcoming year must be submitted to the European Commission and to the Eurogroup by 15th October each year.

I will present Budget 2020 to Dáil Éireann on the 8th of October and I intend to submit Ireland’s 2020 Draft Budgetary Plan to the European Commission by the 15th October. As agreed by Government, this Budget will be based on the assumption - purely for budgetary purposes - of a disorderly exit of the UK from the European Union.

I have outlined on several occasions that, irrespective of the actual Brexit outcome, there will be no additional Budget for next year. This position has not changed.

Living Wage

122. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of workers employed by his Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of his Department who earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if he will
make a statement on the matter. [38242/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the National Minimum Wage is a statutory entitlement and has a legislative basis. The Low Pay Commission annually assesses the appropriate level of the National Minimum Wage. The current national minimum hourly rate of pay, since 1 January 2019, is €9.80 per hour, as set out in the National Minimum Wage Order 2018. The Living Wage, to which this Question refers, has no legislative basis and is therefore not a statutory entitlement.

My Department employs 57 members of staff earning less than €12.30 per hour, 29 of which are employed at the Office of Government Procurement. The remaining includes 6 apprentices taking part in an ICT Associate Professional Apprentice Programme.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the bodies under the aegis of my Department is set out in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bodies under the Aegis</th>
<th>Number of Staff earning less than €12.30 per hour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Office of Public Works</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the Ombudsman</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Appointments Service</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Lab</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Shared Services Office</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the National Lottery Regulator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public Sector Pensions

123. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; the status of full restoration in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38416/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I would advise the Deputy that while pensions for An Garda Síochána (the employer in this case) are a matter for the Minister for Justice and Equality, as the matter raised relates to pension policy for the public service generally, I will address the questions raised.

Firstly, I should clarify that retirement lump sum payments under public service pension schemes were not directly reduced by the Financial Emergency Measure in the Public Interest (FEMPI) legislation. The FEMPI legislation implemented measures that directly reduced the pay of serving staff and introduced a Public Service Pension Reduction for pensions in payment, subject to certain rates, thresholds and exemptions. As both the annual pensions and lump sum payments of members of pre-existing public service pension schemes (i.e. excluding the Single Public Service Pension Scheme) are directly linked to salary at retirement, the reductions to the pay of public servants would have had a knock on impact on the lump sum payment they received at retirement.

However, because of what is known as the first ‘grace period’, those who retired between 1 January 2010 and 29 February 2012 did not have the first FEMPI pay reduction (imposed 1 January 2010) reflected in the salary rate used to calculate their annual pension or their lump sum. A second round of FEMPI reductions was imposed in 2013 (imposed on 1 July on public servants with an annual remuneration above €65,000). The second ‘grace period’ meant that those who retired from that point onwards (assuming their pay was affected by those reductions
while still serving) did not have those reductions reflected in the salary rate used to calculate their annual pension or lump sum.

Rather than enter into the details of the individual case, which, as I say, is a matter for the Minister for Justice and Equality, I would note that where retirement occurred after 1 March 2012, the retirement lump sum would be calculated by reference to the salary rates in payment on 1 January 2010 (i.e. following the first FEMPI pay reduction). If the salary was subject to the second FEMPI reduction on 1 July 2013, the operation of the second grace period would mean that the lump sum would still have been calculated by reference to the 1 January 2010 rate.

In accordance with normal public service pension arrangements, retirement lump sums are calculated on the rates of salary that a public servant is in receipt of at time of retirement (with the exception of the ‘grace period’ protection I have described above). I have no proposals to make any change in this regard.

Secondly, in relation to pension increases, the current policy applying to pensions paid under pre-existing pension schemes was agreed by the Government as part of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 (PSSA). This policy is essentially a time-limited (expires end-2020) resumption of the non-statutory pension increase arrangements, sometimes known as pay parity, which formerly prevailed, but which lapsed in 2010. Under that policy, pay increases applied to serving staff over the course of the PSSA are passed on to those annual pensions where the salary on which the annual pension is based, in any case, does not exceed the salary of a serving staff member with the same grade and scale point, after the pay increase has been applied. If it qualifies, the annual pension is eligible for an increase to the extent that this will ensure alignment with the pay of serving staff.

Guidance on operation of the pension increase policy is set out in my Department’s Circular 02/2018, while further instructions have recently been issued in Circular 19/2019.

Finally, if the pension in question remains subject to the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR), the individual will qualify for a further lessening of its impact, or, indeed, its total removal in 2019 or 2020. The Deputy should also note that, no later than 31 December 2020, I will make an order which will specify a date for the full removal of PSPR from the residual group of PSPR-affected pensions.

Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General

124. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of requests his Department received from the Office of Comptroller and Auditor General seeking approval for the recruitment of extra staff since 1 January 2018; the number of requests that are approved or refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38571/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Revised Estimates Volume 2019 provided €14,638,000 (Gross) for the operation of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. This allocation was provided following consideration of a business case received from the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

This allocation represented an increase of some €661,000 (5%) on the gross amount of €13,977,000 for the operation of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General for 2018.

The year on year increase was driven, in part, by the Office’s need to increase their staff complement to further increase capacity in their examination and reporting programme.
Furthermore, and in line with the estimates process, I wish to inform the Deputy that a budgetary submission has been received by my Department from the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General regarding Budget 2020. This submission is currently under consideration by officials within my Department and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General will be informed of their budgetary allocation for 2020 as a matter of course.

Freedom of Information Fees

125. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated full-year cost of abolishing all fees under the Freedom of Information Act 2014. [38673/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** It should be noted from the outset that in practice fees for making FOI requests were largely abolished under the Freedom of Information Act 2014. In general, no fee whatsoever is charged for applications under the 2014 Act by an individual for their personal information. This applies at all stages the FOI process, including with respect to a review by the Information Commissioner. Based on 2018 figures, this category amounts to almost 60% of all requests.

With respect to non-personal requests, application fees at the initial stage of the process were abolished under the 2014 Act. Fees of €30 and €50 respectively apply to internal reviews and reviews by the Information Commissioner, although these can be reduced to €10 and €15 respectively, or waived, where a requester holds a medical card. Based on 2018 figures, over 97% of non-personal requests were satisfactorily handled without the need for review, and as such no application fee was charged.

Available statistics do not dis-aggregate internal reviews of requests for personal information, to which no fee applies, and internal reviews of non-personal requests, nor are instances highlighted where reduced fees or a fee waiver applied, therefore it is not possible to state a precise sum recouped in application fees. Given that, in 2018, 40% of requests were for non-personal information, 1,082 internal reviews overall were carried out by public bodies, and the Commissioner carried out 328 reviews to which an application fee potentially applied, the total figure for all application fees paid in that year may be estimated at well below €40,000.

The legislation also provides for search and retrieval fees to be charged where a non-personal FOI request requires a minimum of five hours of work merely locating and gathering records. Therefore, a fee of this nature is only charged where a non-personal request is relatively large, and does not take account of the totality of the work involved in responding, but only the search and retrieval portion. The fee payable by a requester is capped at a maximum of €500, even where the cost of the work involved may exceed this, and may in appropriate cases be waived entirely on public interest grounds. Moreover, it should be noted that under the 2014 Act officials are obliged to assist requesters where appropriate in making a more focused request so as to meet their objectives by the most efficient possible means, and that there is nothing to prevent requesters making follow-up requests for additional information. No figures are available at present to confirm the exact proportion of non-personal requests that attracted a fee, or the total sum recouped by way of search and retrieval charges.

The final costing of a proposal to remove the remaining FOI fee provisions must also take account of the potential knock-on costs to the exchequer arising out of likely demands on the resources of both public bodies and the Information Commissioner through increased usage of their respective review functions, as well as, in the case of search and retrieval fees, the likely requirement to process a larger amount of more resource-intensive requests. An analysis of this
nature has not been carried out to date, and as such no estimate can be provided in this regard.

As matters stand, administering the Freedom of Information system in the context of ever-increasing demand presents a significant administrative and resourcing challenge to public bodies. Since 2013, the last full year of operation for the previous legislation, the number of FOI requests received by public bodies has almost doubled to a total of 36,896 requests in 2018. The abolition of fees in most cases has been a significant contributory factor to this increase. In order to support this system, in 2019 the Office of the Information Commissioner was allocated a dedicated program budget of €3,292,000 out of the total allocation of €11,718,000 to the Ombudsman group, within which it shares certain support resources.

Estimating the true cost of the Freedom of Information system within public bodies has historically proven difficult, as doing so has been taken as necessitating an additional administrative burden on already hard-pressed decision makers to accurately record and collate the time spent on each request at various levels of seniority, as well as other associated costs. In this regard, the Central Policy Unit for Freedom of Information at my Department has recently initiated a project aiming at measuring the cost to the exchequer of administering FOI in a robust and user friendly manner. The methodology remains under development, however it is intended that a figure for the true cost of FOI should be available by mid-2020. Assuming that the number of requests continues on previous trends, it may be anticipated even at this juncture that the total cost will run well into eight figures.

**Public Sector Pay**

126. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the yearly wage cost of a whole-time corporate compliance manager. [38674/19]

127. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the yearly wage cost of a whole-time legal adviser. [38675/19]

128. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the yearly wage cost of a whole-time principal solicitor. [38676/19]

129. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the yearly wage cost of a whole-time enforcement portfolio manager. [38677/19]

130. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the yearly wage cost of a whole-time enforcement lawyer. [38679/19]

131. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the yearly wage cost of a whole-time principal officer. [38680/19]

132. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the yearly wage cost of a whole-time professional accountant grade 1. [38681/19]

133. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the yearly wage cost of a whole-time State solicitor. [38682/19]

136. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the yearly wage cost of a whole-time executive officer. [38685/19]

137. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the yearly wage cost of a whole-time clerical officer. [38686/19]
Questions - Written Answers

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 to 133, inclusive, 136 and 137 together.

The main civil service pay scales are published in circulars which are a matter of public record and available at https://www.gov.ie/en/circulars/. Rates from these scales have also been included in the list below for convenience.

Annual Wage Whole time as of 1st September 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Minimum Scale point PPC€</th>
<th>Max Scale Point / Long Service Increment as appropriate€</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Compliance Manager</td>
<td>80,670</td>
<td>99,164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Advisor – Assistant Secretary</td>
<td>139,628</td>
<td>159,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Advisor – Principal Officer</td>
<td>87,325</td>
<td>107,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Solicitor</td>
<td>87,325</td>
<td>107,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforcement Portfolio Manager</td>
<td>87,325</td>
<td>107,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforcement Lawyer</td>
<td>87,325</td>
<td>107,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Officer</td>
<td>87,325</td>
<td>107,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional accountant grade 1</td>
<td>71,155</td>
<td>88,158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Solicitor</td>
<td>32,716</td>
<td>83,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Officer</td>
<td>30,127</td>
<td>50,834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Officer</td>
<td>23,984</td>
<td>39,796</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public Sector Pay

134. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the yearly wage cost of a whole-time assistant principal officer. [38683/19]

135. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the yearly wage cost of a whole-time higher executive officer. [38684/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that officials from my Department have met with representatives of Wicklow County Council to discuss the future of Rockbrae House and surrounding lands and are currently waiting for an updated position from the Council with regard to any potential proposals they have for the property. Until these considerations are advanced I am unable to provide a position on the future of Rockbrae House at this juncture.

I recognise the outstanding contribution veterans have made to the State and in that regard my Department is committed to supporting IUNVA in recognition of their valued service.

*Questions Nos. 136 and 137 answered with Question No. 126.*

Garda Remuneration
138. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the yearly wage cost of a whole-time Garda Síochána detective inspector. [38687/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** This question would be a matter for the Minister of Justice and Equality as Garda Síochána staff are employed by his Department.

### Oireachtas Members’ Remuneration

139. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated savings by capping Deputies’ salaries at €75,000. [38722/19]

140. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated savings by capping Senators’ salaries at €60,000. [38723/19]

141. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated savings by reducing the allowances of Ministers and the Taoiseach by 50%. [38724/19]

142. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated savings by withdrawing Oireachtas officeholders’ allowances. [38725/19]

143. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated savings by reducing the party leader allowance by 10%. [38726/19]

144. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated savings by withdrawing committee chairperson’s allowances. [38727/19]

145. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated savings by withdrawing the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission allowances. [38728/19]

146. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated savings by withdrawing the super junior Minister allowances. [38729/19]

147. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated savings by withdrawing the mobile phone allowances of Deputies and Senators. [38730/19]

148. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated savings by reducing the salary of the Taoiseach and Ministers by 50%, excluding the Deputy portion. [38731/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 139 to 148, inclusive, together.

The information requested by the Deputy is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated annual savings to be made by:</th>
<th>€</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capping TDs’ salaries at €75,000</td>
<td>3,423,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capping Senators’ salaries at €60,000</td>
<td>507,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing the allowances (i.e. salaries excluding TD element) of Ministers and An Taoiseach by 50%</td>
<td>623,226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Questions - Written Answers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated annual savings to be made by:</th>
<th>€</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawing Oireachtas officeholders’ allowances (i.e. salaries excluding TD element)</td>
<td>2,197,991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing the party leader allowance by 10%</td>
<td>860,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawing committee chairperson’s allowances</td>
<td>231,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawing the Oireachtas Commission allowances</td>
<td>76,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawing the ‘super junior Minister’ allowances</td>
<td>34,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawing the mobile phone allowances of TDs and Senators</td>
<td>21,536</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Shared Services

149. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to recent issues with the operation of the Payroll Shared Service Centre website Core portal; the nature of the issue; the reason it occurred; the steps being taken to address the issue and ensure it does not recur; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38790/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I have been informed by the National Shared Services Office (NSSO), who are responsible for the Payroll Shared Services Centre, of recent issues with the payroll system and the Core online portal.

The NSSO have advised that there was a major power incident on Wednesday 28th August 2019 affecting the relevant Government data centre which hosts the Civil Service, and some Public Service, payroll databases. A number of items of key computing hardware were damaged beyond repair in the incident. As a result, the System Recovery plan was immediately activated and all databases were switched over to the System Recovery site in a different Government data centre.

These mitigating actions ensured that all payments have been processed on time since the incident occurred.

The root cause of the incident has been investigated and mitigating measures have been put in place to prevent a recurrence. Damaged hardware has been replaced and prepared for the return of payrolls back to normal.

The NSSO has also advised that they continue to regularly update staff, managers and other stakeholders via direct email. The payroll contact centre continues to be available to take any questions from customers, and updates are posted on the website daily since this incident occurred.

### Flood Relief Schemes Status

150. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of the proposed flood relief works at Kanturk, County Cork; if funding has been ap-
proved by the OPW for the works; the timeframe for the commencement and completion of the works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38883/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): A proposed flood relief scheme at Kanturk has been identified by the CFRAM programme to be progressed, with a preliminary cost estimate of approximately €8.2 million. This proposed scheme comprises the provision of a storage area on the Dalua River upstream of the town, along with Fluvial Flood Defences on the Dalua and Allow rivers, comprising of walls and embankments. This measure also includes the provision of pump stations for managing surface water run-off during a flood event.

The flood relief scheme will be funded from within the allocated €1 billion for flood risk management over the period 2018-2027. While the proposed scheme is not in the first tranche of projects to be progressed, my Office and the Cork County Council will work closely to ensure that it will be commenced as soon as possible within the 10-year timeframe for the programme of investment.

Once consultants are appointed to progress the scheme, consultation with statutory and non-statutory bodies as well as the general public takes place at the appropriate stages to ensure that all parties have the opportunity to input into the development of the scheme.

School Transport Fees

151. Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated full-year cost of universal free travel on the school transport scheme operated by Bus Éireann. [38671/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills. In the 2018/19 school year there were over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

The purpose of the School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school. Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who hold valid Medical Cards (GMS Scheme) are exempt from paying the annual charge.

In 2018, receipts from school transport charges amounted to some €15.9m or about 8% of the total cost of the scheme provided by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department. If universal free travel was to be provided this would be the additional cost on the scheme.

School Accommodation Provision

152. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of capital projects planned to provide extra places in schools for pupils with special needs; if the waiting times for such projects are double the waiting time for building mainstream schools;
Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department’s school building programme to be delivered as part of the National Development Plan is focused on providing the additional school places needed to ensure that every child, including children with a special educational need have a school place. This includes establishing new schools and extending existing schools in areas where more school places are needed to meet the demand in these areas.

The delivery of special needs places in schools is being prioritised under my Department’s Capital Programme and Additional Accommodation Schemes. The current status of projects being delivered under these schemes may be viewed on my Department’s website www.education.ie and this is updated regularly. It is now Department policy to provide classes for pupils with special educational needs in all new schools being established or where a major extension is being provided.

The timing of the delivery of building projects generally may vary and depends on a number of factors including the availability of sites and securing the statutory consents including planning permission, fire and disability access certifications.

School Patronage

153. Deputy Ruth Coppinger asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the boundaries for the determination of patronage for the new second level school in Blanchardstown, Dublin 15 will be extended to include Waterville (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38236/19]

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

The school planning areas are used in the demographic exercise as a basis for the assessment of areas of growth and to inform recommendations on the establishment of any new schools required in that school planning area. There are no current plans to revise school planning areas.

As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2018, the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022), including a new post-primary school to be established in 2020 to serve the Blanchardstown_West_Dublin15 and BlanchardstownVge_Dublin15 school planning areas as a regional solution.

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. The application process for patrons to run this school has been completed.

Parental preferences for each patron, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

New schools established since 2011 to meet demographic demand are required, in the first instance, to prioritise pupil applications from within the designated school planning area(s)
which the school was established to serve. This does not preclude schools from enrolling pupils from outside of the designated school planning area where they have sufficient places.

For school planning purposes, Waterville is located in the adjacent Mulhuddart_Tyrrelstown_D15 school planning area. As the Deputy may be aware, a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school was established in 2014 to serve the Mulhuddart_Tyrrelstown_D15 school planning area and had just over 600 pupils enrolled in the 2018/19 school year.

While the recent announcement did not include a new post-primary school for the Mulhuddart_Tyrrelstown_D15 school planning area, the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular will have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040. My Department will also continue to monitor areas where the accommodation of existing schools may need to be expanded in order to meet the needs of the local population.

School Accommodation Provision

154. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for ASD accommodation; and if these works will be sanctioned. [38260/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy may be aware, my Department gave grant approval for the construction of a two-classroom SEN Base, at the school to which he refers, under the Additional Accommodation Scheme 2019.

My Department has been actively engaging with the school to resolve issues with the submitted design and proposals put forward in that respect. In the meantime, the school applied for and obtained planning permission for unapproved works. My Department has now written to the school seeking clarification and further information in respect of this development. Once this information is received, my Department will review the project and contact the school directly.

Third Level Staff Remuneration

155. Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the application of a circular; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38265/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Circular 0048/2016 refers to Direct entry (recruitment) grades in the Education Sector (Post 1 January 2011 Entrants) Recognition of Previous Public Service in another EU Member State.

This is a matter for the employer.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

156. Deputy Sean Fleming asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) will be approved for the summer works scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38273/19]
Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm to the Deputy that, the school referred to, has submitted an application for the Summer Works Scheme (SWS) 2020 onwards for car parking facilities (Category 10). Commensurate with the level of funding available for SWS 2020 onwards, applications will be assessed on a top down basis in accordance with the prioritisation criteria outlined in the governing Circular Letter for the Scheme. This Circular Letter (0027/2019) is available on my Department’s website www.education.ie.

It is my intention to publish a list of successful applicants in Q4, 2019 for works to be carried out in summer 2020.

School Staff Appeals Mechanism

157. Deputy Mattie McGrath asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is an appeal process for SNAs who cannot get on a panel; if not, the reason therefor; the reason the supplementary manager of the panels cannot hear appeals from SNAs working within or outside of the system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38319/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The supplementary assignment arrangements for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) were established on foot of proposals brought forward by the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) when the Haddington Road Agreement was being agreed. These supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs continue to operate under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 - 2020, and both unions representing SNAs, namely SIPTU and FÓRSA, have signed up to that agreement.

As set out in the LRC proposals, the supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs only apply to current SNAs who are notified that they are to be made redundant. Accordingly, the purpose of these arrangements is to facilitate eligible SNAs who are being made redundant by one employer in filling SNA vacancies that may become available in another school / ETB.

Once an SNA with a minimum of one year’s service (service in a substitute capacity i.e. covering for maternity leave, sick leave, career breaks, job-sharing etc. does not count) is notified by his/her employer that s/he is to be made redundant then s/he shall be deemed to be a member of a supplementary assignment panel for SNAs. The detailed supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs for the 2019/2020 school year are set out in Departmental Circular 0030/2019 which issued on 22 May 2019 and which is available on the Department’s website at the following address: http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0030_2019.pdf

The operation of this panel is described and outlined in Circular 0030/2019 and it is designed to be as flexible as possible. It enables all eligible SNAs, who have the requisite Panel Form 1 completed by their former employer, to apply for any SNA position that is advertised by a school or an ETB with no sectoral, diocesan or geographical limitations imposed. Every eligible SNA will remain on the panel for two years with a view to getting further employment. If they are not successful over that period of time in obtaining a further SNA position then they will be eligible for a redundancy payment.

Furthermore, an SNA may opt out of this supplementary assignment panel at any point in time triggering the processing of his/her redundancy payment in line with the terms set out in the SNA redundancy scheme (DES Circular 58/06) or any revision of same that is applicable at that time.

It should be noted that this does not prevent any person, including newly qualified SNAs, from applying for SNA vacancies but employers are obliged to give precedence to applicants.
who are members of the SNA Supplementary Assignment Panel.

The Supplementary Assignment Panel arrangements are reviewed by my Department on an annual basis in conjunction with an independent Supplementary Assignment Manager, the school management bodies and the two unions representing SNA staff (FÓRSA and SIPTU).

My Department has set up a dedicated e-mail address to deal with all queries in relation to the SNA Supplementary Assignment Panel and any queries in respect of the operation of the Panel can be directed to this dedicated e-mail address:

snasupplementpanel@education.gov.ie.

Schools Building Projects Status

158. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a new school building for a Gaelscoil (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38357/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Deputy may be aware that this project is being devolved for delivery to Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB). To enable this, my Department has recently issued a Service Level Agreement (SLA) to the ETB for its signature.

The execution of this SLA will allow CMETB to procure a design team to take the project through the various stages of architectural planning and onwards through statutory planning requirements and construction.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

159. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the allocation of home tuition hours for children with autism and special educational needs for the 2019-20 academic year will be expedited; the reason for the lengthy delays in the allocation of home tuition hours that is perceived as detrimental for children with special needs and causing undue stress and hardship on home tutors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38385/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Special Education Home Tuition Grant scheme provides funding towards a compensatory educational service for children with special educational needs seeking an educational placement for whom such a placement is not available. The scheme also provides for early intervention for children with Autism.

The application forms and related Circular for this year’s scheme were published on the 8th August 2019. Last year, the forms and circular were published on the 26th July 2018.

Applications forms must be signed by the NCSE local SENO to confirm that no school placement is currently available for a child. SENOs are processing home tuition applications as a matter of urgency.

The Home Tuition Application form outlines that it may take the Department up to 15 working days to process home tuition applications. The vast majority of applications made during the summer have been processed. The Department is prioritising the processing of a small number Home Tuition applications with a view to processing completed applications within a shorter timeframe.
By its nature, the grant is intended to be a short term intervention until the a school placement is available. Home Tutors are engaged by the parents/guardian of the child who is to receive tuition. Home tutors do not have a contractual relationship with the Department.

School Textbooks

160. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 196 of 3 October 2017, his policy in terms of the use of workbooks at post-primary school level; and the progress made with an association (details supplied) in order to ensure workbooks can be reused. [38497/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** It is a matter for the Board of Management of each individual school to decide on its own policy in relation to the use of textbooks and workbooks in the school. Individual schools should adopt a cost-conscious approach to the selection of books in their classes.

In relation to textbook costs an agreement was reached with the Irish Educational Publisher’s Association which resulted in the agreement of a Code of Practice. The Code commits the publishers to limit the publication of new editions and to maintaining editions of books in print unchanged for at least six years. The publishers have also given assurances that they will sell textbooks to schools at discounts so that schools can purchase textbooks in bulk to stock book rental schemes.

School book rental schemes have an important role to play in reducing the cost of school books for parents. Approximately 95% of primary schools and 65% of post-primary schools operate a book rental scheme.

My Department supports the operation of book rental schemes through the funding provided under its school books grant scheme. Under this scheme, my Department provides funding of €16 million annually to all recognised primary and post-primary schools in the free education scheme. In addition €15.7 million seed capital was provided over three years to support the establishment of book rental schemes in primary schools.

My Department published a circular to school authorities and ETBs regarding measures to be adopted by schools to reduce the costs which include the provision of a book rental scheme. The circular can be accessed on my Department’s website at [https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/c10032_2017.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/c10032_2017.pdf).

One of the measures in the circular, under the “Principles of cost-effective practice”, which are to be adopted is that school authorities, ‘phase out the use of workbooks which cannot be reused’. My officials have engaged with the Irish Education Publishers’ Association (IEPA) to consider how best to ensure the provisions of the circular can best be implemented. It is acknowledged that the use of workbooks can be beneficial in supporting the development of rudimentary skills, such as, fine motor skills, pre-writing and letter formation skills and phonological awareness skills.

In relation to revised editions of textbooks, members of the Irish Educational Publishers’ Association subscribe to a Code of Practice which includes an agreement that publishers will not revise any texts within at least four years - unless there is a change in the curriculum, the state examination or methods of assessment, or if there is a recognised teacher-led demand to do so.

My Department continues to consider how best to implement the terms of the circular in
relation to the use of workbooks.

School Equipment

161. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his policy regarding the use of information technology tablets; and if schools have been issued departmental guidelines or circulars in terms of keeping down the associated costs for parents and guardians. [38498/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Decisions regarding the use and deployment of digital technology in schools is a matter for the Board of Management of each school. Where the introduction of digital devices is planned, consultation with members of the school community including parents is advised. Consultation between parents, students and schools is now underpinned through the recently published Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill 2019. The cost and other implications must be fully considered by the Boards of Managements before a decision is made. It is important for schools, in conjunction with parents, to retain local autonomy for decisions on the use of digital technology, including tablet devices, laptops, and learning platforms, and how best to manage their integration into classroom practice reflective of their own context and requirements. In making this decision each school should refer to and reflect on the available information.

The Professional Development Service for Teachers Technology in Education (PDST-TIE) offers advice to schools and have developed an advice sheets on digital technology in education, including on the adoption of Laptops and tablets in schools. The information on their website outlines what these devices can offer schools to support teaching, learning and assessment, and facilitate students’ active learning and collaboration. Specific items for consideration including software and hardware requirements, purchasing regulations, are addressed in the support information.

I am keenly aware of the challenges faced by educators and parents, in relation to costs of digital technology, including tablets, and my Department continues to work to help support schools and families meet these costs. In 2017 a circular letter issued to schools with measures to be adopted to reduce the cost of school uniforms and other costs. This circular also instructed schools to consult with parents and their school community on the issue of ensuring costs are reasonable for parents, and how to avoid costs acting as a barrier. This circular specified that wherever possible, generic rather than branded items should be specified (e.g. uniform, clothing, IT tablets, sports equipment etc.).

The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, sets out a plan to embed the use of digital technology in teaching, learning and assessment, and affirms that the use of digital technology can enhance the teaching and learning experience. The Strategy recognises that schools require investment in their ICT infrastructure. Funding of €210m has been committed to support the implementation of this strategy with €60m issued to schools over the 2016/17 and 2017/18 school years and a further €50m recently issued to schools in respect of the 2018/19 school year.

Schools Building Projects Status

162. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school (details supplied); if progress has been made in securing a greenfield or brownfield site for a permanent building; the timeframe envisaged for the delivery of a new school for pupils who are currently educated in prefabs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38522/19]
Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question submitted an application for major capital funding to my Department to construct a new school building on a green field site.

Given the need to meet demographic growth, the delivery of new schools, together with extension projects identified by my Department’s school building programme to be delivered as part of the National Development Plan, will remain the focus of my Department’s budget for the coming years. My Department is not in a position, at this point, to indicate when a permanent building will be provided for the school referred to by the Deputy.

Home Tuition Scheme Administration

163. Deputy Jan O’Sullivan asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the applications for home tuition for the current academic year have now been processed; if not, when it is expected that they will be completed; if he will ensure that application forms are available earlier in 2020 and into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38525/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The purpose of the Home Tuition Grant Scheme is to provide a compensatory educational service for

- (a) Early educational intervention for children with autism who meet the schemes eligibility criteria
- (b) Students with special educational needs seeking an educational placement in a recognised school
- (c) Students, enrolled in schools, with significant medical conditions which has caused, and is likely to continue to cause, major disruption to their attendance at school

The application forms and related Circular for this year’s scheme were published on the 8th August 2019. Last year, the forms and circular were published on the 26th July 2018.

The Home Tuition Application form outlines that it may take the Department up to 15 working days to process home tuition applications.

The vast majority of applications made during the summer have been processed. The Department is prioritising the processing of Home Tuition applications with a view to processing completed applications within a shorter timeframe.

The operation of the Home Tuition Grant Scheme is reviewed annually. Officials in my Department will review the operation of the 2019/20 Home Tuition Grant Scheme which will take into consideration any issues arising during the school year.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

164. Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice asked the Minister for Education and Skills when home tuition hours will be sanctioned for children with autism spectrum disorders in primary schools in view of the fact that schools are in the third week of the school year and children are losing out on valuable tuition hours and teachers are losing out on work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38555/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Special Education Home
Tuition Grant scheme provides funding towards a compensatory educational service for children with special educational needs seeking an educational placement for whom such a placement is not available. The scheme also provides for early intervention for children with Autism.

The application forms and related Circular for this year’s scheme were published on the 8th August 2019. Last year, the forms and circular were published on the 26th July 2018.

Applications forms must be signed by the NCSE local SENO to confirm that no school placement is currently available for a child. SENOs are processing home tuition applications as a matter of urgency.

The Home Tuition Application form outlines that it may take the Department up to 15 working days to process home tuition applications. The vast majority of applications made during the summer have been processed. The Department is prioritising the processing of a small number Home Tuition applications with a view to processing completed applications within a shorter timeframe.

By its nature, the grant is intended to be a short term intervention until the a school placement is available. Home Tutors are engaged by the parents/guardian of the child who is to receive tuition. Home tutors do not have a contractual relationship with the Department.

**Third Level Funding**

165. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated full-year cost of increasing funding to third level institutions by 1%. [38561/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The 2019 Allocation of recurrent exchequer funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) designated institutions and the directly funded higher education institutions is in the order of €1 billion. To increase this allocation by 1% would incur a full-year cost in the order of €10 million.

**Student Grant Scheme Expenditure**

166. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated full-year cost of restoring the non-adjacent SUSI grant level from 24 km to 30 km, 35 km and 40 km, in tabular form. [38562/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** SUSI does not collate data in the format request by the Deputy. Therefore, it is not possible to cost the increase in the non-adjacent distance criterion from 24 km to 30 km, 35 km and 40 km.

However, the cost of reversing the change to the distance criteria from 24 km to 45 km for the student grant is estimated to be in the region of €26m.

The above costing assumes that a change to the distance criterion would result in a similar percentage of students qualifying for the higher non-adjacent grant support, as existed pre Budget 2011.

**Student Grant Scheme Expenditure**

167. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the
estimated full-year cost of restoring the SUSI grant scheme to pre-2011 levels. [38563/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): It is not possible to definitively estimate the full year cost of restoring the SUSI grant scheme to pre-2011 levels.

To put it in context, in 2010/11 there were 71,532 students who benefitted from grant support at a cost of €355m, whereas in 2018/19 there were 74,557 students in receipt of grant support at a cost of €363m.

In the intervening years we have centralised the student grant scheme (replacing four separate schemes and sixty six awarding authorities with one scheme administered by a centralised awarding authority), had a complete turnover of students, income levels have changed and numerous changes have been made to the annual schemes which affect eligibility criteria.

However, it is estimated that it would cost in the region of €100m to reverse all of the adjustments that have been made to the student grant scheme since 2011.

School Catchment Areas

168. Deputy Jack Chambers asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will include an area (details supplied) in the catchment area for the new secondary school for west Blanchardstown, Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38564/19]

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

The school planning areas are used in the demographic exercise as a basis for the assessment of areas of growth and to inform recommendations on the establishment of any new schools required in that school planning area. There are no current plans to revise school planning areas.

As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2018, the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022), including a new post-primary school to be established in 2020 to serve the Blanchardstown_West_Dublin15 and BlanchardstownVge_Dublin15 school planning areas as a regional solution.

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. The application process for patrons to run this school has been completed.

Parental preferences for each patron, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

New schools established since 2011 to meet demographic demand are required, in the first instance, to prioritise pupil applications from within the designated school planning area(s) which the school was established to serve. This does not preclude schools from enrolling pupils from outside of the designated school planning area where they have sufficient places.

For school planning purposes, Waterville is located in the adjacent Mulhuddart_Tyrrelstown_D15 school planning area. As the Deputy may be aware, a new 1,000 pupil post-primary
school was established in 2014 to serve the Mulhuddart_Tyrrelstown_D15 school planning area and had just over 600 pupils enrolled in the 2018/19 school year.

While the recent announcement did not include a new post-primary school for the Mulhuddart_Tyrrelstown_D15 school planning area, the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular will have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040. My Department will also continue to monitor areas where the accommodation of existing schools may need to be expanded in order to meet the needs of the local population.

Teaching Council of Ireland

169. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason it takes a minimum of 12 weeks and in some cases even longer for a teacher to register with the Teaching Council in view of the fact its counterpart in Scotland only takes ten days; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38585/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Under the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015 the Teaching Council is the body with statutory authority and responsibility for the regulation of the teaching profession in Ireland including the registration of teachers in the State.

It is a function of the Council under the Teaching Council Acts (s7(2)) to act as the competent authority for the recognition of qualifications obtained by a person who has applied under this Act for registration as a teacher.

Teachers whose applications meet all the necessary requirements are registered under Section 31 of the Teaching Council Act and the Teaching Council (Registration) Regulations 2016.

For teachers who qualified within Ireland, the registration process may take up to 6-8 weeks from receipt of complete application and depending on the time of year (taking into account peak summer processing periods). If all requirements are met, including garda vetting, and fit and proper person requirements, the registration process may be completed in less than the 6-8 week timeframe outlined.

The Teaching Council contacts students in the final year of programmes of initial teacher education in higher education institutions to offer them a fast track registration process upon receipt of their final results.

Where a person has obtained their teaching qualifications in another Member State of the EU, Directive 2005/36/EC, as amended, applies. This Directive governs the recognition of professional qualifications across Member States. Where a person has obtained their teaching qualifications and is eligible to practice the profession in another Member State, they may apply to the Teaching Council to seek recognition of their qualifications in accordance with the provisions of the Directive. Assessment of qualifications to determine that they are comparable to accredited qualifications in Ireland may take approximately twelve weeks from the date of receipt of all requested documentation, in accordance with the EU Directive timelines. Applicants must also meet standard registration requirements in relation to character reference, garda vetting and overseas police clearances.

The Teaching Council has advised me that where a complete application is submitted and fit and proper person requirements including garda vetting/police clearance are met registration is often completed faster than the standard registration timelines set out above.
Questions - Written Answers

Pyrite Issues

170. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the situation at a school (details supplied) affected by pyrite; if his attention has been drawn to the many issues this is causing pupils and staff at the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38605/19]

   **Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Department is fully aware of the pyrite issue in this school and the health and safety issues to which it gives rise. These issues are being dealt with under my Department’s Emergency Works Scheme. In that context, approval was given recently for works to take place under that scheme.

   At the same time, the school is progressing with its application for works under the Additional Accommodation Scheme. Officials in my Department have been in contact with it recently in that respect.

   The Department will continue to assist the school under both schemes with a view to alleviating the concerns raised by the Deputy.

Social Insurance Payments

171. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding social insurance contributions for a person in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38643/19]

   **Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the matter referred to by him has been resolved. The information available in my Department has been forwarded to the Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection.

   There are 120,000 teaching and non-teaching and retired staff paid on a fortnightly basis on payrolls operated by my Department. There are up to 20,000 changes to the payrolls for the commencement of the new school year. This consists of retirements, resignations, career breaks, job-sharing, new appointments, increases / decreases in teaching hours, temporary contracts, secondments, award of Contracts of Indefinite Duration, re-deployments, and pension payment set ups.

   Accordingly, at this time of year the priority of my Department is to ensure that all staff being appointed to schools and those retiring are paid salary or pension as soon as possible.

Teachers’ Remuneration

172. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for further delays to the payment of teachers in September 2019; the nature of the delays; the actions being taken to address this issue; if the problem that has occurred is the same problem that arose in January 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38645/19]

   **Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** There are no unnecessary delays to the payment of teachers on payrolls operated by my Department this September.

   There are 120,000 payees paid on a fortnightly basis. The process for the payment of an individual teacher is that where a contract is awarded by the managerial authority of a school, application forms are submitted to my Department to enable payment to be set up.
The application form must confirm that a teacher is qualified for the appropriate sector and confirm their registration details with the Teaching Council. Details of bank accounts, pension status and other requested information must also be submitted. Once a completed application form is received, the payment will be processed as soon as possible. Normally, payroll closing dates are 10 days ahead of payment date. Where an application form is not complete or where there are queries on some aspect of the application, the forms will be returned to the schools which can result in a delay to payment being set up for a teacher. Where a teacher’s registration is not active with the Teaching Council, payment can not be made for the period that a person is unregistered.

Where a teacher is working on a casual / non-casual basis, school authorities enter details of the employee and the claim for payment into the online claims system and these will transfer to the Department’s payroll and be paid according to the payroll schedules. Schools authorities have details of payroll closing dates. These payments cannot be processed until they are signed off by the school authorities. If the deadline for payrolls is missed, payments will not be made until the following payroll date.

During July and August, there are up to 20,000 changes to the payrolls operated by my Department. This consists of retirements, resignations, career breaks, job-sharing, new appointments, increases / decreases in teaching hours, temporary contracts, secondments, award of Contract of Indefinite Duration, re-deployments, and pension payment set ups. All appointments and changes are dealt with in chronological order. It is my Department’s policy to set up as many teachers as possible for the first payroll of the new school year but not all payments can be guaranteed as details may not be received in time to enable payment to be made or applications received may be incomplete, and may have to be returned to the managerial authority for completion.

Once a contracted teacher is set up on payroll, their payment will continue until the end of the contract. Teachers’ working on a casual / non-casual basis will be paid on the next scheduled payroll after the details have been submitted and signed off by the school.

**Teachers’ Remuneration**

173. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied that his Department and the Revenue Commissioners have resolved technical issues that led to the non-payment of teachers in January 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38646/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to clarify for the Deputy that all teachers were paid in January 2019.

An issue arose at that time in relation to incorrect amounts of income tax being deducted from substitute and part-time teachers. This arose as incorrect end dates were included in payroll submissions reported to Revenue under the changes introduced by the modernization of PAYE. The inclusion of these end-dates in the Departments’ submissions automatically ceased the DES employment of those concerned in Revenue records and resulted in their available tax credits being made available to other employments. When the Department next requested updated Revenue Payroll Notifications for those impacted, Revenue had already ceased the employments and transferred tax credits leaving no tax credits or cut offs available for their continuing employments by the Department.

The payroll software was amended for payrolls after the 17th January 2019 to prevent an
end date transferring to Revenue. This resolved the problem and refunds of tax were issued to the people involved.

Staff of my Department actively engaged with the Revenue Commissioners to address the problem at the time. They have liaised with during the year and continue to liaise with the Revenue Commissioners to ensure that no further issues will arise to prevent correct RPN details being applied.

Ministerial Meetings

174. Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will respond to and meet a group (details supplied). [38647/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has a statutory function to plan and co-ordinate the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs in consultation with the relevant stakeholders and the HSE.

This includes the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where the NCSE identifies need.

The NCSE works with my Department and with families and schools to ensure that advance planning is in place so that schools can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing specialised placements.

To this end, the NCSE through its national network of Special Educational Needs officers (SENOs) has established structures to engage with relevant stakeholders, including Parents groups. I understand that there has been engagement with this Group already. If there are outstanding matters, then it is suggested that these are best raised with the NCSE directly who have operational responsibility for advising on provision.

I will refer the request to the NCSE so that the council can engage directly with the group referenced by the Deputy at local level.

Schools Site Acquisitions

175. Deputy Jan O’Sullivan asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the negotiations to secure a permanent site for two secondary schools (details supplied). [38720/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Agreement in principle has been reached with a landowner for the acquisition of a site at Donaghcumper, Celbridge. There are technical considerations crucial to the delivery of the site and my Department continues to engage with the landowner and Kildare County Council on these issues in order to enable architectural planning to commence.

I can assure the Deputy that it is a priority for my Department to commence the architectural planning process for this site at the earliest possible stage. For the time being, given the commercially sensitive nature of site acquisitions in general, I am unable to elaborate further.

Industrial Relations
176. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he has taken to avoid industrial action by members of a union (details supplied); if further talks are scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38721/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I recognise the very important work done by these staff, and the other support staff in the running of our schools. I have spoken to a number of school secretaries about their employment conditions and understand the issues they have raised.

Earlier this year I relaxed the moratorium for those C&C and ETB schools with enrolments of 700 and more which allow them to employ additional school secretaries up to a maximum of two per school. There are 91 schools in the C&C and ETB Sector who meet this criteria, based on the information currently available to this Department. This is an initial step and has taken immediate effect.

Schemes were initiated in 1978 and 1979 for the employment of clerical officers and caretakers in schools. The schemes were withdrawn completely in 2008. These schemes have been superseded by the more extensive capitation grant schemes. The current grant scheme was agreed in the context of the Programme for Economic and Social Progress, published in 1991.

The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools now receive assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services under these grant schemes. It is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs. Where a school uses the grant funding for caretaking or secretarial purposes, any staff taken on to support those functions are employees of individual schools. Specific responsibility for the pay and conditions rests with the school.

On foot of a Chairman’s Note to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, my Department engaged with the Unions representing school secretaries and caretakers, including through an independent arbitration process in 2015. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for staff and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 be phased in over that period. This arbitration agreement covers the period up to 31 December 2019.

The arbitration agreement was designed to be of greatest benefit to lower-paid secretaries and caretakers. For example, a secretary or caretaker who was paid the then minimum wage of €8.65 per hour in 2015 prior to the arbitration has from 1 January 2019, been paid €13 per hour which is a 50% increase in that individual’s hourly pay.

Officials from my Department attended a meeting of the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on the 9th of April to discuss the status of non-teaching staff.

In May this year officials from my Department had discussions with FÓRSA trade union representatives as part of a planned meeting. FÓRSA took the opportunity to formally table a pay claim.

This was tabled as a follow-on claim from the current pay agreement for this cohort of staff which lasts until December 2019. The Department issued surveys on the 10th of July to establish the full current cost of the trade union’s claim. This is standard practice.

FÓRSA’s claim will be fully considered once the current costings have been determined on completion of the survey analysis.

Officials from my Department met with FÓRSA representatives last week. Management Bodies representing the employers of schools impacted by the action were also in attendance at the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to further explore the details of the pay claim as
presented by FÓRSA and the nature of the industrial action.

In these circumstances the industrial action by FÓRSA members is considered premature, not least because the period of the current arbitration agreement has not expired. My officials are fully open to having further dialogue with FÓRSA once the survey work has been undertaken.

School Transport Appeals

177. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a Bus Éireann appeal (details supplied); if he will review the response from the transport provider; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38739/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department. In the 2018/2019 school year over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

The purpose of the School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school. Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

The School Transport Appeals Board, which is independent of my Department, determines appeals against decisions made by, or on behalf of, the Department of Education and Skills regarding the provision of school transport services and/or grant-aid under the terms of the School Transport Schemes.

An appeal was lodged with the School Transport Appeals Board on the 28th August 2019 in relation to the case referred to by the Deputy. The Board has requested School Transport Section to provide a report in accordance with the terms of the Board’s Operating Procedures. When received, the Board will liaise directly with the family regarding the appeal date and their subsequent deliberations.

Schools Building Projects Status

178. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the proposed major building project at a school (details supplied). [38740/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** A building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is included in my Department’s Construction Programme which is being delivered under the National Development Plan.

This building project will provide a 16-classroom school on the site. A new Design Team had to be appointed as the original brief was for 8 classrooms, but was increased due to greater enrolments.

My Department recently gave approval to the School and Design Team to progress to Stage 2B of Architectural Planning – Detailed Design Stage which includes the applications for Plan-
ning Permission, Fire Certificate, Disability Access Certificate and the preparation of Tender Documents.

**State Examinations Appeals**

179. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students that appealed their leaving certificate results and attained a higher mark in 2017, 2018 and 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38747/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations. In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

**State Examinations Appeals**

180. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students that appealed their leaving certificate results in 2017, 2018 and 2019. [38748/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations. In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

**Special Educational Needs Staff**

181. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) has inadequate provision of special needs assistants for the 2019-2020 academic year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38755/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department’s website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie), in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

In considering applications for SNA support for individual pupils, the NCSE take account of the pupils’ needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

SNA allocations to all schools can change from year to year as children with care needs leave the school, as new children with care needs enrol in a school and as children develop more independent living skills and their care needs diminish over time.
The NCSE Appeals Process may be invoked by a parent or a school where it is considered that a child was not granted access to SNA support because the requirements outlined in Circular 0030/2014 were not complied with. Schools may also appeal a decision, where the school considers that the NCSE, in applying Department policy, has not allocated the appropriate level of SNA support to the school to meet the special educational and/or care needs of the children concerned.

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2019/20, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE.

The closing date for receipt of appeals in regard to SNA allocations is Friday 27th September 2019.

As this question relates to a particular school, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

**Schools Site Acquisitions**

182. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of plans for a permanent location for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38756/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am pleased to inform the Deputy that good progress has been made in determining the permanent site location for the school to which he refers. My Department has assessed various site options and has narrowed down its search to one site. Officials are in active engagement with the owner of this site.

The location will be confirmed as soon as it is possible to do so.

**Departmental Properties**

183. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for a building (details supplied) which is owned by his Department in view of the need for a permanent location for schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38757/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The property to which the Deputy refers is in the ownership of Dublin Dun Laoghaire ETB. Its suitability for the provision of school accommodation has been assessed and it was determined that the property did not provide a viable solution.

On that basis my Department approved a proposal from the ETB to dispose of the property.

**Schools Establishment**

184. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new schools planned in the Dún Laoghaire area in the coming years; the patrons of these schools; the sites and or buildings under consideration for the schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38758/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy will be aware,
the Government announced plans in April 2018 for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022) including a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school to be established in September 2021 to serve the Booterstown, Blackrock & Dun Laoghaire school planning areas as a regional solution.

This announcement follows nationwide, demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country.

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. Parental preferences for each patron, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

The Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) has been developed by my Department to provide objective information to parents and guardians which will allow them to make an informed choice in expressing a preference for their preferred model of patronage for their child’s education.

The patronage process for new schools is overseen by an external independent advisory group, the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). Following their consideration of my Department’s assessment reports, the NSEG will submit a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. The assessment reports and the NSEG recommendations for all such patronage processes are made available on my Department’s website.

The patronage process for the new schools to be established in 2021, including the new post-primary school to serve the Booterstown_Blackrock & Dunlaoghaire school planning areas, will be run next year. Updates in relation to further patronage processes will be announced on the OPPS website and the Department’s website (www.education.ie).

My Department is currently identifying site options for the new school and a determination regarding the permanent location for the school will be made as soon as possible.

**Special Educational Needs Staff**

185. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the method of calculation of special needs assistant allocation for schools; the way in which children that are still awaiting an assessment of needs can be catered for in cases in which they have no formal diagnosis but a clear need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38759/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department’s website at www.education.ie, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

In considering applications for SNA support for individual pupils, the NCSE take account of the pupils’ needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of
the pupils from its current level of resources.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

SNA allocations to all schools can change from year to year as children with care needs leave the school, as new children with care needs enrol in a school and as children develop more independent living skills and their care needs diminish over time.

The NCSE Appeals Process may be invoked by a parent or a school where it is considered that a child was not granted access to SNA support because the requirements outlined in Circular 0030/2014 were not complied with. Schools may also appeal a decision, where the school considers that the NCSE, in applying Department policy, has not allocated the appropriate level of SNA support to the school to meet the special educational and/or care needs of the children concerned.

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2019/20, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE.

The closing date for receipt of appeals in regard to SNA allocations is Friday 27th September 2019.

On 27th March I announced the trialling of the School Inclusion Model, a new model of support for students with special educational and additional care needs, which is being piloted in 75 schools in the Kildare/Wicklow/South Dublin region in the current school year.

The School Inclusion Model aims to build schools’ capacity and to provide the right supports at the right time for students with additional needs.

One element of this pilot is frontloading SNA support to schools, similar to the approach taken with the Special Education Teacher allocation model introduced to schools in 2017. This new SNA allocation model removes the need for a formal diagnosis for access to SNA support and is an important step towards a needs based model of support.

The pilot also provides an opportunity for review and evaluation of proposals to ensure we are providing the most effective and efficient service to those requiring additional support.

School Services Staff

186. Deputy John Curran asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to end pay injustice facing school secretaries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38783/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I recognise the very important work done by these staff, and the other support staff in the running of our schools. I have spoken to a number of school secretaries about their employment conditions and understand the issues they have raised.

Earlier this year I relaxed the moratorium for those C&C and ETB schools with enrolments of 700 and more which allow them to employ additional school secretaries up to a maximum of two per school. There are 91 schools in the C&C and ETB Sector who meet this criteria, based on the information currently available to this Department. This is an initial step and has taken immediate effect.

Schemes were initiated in 1978 and 1979 for the employment of clerical officers and care-
takers in schools. The schemes were withdrawn completely in 2008. These schemes have been superseded by the more extensive capitation grant schemes. The current grant scheme was agreed in the context of the Programme for Economic and Social Progress, published in 1991.

The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools now receive assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services under these grant schemes. It is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs. Where a school uses the grant funding for caretaking or secretarial purposes, any staff taken on to support those functions are employees of individual schools. Specific responsibility for the pay and conditions rests with the school.

On foot of a Chairman’s Note to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, my Department engaged with the Unions representing school secretaries and caretakers, including through an independent arbitration process in 2015. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for staff and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 be phased in over that period. This arbitration agreement covers the period up to 31 December 2019.

The arbitration agreement was designed to be of greatest benefit to lower-paid secretaries and caretakers. For example, a secretary or caretaker who was paid the then minimum wage of €8.65 per hour in 2015 prior to the arbitration has from 1 January 2019, been paid €13 per hour which is a 50% increase in that individual’s hourly pay.

Officials from my Department attended a meeting of the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on the 9th of April to discuss the status of non-teaching staff.

In May this year officials from my Department had discussions with FÓRSA trade union representatives as part of a planned meeting. FÓRSA took the opportunity to formally table a pay claim.

This was tabled as a follow-on claim from the current pay agreement for this cohort of staff which lasts until December 2019. The Department issued surveys on the 10th of July to establish the full current cost of the trade union’s claim. This is standard practice.

FÓRSA’s claim will be fully considered once the current costings have been determined on completion of the survey analysis.

Officials from my Department met with FÓRSA representatives last week. Management Bodies representing the employers of schools impacted by the action were also in attendance at the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to further explore the details of the pay claim as presented by FÓRSA and the nature of the industrial action.

In these circumstances the industrial action by FÓRSA members is considered premature, not least because the period of the current arbitration agreement has not expired. My officials are fully open to having further dialogue with FÓRSA once the survey work has been undertaken.

**Schools Building Projects**

187. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to address the delays being experienced by his Department to progress its school building projects beyond stage 2B; if the process will be reviewed; if the relevant actions that can be taken to rapidly progress the projects and the timeframe for these projects will be taken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38786/19]
Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Stage 2(b) Detailed Design is arguably the most complex and detailed of all the stages in Architectural Planning. In addition to securing the necessary statutory approvals it also includes the preparation of complex and detailed tender documents. In completing Stage 2(b), Design Teams are now required to upgrade design details to ensure that new school buildings are Near Zero Energy Buildings (NZEB) in compliance with the 2017 amendment to Part L of the current Building Regulations. In many cases this has involved a second planning application to allow for the installation of photovoltaic panels on the roof following receipt of the initial planning permission.

The Deputy will appreciate that all major school building projects under the Department’s Construction Programme are progressed through the various stages of architectural planning in accordance with the Department’s Design Team Procedures, Building Control Regulations and Public Works Contract requirements and that as the funding is exchequer funding the process and costs associated with any major project must be fully accounted for.

Design Teams must therefore be diligent in their preparation of the Stage 2(b) tender documentation in order to satisfy all regulatory bodies and my Department’s Design Team Procedures. This results in minimising delays during further stages of the project.

Over the past year, some school building projects have undergone a longer than normal Stage 2b process. This can be due to a complicated or detailed planning application, appeals to An Bord Pleanála, complications around decant arrangements or issues relating to the site.

In addition, since November 2018, a number of competitions to pre-qualify suitable and competent building contractors have been challenged in the High Court leading to the need to completely redraft the procedures and processes involved in pre-qualification. This has impacted over the past few months on projects which were not themselves subject to a direct challenge. However, having implemented the revised procedures, my Department has moved proactively to reduce the risk of Stage 2b projects at present and in the future being further delayed by legal challenge.

My Department also regularly reviews and updates it’s suite of guidance and design advice documents which are available to schools and design teams through the Departments web-site. The most recent updates to these documents was in May when revised Guidance on Procurement of Contractors was published and in April when the guidance on Procuring Construction Contractors was revised.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

188. Deputy Niall Collins asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an emergency works application by a school (details supplied) regarding a replacement boiler that is urgently needed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38791/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the school to which he refers has been approved funding in respect of the request submitted.

School Transport

189. Deputy Bobby Aylward asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the possibility of utilising the recently announced €1 million funding for school transport to provide additional
bus capacity for approximately 11 concessionary children (details supplied) in Knockmoylan and Ballyhale, County Kilkenny, who have been left without a seat will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38809/19]

190. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the possibility of utilising the recently announced €1 million funding for school transport to provide additional bus capacity for approximately 12 concessionary children (details supplied) in Mullinavat, County Kilkenny, who have been left without a seat will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38810/19]

191. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the possibility of utilising the recently announced €1 million funding for school transport to provide additional bus capacity for approximately seven concessionary children (details supplied) in County Kilkenny will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38811/19]

192. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the possibility of utilising the recently announced €1 million funding for school transport to provide additional bus capacity for approximately 13 concessionary children (details supplied) in County Kilkenny will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38812/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):**

I propose to take Questions Nos. 189 to 192, inclusive, together.

School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills. In the 2018/19 school year there were over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

The purpose of the School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school. Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Minister McHugh has recently sanctioned an additional €1m on the school transport budget to allow for temporary alleviation measures to address a shortage of school transport capacity on the post primary scheme in 2019. The cost of these measures is being given to those areas where there is a significant concentration of post-primary children who have paid on time for the 2019/2020 school year and who are attending their second closest school. A number of measures have been confirmed to alleviate some of the capacity issues in the areas of highest demand in some parts of the country.

With regard to the provision of transport for the current school year, Bus Éireann continues to work with the Department of Education and Skills to process applications and design routes to ensure that all eligible pupils who paid on time are facilitated with school transport. In doing this they are endeavouring to facilitate as many concessionary pupils as possible where capacity exists.

Parents are advised to contact their local Bus Éireann office should they have specific queries in regard to capacity on various routes.

**Autism Support Services**

85
193. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O’Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the system being put in place in order to school twin brothers with autism (details supplied); if a system will be put in place by which they may be home schooled in the event that the schools are not available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38857/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The policy of this Department is that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with Autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

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


The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has a statutory function to plan and co-ordinate the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs. This includes the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where the NCSE identifies need.

The NCSE works with families and schools to ensure that advance planning is in place so that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

Where there is no suitable placement available for a child with Special Educational Needs, Home Tuition Grant funding to provide a compensatory educational service for their child. The availability of a suitable school placement is assessed by the NCSE having regard to, although not limited to, the relevant diagnosis and relevant professional reports.

By its nature, the grant is intended to be a short term intervention and should not be regarded as an optional alternative to a school placement.

The Home Tuition grant will not available where the NCSE confirm that an available placement has been identified to Parents. Failure to enrol a child in an identified placement will not give rise to eligibility under the scheme.

The NCSE has been requested to review the circumstances of this case and engage with the family directly regarding the childrens educational needs.

**Schools Building Projects Status**

194. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the completion of footpaths and pedestrianised crossings at a school (details supplied); the reason for the delay in the ESB carrying out necessary works to allow the contractor to complete the works; the role of his Department in this; if his Department is the client that must apply for ESB unmetered connections to help facilitate ESB completion of said works; and if not, his plans to deal with these continuing delays. [38899/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** A new 12-classroom school
for the school referred to by the Deputy was opened in September 2018. The Board of Management for the school in question was the Contracting Authority for the building project.

Officials from my Department’s Planning & Building Unit have been in contact with the School seeking information in relation to the ongoing issues referred to by the deputy. On receipt of information from the school and its Design Team the matter will be considered further.

**Housing Assistance Payment Eligibility**

195. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a housing assistance payment is assessed as means when eligibility for free legal aid is being examined; his views on an applicant being denied free legal aid in cases in which their HAP takes them over the income limit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38400/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The financial eligibility criteria for legal aid are set out in the Civil Legal Aid Regulations 1996 to 2017. The current position is that, in principle, all income received by an applicant for legal aid is liable to be treated as income. Any exceptions are specifically detailed in the Regulations. The Legal Aid Board has advised me that it gave careful consideration to the matter of HAP and concluded that it had to treat HAP as a form of income.

I am advised by the Legal Aid Board that some applicants are in receipt of significant HAP payments due to high rent levels, particularly in Dublin. This may affect applicants’ financial eligibility for civil legal aid.

The Legal Aid Board has made a submission to my Department regarding financial eligibility for civil legal aid and advice generally. This includes a proposal on the treatment of HAP for financial eligibility purposes. This proposal is being examined by my Department. However, it should be borne in mind that any alterations to eligibility limits would have resourcing implications for the Board. Furthermore, any proposed changes to the rules pertaining to eligibility would not only require my approval but also the consent of my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

**Road Traffic Accidents Data**

196. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of road traffic accidents recorded in each of the years 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019 on the Cork to Limerick road. [38433/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have sought a report from the Garda authorities in relation to this matter and I will write directly to the Deputy when I receive the requested information.

**Garda Expenditure**

197. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the yearly wage cost of a whole-time digital forensic specialist. [38678/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** There has been an unprecedented level of investment in An Garda Síochána in recent years. The budgetary allocation
to An Garda Síochána for 2019 amounts to €1.76 billion. Very significant capital investment is also being made in Garda ICT, the Garda fleet and the Garda estate. In total, the Garda capital allocation has increased from €61 million to €92 million in 2019, which represents a 50% increase.

I would also point out that An Garda Síochána is a growing organisation. We currently have over 14,200 Gardaí nationwide, supported by over 2,700 Garda staff. As part of the Government’s plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021, there is ongoing and increased recruitment both of new Gardaí as well as Garda staff, allowing for redeployment of Gardaí to operational duties at the front-line.

This continuing investment in people and capital demonstrates the Government’s commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

In accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including the training of its members and Garda staff. The Commissioner is also responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána, in light of identified operational demands.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that they have not yet reached the point of recruiting digital forensic specialists for An Garda Síochána. As such, I am informed that it is not possible to quantify the costs which might arise in relation to any such possible future post.

Garda Expenditure

198. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the yearly wage cost of a whole-time Garda Síochána detective sergeant. [38688/19]

199. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the yearly wage cost of a whole-time Garda Síochána detective. [38689/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 198 and 199 together.

There has been an unprecedented level of investment in An Garda Síochána in recent years. The budgetary allocation to An Garda Síochána for 2019 amounts to €1.76 billion. Very significant capital investment is also being made in Garda ICT, the Garda fleet and the Garda estate. In total, the Garda capital allocation has increased from €61 million to €92 million in 2019, which represents a 50% increase.

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responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including the training of its members and Garda staff. The Commissioner is also responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána, in light of identified operational demands.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the current yearly wage cost of a whole-time Garda Síochána Detective Sergeant is €70,391. I am further informed that the current yearly wage cost of a whole-time Garda Síochána Detective Garda is €59,822. I am informed that these salary costs have been calculated using the midpoint of the current (September 2019) Garda Salary scale and include fixed allowances to which members are entitled. An estimate of Employer’s PRSI at a rate of 10.95% is also included in the estimated cost. Allowances for unsocial hours and any potential overtime payments in excess of standard briefing time are not included in this estimate.

**Garda Expenditure**

200. Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the yearly wage cost of a whole-time forensic accountant. [38690/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation for 2019 of €1.76 billion. Very significant capital investment is also being made in Garda ICT, the Garda fleet and the Garda estate. In total, the Garda capital allocation has increased from €61 million to €92 million in 2019, which represents a 50% increase.

In accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including the training of its members and Garda staff. The Commissioner is also responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the current (September 2019) yearly wage cost of a whole-time forensic accountant is €68,827. This estimated costing assumes that forensic accountants are placed on the first point of the relevant salary scale. Employer’s PRSI is included in the estimate at a rate of 10.95%.

**Family Reunification**

201. Deputy Jan O’Sullivan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a particular issue in the embassy in Abuja, Nigeria, that is causing difficulty in the processing of join family visa applications in view of the fact that there are serious delays in sending the applications to Dublin such as in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38233/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Immigration Service of my Department that the applications referred to by the Deputy were received in the Abuja Visa Office on 7 December, 2018. Our Policy Document on Family Reunification, contains a stated business target that visa applications to join Irish citizens should ideally be dealt with within six months of receipt of application. However, this business target does not constitute a legal obligation. As the Deputy will appreciate, there is detailed and often complex assessment required to be carried out in relation to applications for family reunification.
While the Immigration Service endeavours to have applications of this nature processed as quickly as possible, processing times can vary based on a number of factors. These factors include the number of applications under consideration at the time, the individual circumstances of the applicant and the sponsor, the complexity of applications and whether further information or investigation is required, and the resources available to process applications. Any delays in achieving the business target are primarily related to the processing of more complex cases where the provision of additional documentation is requested or where detailed assessments of family rights under the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights are required.

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

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the Immigration Service 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 Immigration Service is, in the Deputy’s view, inadequate or too long awaited. In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to the Abuja Visa Office (abujaembassy@dfa.ie).

Living Wage

202. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of workers employed by his Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of his Department that earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38244/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Department is currently undertaking a major transformation programme and in light of this the information sought cannot be provided in the time allowed. As soon as the information has been collated I will write to the Deputy on the matter.

Gender Equality

203. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the actions taken and planned to address the gender pay gap that exists in the workforce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38255/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** Tackling the gender pay gap is an important element in the Programme for a Partnership Government and is included as a key commitment in the Government’s National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020.

The Gender Pay Gap Information Bill 2019 was published on 8 April 2019 and the Bill completed Dáil Committee Stage in June. Report Stage is currently awaited.

The aim of the Bill is to provide transparency on the gender pay gap. The Bill provides
for the making of Regulations by the Minister for Justice and Equality requiring employers to publish gender pay gap information. The Regulations would initially apply to firms with 250 or more employees but, over the next few years, this would be reduced to 50 employees. Information on differences in bonus pay will be among the data, which must be published. The Regulations will apply to the public sector as well as the private sector, subject to the employment thresholds.

It is intended that mandatory reporting will incentivise employers to take measures to address the issue insofar as they can.

Measures such as those included in the Bill have been taken in a number of other countries and, indeed, EU Member States were encouraged to take such measures in an EU Commission Recommendation of 2014.

The other gender pay gap measures in the National Strategy for Women and Girls include initiating dialogue between union and employer stakeholders on the matter, increasing understanding of the gender pay gap and its causes and developing practical tools to assist employers to calculate the pay gap within their organisations.

Tackling this issue is good for equality and that it makes good business sense, as firms which can report a low or non-existent gender pay gap will have an advantage in recruiting future employees. Initiatives to address the gender pay gap can also be expected to have a positive impact on disparities in income for women across and after their working lives.

Citizenship Applications

204. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of cases in which citizenship was granted in the past three years to persons that had no Irish born grandparent but had Irish born great grandparents under the power he has to use his absolute discretion in the granting of citizenship; the circumstances of such cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38286/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. All applications for a certificate of naturalisation are processed and assessed individually in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

It is open to an applicant to apply under Section 16(a) of the 1956 Act where the applicant is of Irish descent or has Irish association. Under the legislation, a person is of Irish association if they are related by blood, affinity or adoption to, or is the civil partner of, a person (living or deceased) who is/was an Irish citizen or entitled to be an Irish citizen. In such cases, the conditions for naturalisation set out under Section 15 of the Act, including residency may be waived on a discretionary basis. The onus is on the applicant to provide evidence of Irish descent or Irish association.

Unfortunately, I am advised that statistics are not compiled in the manner requested by the Deputy, i.e. persons that had no Irish born grandparent but had Irish born great grandparents. The retrieval of this data would require a case by case examination of applications received during the timeframe specified and would represent a significant diversion of resources from day to day processing. However, I am informed by my officials that there are currently 292 Irish association cases under active consideration by the Immigration Service of my Department.
205. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the increase in the number of persons seeking asylum or subsidiary protection over the past three years; the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38287/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, applications for international protection, or asylum as the process was formerly described before we introduced the International Protection Act 2015, is demand-led. It is not possible to accurately predict demand but we know that it can be greatly affected by international events such as regional conflicts and general global migration trends.

The total number of applications received over the past three years is provided in the following table, for the Deputy’s information.

As the table shows, the number of applications received has been steadily increasing in recent years. In 2017, there was an annual increase of 30% followed by a further annual increase of approximately 26% last year. To date this year, we have seen a 36% increase in the number of applications received.

Applications are examined by the International Protection Office (IPO), which is independent in exercising its international protection functions. The introduction of a single application procedure under the International Protection Act 2015 means that the IPO is now examining all grounds for granting protection or a humanitarian permission to remain in one process rather than sequentially as before. The aim is to identify as early as possible those who are in need of our protection and those who can safely return to their country of origin. Currently, applications are being processed by the IPO in an average of 16 months with prioritised applications being processed in approximately 9 months. Our aim is to reduce processing in all cases to 9 months; however, this is naturally impacted by the number of applications received.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016 (Asylum)</td>
<td>2,244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017 (International Protection)</td>
<td>2,926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018 (International Protection)</td>
<td>3,673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019 (International Protection)</td>
<td>3,095*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* figure to the end of August 2019

**Direct Provision Data**

206. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the increase in the number of persons in direct provision over the past three years; the number of persons in direct provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38288/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** As the Deputy will be aware, while a claim for International Protection is being examined, the State is legally obliged to offer accommodation and related services to anyone without means - which includes all meals, medical care and utilities. A weekly personal allowance is paid to each person in a centre and exceptional needs are covered by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

The number of applications for international protection has been steadily increasing and is
up 36% since the start of this year. To meet the associated increase in demand for accommodation, my Department has initiated two processes to source additional accommodation. We have sought expressions of interest from parties who would be interested in providing accommodation and related services to people in the international protection process and we have also launched a nationwide, regional tendering process.

Following the most recent tender process, an evaluation of offers is underway. When the evaluation and other commercially sensitive aspects of the process are completed, the Department will begin engagement with local communities and their political representatives.

In 2015, 4,696 people availed of the offer of accommodation services in a direct provision accommodation centre. By end 2018, 6,115 persons were residing in these centres. This is an increase of 1,419, which represents a 30.2% increase in the numbers of those in living in accommodation centres in the period 2015 to 2018.

The following table provides the totals for each year from 2015 to 2018, for the Deputy’s information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Occupancy in Accommodation Centres, End of the Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>4,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>4,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>5,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>6,115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Direct Provision Data**

207. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the location of each direct provision centre; the estimated number of persons in each centre; the number that are dependent children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38289/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**
I can advise the Deputy that there are currently 38 accommodation centres in the State. The occupancy, as of 15 September, is set out in the following table along with the breakdown of the number of dependent children, requested by the Deputy.

There are also 1,363 people currently in emergency accommodation in hotels and guest houses located throughout the State. My Department does not disclose the specific location of emergency accommodation centres in order to protect the identity of international protection applicants.

**Accommodation as of 15 September 2019**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>ADDRESS</th>
<th>CURRENT OCCUPANCY (incl. children)</th>
<th>NO. OF CHILDREN BY CENTRE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DUBLIN</td>
<td>Balseskin</td>
<td>St.Margaret’s, Finglas, Dublin 11</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COUNTY</td>
<td>LOCATION</td>
<td>ADDRESS</td>
<td>CURRENT OCCUPANCY (incl. children)</td>
<td>NO. OF CHILDREN BY CENTRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>93</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Johnson Marina</td>
<td>Tralee</td>
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<td>COUNTY</td>
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<td>NO. OF CHILDREN BY CENTRE</td>
</tr>
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<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
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<td>LOUTH</td>
<td>Carroll Village</td>
<td>Dundalk</td>
<td>63</td>
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<td>MAYO</td>
<td>The Old Convent</td>
<td>Ballyhaunis</td>
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<td>MEATH</td>
<td>Mosney</td>
<td>Mosney</td>
<td>721</td>
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<td>Chapel Hill</td>
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<td>TIPPERARY</td>
<td>Bridgewater House</td>
<td>Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary</td>
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<tr>
<td>WATERFORD</td>
<td>Atlantic House</td>
<td>Tramore, Co. Waterford</td>
<td>80</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ocean View</td>
<td>Tramore, Co. Waterford</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Birchwood</td>
<td>Ballytruckle Road</td>
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<td>50</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Viking House</td>
<td>Coffee House Lane</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>WICKLOW</td>
<td>The Grand Hotel</td>
<td>Abbey Street, Wicklow</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>WESTMEATH</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlone</td>
<td>Athlone</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6058</strong></td>
<td><strong>1677</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Direct Provision System**

208. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for putting asylum seekers, persons seeking subsidiary protection and others in direct provision rather than allowing them to live in the community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38290/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**
The State offers accommodation, food and a range of other services (including healthcare, utilities, a weekly personal allowance etc.) to any person who arrives in the State seeking international protection. No one is obliged to accept this offer and applicants can choose to stay with friends or family living in the community or to source and provide for their own accommodation if they have the means to do so.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is not possible to predict how many people will arrive in any given year or indeed on any given day seeking international protection. The current system ensures that applicants can receive shelter, food and other essential services immediately upon their arrival.

More than 60,000 vulnerable people have been assisted by my Department since the Direct Provision system was introduced, including many families with children. Currently, my De-
People who are seeking international protection have a temporary right to reside in the State while we are examining their claim. Anyone who receives a positive decision on their application has the same rights to State services and supports, including housing, as nationals and EEA nationals. My Department is currently continuing to accommodate over 900 people who have been granted an international protection status or a permission to remain while we assist them to transition to mainstream housing. We are working with the Local Authorities and the City and County Managers Association, in addition to providing funding support to organisations like DePaul Ireland and the Peter McVerry Trust, to provide all possible assistance to help these people to move on from centres. This is extremely important for their integration in our local communities and to foster independence as they begin their new lives.

Direct Provision Data

209. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the present tendering process being carried out in the west of Ireland in relation to the provision of direct provision will be concluded; the stage at which local communities will be consulted in relation to same; the nature of the consultation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38291/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**

As the Deputy will be aware, the State has a legal obligation to offer accommodation, food and a range of other services (including meals, utilities, healthcare etc.) and allowances to any person who claims a right to international protection in Ireland while their legal claim is being examined. The number of applicants has been steadily increasing (up 36% since the start of the year) and to cope with demand, my Department has invited premises to tender to offer accommodation and other services.

Following the most recent tender process, an evaluation of offers received is now underway. We cannot confirm the location of new centres at this time. When the evaluation and commercially sensitive aspects of the process are completed, my Department will begin engagement with local communities and their political representatives.

It is anticipated that the evaluation process for this region will conclude by mid November 2019.

Additionally, advertisements were placed in the national press seeking expressions of interest from accommodation providers for suitable accommodation, which the Department could contract for 12 months. Accommodation providers can offer premises both through the tender process and the expressions of interest process.

Road Safety

210. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he convened a meeting regarding parking by private motorised vehicles in cycle lanes with the Ministers for Transport, Tourism and Sport and Housing, Planning and Local Government; the actions decided upon; when cyclists will begin to see an improvement in enforcement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38320/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy may be aware that I regularly meet my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Mr.
Shane Ross TD, to discuss road safety matters including in particular at the Ministerial Committee on Road Safety.

Minister Ross and I co-chair that Committee, which is made up of all major stakeholders involved in road safety, including the Road Safety Authority, An Garda Síochána, the Health and Safety Authority, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, the Medical Bureau of Road Safety, the Department of Health, the City and County Managers’ Association and the Attorney General. It provides an important forum to oversee the implementation of the Road Safety Strategy and facilitate high-level discussion of road safety issues.

Minister Ross and I met most recently in relation to road safety issues at last week’s Committee meeting.

In relation to the specific matter raised by the Deputy, namely parking by private vehicles in cycle lanes, I am informed by An Garda Síochána that there has been a very significant increase in the monthly average of Fixed Charge Notices issued for ‘Parking in a Cycle Track’. This highlights An Garda Síochána’s dedication and ongoing commitment to making our roads a safer place for all road users including cyclists.

I have included for the Deputies information a detailed table compiled by An Garda Síochána with details of fixed charge notices issued from 2010 up to the end of June 2019.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FCNs issued</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>3,553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly average issued</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am further informed that An Garda Síochána’s Roads Policing Operations Plan for 2019 was developed with a particular road safety focus on the vulnerable road user categories of motorcyclists, pedal cyclists, learner-permit holders and pedestrians. To ensure safety on our roads, all road users must comply fully with relevant road traffic legislation. An Garda Síochána are committed to educating all road users in their attitudes and behaviour, and when necessary detecting and intercepting dangerous drivers, or those who refuse to comply with road traffic laws; including the enforcement of cycle track access for cyclists during designated hours.

Finally, I would reiterate that road safety is a shared responsibility. I would urge drivers to remember that illegal parking in cycle tracks leads to an increased safety risk for vulnerable cyclists, as they are forced to avoid obstructions by moving into adjacent traffic flows.

**Citizenship Applications**

211. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the ongoing lengthy delays in a citizenship application by a person (details supplied) will be examined; when a decision will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38334/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed by the Immigration Service of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy made an application for a certificate of naturalisation on 19 March 2019.
Questions - Written Answers

As the Deputy will appreciate the granting of Irish Citizenship through naturalisation confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to protect the integrity of the process. All applications are examined to determine if the applicant meets the statutory conditions for naturalisation as set out in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, such as good character and lawful residence.

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 may take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks may take a considerable period of time.

Queries in relation to the status of individual Immigration cases may be made directly to the Immigration Service 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 Question process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service in cases where the response from the Immigration Service is, in the Deputy’s view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Proposed Legislation

212. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the first draft of new legislation will be brought forward which will grant applicants for Irish citizenship the right to be absent from the country for a set period of time; when clarity will be provided on the issue in view of the fact that the High Court ruling regarding same is causing distress for applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38335/19]

216. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to his previous e-mail (details supplied), the position regarding legislation to address a recent High Court judgment on citizenship rights; if citizenship eligibility rules will be brought into line with other countries in which applicants are allowed 90 days or more per year outside the country prior to their application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38413/19]

221. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Irish nationality and citizenship (amendment) Bill will pass both Houses of the Oireachtas in view of the practical difficulties that arise for applicants for naturalisation from a recent court ruling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38579/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 212, 216 and 221 together.

I am aware that the recent judgment of the High Court relating to continuous residency under Section 15(1)(c) of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 1956 (as amended) has given cause for concern. The matter remains before the courts with the lodgement of an appeal before the Court of Appeal and is therefore sub-judice.

I can, however, assure the Deputy that my Department is doing everything possible to put in place a solution on an urgent basis. I have taken expert legal advice and I intend to introduce legislation to address the issue. At the end of July, I obtained Cabinet approval for a proposed Bill and intensive work is taking place in my Department where officials are working with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel in the Attorney General’s Office to finalise the draft Bill.

I am advised that the appeal is likely to be heard early next month. The outcome of the ap-
peal will, of course, have a bearing on whether or not legislation is required. Should it be necessary, I intend to introduce the Bill in the Oireachtas as soon as possible this term. I know that colleagues of all parties are concerned with the difficulty that has arisen and I am hopeful that the Oireachtas will give the Bill early and positive consideration.

As soon as the legal issues are resolved, my officials will make all necessary arrangements for the next Citizenship Ceremony. Invitations will issue four weeks in advance of the ceremony to ensure everyone has adequate notice.

In the interim, the Immigration Service of my Department is advising those who are planning to apply for citizenship to continue to collect all of the necessary proofs that support their application and to submit a comprehensive application form. Once a solution is in place, if any additional information is required, applicants will be contacted as part of the processing of their application.

Ministerial Meetings

213. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of meetings he has engaged with the CEO and-or equivalent of each State agency under his remit to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38388/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I engage regularly with the heads of agencies and bodies to discuss topical issues as needs arise. Our discussions take place in a range of settings, in particular at events related to my sector. Such meetings would not necessarily be captured in my diary. In the following table, I have listed the meetings recorded in my departmental diary since 1 January 2019. Such meetings include one-to-one sessions, along with conferences and launches specific to that agency/body.

I, along with my colleague, the Minister of State for Justice and Equality David Stanton T.D., host an annual roundtable event bringing together delegates from across the Department and from the agencies and bodies in the justice and equality sector. Participants include senior management from the Department, Chief Executive Officers, Chairs of Boards and senior staff from the agencies/bodies.

This event provides a valuable opportunity to share experiences and consider together new challenges facing the sector. This annual Roundtable is one of the forums developed to encourage interactions, build relationships and inter-agency co-operation and enhance sharing of experience and learning within the justice and equality sector. To date, four such meetings have been held with the most recent taking place on 19 July 2019.

In addition, my officials meet regularly with the heads of agencies/bodies under my remit in accordance with the formal governance arrangements set out for each, keeping me abreast of relevant issues and developments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Agency/BODY</th>
<th>No. of Meetings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An Garda Síochána</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coroner’s Office</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courts Service</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Protection Commission</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forensic Science Ireland</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspector of Prisons</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
State Agency/Body | No. of meetings
--- | ---
Irish Prison Service | 3
Legal Aid Board | 1
Office of the State Pathologist | 1
Property Services Regulatory Authority | 2

Garda Data

214. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda public service vehicle inspectors assigned to each Garda division at 9 September 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38389/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** There has been an unprecedented level of investment in An Garda Síochána in recent years. The budgetary allocation to An Garda Síochána for 2019 amounts to €1.76 billion. Very significant capital investment is also being made in Garda ICT, the Garda fleet and the Garda estate. In total, the Garda capital allocation has increased from €61 million to €92 million in 2019, which represents a 50% increase.

This continuing investment in people and capital supports the Government’s commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

In accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including personnel matters. The Commissioner is also responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána, in light of identified operational demands.

I am assured however that Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use.

The Deputy may wish to be aware that information on the Garda workforce is available at the following link: http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures

Finally, I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the following table sets out the number of Garda public service vehicle inspectors and their assignment, correct as at 9 September 2019.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Division or location</th>
<th>Number of PSV Inspectors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DMR</td>
<td>DMR (Roads Policing)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>Meath</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wicklow</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laois/Offaly</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Westmeath</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kildare</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>Sligo/Leitrim</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cavan/Monaghan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Region | Division or location | Number of PSV Inspectors
---|---|---
South Eastern | Kilkenny/Carlow | 1
| Wexford | 1
| Tipperary | 1
| Waterford | 1
Southern | Cork West | 1
| Cork North | 1
| Cork City | 1
| Limerick | 1
Western | Clare | 1
| Mayo | 1
| Galway | 1

**Closed-Circuit Television Systems**

215. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to extend the application dates for the community-based CCTV scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38401/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy may be aware, Community CCTV is governed by section 38(3)(c) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and the Garda Síochána (CCTV) Order 2006 (SI No 289 of 2006). This legal framework requires that any proposed community CCTV scheme must:

- be approved by the local Joint Policing Committee,

- have the prior support of the relevant local authority, which must also act as data controller, and

- have the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner.

This is the legal basis for all community CCTV schemes, regardless of how they are funded and these key legal requirements have not changed since 2006. The possibility of establishing a Community CCTV scheme is available to groups that meet these legal requirements, anywhere in the country.

Since 2017, my Department has administered a grant aid scheme supporting groups wishing to establish a community-based CCTV system in their area.

The Deputy will appreciate that while the Estimates process is ongoing, I am not in a position to respond to his query in relation to my Department’s allocation for the coming year. However, I can confirm that the grant aid scheme remains open for applications from interested groups in 2019 and that all fully completed applications received before the end of 2019 will be considered.

Eligible groups, including community groups and local authorities nationwide, can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum total of €40,000. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that I have recently expanded the grant aid scheme to cover not only new CCTV systems but also to allow funding applications for extension or upgrade of existing Community CCTV systems which are incomplete or obsolete. Applicants can now also seek a grant of up to €5,000 for minor maintenance costs.
I must emphasise that grant funding can be considered only for CCTV systems which meet the legal requirements for CCTV, in other words CCTV systems which have been approved by the relevant Joint Policing Committee, the relevant Local Authority (also acting as Data Controller) and which have received the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner.

If the Deputy is aware of groups wishing to avail of the scheme, further details are available to download from my Department’s website - www.justice.ie and support and guidance is available to help interested groups through a dedicated email address communitycctv@justice.ie

Question No. 216 answered with Question No. 212.

Legal Aid Service Data

217. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of solicitors, paralegal and administrative staff participating on the free Legal Aid Board by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38414/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Legal Aid Board and they have provided the information in the following tables:

<table>
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<th>County</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Admin Staff</th>
<th>Paralegal</th>
<th>Solicitor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Cavan</td>
<td>Cavan Law Centre</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>Ennis Law Centre</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>Cork North Law Centre</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>Cork South Law Centre</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td>Letterkenny</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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Questions - Written Answers

Below: The number of solicitors offering services via the Board’s private practitioner panels per county.

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* The Childcare Private Practitioner panel is currently operating on a pilot basis in three counties.

** The Board offers legal services to International protection clients via three of its law centres and maintains a private practitioner panel on this basis also.

Legislative Reviews

218. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the review of the Defamation Act 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38464/19]
**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** My Department is currently finalising the statutory review of the Defamation Act 2009. I expect a draft report with options for reform, including possible proposals for legislative change, to be submitted to me in the coming weeks.

The Review is addressing all of the issues raised in submissions made to it, including those that featured in a recent campaign by the print media. These include:

- whether changes should be made to the respective roles of the judge and the jury in High Court defamation cases; and

- whether any change should be made to the level or type of damages which may be awarded in defamation cases, or to the factors to be taken into account in making that determination.

The objective set for the defamation review from the outset was to ensure that our defamation law strikes the right balance between protecting an individual’s good name and privacy. Furthermore, our defamation law must protect the right to freedom of expression, taking account of the vital role played by a free and independent press in our democracy.

This is an important and complex area of legal reform and I can assure the Deputy that is a priority for me and for my Department.

**Closed-Circuit Television Systems**

219. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the contact details within his Department for local groups to liaise with in relation to the CCTV scheme and their respective applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38558/19]

220. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of CCTV schemes approved for funding since the scheme commenced; the number of schemes approved in 2019; if all local authorities are signed up to the scheme; the areas that have been successful with their applications, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38560/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 219 and 220 together.

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

- be approved by the local Joint Policing Committee;

- have the prior support of the relevant local authority, which must also act as data controller, and

- have the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner.

This is the legal basis for all community CCTV schemes, regardless of how they are funded and these key legal requirements have not changed since 2006. The possibility of establishing a Community CCTV scheme is available to groups that meet these legal requirements, anywhere in the country.

Since 2017, my Department has administered a grant aid scheme supporting groups wishing
to establish a community-based CCTV system in their area. To date, 21 applications have been approved under the scheme, involving approved grants totalling more than €540,000. The location of these approved funding applications, as requested by the Deputy, are as follows:

- Carrick on Shannon, Co Leitrim
- Cranmore, Co Sligo
- Arklow, Co Wicklow
- Courttown/Riverchapel, Gorey and Wexford Town, Co Wexford
- Abbeyfeale, Adare, Askeaton, Caherconlish, Cappamore, Castleconnell, Croom, Foynes, Kilmallock, Newcastlewest, Pallasgreen, Patrickswell, Murroe and Rathkeale, County Limerick.
- Monaghan Town, Co. Monaghan

I can confirm that the grant aid scheme remains open for applications from interested groups in 2019 and that all fully completed applications received before the end of 2019 will be considered.

Eligible groups, including community groups and local authorities nationwide, can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum total of €40,000.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that I have recently expanded the grant aid scheme to cover not only new CCTV systems but also to allow funding applications for extension or upgrade of existing Community CCTV systems which are incomplete or obsolete. Applicants can now also seek a grant of up to €5,000 for minor maintenance costs.

I must emphasise that grant funding can be considered only for CCTV systems which meet the legal requirements for CCTV, in other words CCTV systems which have been approved by the relevant Joint Policing Committee, the relevant Local Authority (also acting as Data Controller) and which have received the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner.

If the Deputy is aware of groups wishing to avail of the scheme, further details are available to download from my Department’s website - www.justice.ie and support and guidance is available to help interested groups through a dedicated email address communitycctv@justice.ie

*Question No. 221 answered with Question No. 212.*

**Direct Provision System**

**222. Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new direct provision centres planned for 2019 and 2020; the way in which the proposed new centres are selected and or the criteria for same; the way in which the centres will be staffed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38586/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** As the Deputy will be aware, while a claim for International Protection is being examined, the State is legally obliged to offer accommodation and related services to anyone without means - which includes all meals, medical care and utilities. A weekly personal allowance is paid to each person in a centre and exceptional needs are covered by the Department of Employment...
24 September 2019

Affairs and Social Protection.

My Department requires additional accommodation centres as the number of people arriving to seek our protection continues to rise (figures are up 36% in the first half of this year). There are also now more than 1,300 people placed in emergency accommodation in hotels and guesthouses. This is a highly unsatisfactory situation and can only be regarded as a short-term solution. The procurement of new accommodation centres has been approached in two ways.

Firstly, the Department has advertised in the national media for expressions of interest from property owners for a short-term contract (usually one year) to meet demand while the regional tender process is rolled out nationally. Centres in Kenmare, Lisdoonvarna, Mallow, Moate and Wicklow were opened in 2018 through this process. Further centres may also be opened through this process.

Secondly, my Department is running procurement competitions on a regional basis throughout the country to procure accommodation through the government's procurement portal, Etenders. These contracts will be longer term than the expressions of interest with a minimum contract duration of 2 years on offer and a maximum contract duration of 4 years.

Accommodation providers can offer premises both through the expressions of interest process or the tender process.

The following regional competitions have progressed through the evaluation stage and are in the mobilisation phase; the South East, Midlands and the MidWest Regions. Evaluation is underway for the South West and Western Regions. The closing date for bids for the Mid East Region was the 16 September and evaluation will commence shortly. Advertisements for bids for the Dublin Region was published on 18 September and advertisements for the Borders Region are scheduled to be published by the end of this month.

The Deputy will be aware, that until the procurement process, which is commercially sensitive, is complete, it is not possible to confirm any specific locations or premises.

Tenders received are evaluated on the most economically advantageous tender method which assesses bids on the quality of service as well as price. The level, expertise and qualifications of staff are assessed as part of this process.

I recently published agreed National Standards for accommodation centres. The Standards will apply to all service providers contracted by the Department to operate and manage accommodation and reception centres. They provide a framework for the continued development of supports and services for residents by improving the quality of care and ensuring consistency across the centres. A copy of the Standards can be found on my Department's website www.justice.ie.

**Direct Provision System**

223. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has consulted with the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government regarding accommodation needs of persons that cannot be facilitated in direct provision centres due to lack of accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38587/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** As the Deputy will appreciate, my Department is experiencing significant upward pressure on its accommodation portfolio due to an increase in the number of people claiming international
protection and an associated demand for accommodation and related services. In the first half of this year alone, we have seen a 36% increase in the number of applications received.

Our 38 existing accommodation centres are currently at full capacity. To ensure that we can continue to provide accommodation for all applicants who require it, since September 2018, my Department has arranged for the provision of emergency accommodation in hotels and guest houses. Every effort is being made to re-accommodate residents in these emergency locations to a dedicated accommodation centre as quickly as possible. My Department is actively working on securing additional capacity, both in existing centres and through sourcing new centres via a series of regional procurement competitions and an expression of interest process that was advertised in the national media.

Currently, we are accommodating 6,056 people across our 38 accommodation centres and a further 1,363 people in 34 emergency accommodation locations.

Officials of my Department regularly engage with other Government Departments and Public Sector organisations to ensure that everyone in the protection process can access the necessary public services and supports. Regular meetings take place with representatives from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department Education and Skills, and with representatives from the Health Services Executive and the Education and Welfare Service.

My Department is represented on the Homeless Interagency Group and the Dublin Joint Homelessness Consultative Forum. My officials also engage on a regular basis with representatives of the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive.

Residents who have been granted an international protection status or a permission to remain have the same access to housing supports and services as Irish and European Economic Area (EEA) nationals. There are currently approximately 900 residents with status or permission to remain. My Department is supporting these residents to move out of our accommodation centres and into secure permanent accommodation. We are providing funding support to DePaul Ireland and the Peter McVerry Trust to work with these residents to secure homes. A number of NGOs have also been awarded monies under the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). These include the PATHS project and South Dublin County Partnership. Additionally, my Department is liaising with officials in the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, and with the City and County Managers Association (CCMA) collectively to support residents with status or permission to remain to access housing options.

International Protection

224. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if each aspect of service and accommodation aspects are put out to tender of if a preferred supplier list is used; the number of companies on the preferred supplier list in respect of services and goods related to direct provision; the frequency with which the lists are reviewed and or updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38588/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department does not use a preferred supplier list in procuring accommodation centres for people seeking international protection.

My Department is currently engaged in a number of regional procurement processes. A Request for Tender (RFT) is issued through the Government’s procurement portal E-tenders for the provision of accommodation centres, including the provision of catering, housekeeping,
It is open to any person, company or indeed non-governmental agency to enter a bid into the process. Each RFT to date has sought to establish a Multi-Supplier Framework for a specific region within the State. As the Deputy may be aware, a framework agreement is an agreement between one or more economic operators, the purpose of which is to establish the terms governing contracts to be awarded during a given period, in particular with regard to price and, where appropriate, the quantity envisaged.

All tenderers who are successful and admitted to a framework agreement by my Department have offered suitable premises to house people seeking international protection and must, as part of the agreement, provide all aspects of the management and provision of catering, housekeeping, general maintenance and security services in their proposed accommodation centres. Each Framework Agreement is for a specific period, which is outlined in each RFT.

**Immigration Status**

225. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the immigration status of the persons who were adversely affected by the recent student recruitment agency closure; the measures to be put in place to ensure that international students are protected against another closure of this nature; the status of the investigation into the circumstances surrounding the closure of the agency which was carried out by the Garda National Immigration Bureau; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38746/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Immigration Service of my Department is aware of the situation referred to by the Deputy and contacts between the Burgh Quay Registration Office and the Irish Council for International Students took place before the summer break in this regard.

Arrangements were put in place to facilitate any continuing language students who had paid their second year fees to the company rather than directly to a college. Some of these courses were due to start last July; however, students were allowed to defer their college entry to end September, to allow them to make new arrangements. Students with proof from a college that they had been accepted onto a course to start by the end of September were granted a temporary Stamp 2 permission.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) have also advised that they will consider the voluntary return of any students rendered destitute because they have lost money as a result of the closure. If a student decides to avail of the IOM option this will not impact negatively on any further stay in Ireland, whether to visit or to reside.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the issue of any investigation is a matter for An Garda Síochána and it would therefore not be appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

**Deportation Orders**

226. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for the delay for a person (details supplied) in receiving a family permanent visa; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38752/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed by the Immigration Service of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy is the subject of
a Deportation Order signed on 7 September 2018.

Representations were received on behalf of the person, pursuant to Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 199 (as amended), seeking to revoke the Deportation Order. This request will be considered as soon as possible.

The decision from the consideration of this request will be to have the existing Deportation Order ‘affirmed’ or ‘revoked’. Once such a decision has been made, this decision will be notified to the applicant in writing. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the Immigration Service 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 Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may wish to consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the Immigration Service is, in the Deputy’s view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Garda Data

227. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí by rank attached to the Garda stolen vehicle investigation unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38774/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Garda Commissioner has responsibility for managing An Garda Síochána and for the allocation of Garda resources, in light of identified operational demands. This includes responsibility for personnel matters. As Minister I have no direct role in these matters. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use.

I am advised by the Commissioner that the Stolen Motor Vehicle Investigation Unit forms part of the Garda National Bureau of Criminal Investigation and falls under the remit of Assistant Commissioner, Special Crime Operations (SCO).

I am further informed that the unit has a total of 10 officers including both Garda Staff and Garda members as follows: 1 Detective Superintendent, 1 Detective Sergeant, 7 Detective Gardaí and 1 member of Garda civilian staff.

Judicial Council

228. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps he is taking to accelerate the process of establishing the judicial council in order to protect voluntary and community groups from rising insurance costs and subsequent closure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38780/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** In conjunction with the Courts Service, my Department is actively engaged in assisting with the establishment of the independent Judicial Council by the end of this year. This includes considering the practical arrangements for staffing and accommodation, which will need to be put in place before the Judicial Council is established.
The relevant Orders to commence the Judicial Council Act 2019 are expected to be made later this year.

The issue of awards in personal injury claims is being dealt with within the framework of the Judicial Council Act 2019. This landmark Act provides for the establishment of a number of committees including a personal injuries guidelines committee, which will be assigned the function of compiling guidelines for appropriate general damages for various types of personal injuries.

The measures included in the Judicial Council Act constitute an element of a wide range of actions undertaken by Government to mitigate the costs insurance companies impose on consumers.

**Garda Expenditure**

229. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the breakdown of costs associated per year in regard to implementing the report *A Policing Service for the Future*; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38822/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Unprecedented resources are currently being provided to An Garda Síochána by the Government. A total budget of €1.76 billion has been allocated to An Garda Síochána in 2019, in addition to capital investment of €92 million this year. This represents a 50% increase in capital funding to An Garda Síochána compared to 2018.

This investment is supporting an ambitious ongoing process of Garda reform, arising from the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing and *A Policing Service for the Future*, the 4-year implementation plan for that report published last December.

Implementation of the plan is being overseen by a dedicated Policing Reform Implementation Programme Office located in the Department of the Taoiseach, as recommended by the Commission. An Implementation Group on Policing Reform (IGPR) with collective responsibility for delivery of the implementation plan has been established with Helen Ryan, former member of the Commission, as its independent chair.

*A Policing Service for the Future* is a living document and throughout the implementation process, the Programme Office will be reviewing and updating the plan as required, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, to maintain ambitious but realistic commitments, time-frames and milestones in delivery of the reform project. Further information is available on the Policing Reform Portal at the following link https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/065724-policing-reform/

As the Deputy will appreciate, much of the cost of the implementation of this reform process arises against the regular votes of the Departments, organisations and agencies involved. The vast majority of the costs are in the Garda Síochána Vote, including in relation to staffing, training and ICT. As such, the full costs are not disaggregated and it is not possible to give a full breakdown at this time.

**Living Wage**

230. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of workers employed by her Department and in each office or agency under the
aegis of her Department that earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38245/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Remuneration of all the staff of the Department, its Offices and its Agencies is as sanctioned by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for various individual grades in line with Government policy.

In relation to the Department and its Offices, there are currently 5 staff earning an hourly rate less than the living wage, (based on a 37-hour net working week). This figure reflects recent recruitment of staff at the starting point on the relevant incremental scale for their grades, namely Services Officer and Services Attendant. However, as the maximum point on the incremental scales for these grades is above the hourly rate of €12.30, over time, and based on satisfactory performance, each staff member in these grades would proceed to earn more than the figure of €12.30 per hour.

With regard to the Agencies under the aegis of my Department the position in relation to each is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Position (based on a 37-hour week net)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise Ireland</td>
<td>19 employees currently earning a rate equivalent or less than €12.30 per hour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAASA*</td>
<td>1 employee currently earning a rate less than €12.30 per hour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDA Ireland</td>
<td>9 employees currently earning a rate less than €12.30 per hour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSAI</td>
<td>4 employees currently earning a rate less than €12.30 per hour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCPC</td>
<td>There are no employees currently earning less than €12.30 per hour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIAB</td>
<td>There are no employees currently earning less than €12.30 per hour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Foundation Ireland</td>
<td>There are no employees currently earning less than €12.30 per hour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Safety Authority</td>
<td>There are no employees currently earning less than €12.30 per hour.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on a 39-hour working week net

**Trade Missions**

231. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to travel on a trade mission to Spain; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38387/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Enterprise Ireland offers a programme of trade missions and events which support the goal of securing high-level market access for companies based in Ireland who are aiming to grow business overseas and increase domestic employment.

In accordance with the 2019 trade mission programme, my colleague, Mr Pat Breen, T.D., Minister of State for Trade, Employment, Business, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protec-
24 September 2019

The Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation will lead a trade mission to Madrid on 2 and 3 October 2019. Twenty Irish companies will accompany the Minister on the mission. Minister Breen will also hold meetings with his Spanish counterpart to discuss trade related issues during the mission.

Fire Safety

232. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to the recently revealed high level of fire safety toxins in homes (details supplied). [38436/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** In the area of furniture fire safety, there are no harmonised EU standards. The Irish standards and regulations were introduced to protect consumers by preventing the rapid spread of a fire started on or near furniture. These standards are in line with those introduced in the UK, which is particularly relevant given the cross-border trade in furniture on the island of Ireland and the presence of furniture manufacturers along the border area.

The UK has undertaken two consultations (in 2014 and 2016) on the suitability of the UK regulations but has yet to amend its regulations. In view of the similarity of the regulations in both jurisdictions, my Department has liaised very closely with the relevant department in the UK and continues to monitor the situation to keep abreast of developments in that jurisdiction. My Department also liaises, both formally and informally, with other stakeholders in Ireland on the issue.

Having similar regulations in place on both sides of the border gives consumers clarity and certainty that uniform safety standards apply, while manufacturers have certainty that their products can be sold in both jurisdictions without going to the added expense of manufacturing furniture according to different standards and legislation. Any change in existing regulations, or replacement thereof, will have to provide a robust level of safety when it comes to furniture catching fire.

My Department is conscious of the need to ensure that if replacement regulations are to be introduced, they must be effective and evidence-based, bearing in mind the tension between short term effects (in relation to flame retardant chemicals providing time to escape a fire and the impact on fire crews’ operations) and possible long-term health considerations. There is also a need to ensure that if the Regulations are to change there will be no reduction in safety for the consumers of Ireland.

My Department will be issuing a public consultation document on the Irish regulations in the near future. The public consultation will assist the Department in revisiting the current regulations while maintaining a high level of safety with regard to flammability of furniture in Irish homes.

Trade Union Membership

233. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of members of trade unions that notified her Department of being in benefit on 31 December 2018 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38519/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen):** Section 20(1) of the Industrial Relations Act, 1990 provides that within one month
after 31st December each year a trade union which is the holder of a negotiation licence shall send to the Minister a statement of the number of its members on the 31st December. Details of the trade unions membership numbers as at 31st December 2018 are in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union</th>
<th>Membership at 31st December 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants (AHCPS)</td>
<td>3,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI)</td>
<td>16,849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forsa (The Civil Public and Services Union (CPSU), Public Service Executive Union (PSEU) and the Irish Municipal, Public and Civil Trade Union (IMPACT) merged on 1 January 2018 to form Forsa).</td>
<td>79,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT)</td>
<td>2,469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Medical Organisation (IMO)</td>
<td>5,601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Nurses and Midwives’ Organisation (INMO)</td>
<td>42,232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO)</td>
<td>38,545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Laboratories Staff Association (MLSA)</td>
<td>1,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison Officers Association (POA)</td>
<td>3,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operative Plasterers and Allied Trades Society of Ireland (OPATSI)</td>
<td>916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU).</td>
<td>202,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConnectThe Technical Engineering and Electrical Union (TEEU) merged with UCATT on 1 January 2017 to form Connect.</td>
<td>39,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI)</td>
<td>18,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITE</td>
<td>21,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinary Officers’ Association (VOA)</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinary Ireland (VI)</td>
<td>1,134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Work Permits Applications

234. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason An Bord Altranais issues a recognition of both a diploma and degree certificate for non-national nurses to be eligible to work here but her Department will not issue a critical skills visa to non-degree holding nurses to enable them to work here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38753/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The critical skills employment permit is designed to attract highly skilled people into the labour market. Eligible occupations, on the critical skills occupation list, under this type of permit are
deemed to be critically important to growing Ireland’s economy, are highly demanded and high-
ly skilled and in significant shortage of supply in our labour market. For this employment type
non-EEA nationals must be the holder of a degree level qualification or higher in the relevant
field if the remuneration on offer is between €30,000 and €60,000 per annum. In cases where
the remuneration is €60,000 or more the non-EEA national can be either the holder of a degree
level qualification or higher in the relevant field or have the necessary experience for the role.

Qualified non-EEA nurses who wish to work in Ireland are eligible for critical skills em-
ployment permits where they have been awarded a relevant degree or degree equivalent and the
proposed employment meets the criteria for this type of employment permit. Where a non-EEA
nurse is qualified to practice nursing in Ireland but does not hold a relevant degree, they may be
eligible for a General Employment Permit in order to work here.

The determination of qualification equivalence is made by NARIQ Ireland; information is
available at  http://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Qualifications-Recognition.aspx

Non-EEA nurses who wish to work in Ireland must normally complete an adaptation pro-
cess in order to register with The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland. Permission to be in
the State to undertake this process is granted by the Department of Justice and Equality.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

235. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to
be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre group review decision making process
that will be given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38928/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of
Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the
community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and
direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

236. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement dataset
will specifically cover only current HSE funded users of the FreeStyle Libre device; if not, if
the Health Technology Assessment Group review will simply compare total blood glucose strip
usage spend year on year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38929/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of
Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the
community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and
direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

237. Deputy Carol Nolan asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to be
used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre review decision making process that will be
given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38950/19]
Questions - Written Answers

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

238. Deputy Carol Nolan asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement dataset will specifically cover only current HSE funded users of FreeStyle Libre device; if not, if the Health Technology Assessment Group review will compare total blood glucose strip usage spend year on year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38951/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

239. Deputy Jack Chambers asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre Group review decision making process that will be given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39086/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

240. Deputy Jack Chambers asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement dataset will specifically cover only current HSE funded users of the FreeStyle Libre device; if not, if the Health Technology Assessment Group review will compare total blood glucose strip usage spend year on year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39087/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

241. Deputy Patrick O’Donovan asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre Group review decision making process that will be given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39116/19]
Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

242. Deputy Frank O’Rourke asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages that will be attached to criteria by the Health Technology Assessment Group review in its decision making process in the upcoming review of HSE FreeStyle Libre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39126/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

243. Deputy Frank O’Rourke asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement dataset will specifically cover only current HSE funded users of the FreeStyle Libre device; if not, if the Health Technology Assessment Group review will compare total blood glucose strip usage spend year on year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39127/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Freedom of Information Requests

244. Deputy John Brassil asked the Minister for Health the status of a freedom of information request to the HSE by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38217/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This is a matter for the HSE and I have asked them to respond to the Deputy directly.

Suicide Prevention

245. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Health the way in which he will collect improved data and research on suicidal behaviour as outlined in the National Office for Suicide Prevention Annual Report 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38227/19]

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.
246. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of extending free general practitioner care to children under eight years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38229/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government intends to extend GP care without fees to all children aged between 6 and 12 years on a phased basis, starting in 2020. Legislative changes will be required to give effect to this extension.

It is not possible at this time to give an estimate of the cost of extending GP care without fees to this cohort of the population. The fees payable to GPs for this service will be determined following consultations with GP representatives on the scope and content of the general practitioner service to be provided.

As part of the recent agreement reached on GP contractual reforms and service developments, the IMO has agreed that it will engage with the Department of Health and the HSE in relation to the contractual aspects of this service in advance of implementation.

Following these consultations, an appropriate fee for the provision of the service by GPs will be set under the Public Services Pay and Pensions Act 2017.

**Services for People with Disabilities**

247. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if a bus service managed by the HSE could arrange collection of a person (details supplied) at a suitable time. [38230/19]

**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.

**HSE Staff Recruitment**

248. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if progress has been made in appointing a clinical lead for the national clinical dual diagnosis programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38234/19]

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

**Hospital Beds Data**
249. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of inpatient detox beds for persons with a dual diagnosis; the HSE regions in which these beds are available; when such beds will be available for those that need them in all regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38235/19]

**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.

### Living Wage

250. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of workers employed by his Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of his Department that earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38246/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The staff of my Department are on centrally negotiated civil service pay scales. There are a number of Clerical Officers on the lower end of the pay scale for that grade who are on salaries below €12.30 per hour but as they progress over time on their pay scale, their salaries will exceed this amount.

I have asked that the HSE respond to you directly on the aspect of the question that relates to their public sector employees. In relation to Non-Commercial State Agencies under the remit of the Department, this information is being sought and will be forwarded to the Deputy when collated.

### Hospital Appointments Delays

251. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38263/19]

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

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

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

### Medical Card Eligibility

252. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health the criteria in relation to emer-
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Emergency medical cards; the extent to which a person must be sick; the way in which such an assessment is made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38269/19]

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

Rehabilitation Training Allowance Payments

253. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the rehabilitative training allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38277/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): This 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. The 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 payment of the Rehabilitative Training (RT) Bonus came into place on the transition of Rehabilitative / Training Programmes to the HSE following the dissolution of the National Rehabilitation Board in June 2000.

The decision to phase out the Rehabilitative Training (RT) Bonus payment is designed to bring equity and consistency between people with a disability attending HSE funded rehabilitative training programmes who receive the payment, and those attending similar HSE funded Day Services or in other State schemes such as further education and training, who do not.

This action will ensure all HSE funded Day Services are provided on an equitable basis and will also ensure that the use of finite resources is maximised.

The Rehabilitative Training (RT) Bonus Payment is a historical payment, introduced in July 2001, aligned with a similar FÁS Training Bonus. However, during 2011 the FÁS Training Bonus was reduced to €20.00 and then eliminated the following year while to date the RT Bonus Payment has continued to be paid in the Health Sector.

It is worth remembering that:

- There is no cut in the number of RT places available
- There is no cut in payment of the bonus - those who have it will continue to receive it for the remainder of their RT Placement
- All participants continue to be eligible for Disability Allowance of €203 per week
- All participants continue to be eligible for a free travel pass
- No expectation of an additional RT bonus payment has been created by HSE for 2019 participants

The redirected funding (€3.7 m over 4 years), which will be ring-fenced, will facilitate 148 full day placements or 370 enhanced day places nationally based on priority need.

Each CHO will have the flexibility to redirect its own savings to address local service re-
requirements. The HSE will put in place a monitoring system and regularly report the additional placements realised to the Department of Health.

Hospital Groups

254. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if a decision has been made to remove Our Lady’s Hospital, Navan, from the Ireland East hospital group and put it into the RCSI hospital group; if consultation has been carried out in the making of this decision; the persons or bodies consulted; when it will occur; the changes that will happen to services at the hospital; if the emergency department at the hospital will not have a reduced service; and the steps which will be taken regarding existing Mater Hospital operations that are undertaken at the hospital. [38279/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy will be aware, 9 Community Healthcare Organisations (CHOs) and 6 Hospital Groups are currently in place on an administrative basis to plan and deliver community and acute care services respectively.

While significant progress has been made by CHOs and Hospital Groups, there is broad consensus that having separate and un-aligned structures for acute and community care impedes the development of a more integrated health service underpinned by population-based planning, as envisaged under the Sláintecare programme.

The Sláintecare Report called for the establishment of regional bodies based on the alignment of current CHO and Hospital Group structures. What is being proposed under Sláintecare is not simply a reconfiguration of hospital groups, but something much more significant and fundamental. It is the establishment of new health service management structures, which will be tasked with planning, managing and delivering all health and social care services for a given population based on coherent regional areas, on a population health basis. And within these regions, acute hospitals will work with primary, community and social care to provide integrated care.

As a first step in this process, I announced the areas for six new regional bodies in July. Our Lady’s Hospital, Navan will come within the remit of Area A which is depicted on the map in Appendix A. Details of the geographical areas covered by each new regional health area and the hospitals within these areas is also outlined in the appendix. It is important to note that the Mater Hospital is also within the remit of Area A.

The announcement of these areas is an important step in signalling the future shape of the health service. A number of pieces of research, analysis and consultation were undertaken to support the identification of the optimal boundaries of the new regions. This included a review of approaches taken internationally, a review of national policy documents on health reform and previous criteria used in determining regional health bodies, a public consultation process and a detailed analysis of service usage patterns.

As agreed by Government, my Department will now progress the development of detailed policy proposals on reconfiguration of the HSE, including the establishment of regional health bodies, and bring these proposals back to Government for approval next year. This process will provide an opportunity for further consultation and engagement with all key stakeholders to ensure that any structural changes do not unduly cause disruption and loss of focus on service delivery and the roll-out of the broader reform programme, and details of this will be announced in due course.

I would also like to reassure the Deputy that the announcement of future regional areas
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will not have any immediate impact on services. As the Deputy is aware, Ireland East Hospital Group is engaged in a programme of re-design work to further integrate and enhance the role of Navan Hospital within the current Group and to ensure that it will provide more services safely and appropriately with better linkages to primary, continuing and social care. It is intended that the Hospital Group will continue to engage closely with all interested parties to ensure that the needs of patients, staff, the local and wider community are addressed both in terms of the current Hospital Group configuration and also during the transition to future arrangements.


Healthcare Professionals

255. Deputy Louise O’Reilly asked the Minister for Health if he will legislate for a Supreme Court judgment (details supplied) in the Regulated Professions (Health and Social Care) (Amendment) Bill 2019. [38283/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Supreme Court decision in question confirmed that there is a “seriousness” threshold for cases involving “poor professional performance”. The Court clarified that this threshold is provided for in the definition of poor professional performance in the Medical Practitioners Act 2007, and, it follows, in the other health professional regulatory Acts which the Regulated Professions (Health and Social Care) Amendment Bill 2019 Bill is amending.

The case in question illustrated that registrants who receive one of the minor sanctions are left with limited options to challenge that decision. Accordingly, following consultation with the professional regulators, the Regulated Professions (Health and Social Care) Amendment Bill 2019 which is currently progressing through the Oireachtas provides for a right of appeal to the High Court for registrants receiving a minor sanction.

The Bill is scheduled for Committee stage consideration by the Select Committee on Health on 25 September 2019.

National Children’s Hospital Expenditure

256. Deputy Louise O’Reilly asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of the national children’s hospital; the estimated costs of the enabling work, construction and fit-out in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38284/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) has statutory responsibility for planning, designing, building and equipping the new children’s hospital. I have referred your question to the NPHDB for direct reply.

National Children’s Hospital Expenditure

257. Deputy Louise O’Reilly asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of the information and communications technology systems for the new national children’s hospital; the person or body contracted to provide the systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38285/19]
Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Investment in ICT will be funded through the ICT capital programme. The allocation for ICT in the new children’s hospital is €149 million (estimate based on market soundings). This includes the costs for an Electronic Health Record, which will be procured separately.

I have been advised that contracts for the implementation of ICT at the new children’s hospital have not yet been awarded. Open procurement processes will be used to source all ICT and to select the successful vendors.

The new Children’s hospital will also benefit from the phased implementation of a small number of national systems that are being deployed in all acute hospitals in the coming years. These deployments are funded separately from national ICT capital budgets.

The implementation of ICT into the new children’s hospital supports my Department’s eHealth strategy and commitments under the Sláintecare Action Plan to progress the development of clinical ICT systems, to realise the ambition and benefits associated with opening the facility as a digital hospital and to provide the required infrastructure to support effective clinical decision making.

Infectious Diseases

258. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Health the number of cases of CRE confirmed at Waterford University Hospital; the protocol in place if patients are being transferred from the hospital to another health facility; if patients that have been transferred are tracked and monitored for CRE; the steps taken to ensure patient safety and infection control at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38303/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

259. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Health if an early appointment for a knee operation will be arranged at Cappagh hospital for a person (details supplied); and if the matter will be expedited. [38304/19]

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.
260. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health if general practitioners can charge medical card patients for blood tests carried out in their surgeries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38305/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the terms of the current GMS contract, GPs are required to provide eligible patients with “all proper and necessary treatment of a kind usually undertaken by a general practitioner and not requiring special skill or experience of a degree or kind which general practitioners cannot reasonably be expected to possess.” There is no provision under the GMS GP contract for persons who hold a medical card or GP visit card to be charged for routine phlebotomy services provided by their GP which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition.

The HSE has advised GPs that where a blood test forms part of the investigation or necessary treatment of a patient’s symptoms or conditions, this should be free of charge for patients who hold a medical card or GP visit card. Notwithstanding this, I am aware that some GPs are charging GMS patients for phlebotomy services in some circumstances.

This is a matter of concern for me as it has long been the position, under successive Governments, that no user charges should apply to GP services provided to GMS and GP visit card patients. If a patient who holds a medical card or GP visit card believes he or she has been incorrectly charged for routine phlebotomy services by his or her GP, then that patient should report the matter to their HSE Local Health Office.

261. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if surgery will be scheduled for a person (details supplied). [38327/19]

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

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

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

**Home Help Service Provision**

262. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if additional home help hours will be provided to a person (details supplied). [38338/19]
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 Staff Remuneration

263. Deputy John Brassil asked the Minister for Health if a salary arrears payment will issue as a matter of priority to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38339/19]

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

Ministerial Correspondence

264. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Health if a letter of complaint was received from a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38343/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A letter on the lines set out by the Deputy has not been received in the office of the Minister for Health as of 23 September 2019.

Respite Care Services Provision

265. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the case of a child (details supplied); and when the child will receive respite at a centre. [38350/19]

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.

Community Pharmacy Services

266. Deputy Louise O’Reilly asked the Minister for Health when negotiations will commence on a new community pharmacy contract in view of his commitment given at a conference (details supplied); when the talks will conclude; and if he will make a statement on the
manner. [38351/19]

267. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when he plans to commence talks with the representative body for pharmacy contractors on reform and modernisation of pharmacy services and the unwinding of FEMPI for community pharmacists in view of his commitment given at a conference (details supplied). [38352/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 266 and 267 together.

The Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment to expand the role of community pharmacy in managing patient health, and this is an issue which I intend to progress.

Work has been done in recent years on wider healthcare roles for pharmacies, including the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland’s Future Pharmacy report, concerning expansion of professional pharmacy practice. It is clear from this and other work that there is potential to increase the range of both private and publicly funded health services delivered through community pharmacy. Important new services, in influenza vaccination and emergency contraception, have already been introduced.

To be funded by the taxpayer, new public health services in community pharmacy, as elsewhere, should improve health outcomes and provide value for money and benefits for patients. Any new or transferred services should be based on sound evidence, with matching improvements in governance and administration.

I recently met with the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) where these and other issues were discussed. My officials will be engaging with the IPU on new fee regulations before the end of the year and the intention is to broaden the discussions to wider contract issues in 2020.

It is my intention to commence a broader discussion on contractual and service arrangements following this in 2020.

**Pharmacy Regulations**

268. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when pharmacists will be permitted to provide oral contraception to women without prescription in line with his commitment to improve access to contraception and plans being considered by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38353/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A Working Group was established in April 2019 to consider the range of policy, regulatory and legislative issues arising in relation to improving access to contraception. As part of its deliberations and engagement with stakeholders, the Group has considered the potential role of pharmacists in providing oral contraception to women without prescription.

The Group is continuing its deliberations and intends to report to the Minister shortly.

**Pharmacy Services**

269. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when the pharmacy-based minor ailment service will be rolled out to provide medical card holders with advice and appropriate treatment for minor ailments without the need to visit a general practitioner, as is
commonplace in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38354/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment to expand the role of community pharmacy in managing patient health, and this is an issue I intend to progress.

Work has been done in recent years on wider healthcare roles for pharmacies, including the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland’s Future Pharmacy report, concerning expansion of professional pharmacy practice. It is clear from this and other work that there is potential to increase the range of both private and publicly funded health services delivered through community pharmacy. Important new services, in influenza vaccination and emergency contraception, have already been introduced.

To be funded by the taxpayer, new public health services in community pharmacy, as elsewhere, should improve health outcomes and provide value for money and benefits for patients. Any new or transferred services should be based on sound evidence, with matching improvements in governance and administration.

I met with the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) earlier this year and I attended their conference in Galway and these and other issues were discussed in both forums. It is my intention that there will be further consultation with the IPU before the end of the year.

**Services for People with Disabilities**

270. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; if the person can be moved to a similar independent facility in County Cavan to be close to family; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38355/19]

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

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

**Ambulance Service Data**

271. **Deputy Patrick O’Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulance cars assigned to HSE officers; if HSE officers are the only persons allowed to drive the vehicles; if not, if named non-ambulance personnel can drive them; if so, the number; the annual mileage in 2018 by vehicle assigned to specific personnel; the number of call-outs made by each vehicle assigned to an officer in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38361/19]

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

272. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Health when the perceived significant inequality in funding for the UL hospital group will be addressed (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38362/19]

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

Dental Services Provision

273. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will provide funding for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38363/19]

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

Electronic Cigarettes

274. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the research his Department has commissioned and-or carried out on vaping; the regulations issued on the sale of vaping devices and liquids; the health advice issued on the subject of vaping; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38364/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The current position on e-cigarettes in Ireland is based advice from the Health Information and Quality Authority (‘HIQA’) in its 2017 *Health Technology Assessment of Smoking Cessation Products and Services*.

In relation to the safety of e-cigarettes the HIQA assessment concluded that this remains an evolving area of research; while potentially safer than smoking, evidence on long-term safety has yet to be established.

In relation to e-cigarettes as an aid to smoking cessation HIQA advised the Minister for Health as follows:

> Although the currently available results for e-cigarettes are promising, there is insufficient evidence at present to reliably demonstrate their effectiveness as an aid to smoking cessation.

Although the HIQA assessment was published only in 2017, the evidence on e-cigarettes is rapidly evolving. In that context, in March this year I asked the Health Research Board to undertake a review of the evidence in relation to the health harms of e-cigarettes, their effectiveness as an aid to smoking cessation and whether they act as a gateway to smoking tobacco products. The evidence review is expected to be completed in March 2020.

In addition my Department continues to monitor developments and publications by authoritative bodies on the safety of e-cigarettes and whether they facilitate smoking cessation.

Under these Regulations health warnings which advise consumers that e-cigarettes contain nicotine which is a highly addictive substance are mandatory. The Regulations also provide for mandatory safety and quality requirements for e-cigarettes and refill containers, including maximum nicotine concentrations for e-cigarettes containing nicotine, and maximum volumes for cartridges, tanks and nicotine liquid containers.

Finally the Regulations require e-cigarette manufacturers or importers to notify the Health Service Executive of all products that they place on the market and, if a manufacturer, importer or distributor has a reason to believe that a product is not safe, they are required to immediately notify the Health Service Executive and to explain what corrective action has been taken.

In relation to advertising, the Regulations prohibit advertisements for e-cigarettes online and in printed publications except for those directed at persons in the e-cigarette industry or publications printed and published outside the EU and intended for markets outside the EU. In addition, advertisements for e-cigarettes are prohibited on television and on radio. Finally, any form of contribution to an event, activity or person with the aim of promoting e-cigarettes and with a cross-border effect is also prohibited.

In addition to the current legislation my Department is developing a draft scheme for a Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Bill which will include provisions to:

- introduce a new licensing system for the retail sale of tobacco products and nicotine-inhaling products such as e-cigarettes
- prohibit the sale of nicotine inhaling products to persons under the age of 18
- prohibit the sale of tobacco products and nicotine inhaling products by persons under the age of 18

I intend to bring the draft scheme to Government in the coming weeks.

The current health advice given by the Health Service Executive (‘HSE’) reflects the position from the HIQA research and conclusions.

The HSE advises people who smoke that currently e-cigarettes are not recommended as a help to stop smoking because the safety and effectiveness profile is uncertain. People who want to stop smoking and /or using e-cigarettes, and who want support, can use HSE QUIT services and access help. Research shows that using stop smoking services like the HSE’s QUIT service makes someone twice as likely to quit for good. Even better news is that using stop smoking services in combination with Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) and stop smoking medication makes people three to four times more likely to quit. The HSE’s QUIT service is a free, personal support service to help quitters – providing a team of trained advisors, online tools, understanding and support. If anyone is thinking of giving up smoking, or is using e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation aid, the QUIT service can help over the phone, on Facebook or Twitter, via email or text, or through Live Chat via the QUIT.ie support. The QUIT Service also has a network of face-to-face HSE QUIT services in locations around the country, providing one-to-one and group support for smokers.

Prescriptions Data

275. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the number of prescriptions issued to medical card holders for oxycodone in each of the years 2009 to 2018 and to date in 2019;
and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38365/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of medicines; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Prescriptions Data**

276. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the number of prescriptions issued to medical card holders for benzodiazepines in each of the years 2009 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38366/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of medicines; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Prescriptions Data**

277. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the number of prescriptions issued to medical card holders for fentanyl in each of the years 2009 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38367/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of medicines; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Prescriptions Data**

278. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the number of prescriptions issued to medical card holders for opioids in each of the years 2009 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38368/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of medicines; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Counselling Services Provision**

279. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the National Counselling Service waiting list in County Louth; and the length of time they have been waiting [38370/19]

**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.
280. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of intensive home care packages approved in County Louth to date in 2019; and the number of persons seeking same. [38371/19]

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

**Nursing Home Accommodation Provision**

281. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed additional nursing home beds at a hospital (details supplied). [38372/19]

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

**Hospital Accommodation Provision**

282. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed 50-bed facility for a hospital (details supplied). [38373/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In the recently published Health Service Executive Capital Plan 2019 - 2021, the plan provides for €220m capital funding to the Community Nursing Unit programme over the period 2019 to 2021 and sets out the current status of all projects within the programme, including St Joseph’s Hospital Ardee.

This project, which it is expected to have 50 beds, is to be delivered as part of a bundle of facilities by Public Private Partnership (PPP). A design team has been appointed and a planning application has recently been lodged in respect of this project.

**Primary Care Centres**

283. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the status of Dundalk primary care centre. [38374/19]

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

**Hospitals Data**

284. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of cataract surgeries performed in County Louth in each of the past five years. [38375/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.
285. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in County Louth awaiting cataract surgery; and the length of time they have been waiting. [38376/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government. In this regard, the Government is committed to improving waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures.

Budget 2019 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019. The joint Department of Health/HSE/NTPF Scheduled Care Access Plan 2019 was published in March and sets out measures to improve access for patients waiting for scheduled care this year. The plan places a strong focus on ten high-volume Inpatient/Day Case procedures, including cataracts.

At the end of July 2017, the number of people waiting for a cataract procedure was 10,024. Under the Inpatient Day Case Access Plan 2018, Cataracts were one of the specialties targeted by the NTPF, and by end December 2018, the number of patients waiting had fallen to 6,440, a reduction of 36%. The number of patients waiting for a Cataract procedure at the end of August 2019 had further reduced to 5,528, with 527 of patients waiting over 9 months. This represents a reduction of 3,844 or 88% when compared to July 2017, when there were 4,371 patients waiting over 9 months for a cataract operation.

In regard to the data requested by the Deputy, there are currently no patients on the cataract surgery waiting list in either Louth County Hospital or Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda. The waiting times for cataract surgery by area of residence in County Louth is outlined in the document attached.

To ensure anonymity numbers lower than 5 have been merged in certain timebands

<table>
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<th>0-3 Months</th>
<th>3-6 Months</th>
<th>6-9 Months</th>
<th>9-12 Months</th>
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<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hospital Services**

286. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the ophthalmology services available at Louth County Hospital, Dundalk; and if he has implemented the recommendations of the primary care eye services review group in this regard. [38377/19]

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

**Disability Services Data**

287. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with disabilities in County Louth that have requested long-term residential care [38378/19]

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

Disability Services Data

288. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with disabilities in County Louth who had business cases for residential care approved by the HSE but are still awaiting a residential placement. [38379/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** 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.

Mental Health Services

289. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the status of the model of care for dual diagnosis; if a clinical lead has been recruited; the way in which the project will be further developed; and if Dundalk will be selected as a demonstration site. [38380/19]

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

Mental Health Services Funding

290. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding allocated to the development of a model of care for dual diagnosis in each of the past five years. [38381/19]

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

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

291. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting an initial assessment for occupational therapy in County Louth; and the number that have been waiting for three, six, 12 and more than 12 months, respectively for this assessment. [38382/19]
292. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting a therapeutic appointment for occupational therapy treatment in County Louth; and the number of these persons that are under 18, 18 to 65, and over 65 years of age, respectively. [38383/19]

293. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting an initial assessment for occupational therapy in County Louth that are under 18, 18 to 65 and over 65 years of age, respectively. [38384/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 291 to 293, inclusive, together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for them to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### Hospital Appointments Status

294. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the status of an ophthalmology appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38391/19]

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

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

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

### HSE Reviews

295. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if his Department received the findings of the review of the HSE reimbursement and pricing decision-making process; if he will make these findings publicly available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38395/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Work on the review of the HSE reimbursement and pricing decision-making process is ongoing. The review, conducted by Mazars, is progressing and on completion my officials will consider its findings.

The review will make recommendations in respect of any required improvements to the HSE’s systems, structures, processes, governance arrangements or use of specialist resources.

### Medical Card Drugs Availability
296. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if a child (details supplied) will be provided access to a supplement on the child’s long-term illness card without a script from a hospital. [38397/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of medicines; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Health Services Staff Recruitment**

297. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health when it is planned to fill two vacancies that have existed for some time in order to address the lack of psychology services in north County Tipperary. [38402/19]

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

**Nursing Staff Remuneration**

298. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated net cost for 2019 of implementing the nurses’ pay deal agreed in February 2019 based on the savings and productivity measures to be put in place. [38418/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE are currently finalising the estimate of the costs arising from the Labour Court recommendation, in the context of Budget 2020 planning.

Health Service Management are committed to the implementation of this Labour Court recommendation and the implementation of all aspects of the agreement will be closely monitored through an agreed HSE Implementation Plan.

**HSE Funding**

299. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimate provided to his Department by the HSE on its financial position at the end of 2019. [38419/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE’s latest income and expenditure position at 31 July 2019 shows a revenue deficit of €226m which represents 2.5% of the available budget for the same period, a significant improvement on the same period last year. The main drivers of the deficit are acute hospitals, disability services, pensions, State Claims, PCRS and overseas treatments.

My Department is engaging in ongoing dialogue with the HSE and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the financial performance of the Executive year to date, including consideration of the implications for the projected outturn for the year.

These discussions are still progressing and until they are concluded it would not be appropriate for me to anticipate the outcome.
Questions - Written Answers

Mental Health Services Provision

300. Deputy James Browne asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the development of a new mental health unit at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38428/19]

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.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

301. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre review decision making process that will be given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38429/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

302. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement dataset will specifically cover only current HSE funded users of the FreeStyle Libre device; if the Health Technology Assessment Group review will just compare total blood glucose strip usage spend year on year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38430/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Delays

303. Deputy Tony McLoughlin asked the Minister for Health the reason an operation has not proceeded for a person (details supplied); when they will be called for an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38431/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Maintaining scheduled care access for all patients is a key priority for hospitals. I fully acknowledge the distress and inconvenience for patients and their families when elective procedures are cancelled, particularly for clinically urgent procedures.

While every effort is made to avoid cancellation or postponement of planned procedures, the HSE advise that planned procedures and operations can be postponed or cancelled for a variety of reasons including capacity issues due to increased scheduled and unscheduled care demand, medical reasons, and patient choice.
In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

**Ambulance Service Data**

304. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulance call-outs due to road traffic accidents recorded on the Cork to Limerick road since January 2019. [38434/19]

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

**Tobacco Control Measures**

305. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to vaping advertising on bus stops here; his views on whether such advertising should be curtailed; if he or his officials have met with representatives of the vaping and e-cigarette industry to date in 2019; and if so, the circumstances under which the meeting occurred. [38439/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** E-cigarettes are regulated under the European Union (Manufacture, Presentation and Sale of Tobacco and Related Products) Regulations 2016 (S.I. 271/2016). These Regulations prohibit advertisements for e-cigarettes online and in printed publications except for those directed at persons in the e-cigarette industry or publications printed and published outside the EU and intended for markets outside the EU. In addition, advertisements for e-cigarettes are prohibited on television, on-demand television services and on radio. Finally, any form of contribution to an event, activity or person with the aim of promoting e-cigarettes and with a cross-border effect is also prohibited.

The current priority in relation to e-cigarettes is the draft scheme under development for a Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Bill. The Bill will include provisions to prohibit the sale of nicotine inhaling products such as e-cigarettes by and to persons under the age of 18 and introduce a new licensing system for the retail sale of nicotine-inhaling products such as e-cigarettes.

Neither I, nor my officials have met with representatives of the vaping and e-cigarette industry to date in 2019.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

306. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre device review decision making process that will be given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38441/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.
307. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement dataset will specifically cover only current HSE funded users of the FreeStyle Libre device; and if not, if the Health Technology Assessment Group review will compare total blood glucose strip usage spend year on year. [38442/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

308. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre review decision making process to be given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38443/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

309. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement data set will specifically cover only current HSE funded users of the FreeStyle Libre device; if not, if the Health Technology Assessment Group review will compare total blood glucose strip usage spend year on year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38444/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Pharmacy Services**

310. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health if the necessary arrangements will be put in place to ensure that prescribed medications and repeat prescriptions issued by pharmacies will be on a calendar month basis which for 11 months of the year is a 30 or 31 day period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38445/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**
311. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the availability of propranolol under the drug payment scheme; if the drug will be made available to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38447/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of medicines; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

312. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement dataset will specifically cover only current HSE funded users of the FreeStyle Libre device; and if not, if the Health Technology Assessment Group review will compare total blood glucose strip usage spend year on year. [38448/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

313. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre review decision making process that will be given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38450/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

314. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a reimbursement payment through the cross border directive scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38451/19]

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

**HSE Staff**

315. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to an employment issue for healthcare workers (details supplied) in County Cork. [38455/19]

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

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

**Cancer Screening Programmes**

316. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the processing time for colposcopy results by hospital; the number of laboratories examining these biopsies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38465/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** CervicalCheck has established a network of quality assured colposcopy clinics for women requiring further investigation following a smear test. A woman can be referred to one of 15 colposcopy clinics located nationwide. Colposcopy units have experienced significant pressure in recent months, in light of increased demand from both screening and direct referral.

The HSE advises that extra clinical sessions have been added to reduce waiting lists, and extra efforts are being made when appointments are cancelled to fill the vacant slot to further reduce waiting lists, and to ensure the increased referrals are categorised promptly. Notwithstanding these efforts, clinics have been experiencing service pressures, and additional funding is being provided this year to address these pressures.

In relation to the specific data requested, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

**National Carers’ Strategy Funding**

317. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will allocate annual funding of €3.2 million in budget 2020 to an organisation (details supplied) to assist it in the delivery of vital core services to carers nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38471/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the 2012 National Carers’ Strategy, a range of measures have been introduced or extended by the Department of Health and other departments to support family carers. Funding has been secured for information and training supports for family carers, the development of support networks and support groups to assist with the transition back into social and economic life at the end of the caring role and measures that assist in promoting carer self-identification. In 2016 and 2017, continued payments after the death of the cared for person or their permanent move into residential care or a nursing home was extended from 6 weeks to 12. Since September 2018, free GP visit cards have been extended to persons in receipt of the Carer’s Allowance.

The level of funding available for the Department of Health in 2020 and the quantum of services to be provided by the HSE will be considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process and National Service Planning.

**Transport Support Scheme**
318. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will replace the mobility and transport grant which was withdrawn in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38472/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Deputy may be aware that my colleague, the Minister for Health and I, brought a Memorandum to Government on proposals for a new Transport Support Payment Scheme. Following consideration of the matter, it was decided to withdraw the Memorandum from the Cabinet Agenda at that time. We intend to revert to Government in due course with revised proposals to reflect the discussions at that Cabinet meeting and further discussions between myself and Minister Harris, on the best way to progress the Transport Support Payment Scheme.

In line with the Government decision in 2013, persons who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance at the time that the scheme closed have continued to receive the monthly payment.

It is important to note that the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme, operated by the Revenue Commissioners, remains in place. This scheme provides VRT and VAT relief, an exemption from road tax and a fuel grant to drivers and passengers with a disability, who qualify under the relevant criteria set out in governing regulations made by the Minister for Finance. Specifically adapted vehicles driven by persons with a disability are also exempt from payment of tolls on national roads and toll bridges. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has responsibility for this particular scheme.

The Deputies may wish to note that in July this year, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Michael Ring T.D., announced CLÁR funding of €890,632 to 20 voluntary community organisations. This funding will support the purchase and/or fit out of vehicles to provide transport for people in rural areas with mobility issues. It will support voluntary organisations that provide:

- Transport for people with significant mobility issues, including those requiring specialised wheelchair accessible vehicles, to day-care or other medical, therapeutic or respite services; or

- Transport to/from designated cancer treatment hospitals/centres under the National Cancer Care Programme.

There are improvements in access to a range of transport support schemes available to persons with disabilities in the State and on-going work is being carried out by Government Departments, agencies and transport providers to further improve access to public transport services. Under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has responsibility for the continued development of accessibility and availability of public transport for people with a disability.

**General Practitioner Services Provision**

319. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will extend the general practitioner visit card to carers in receipt of the carer’s support grant in Budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38473/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Since 01 September 2018 all those in receipt of either a full or half-rate Carer’s Allowance or Carer’s Benefit are automatically eligible for a GP service free of charge. There are currently no plans to extend GP visit Cards to persons specifically in receipt of a Carer’s Support Grant (formerly known as the Respite Care Grant), however it is noted that many persons in receipt of this Grant will qualify for a GP visit card as
the Carer’s Support Grant is paid automatically to persons in receipt of Carer’s Allowance or Carer’s Benefit.

**Mental Health Services Staff**

320. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the transfer of staff from one facility to another (details supplied). [38513/19]

**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.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

321. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has received a request for funding from the HSE for the reimbursement of the drug Tagrisso for the treatment of adult patients with locally advanced or metastatic EGFR T790M mutation-positive NSCLC; when he expects funding to be made available for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38520/19]

366. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1309 of 6 September 2019, when the HSE received the further information from the manufacturer regarding Tagrisso; the length of time reimbursement has been under consideration by the HSE; when the HSE will make a final decision regarding reimbursement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38787/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 321 and 366 together.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. The Minister for Health has no role in relation to reimbursement decisions.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

The current application for the reimbursement of Osimertinib (Tagrisso) for the treatment of adult patients with locally advanced or metastatic EGFR T790M mutation-positive NSCLC was received on 16 January 2018.

Following the NCPE’s assessment and after a number of rounds of commercial negotiations and HSE reviews, the HSE notified the applicant in February 2019 that it was minded not to approve reimbursement for this indication.

The 2013 Act provides for a period of representations after such notifications, before the HSE can make its final decision. The HSE have received representations from the manufacturer and they are under consideration by the HSE leadership team in advance of a final reimbursement decision.
24 September 2019

Cancer Screening Programmes

322. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 1190, 1191 and 1197 of 6 September 2019, if a direct response will issue on the specific question regarding a patient having to fund an independent review of her smears if she has been diagnosed with cervical cancer. [38526/19]

323. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 1190, 1191 and 1197 of 6 September 2019, if a response will issue on whether the financial burden on patients with cervical cancer will be removed; and if the HSE will fund an independent review of smears if requested. [38527/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 322 and 323 together.

As previously outlined to the Deputy, in response to a recommendation from Dr Gabriel Scally, the HSE has established an Expert Group to review clinical audit of interval cancers in the three cancer screening programmes. This work, which incorporates consideration of international best practice, is expected to be complete by the end of this year, following which the recommendations will be implemented.

In relation to the issue of funding private smear reviews, this matter remains under consideration. However, in that context it is important to again re-emphasise the limitations of cervical screening, and the fact that false negative results are an inherent part of any cervical screening programme. Cervical screening will not prevent all cases of cervical cancer and unfortunately some women will still develop cervical cancer despite regular screening. The HPV test is a more accurate testing mechanism than liquid-based cytology, which is the current testing mechanism. I have asked the HSE to introduce HPV testing as the primary screening method for the prevention of cervical cancer as soon as possible and have approved a draft project plan for the HPV primary screening project. Its use will result in fewer false negative results, though it is important to be clear they will continue to occur.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

324. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement dataset specifically covers only current HSE-funded users of the FreeStyle Libre device; if the health technology assessment group review will compare total blood glucose strip usage spend year on year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38567/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

325. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre review decision-making process that will be given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38568/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of...
Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Ministerial Meetings**

326. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of times he has formally met his UK counterpart to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38569/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I engage regularly with my EU counterparts at the EPSCO (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs) Council meeting of Health Ministers, as well as through bilateral meetings in capitals and on the margins of Council meetings.

I have met UK Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health, Baroness Blackwood at the EPSCO (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs) Council meeting of Health Ministers in Luxembourg on 14 June 2019.

I had previously met Baroness Blackwood at the Informal meeting of Health Ministers in Budapest on the 15 April 2019.

There is ongoing liaison between my officials and colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care, UK and other devolved administrations in the UK.

**Autism Support Services**

327. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an autism assessment appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38572/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As the Deputy’s question relates to a service issue it has been referred for direct reply.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

328. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement dataset will specifically cover only current HSE-funded users of the FreeStyle Libre device; and if not, if the health technology assessment group review will compare total blood glucose strip usage spend year on year. [38573/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

329. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the weighting percent-
ages to be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre review decision-making process that will be given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38574/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### Medicinal Products Reimbursement

330. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement dataset will specifically cover only current HSE-funded users of the FreeStyle Libre device; and if not, if the Health Technology Assessment Group review will compare total blood glucose strip usage spend year on year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38575/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### Hospital Appointments Status

331. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a procedure for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38580/19]

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

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

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

### Medical Card Drugs Availability

332. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medication (details supplied) has been withdrawn and is no longer available under the medical card; if a replacement or substitution of another medication will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38589/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of
Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of medicines; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Disability Services Provision**

333. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the measures he is taking regarding the crisis with the lack of resources in early intervention, adequate respite services and a lack of residential spaces for persons with disabilities in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38590/19]

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

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

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

334. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health the status of the rolling out of Plenadren as an alternative hydrocortisone therapy here under the HSE drugs schemes in view of the fact it has been approved in the UK, Spain and the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38591/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of medicines; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

335. **Deputy Kate O’Connell** asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre review decision making process that will be given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38592/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

336. **Deputy Kate O’Connell** asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement dataset will specifically cover only current HSE-funded users of the FreeStyle Libre device; and if the
health technology assessment group review will compare just total blood glucose strip usage spend year on year. [38593/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Medical Products**

337. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the Chief Medical Officer’s report on mesh implants carried out here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38598/19]

338. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of women that received mesh implants here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38599/19]

339. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to address the concerns of women who had mesh implant procedures carried out here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38600/19]

343. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health when an aftercare service pathway will be in place for those living with complications arising from vaginal mesh implant surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38634/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 337 to 339, inclusive, and 343 together.

As Minister for Health, I requested Dr Tony Holohan, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) to draft a report on the use of Uro-Gynaecological Mesh in the surgical treatment of stress urinary incontinence (SUI) and pelvic organ prolapse (POP) in women. The report covers the clinical and technical issues involved in ensuring both:

1. the safe and effective provision of mesh procedures in urogynaecology and
2. an appropriate response to women who suffer complications as a result of undergoing such procedures.

This report was published on the Department of Health website on 21 November 2018.

The CMO’s Report identifies that for many women, surgical procedures using synthetic mesh devices have provided a more effective and less invasive form of treatment than traditional SUI and POP procedures. However, mesh devices are associated with significant and severe complications in a minority of women. These are of concern given the difficulties of mesh implant removal.

The Report makes 19 recommendations including:

- the development of patient information and informed consent materials;
- surgical professional training and multidisciplinary expertise in units carrying out mesh procedures;
- the development of clinical guidance;
- the development of information systems to monitor the ongoing use of mesh devices;
- ensuring the reporting of mesh related complications; and
- ensuring timely, appropriate and accessible care pathways for the management of women with complications.

In advance of the report’s completion, the HSE was requested in May 2018 to begin work immediately on the development of national standardised patient information and informed consent materials and the clarification and development of treatment pathways and appropriate referral services for women suffering serious complications.

The HSE was also asked by the Chief Medical Officer on 24 July 2018 to pause all mesh procedures where clinically safe to do so, pending confirmation by the HSE of the implementation of recommendations relating to (i) professional training requirements, (ii) patient information and consent and (iii) the development and maintenance of a national data set for all mesh procedures carried out in HSE funded hospitals.

A central finding of the CMO’s report is that there are significant gaps in knowledge about current practice in Ireland concerning the use of mesh implants. Routinely collected clinical activity data does not identify the number of women who have received mesh implants in HSE funded hospitals. This is being addressed through ongoing work to implement recommendation (iii) above.

A Synthetic Mesh Devices Advisory Group was convened by the HSE, to advise on and progress all of the recommendations which included three patient representatives, as well as representatives of the HPRA, the IOG, the RCSI, the CFI and all Hospital Groups to advise on and action all of the recommendations above.

I am informed that an ongoing work programme for the clarification and development of treatment pathways and appropriate referral services for women suffering from mesh-related complications is being progressed by the HSE. This work includes identifying the appropriate specialist clinical expertise and facilities required at hospital group level and nationally to provide comprehensive aftercare services.

Pending the completion of this work, the HSE is also examining options to address service requirements for patients with immediate or urgent needs.

As was requested by the Secretary General of my Department in November 2018, the HSE has prepared an Implementation Plan for the complete set of recommendations set out in the CMO’s Report, which was approved by the Leadership Team in the HSE and published on the HSE website on 26 April 2019, which I hope provides further clarity on this issue.

I am informed that the HSE has advised that a detailed progress report on implementation of the recommendations will be provided to my Department and this report is awaited.

The HSE has published a dedicated webpage about vaginal mesh implants, including contact information for women suffering complications, which I hope is a useful resource. This can be found on the HSE website.

I would strongly encourage all women affected by mesh to engage with the relevant HSE contact points provided, to ensure that their service needs can be identified and provided for.

At my meeting with the Mesh Survivors Ireland Group on 7 March 2019 I agreed to continue engagement with them on a pathway forward, to ensure that the ongoing clinical manage-
ment of this patient group is in line with international best practice and emerging evidence. It is my intention to meet again with the Mesh Survivors Ireland group in the coming weeks.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

340. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre review decision making process that will be given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38601/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

**Occupational Therapy Provision**

341. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the lack of early intervention occupational therapy services in Coolock primary care centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38602/19]

**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 Services**

342. **Deputy Séan Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if a new emergency department and a cystic fibrosis unit will be provided at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9, without delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38603/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health Service Executive recently published its Capital Plan for 2019-2021 outlining 250 projects to be progressed over the three-year period.

The Capital Plan includes the new emergency department, which is at planning stage and a cystic fibrosis unit, which is at design stage at Beaumont Hospital.

It is important to recognise that all capital development proposals must progress through a number of approval stages, in line with the Public Spending Code, including detailed appraisal, planning, design and procurement, before a firm timeline or funding requirement can be established. The final decision to proceed with the construction of a project cannot be made until the tender process has been completed and the costings reviewed to ensure that the proposal delivers value for money and remains affordable, and that sufficient funding is available to fund the
project to completion, including equipping and commissioning costs.

The delivery of capital projects is a dynamic process and is subject to the successful completion of the various approval stages, which can impact on the timeline for delivery.

The HSE actively manages the capital programme in order to ensure it has flexibility to progress as many projects as possible within the available funding, particularly in the event of any project not progressing as anticipated.

As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

*Question No. 343 answered with Question No. 337.*

**Health Promotion**

344. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 201 of 19 June 2018, 345 of 5 February 2019, and 497 of 9 July 2019, the position regarding the staff breastfeeding in the workplace policy for HSE staff; if the policy is still due to be finalised in quarter 4 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38642/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** As the question refers to service matters, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

**Hospital Appointments Administration**

345. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is not being called for a MRI scan; the reason they were provided with false information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38644/19]

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

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

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

**Hospital Appointments Status**

346. **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. [38648/19]
Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

347. Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be given a date for an appointment to be assessed for early intervention services. [38718/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy’s question relates to a HSE service issue it has been referred for direct reply.

Primary Care Centres

348. Deputy Pat Buckley asked the Minister for Health the reason for the decision to close the Castlemartyr health centre in Cork; if it is his decision; and if not, the person that made this decision. [38732/19]

349. Deputy Pat Buckley asked the Minister for Health the reason for the decision to relocate the public health nursing services from Castlemartyr, County Cork, to Midleton Community Hospital six miles away; and the person that made the decision. [38733/19]

350. Deputy Pat Buckley asked the Minister for Health the reason in January of 2019 permission was granted to carry out a single story extension including the remodelling of the interior and the installation of a wheelchair assessable ramp at Castlemartyr community health centre; the reason work was not started on this plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38734/19]

351. Deputy Pat Buckley asked the Minister for Health his plans to expand the public health services in Castlemartyr, County Cork. [38735/19]

352. Deputy Pat Buckley asked the Minister for Health if the decision to close Castlemartyr health centre is finalised; and the final date for the closure. [38736/19]

353. Deputy Pat Buckley asked the Minister for Health the plans the HSE has put in place to facilitate patients and service users to travel to Midleton from Castlemartyr, County Cork. [38737/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 348 to 353,
inclusive, together.

As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, and operation of Primary Care Centres and facilities and the delivery of services, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

**Services for People with Disabilities**

354. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the number of children by CHO awaiting an assessment of needs to be completed; the length of time they have been waiting since they were first referred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38760/19]

355. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the number of children by CHO awaiting an assessment of needs to be commenced; the length of time they have been waiting since they were first referred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38761/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 354 and 355 together.

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

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

**HSE Staff Data**

356. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of full-time dieticians employed by the HSE in CHO area 9 in 2018 and to date in 2019; if this number will be further increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38768/19]

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

**HSE Staff Data**

357. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff by job title working in the paediatric eye care team in CHO area 9; the number of vacancies by job title in the team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38769/19]

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

**Hospital Services**
358. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health when he expects the new cochlear implant unit at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9 to be fully opened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38770/19]

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

### Antimicrobial Resistance

359. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the policy of his Department and the HSE regarding the spread of antibiotic resistant superbugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38771/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The prevention and control of healthcare associated infections (HCAIs) and Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) has been a significant patient safety and public health priority for my Department for numerous years.

A wide range of initiatives has been put in place in the Irish health system including:

- improved surveillance of infections and prescribing,
- infection prevention and control processes,
- antimicrobial stewardship initiatives,
- public and professional awareness raising and
- a significant emphasis on the education and training of healthcare professionals.

In October 2017, with Minister Creed, I published Ireland’s first *National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance, 2017-2020 (iNAP)* and since publication, my Department, the Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine and other organisations have been engaged in an intensive programme of work to implement the strategic objectives of the iNAP Plan.

Over the last eighteen months, a number of measures have also been put in place through the work of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET), convened in October 2017 to address in particular the increase in the CPE ‘superbug’:

- The HSE has implemented strong governance arrangements for healthcare associated infections (HCAIs) and AMR.
- The HSE’s Health Protection Surveillance Centre has also driven enhanced surveillance of HCAIs, including the production of monthly surveillance reports on CPE.
- My Department has provided additional funding for prioritised posts in both the acute and community sectors to build capacity for infection prevention and control and antimicrobial stewardship. These have included posts for the HSE’s national antimicrobial resistance team, additional posts for laboratory/screening activities, and infection prevention and control teams.
- A suite of publicly available guidance documents has been developed by the CPE Expert Group. The Group provides expert advice across health care settings regarding actions that should be taken in relation to CPE screening and control of spread of CPE.
- A dedicated HSE communications campaign and website with focused information and education tools is in place.
While the number of newly diagnosed CPE patients has slightly increased, this is in the context of substantially increased screening activity over the past year.

Over two years, my Department has provided dedicated AMR funding, totalling €6.6 million in full year costs. The HSE has prioritised work programmes for this funding in line with HCAI/AMR risk. A number of posts are now in place and new developments are underway.

As part of iNAP, enhanced surveillance of AMR and antimicrobial usage patterns, both within and between sectors has commenced with the publication in January 2019 of Ireland’s first cross sectoral One Health Report on Antimicrobial Use and Antimicrobial Resistance. Work on a second report is underway.

Ireland is hosting a European Commission/European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) One Health AMR Country Visit from 7th - 11th October next. This type of visit to Member States by the Commission and ECDC is an established work programme providing support and advice to countries on their arrangements across the human health, animal health and environmental sectors, with an emphasis on antibiotic resistance and the ‘One Health’ or whole of government approach. A programme including a full day of presentations and targeted site visits through the week is now confirmed. Ireland is very pleased to engage on this programme and notes its value to all participants.

The Department will continue to engage with the HSE and other stakeholders to ensure that AMR, HCAIs and CPE in particular remain a priority.

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Cancer Services Provision

360. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to improve services for survivors of cancer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38772/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026 places a strong emphasis on providing supports to patients throughout their cancer journey.

In line with Recommendation 41 of the Strategy, I recently launched the National Cancer Survivorship Needs Assessment - ‘Living with and Beyond Cancer in Ireland’. This outlines key challenges involved, and actions to be taken, to better address the needs of cancer patients and their families.

While some healthcare professionals already provide the care and support recommended in the Needs Assessment, there is a need to strengthen, standardise and ensure access for patients to good survivorship services and supports across designated cancer centres, other hospitals and primary care services, as well as in community and voluntary services.

Also, Recommendation 43 of the Strategy highlights the need for the development of dedicated survivorship programmes emphasising the physical, psychological and social factors that affect health and wellbeing. Arising from this, Cancer ‘Thriving & Surviving’ Programmes, designed to assist patients in achieving optimal quality of life on completion of treatment, are being undertaken in a number of locations nationwide.

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Dental Services Waiting Lists

361. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for a dental appointment at 31 December 2018 and 13 September 2019 in CHO area 9;
and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38776/19]

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

**Hospital Consultant Contracts**

362. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the reason many consultant doctors in the health system here are not on permanent contracts; the further reason for the large number of consultant vacancies in healthcare here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38777/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy on the first part of the question.

The Public Service Pay Commission identified difficulties in recruiting consultants and stated that there are a number of factors involved including the differential in pay between established consultants and those appointed post-October 2012. It proposed that the parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement jointly consider what measures could be taken over time to address this. It is my view a process should be commenced with the various bodies in the near future. However, any solution has to be realistic and affordable.

While there are significant recruitment and retention challenges, particularly in certain specialties and less attractive locations at present, the number of consultants employed (whole time equivalents) has continued to increase on an annual basis, typically by over 100 each year and the majority of vacant posts are filled on a locum or agency basis to support service delivery.

**Disability Support Services Provision**

363. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase both home and residential care to reduce pressure on bed availability in hospitals as a result of a new ESRI report (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38782/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** The level of funding available for my Department for next year is being considered as part of the National Estimates and Budgetary process which is currently underway. Pending completion of this process it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

**National Drugs Strategy Implementation**

364. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health his plans to launch a targeted awareness campaign regarding the dangers of drug use aimed at high-risk groups such as festival-goers and students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38784/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The National Drugs Strategy, ‘Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery’, focuses on a coordinated, comprehensive effort involving all sectors to create safer, healthier communities by supporting people to avoid, reduce and recover from drug-related harm. This public health approach to drug use aims to prevent and address health problems that may arise from drug use.
The report of the Working Group to Consider Alternative Approaches to the Possession of Drugs for Personal Use notes that it is important that all sectors work together to inform the public about the harms associated with cannabis and all other illicit drug use. It therefore recommends a campaign to increase awareness of the treatments available and of the harms associated with drug use. It is anticipated that the HSE will commence planning and development phases of this campaign in 2020.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

365. Deputy John Curran asked the Minister for Health if a decision by the HSE to move youth mental health services from Jigsaw, Clondalkin, to Jigsaw, Tallaght, in January 2020 will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38785/19]

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

Question No. 366 answered with Question No. 321.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

367. Deputy John Curran asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre Group review decision-making process that will be given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38788/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

368. Deputy John Curran asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement dataset will specifically cover only current HSE-funded users of FreeStyle Libre; if not, if the health technology assessment group review will compare total blood glucose strip usage spend year on year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38789/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Departmental Reports

369. Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin asked the Minister for Health the status of the previously promised scoping exercise on a statutory home care scheme; the stage it is at; when a report will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38792/19]
Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Department of Health is currently engaged in the development of a new statutory scheme and system of regulation for home-support services. In preparation for the development of the statutory scheme, the Department commissioned the Health Research Board to carry out a review of the home-care systems in four European countries. In addition, the Department conducted a public consultation on home-care services, on which a report was published in 2018. These reports are available on the Department’s website and will help to ensure that the new scheme is informed both by international experience and by the views of stakeholders, including service-users.

The Sláintecare Implementation Strategy commits to the introduction of the statutory scheme in 2021. As part of this, work is on-going to determine the optimal approach to the development of the statutory scheme within the broader context of the Sláintecare reforms and in 2019 work is focusing on the design of the scheme, the options for regulation, and a review of existing services. Stakeholder-consultation will continue throughout the process of developing the new scheme.

Maternity Benefit

370. Deputy Kate O’Connell asked the Minister for Health the status of a maternity payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38793/19]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications Data

371. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for aids and appliances for those under 18 years of age in each health area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38839/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

372. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Health the most recent waiting list and waiting times for children waiting for scoliosis surgery in Our Lady’s Children’s Hospital, Crumlin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38840/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

HSE Properties

373. Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin asked the Minister for Health the status of the refurbishment of a property (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38856/19]

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

**HSE Planning**

374. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health if the recently published HSE capital plan contains a commitment to secure the residential care units for St. Joseph’s Community Hospital, Stranorlar, by providing the necessary funding for upgrading the hospital; the specific section within the capital plan in which the actual reference is contained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38865/19]

375. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health if the recently published HSE capital plan contains a commitment to secure the residential care units for Ramelton Community Hospital, County Donegal by providing the necessary funding for upgrading the hospital; the specific section within the capital plan in which the actual reference is contained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38866/19]

376. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the reason Lifford Community Hospital did not form part of the current HSE capital plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38867/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 374 to 376, inclusive, together.

The Health Service Executive recently published its Capital Plan for 2019-2021 outlining 250 projects to be progressed over the three-year period.

The Capital Plan provides for €220m capital funding to the Community Nursing Unit programme over the period 2019 to 2021 and also sets out in Appendix 3 the current status of all projects within the CNU programme, including St. Joseph’s Community Hospital, Stranorlar and Ramelton Community Hospital.

The CNU programme provides for the retention of services at both St. Joseph’s Community Hospital, Stranorlar and Ramelton Community Hospital with a requirement for refurbishment of both centres.

In the short term the HSE will undertake minor capital works in both units in order to deal with regulatory compliance and an agreed schedule of works is being finalised with HIQA.

The redevelopment of Lifford Community Hospital on the existing site is not deemed viable. The need for additional beds and the potential to develop a new facility on a greenfield site will be reviewed further post 2021. Thereafter it can be considered for inclusion in the Capital Plan.

It is important to recognise that all capital development proposals must progress through a number of approval stages, in line with the Public Spending Code, including detailed appraisal, planning, design and procurement, before a firm timeline or funding requirement can be established.

The delivery of capital projects is a dynamic process and is subject to the successful completion of the various approval stages, which can impact on the timeline for delivery.

The HSE actively manages the capital programme in order to ensure it has flexibility to progress as many projects as possible within the available funding, particularly in the event of any project not progressing as anticipated.
24 September 2019

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

377. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre Group review decision-making process that will be given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38881/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

378. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement dataset specifically covers only current HSE-funded users of the FreeStyle Libre device; if not, if the health technology assessment group review will compare total blood glucose strip usage spend year on year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38882/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Forestry Grants

379. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will introduce proposals to reward financially landowners who have their lands planted with forestry to take into account the fact that their lands are acting as carbon sinks and helping the State to achieve its climate change targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38318/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The current model adopted by Ireland to increase forest cover is to provide funding to landowners to cover 100% of the costs of establishing forests and to provide annual premiums to encourage land owners to make this land use change. In addition, tax free incentives are provided when timber is sold and other grant aid provided to construct forest roads. Other models without the use of significant grant aid could have been explored but the State has chosen to fund forestry programmes since the 1990’s with a combination of grants and premiums, tax incentives and other supports to assist landowners in the management of their plantations. The continuation of this model over successive Forestry Programmes since 1990 has been the favoured option of all of the relevant stakeholders also.

This model has resulted in the payment of some €2.4billion directly to farmers by the State since 1990.

The current Forestry Programme is 100% exchequer funded and as such it is governed by rules set out under the “European Union Guidelines for State aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas 2014 to 2020”. With regard to afforestation, these rules provide for annual premium payments to cover agricultural income forgone and maintenance; they do not provide for payments for carbon.
Brexit Supports

380. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to upgrade the Port of Cork to the status of a border inspection post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38346/19]

381. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to upgrade Cork Airport to the status of a border inspection post in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38347/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 380 and 381 together.

My Department has been actively participating in the whole-of-Government approach to Brexit preparedness and contingency planning. This includes the designation and approval of border inspection posts at ports and airports. The focus to date has been on infrastructure developments and upgrades at border inspection posts in Dublin port, Rosslare and Dublin airport, due to the volume of trade flows with the UK.

The decision to designate or seek approval for facilities at a port or airport to carry out import controls on certain regulated products and live animals is based on trade flow analysis and is typically driven by a request from the authority responsible for that port or airport.

Once such a request is received, this begins a process to identify where such a facility could be built. The requirements for a border inspection post would be outlined, which would include the inspection facilities and the accommodation requirements for the staff. This facility would need to comply with the relevant EU regulations, and be approved for use by the Commission.

The Port of Cork Company has approached my Department with respect to the establishment of a border inspection post in the Port. However, in December 2018, they advised my Department that they did not intend to pursue the construction of a border inspection post at that time.

Although the Port of Cork does not have an approved border inspection post, it is designated as a point of entry for bulk shipments of wood and wood products as outlined in Council Directive 2000/29, as amended. The facility conducting these controls is currently in operation.

Cork Airport has not engaged with my Department with respect to the potential construction of a border inspection post.

My Department would consider any requests received on a case-by-case basis but the immediate focus is on preparing for a potential no-Deal Brexit on 31 October within a whole-of-Government approach including further developing our existing border inspection posts.

Alternative Energy Projects

382. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding funding streams to subsidise, promote and implement storage energy units, which harness the power of solar and wind energy, within the Irish agribusiness sector; the position regarding the provision of grant funding for farmers for initial purchase of such self-sufficient renewable storage energy units for the purpose of promoting and implementing energy...
The Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment has lead responsibility for energy policy and activities within the renewable energy sector.

However, my Department does support energy efficiency measures and deployment of renewable technologies through the Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Scheme (TAMS II). I recently announced a €10 million energy grant through TAMS, and, in particular, I introduced grant-aid for solar PV installation of up to 6kWp that includes solar photovoltaic panels, an inverter & controller and a solar PV rechargeable battery.

In addition, a variety of energy saving measures such as; LED lighting, plate coolers, heat transfer units and ice builders are available for the Dairy sector under TAMS II. For the Pigs and Poultry sector, there is a range of grant-aid available including biomass boilers, electrical heat pads, energy efficient LED lighting, indirect heating systems, solar panels for water heating, ventilation fans and control systems, insulation for doors, roofs and walls, air source heat pumps and heat recovery units. Full details of the wide variety of investment items are available on the my Department’s website: https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/s/search.html?query=tams&collection=dafm-search.

Agri-industry are now also beginning to partner with energy suppliers to increase the renewable energy take-up at farm level. Glanbia Ireland, working in partnership with SSE Airtricity and Activ8 Solar Energies recently introduced FarmGen, a farm generated renewable energy initiative. The initiative will offer complementary support to TAMS and will include installation of a 6Kw Solar PV system and a smart metering system which will monitor energy generation and consumption in real-time and include export meters that will have the ability to potentially profit from future incentives to return electricity on to the grid.

As we transition to a low-carbon economy and society to meet our EU 2030 targets and move towards carbon neutrality for the agriculture and land use sector, partnerships in the sector have a key role to play in renewable energy as a key supplier of bioenergy feedstock and in the longer term as a renewable energy provider.

**Brexit Supports**

383. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the rules of the BEAM scheme will be reviewed (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38218/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** BEAM applicants who are not a member of one of my Department’s environmental schemes have the option of committing to join Bord Bia’s Quality Assurance scheme by 1st December. In cases where this is not possible, applicants should seek an appeal of their application and their case will be examined on an individual basis.

The scheme is now operational and the rules cannot be revised.

**Fur Farming**

384. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress in the banning of fur farming; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38237/19]
Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is in the process of preparing a Bill to provide for a phased introduction of a ban on fur farming. Along with animal welfare considerations, social and economic aspects in relation to the industry need to be taken into account. The Bill will make it illegal for any new fur farms to be established and put in place phase out arrangements for the small number of current operators. This will allow for an orderly wind down of the sector and allow time for employees to find alternative opportunities.

The necessary work to prepare the appropriate legislation is ongoing within my Department.

Living Wage

385. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of workers employed by his Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of his Department who earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38247/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The table below outlines the number of staff, by grade, employed by my Department who are earning a wage of less than €12.30 per hour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>No. of staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Officer</td>
<td>150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services Officer</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Operative</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT Apprentice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Agricultural Officer</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>Total: 266</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information in respect of State Bodies under the aegis of this Department is a matter for the bodies themselves. The information requested has been forwarded to them for direct reply to the Deputy.

Fallen Animal Collection Scheme

386. Deputy Peter Burke asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on animal waste mileage limits (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38268/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has not placed any mileage limits on the transport of offal from factories or on the transport of offal to rendering plants in Northern Ireland.

A mileage limit applies only to fallen animals over 48 months under the Fallen Animal TSE
Subsidy Scheme. The Scheme ensures primarily that fallen bovine animals over 48 months, which must be BSE-tested in accordance with EU legislation, are disposed of in compliance with all animal and public health and environmental regulations.

Under the terms of the scheme, the distance of haulage of material from the intermediate plant (knackery) to rendering plant shall not exceed 125kms radius unless with the permission of the Department. The scheme also provides that, where there are not two or more rendering premises inside the 125kms radius from the intermediate plant, then delivery is permitted to either of the two nearest rendering premises as measured by road.

Safeguards are in place in the scheme rules to support competition. Under these arrangements, each animal collector may choose from at least two rendering companies for the disposal of over 48-month animals. The limit on distance for material only applies to fallen animals over 48-months and the Department does not subject fallen animals under 48-months or other non-scheme material to any distance limits. Animal collectors can deliver fallen animals under 48-months and non-scheme material to any of the rendering companies, including those in Northern Ireland.

Animal collectors can also deliver offal to any of the rendering companies, including those in Northern Ireland, without limit restrictions.

Brexit Supports

387. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the membership of a person (details supplied) in the hen harrier environmental scheme can be used as a qualifying criterion for the BEAM scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38271/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The object of the Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM) is to provide temporary exceptional adjustment aid to farmers in the beef sector in Ireland subject to the conditions set out in EU Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1132. BEAM is funded by a combination of EU aid and Exchequer support, provided in light of the difficult circumstances that Irish beef farmers have been facing as a result of market volatility and uncertainty.

Under the scheme, aid will be paid on adult cattle slaughtered between September 24, 2018, and May 12, 2019, at a rate of €100 per animal subject to a maximum of 100 finished animals per herd. Aid will also be paid on suckler cows that calved in 2018, at a rate of €40 per animal subject to a maximum of 40 sucklers per herd.

In order to be eligible for payment applicants needed to be a participant in one of the following schemes;

- Organic Farm Scheme (OFS)
- Green Low Carbon Agri-Environmental Scheme (GLAS)
- Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP)
- Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP)

or

- Be a participant or agree to join the Bord Bia – Sustainable Beef and Lamb Assurance
Scheme (SBLAS)

The Hen Harrier Programme is not among the qualifying schemes as it cannot be directly linked to livestock production.

Applications for BEAM were accepted from the 19th August until the 20th September. As the closing date would have passed when this question is scheduled for reply, staff from my Department contacted the person named prior to the closing date to clarify their eligibility under the scheme and answer any queries they had.

Aquaculture Licence Appeals

388. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding fishermen in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38276/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department considers all applications for aquaculture licences in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable national and 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.

Ministerial decisions have been made in respect of a number of Aquaculture licence applications for Wexford Harbour.

 Appeals against Ministerial decisions in respect of Aquaculture Licence applications are considered by the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) which is an independent body established by Statute for that purpose. Full details of the appeals process can be obtained at: [http://www.alab.ie/appealsprocess/](http://www.alab.ie/appealsprocess/).

As the appeals against these decisions may currently be submitted to ALAB and in view of the independent status of ALAB, it would not be appropriate to comment further on the matter at this stage.

Brexit Preparations

389. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress made on increasing lairage capacity at Cherbourg to cope with the volume of dairy calves in spring 2020; if the agreed extension of two hours as per points 1.3, 1.4 and 1.7(b) of the regulations governing the port of destination and its vicinity will be used to speed up the provision of extra lairage capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38278/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My officials are in on-going communication with Irish exporters with regard to the need for co-operative management between each other to ensure that the lairage capacity at Cherbourg is optimised. I would urge the live export sector to consider developing an additional lairage in Cherbourg or engaging with the owners of existing facilities to explore the potential for additional capacity. This has proved possible – as evidenced by the French authorities approving an increase of the holding capacity of the Qualivia lairage in Cherbourg earlier this year. My Department worked closely with the French authorities in this matter. The move provided for additional daily capacity for 400 animals, providing increased capacity of some 1,200 animals per week.
In my meetings with live exporters, I have suggested that a representative group be set up to represent their interests with a view to enhancing coordination in relation to the live export trade and I welcome the establishment of the new Exporters’ body. I am committed to formal engagement with exporters and I have arranged for a meeting with the new body later this week to discuss and review existing export procedures, including lairage facilities in Cherbourg.

In relation to the two hour extension outlined in Council Regulation No 1/2005, this provision is provided solely for the welfare and interests of the animals involved. The EU Commission have provided explicit guidelines in relation to this provision insofar as the granting of such an extension is dependent of the proximity to the place of destination.

TAMS Applications

390. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application by a person (details supplied) under the TAMS scheme; and the reason a previous application failed. [38301/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** TAMS II is a demand-led scheme and, as provided for in the Terms and Conditions of the scheme, it has been necessary to roll over some applications for consideration into the next tranche. This is due to the high level of applications received in the most recent tranches. All eligible applications are subject to the ranking and selection process on the basis of the specific marking criteria that apply under each measure. Details of these marks are available on the Department’s website.

The person named submitted an application on 5 April 2019 under the Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme under which the ranking and selection cut off mark for tranche 13 was 46.42. The applicant scored 33.2. The application therefore automatically rolled over into Tranche 14.

The ranking and selection cut off mark for the Dairy Equipment Scheme in tranche 14 was 45.10. The applicant’s marks were also below the cut off mark for Tranche 14. A letter issued to the person named informing them of the position on 12 September 2019. The application will be further considered under tranche 15. The applicant also has the right to withdraw this application and submit a revised version for consideration if they so wish.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

391. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in ANC payments; when payments will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38344/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** There is no delay in making ANC payments.

In accordance with changes to EU Regulations which came into effect in 2019, payments under the ANC scheme will now be delivered in two installments, with 85% advance payments issuing initially and a 15% balancing payment issuing from early December.

Payments under the 2019 Scheme commenced on schedule last week. To date, payments of over €169 million have issued to some 79,000 farmers. Some 2,000 additional farmers received payment in the first tranche of payments in 2019 when compared to 2018.
Additional weekly payment runs are in place to ensure additional cases that become clear for payment receive their payment as soon as possible.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

392. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has been provided calculations by Teagasc of the potential amount of land that is not under grass that might be available for conversion to tillage or agroforestry without the loss of soil carbon; the basis for claims by Teagasc scientists that conversion from grassland, beef and dairy to tillage crops would result in net increases of greenhouse gas emissions on a life cycle basis; and his views on the recommendation by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action for diversification measures to ensure that Ireland can become more food secure by growing more tillage crops. [38349/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I refer to my previous reply to the Deputy (PQ ref. 37602/19) regarding the potential amount of land that is not under grass that might be available for conversion to tillage or agroforestry without the loss of soil carbon.

It is important to note that from a policy perspective, conversion of permanent grassland into tillage land is restricted to a maximum of 5% under current CAP regulations.

Furthermore, I am aware that ploughing permanent pasture for tillage results in a loss of soil carbon which somewhat offsets the benefits of reductions in the short-lived greenhouse gas methane (CH4). Our understanding of this trade-off is still evolving. Nevertheless, there is a need to address emissions of GHG from ruminant livestock farming systems. Teagasc has published a suite of GHG mitigation measures for Irish agriculture that can assist in achieving this objective, without the negative impacts of converting grassland to tillage.

Currently, Teagasc is exploring the capacity to increase GHG mitigation via enhancing soil sequestration. This research is supported by DAFM, EPA, EU and international bodies and is being conducted in conjunction with Irish and European Universities/research performing organization.

(See Table 1 below for further details)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Funder</th>
<th>Institutes</th>
<th>Value (€ millions)</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating land-use and land management impacts on soil organic carbon in Irish agricultural systems (Agri SOC)</td>
<td>DAFM RSF fund</td>
<td>Teagasc, TCD, UL</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2018-2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural greenhouse gas research initiative Ireland (Agri I-I)</td>
<td>DAFMRSF fund</td>
<td>Teagasc, TCD, UCD, AFBI, UL</td>
<td></td>
<td>2012-2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments**

393. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an ANC payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38396/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named applied for the 2019 Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme (ANC) on 29 April 2019.

An 85% advance payment has issued to the nominated bank account of the person named. In line with changes to EU Regulations, the 2019 ANC payments will issue in two instalments, with the 15% balancing payment due to issue in December.

**Live Exports**
394. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on an issue in relation to the exportation of live cattle to Libya (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38440/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Live exports are a critical part of Ireland’s livestock industry. They play a significant role in stimulating price competition and providing an alternative market outlet for farmers. The Department facilitates this trade, recognising its critical importance to the agri-sector, while ensuring that live animal exports meet the highest welfare standards. In 2018, the combined total value of live animal exports to the Irish economy was €161 million (€110 million for cattle; €49 million for pigs; €2 million for sheep), according to Bord Bia.

My Department implements a stringent system of controls on the welfare of animals being exported, in particular through a comprehensive legislative framework relating to the transport of animals by sea (The Carriage of Livestock by Sea Regulations 2016 (S.I. 356 of 2016). Only ships approved by my Department can load cattle for export from Ireland. Cattle being exported are monitored during the prescribed isolation period by Department Veterinary Inspectors and, in some cases, by Official Veterinarians from the importing countries. This is in addition to work carried out by Private Veterinary Practitioners who carry out the testing required prior to export to enable certification. Animals are inspected and certified by Official Veterinarians from the Department with regard to their health status and fitness for travel. Due regard is taken to weather conditions in respect of long distance transport.

Ireland continues to work closely with other EU Member State and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) with a view to improving animal welfare practices worldwide. In this regard, Ireland has reaffirmed its on-going commitment to animal welfare through additional OIE multi-annual financial assistance (€75,000 per annum over the period 2017-20) to support its activities to enhance animal welfare worldwide.

**Brexit Supports**

395. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an application by a person (details supplied). [38742/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The object of the Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM) is to provide temporary exceptional adjustment aid to farmers in the beef sector in Ireland subject to the conditions set out in EU Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1132. BEAM is funded by a combination of EU aid and Exchequer support, provided in light of the difficult circumstances that Irish beef farmers have been facing as a result of market volatility and uncertainty.

Under the scheme, aid will be paid on adult cattle slaughtered between September 24, 2018, and May 12, 2019, at a rate of €100 per animal subject to a maximum of 100 finished animals per herd. Aid will also be paid on suckler cows that calved in 2018, at a rate of €40 per animal subject to a maximum of 40 sucklers per herd.

In order to be eligible for payment, applicants needed to be a participant in one of the following schemes;

- Organic Farm Scheme (OFS)
- Green Low Carbon Agri-Environmental Scheme (GLAS)
- Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP)
- Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP)

or

- Be a participant or agree to join the Bord Bia – Sustainable Beef and Lamb Assurance Scheme (SBLAS)

An application under BEAM has been received from the person named. They had animals slaughtered in the reference period and they have indicated they are existing participants in Bord Bia’s SBLAS. Their application is currently being processed where these eligibility criteria will be verified. Payments under BEAM are schedule to commence in the final quarter of 2019.

GLAS Appeals

396. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS appeal application by a person (details supplied). [38754/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was rejected from the GLAS scheme following the findings of an on farm inspection and requested a review of that decision.

The case is currently under review, as part of the internal appeals process.

The applicant will be informed of the outcome, in writing, once the review has been completed.

Fisheries Offences

397. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for introducing a penalty points system for fishing infringements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38830/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy is aware, the 2009 EU Fisheries Control Regulation 1224/2009 and EU Commission Implementing Regulation 404/2011 introduced points systems for serious infringements of the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy committed by the licence holder of a fishing vessel and also separately, the master. These are intended to complement sanctions and promote compliance and were required to be in place on 1st of January 2012.

I signed into force the European Union (Common Fisheries Policy) (Point System) Regulations 2018, S.I. No. 89 of 2018 on March 20th 2018 which fully met the requirement of the relevant EU regulation insofar as the licence holders were concerned. However, the S.I. was annulled by Dail Eireann on 29 May 2018. Given this annulment of the Statutory Instrument that I am satisfied fully met the EU rules, I met Oireachtas representatives during July 2019 to discuss a way forward. Having regard to these discussions, I am at present considering, with my legal advisors, the next steps.

In relation to the masters point’s draft heads have been prepared and sent to the Attorney General for advice. This draft Bill has been listed for inclusion on the Governments Autumn
2019 Legislative Programme.

I can assure the Deputy that I am fully committed to delivering on Ireland’s legal obligations in this regard at the earliest possible date.

Beef Industry

398. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the estimated cost of establishing a national beef market index database. [38885/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As part of the Irish Beef Sector Agreement of 15th September, Bord Bia agreed to develop a beef market price index model based on three components - cattle price index, beef market price index (retail and wholesale) and an offal price indicator.

Work on the development of this index is underway and will be conducted within Bord Bia’s existing budget.

Electric Vehicle Grants

399. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated full-year cost of increasing the grant for each category of electric vehicle by €1,000, €1,500 and €2,000 assuming an increase in uptake of vehicles. [38672/19]

426. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of increasing the grant for each category of electric vehicle by €1,000, €1,500 and €2,000. [38635/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 399 and 426 together.

The electric vehicle purchase grant, introduced in April 2011, provides grant aid of up to €5,000 towards the purchase of a new battery electric vehicle or new plug-in hybrid electric vehicle. From the introduction of the scheme to the end of August 2019, grant support has been provided for the purchase of a total of over 8,000 new vehicles to the value of €37 million. To date this year, over €15 million has been provided to support the purchase of 3,422 new electric vehicles. My Department estimates that the number of new electric vehicles which will receive support this year under the EV purchase will be circa 4,500 to 5,000.

The electric vehicle purchase grant is demand led and it is therefore difficult to predict exactly how many vehicles will be purchased in future years. However, the trend over the last number of years shows increasing numbers of new electric vehicles purchased year on year.

Based on supporting 9,000 electric vehicles next year through the purchase grant in 2020, the table below shows the increased cost if the amount paid were increased by €1,000, €1,500 and €2,000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extra Grant Amount</th>
<th>Extra Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>€1,000</td>
<td>€9m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€1,500</td>
<td>€13.5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€2,000</td>
<td>€18m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
24 September 2019

Electric Vehicles

400. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of electric vehicle charging points he anticipates will be in place in Dublin by the end of 2019, 2020 and 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38749/19]

401. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of electric vehicle charging points he anticipates will be in place nationwide by the end of 2019, 2020 and 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38750/19]

402. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the electric public charging point in Newbridge railway station will be fixed; his plans to increase the number of public charging points in Newbridge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38853/19]

403. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of public electric charging points in County Kildare; his plans for increased charging points; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38854/19]

404. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of public electric charging points in County Laois; his plans for increased charging points; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38855/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 400 to 404, inclusive, together.

There are currently over 650 standard public charge points and 90 fast chargers (the majority of which are operated by the ESB) in Ireland. A real-time map showing the ESB charge point locations, including the status and availability of these charge points, is available on the ESB’s website at [www.esb.ie/ecars](http://www.esb.ie/ecars). The ESB has provided a breakdown by county of those chargers that it operates, and is set out in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Standard Charge Points</th>
<th>Fast Chargers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leitrim</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayo</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monaghan</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meath</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louth</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kildare</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laois</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wicklow</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The operation and maintenance of these charge points is a matter for ESB eCars and therefore not in my remit. However, my Department has contacted ESB regarding the charge point at Newbridge and was advised that the charge point is to be replaced later this year when eCars takes delivery of new replacement chargers. In addition to these chargers operated by ESB eCars, there are public chargers provided by motor dealerships, local authorities, retail outlets and private companies.

I am in the process of increasing the level of investment in charging infrastructure. Under the first call for applications from the Climate Action Fund, funding of up to €10 million will support ESB eCars to develop a nationwide, state-of-the-art electric vehicle fast charging network. This project includes the installation of 90 high-power chargers each of which will be capable of charging two vehicles simultaneously, upgrading 50 existing standard chargers to fast chargers and replacing over 250 existing standard chargers with next generation high reliability models. This is a multi-annual project and is expected to be fully completed by 2022. The locations of the chargers that will be installed as part of this project have not been finalised. However, a provisional map of the planned network, showing indicative locations, was developed by ESB eCars and has been published on my Department’s website.

Last month, I announced funding to support the rollout by Local Authorities of up to 1,000 on-street public charge points for electric vehicles over the next 5 years. This will cater mainly for electric vehicle owners who rely on on-street parking as their primary means of parking near their homes. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland will administer a scheme where Local Authorities can apply for funding to develop on-street charging infrastructure. The detailed terms and conditions for the scheme are currently being developed and I expect the scheme to open for applications shortly.

In addition, we will introduce new regulations to require non-domestic buildings with over 20 car parking spaces to install charging facilities.

Home charging is the primary method of charging for the majority of electric vehicles both internationally and in Ireland. Charging at home at night is the most cost-effective and eco-friendly way to charge an electric vehicle. Given the high proportion of homes with driveways and dedicated parking spaces, Ireland has greater capacity for home charging than many other countries. A Government grant of up to €600 is available, via the SEAI, to the purchasers of new and second-hand electric vehicles to support the installation of home chargers.

Living Wage

405. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of workers employed by his Department and in each office or
agency under the aegis of his Department that earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38243/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department currently has 25 staff members who earn less than €12.30 gross per hour. The additional cost to my Department of implementing a wage of €12.30 per hour would be approximately €85,303 per annum inclusive of employers pay related social insurance (PRSI).

The information requested in relation to the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each agency. The Department will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisations.

**Illegal Dumping**

406. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount allocated to each local authority in each of the years 2017 to 2019 under the enforcement measures grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38264/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department has introduced a number of measures to target illegal dumping and to strengthen efforts to improve waste enforcement generally. These include:

- The provision of an annual waste enforcement grant of €7.4 million to support the recruitment and retention of 150 local authority waste enforcement personnel across the country;

- The establishment of Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) to support and co-ordinate local authority action;

- The establishment of a National Waste Enforcement Steering Committee, which facilitates the deployment of co-ordinated multi agency responses to illegal waste activity across the regions.

In addition, my Department launched the National Anti-Dumping Initiative in 2017, to encourage local authorities, in partnership with community organisations, to identify high risk or problem areas, conduct necessary clean-up operations and develop appropriate enforcement responses to incidences of illegal dumping. In March of this year, I announced funding of €3 million for the 2019 Anti-Dumping Initiative, an increase of 50% on 2018. This funding will support some 280 projects nationwide. Full details of this year’s allocations and the projects funded by this initiative in 2017 and 2018 can be accessed on my Department’s website at the following link:


The allocations made to each local authority under the Local Authority Enforcement Measures Scheme are detailed in the following table. It should be noted that these allocations are currently being reviewed in conjunction with the Local Government Management Agency to ensure that resources continue to be placed where they are needed most.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>Allocation €</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlow County Council</td>
<td>165,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan County Council</td>
<td>278,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare County Council</td>
<td>403,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork City Council</td>
<td>180,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork County Council</td>
<td>455,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin City Council</td>
<td>982,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donegal County Council</td>
<td>202,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council</td>
<td>480,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fingal County Council</td>
<td>220,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway County Council</td>
<td>72,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway City Council</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry County Council</td>
<td>68,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kildare County Council</td>
<td>121,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilkenny County Council</td>
<td>153,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laois County Council</td>
<td>164,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leitrim County Council</td>
<td>74,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limerick City &amp; County Council</td>
<td>377,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford County Council</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louth County Council</td>
<td>130,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayo County Council</td>
<td>156,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meath County Council</td>
<td>259,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monaghan County Council</td>
<td>219,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly County Council</td>
<td>295,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon County Council</td>
<td>136,373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo County Council</td>
<td>176,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dublin County Council</td>
<td>130,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tipperary County Council</td>
<td>211,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterford County Council</td>
<td>303,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath County Council</td>
<td>175,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wexford County Council</td>
<td>236,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wicklow County Council</td>
<td>360,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Enforcement Grant:</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,431,958</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Waste Management

407. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if it is compulsory for a household to use a separate brown biodegradable waste bin provided by their waste collection company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38331/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Under the European Union (Household Food Waste and Bio-waste) Regulations 2015, household waste collectors are required to provide, or arrange for the provision of, a separate collection service for food waste from households in designated brown bin areas. In
accordance with the Regulatory Impact Assessment prepared for these Regulations, the roll-out of the brown bin has been phased in on a progressive basis, commencing on 1st July 2013. The timetable for when the regulations take effect is as follows:

- 1st July 2013 for population centres greater than 25,000 persons;
- 31st December 2013 for population centres greater than 20,000 persons;
- 1st July 2014 for population centres greater than 10,000 persons;
- 1st July 2015 for population centres greater than 1,500 persons, and
- 1st July 2016 for population centres greater than 500 persons.

Households in these areas are required by the Regulations to ensure that food waste is source segregated and collected by an authorised waste collector. Alternatively, it can be recovered by home composting or delivered by the householder to an authorised facility.

The provision of a brown bin collection service, where it is technically and environmentally practical to do so, continues to be monitored by my Department.

**Electric Vehicles**

408. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to assess the reduction in general carbon emissions of an electric car, the power for which is derived exclusively from fossil fuels versus an electric car powered exclusively from clean power such as wind. [38463/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The analysis undertaken for the Climate Action Plan shows the need to switch from internal combustion engine vehicles to electric vehicles in tandem with decarbonising our electricity system in order to achieve our 2030 emissions reduction target. For this reason the Climate Action Plan includes a target of 936,000 electric vehicles on the road in Ireland by 2030 in addition to a target of increasing our electricity generated from renewable sources to 70% by 2030.

Currently a typical new battery electric vehicle emits circa 1.25 tonnes of carbon per annum compared to a fossil fuel powered car which emits circa 3 tonnes per annum. As the emissions intensity of electricity decreases, due to increased levels of renewable energy and the end of peat and coal use for electricity generation, the emissions of the battery electric vehicle are expected to fall to circa 0.5 tonnes per annum by 2030, so in 2030 an electric vehicle will produce one sixth of the emissions that a internal combustion engine does today.

**Waste Disposal Charges**

409. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated full year cost of providing a €100 bin charge waiver annually to those provided with incontinence supplies by the HSE. [38613/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department has engaged with relevant stakeholders, including representative organisations and public bodies, in an effort to see how best to provide a financial support to
persons with long-term incontinence with respect to the disposal of medical incontinence wear. One of the difficulties associated with efforts to deliver a support to date has been trying to accurately estimate the number of persons in need of the support. Stakeholders, including the HSE, agree that it is not possible at present to determine a precise figure.

While there are many different complex issues at play in this area, which are understandable given the sensitive nature of the medical data in question, my Department is continuing to examine options to address this issue.

Waste Disposal Charges

410. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated full year cost of providing a €100 bin charge waiver annually to those in receipt of disability allowance. [38614/19]

411. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated full year cost of providing a €100 bin charge waiver annually to those in receipt of the working family payment. [38615/19]

412. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated full year cost of providing a €100 bin charge waiver annually to those in receipt of an invalidity pension. [38616/19]

413. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated full year cost of providing a €100 bin charge waiver annually to those in receipt of domiciliary care allowance. [38617/19]

414. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated full year cost of providing a €100 bin charge waiver annually to those in receipt of the one parent family payment. [38618/19]

415. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated full year cost of providing a €100 bin charge waiver annually to those in receipt of a general practitioner visit card. [38619/19]

416. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated full year cost of providing a €100 bin charge waiver annually to those in receipt of fuel allowance. [38620/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 410 to 416, inclusive, together.

My Department does not hold up to date data on the numbers of persons being supported by the various schemes referred to by the Deputy as these schemes are not administered by my Department.

Warmer Homes Scheme

417. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of adding the replacement of single glaze windows with double glaze under the warmer home scheme. [38621/19]
418. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of adding the replacement of single glaze windows and replacement doors under the warmer home scheme. [38622/19]

427. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of adding the replacement of single glaze windows with double glaze under the warmer home scheme. [38636/19]

428. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of adding the replacement of single glaze windows and replacement doors under the warmer home scheme. [38637/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 417, 418, 427 and 428 together.

The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme provides energy efficiency upgrades to the homes of people living in or at risk of energy poverty. The Scheme is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on behalf of my Department. These upgrades are provided free of charge to the homeowner. This year I initially allocated €24m to the scheme, and following a mid-year capital review additional funding was made available, bringing the total allocation up to €39.8m.

Prior to 2018, the Warmer Homes Scheme predominantly focussed on delivering shallow measures such as attic and cavity wall insulation. In 2018, a significant change was introduced to the scheme with the expansion of wall insulation measures available to include internal and external wall insulation as standard. This was a very positive step forward and opened the scheme up to many who would previously have been unable to get their walls insulated.

This change has meant that windows can also now be provided under the scheme. Window replacement can be recommended in limited circumstances following an SEAI technical survey. This recommendation is typically made in circumstances where only single glaze windows exist and where wall insulation is also being installed. Recommendations are made on a case by case basis.

Doors are not currently provided under the scheme.

The following table shows estimates of the approximate cost of providing replacement of single glazed windows and doors under the scheme. The projections are based on 2018 completion rates for homes under the scheme and a number of other assumptions as set out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Replace single glazed windows</td>
<td>€3,760,000</td>
<td>Approx. 12% of homes are now recommended for window upgrades under the scheme. Cost of windows package @ €6,000 per home. 2018 completion rates of 5,222 homes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Doors | €2,585,000 | Doors are not currently provided but this projection assumes that 45% of homes would need a replacement door (based on experience in the Warmth and Wellbeing scheme, but no certainty that this would apply if introduced under WHS). Cost of door @€1,100 per home. 2018 completion rates of 5,222 homes.

The Government published the first Climate Action Plan on 17 June. The plan sets out, for the first time, the actions Ireland needs to take to reach our 2030 targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and also puts Ireland on the right trajectory towards net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The Climate Action Plan commits to reviewing ways to improve how current energy poverty schemes target those most in need. That work is underway.

Better Energy Homes Scheme Expenditure

419. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of doubling the grant for solar thermal heating under the better energy home scheme, assuming an increase in uptake. [38623/19]

421. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of increasing the grant under the better energy home scheme by €1,000 for air to water heat pump, ground source to water heat pump and water to water heat pump, assuming an increase in uptake. [38625/19]

422. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of increasing the grant under the better energy home scheme for air to air heat pumps by €400, assuming an increase in uptake. [38626/19]

429. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of doubling the grant for solar thermal heating under the better energy home scheme. [38638/19]

431. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the cost of increasing the grant under the better energy home scheme by €1000 for air to water heat pump, ground source to water heat pump and water to water heat pump. [38640/19]

432. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of increasing the grant under the better energy home scheme for air to air heat pumps by €400. [38641/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 419, 421, 422, 429, 431 and 432 together.

The residential energy efficiency schemes administered by the SEAI are funded by my De-
partment. This year, I have allocated approximately €100 million to these schemes.

The Better Energy Homes grants are available to homeowners for insulation, heating controls, heat pumps, solar PV and solar thermal hot water heating systems. Grants typically cover 30% of the cost of carrying out these works in a home.

Since the introduction of these grants nearly 400,000 homes across the country have received an energy efficiency upgrade, representing nearly one home in four across the country.

The grants for air, water and ground source heat pumps were introduced in April 2018. Home heating is a significant investment for most households, especially if changing from familiar fuels and systems.

Increased demand for 2020 cannot be predicted with any certainty as there are a number of steps a homeowner must go through before deciding to carry out energy efficiency work on their home:

- familiarise themselves with the grants on offer and the grant levels
- Decide to carry out works
- Obtain quotes
- Submit an application
- Complete the works
- Return declaration of works.

The following table sets out the potential costs of increasing the grants by the amounts indicated in the Questions, for different levels of increased uptake over 2019 demand levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grant change</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>500%</th>
<th>1000%</th>
<th>5000%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>increased demand over 2019 levels</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>500%</td>
<td>1000%</td>
<td>5000%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubling solar thermal grant (€2,400)</td>
<td>€2,484,000</td>
<td>€7,452,000</td>
<td>€13,662,000</td>
<td>€63,342,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing heat pump grant by €1,000 (€4,500)</td>
<td>€3,658,500</td>
<td>€10,975,500</td>
<td>€20,121,750</td>
<td>€93,291,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increasing air to air heat pump grant by €400 (€1,000)</td>
<td>€12,000</td>
<td>€36,000</td>
<td>€66,000</td>
<td>€306,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Government’s Climate Action Plan sets an ambitious target of 500,000 energy efficiency retrofits by 2030. Achievement of this target will be supported by the Project Ireland 2040 allocation of €3.7 billion as well as the range of measures identified in the Plan. This will involve a change to the current approach to retrofitting.

I recently announced the establishment of a Taskforce that will drive the achievement of this target. The Taskforce will drive the development of a new national delivery model, which will group homes together, create easy pay back mechanisms and find smart financing. Devel-
opment of the new model will be informed by the experience from existing schemes in Ireland as well as best practice in other jurisdictions. The first meeting of the Taskforce will take place later this month.

**Energy Schemes Data**

420. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of providing a grant of €1,000 for a solar PV scheme. [38624/19]

430. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of providing a grant of €1,000 for a solar PV scheme. [38639/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 420 and 430 together.

On 31 July 2018, a new micro-generation scheme to support domestic customers who install solar photovoltaic panels in their homes was introduced. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administer the Solar PV scheme. The available grant rate of support is indicated in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Maximum support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solar PV</td>
<td>€700 per kWp up to a max 2kWp</td>
<td>€1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solar PV with battery energy storage system</td>
<td>€700 per kWp up to a max 4kWp €1,000 per battery system</td>
<td>€3,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The statistics, provided by SEAI, listed in the table below are those recorded up to 5 September 2019. There has been a total of 1850 applications to that date, with a related grant support of €4.4 million:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ireland</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Grant Support</th>
<th>Installed Capacity</th>
<th>Lifetime (20yr) Carbon Abatement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Installed &amp; Paid</td>
<td>1034</td>
<td>€2,261,280</td>
<td>3,304 kWp</td>
<td>21,476 tCO2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Applications</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>€2,130,945</td>
<td>2,938 kWp</td>
<td>19,100 tCO2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pilot scheme is subject to a review and the costs of installation will be assessed and further opportunities to broaden this scheme to other groups and other technologies will be explored.

*Questions Nos. 421 and 422 answered with Question No. 419.*

**Wind Energy Generation**

423. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of construction of an offshore wind farm. [38628/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):**
Bruton): I am unable to provide an estimated cost of construction of an offshore wind farm as this is a commercial matter for project developers.

The Climate Action Plan sets out the necessary policy measures to help meet our 2030 targets, cut our reliance on fossil fuels and put Ireland on a clear pathway to meeting our 2050 objectives. It includes a suite of actions to decarbonise the electricity sector and boost the quantity of renewable generation in order to meet our target of 70% of demand from renewable sources by 2030. The cost of offshore wind has been falling globally driven by technological advances and competitive auction pressures. The Climate Action Plan commits to connecting at least 3.5GW of Offshore Wind by 2030. The Plan is available on my Department’s website: www.dccae.gov.ie

To realise Ireland’s ambition for large-scale development of offshore wind, significant progress is required on the following:

- The Development management process;
- a route to market;
- a supporting electricity grid model.

The Marine Planning and Development Management (MPDM) Bill, currently under development, will allow the State to regulate offshore energy projects beyond the foreshore. The Bill is due for publication by the end of this year.

The inclusion of specific support for offshore wind in the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) design will be transformative and, in the long run, will deliver the scale of renewables required to decarbonise our electricity system.

My Department has also established a Working Group on the Framework for Offshore Electricity Grid. It will assess the options available for a suitable offshore grid model for Ireland informed by and aligned to Government Policy.

Energy Efficiency

424. Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of universal insulation for 808,000 homes. [38631/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The cost of insulating homes can vary significantly from property to property. Key factors which determine the cost include the type of insulation required, the size of the property and whether there is any existing insulation to be upgraded. It is not, therefore, possible to cost the provision of universal insulation to 808,000 homes.

The Government’s Climate Action Plan sets an ambitious target of 500,000 home retrofits to Building Energy Rating ‘B2’ by 2030. I recently announced the establishment of a Retrofit Taskforce that will drive the achievement of this commitment. The Taskforce which will drive the development of a new national delivery model, which will group homes together, create easy pay back mechanisms (e.g. through your electricity bill) and find smart financing. The Taskforce will:

- Design a pilot to take place in 2020 in both an urban and a rural area to test the model
- Audit the models that exist both in Ireland and internationally, for delivering energy ef-
ficiency measures by aggregating premises

- Design smart finance options to leverage government funding to the best effect
- Design the most appropriate tender for the delivery of the aggregated model
- Assess the scope for easy pay models e.g. an equivalent ‘bike to work’ scheme. Homeowners who choose to upgrade can expect lower energy bills so there may also be potential for a scheme which allows for pay back through utility bills
- Consider how best to ensure a strong pipeline of talent, through apprenticeships, traineeships and upskilling and how best to build a strong supply chain

**Electric Vehicles**

425. Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of 1,000 electric car charging points. [38632/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** There is a range of electric vehicle charge points to suit different needs including home charge points, on-street charge points and fast chargers. The cost of such charge points can vary from several hundred euro to many thousands.

My Department, through the SEAI, provides a grant of up to €600 to support the installation of home charge points. Supporting 1,000 such charge points would cost my Department up to €600,000.

A new support for on-street charge points is being introduced, again through the SEAI, which will support 75% of the capital cost up to a maximum of €5,000 per charge point. Supporting 1,000 such charge points would cost my Department up to €5,000,000.

*Question No. 426 answered with Question No. 399.*

*Questions Nos. 427 and 428 answered with Question No. 417.*

*Question No. 429 answered with Question No. 419.*

*Question No. 430 answered with Question No. 420.*

*Questions Nos. 431 and 432 answered with Question No. 419.*

**Sports Organisations**

433. Deputy Martin Heydon asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the groups, clubs and stakeholders that were invited to the football forum in the Mansion House on 31 May 2019. [38225/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Irish Football Stakeholders Forum which was held on 31st May 2019 brought together a broad cross section of representatives of players, coaches, clubs, leagues, grassroots, officials, volunteers, supporters, sports industry, academics, FAI staff and youth football to discuss the future of Irish football and the Football Association of Ireland. The Forum was attended by a truly diverse and inclusive group of stakeholders from across the Irish football community who participated in a
strong and fruitful discussion and sharing of views on the day.

For data protection reasons, I am not in a position to release the full invitation list.

**Living Wage**

434. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of workers employed by his Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of his Department who earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38248/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** There are approximately 66 full-time workers employed by this Department that earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour.

I have forwarded the Deputy’s question to the agencies under the aegis of my Department for direct response. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

**Bus Services**

435. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the provision of a new bus schedule service on the S1 and S2 services in Sligo town, in particular a new service for the Treacy Avenue area of Sligo town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38270/19]

**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 issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Bus Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy’s question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

**Brexit Preparations**

436. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of preparations for facilitating persons and materials travelling through Cork Airport in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37469/19]

441. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the up-to-date preparations for facilitating persons and materials travelling through Cork Airport in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38348/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 436 and 441 together.

The Government’s current assessment is that there is a significant risk of a no-deal Brexit, which will have profound implications for Ireland. The Government has been preparing for Brexit for over three years to make sure that Irish citizens and businesses are as ready as possible for all scenarios. No-deal preparations have always had the highest priority and intensive engagement with stakeholders across all sectors continues.
As the Deputy will be aware, the European Commission last year put forward a draft legislative proposal aimed at ensuring basic air connectivity in a no-deal Brexit scenario. The measures provide a degree of certainty to the Irish aviation sector and to the travelling public.

Under the Common Travel Area (CTA), Irish and British citizens move freely and reside in either jurisdiction and enjoy associated rights and entitlements. Both the Government of Ireland and the UK Government have committed to maintaining the CTA in all circumstances. In light of these factors, therefore, all direct flights between Ireland and the UK will still be able to operate post-Brexit.

At present, UK passport holders are processed through the EU channel at Irish airports and this will continue, with the EU channel being re-designated as an EU/UK channel. I understand that Cork Airport has identified all signs that would need to be amended, and will have customer services staff available to direct passengers, as necessary.

The establishment of the additional agriculture, health and customs checks which will be required at ports and airports in the event of no-deal is being co-ordinated by an interdepartmental group under the chairmanship of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The group has focused on three locations which we rely heavily upon for our connectivity, namely, Dublin Port, Dublin Airport and Rosslare Europort. The Office of Public Works has been tasked with delivering the required facilities for these checks at these locations. Cork Airport is not expected to require any additional infrastructure to deal with any potential changes resulting from the UK’s departure from the European Union.

Government also supports the development of air connectivity and the expansion of air services more generally through funding from Tourism Ireland for cooperative marketing activity. An increased budget allocation in Tourism Ireland for 2019 will continue to support both seasonal and regional growth and will be underscored by a commitment to focus co-operative partnership activities for Great Britain and the North American and European markets. I continue to encourage all airports to avail of this funding to optimise air services.

Brexit Preparations

437. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of preparations for facilitating persons and materials travelling through the Port of Cork in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37470/19]

440. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the up-to-date preparations for facilitating persons and materials travelling through the Port of Cork in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38345/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 437 and 440 together.

The Government’s current assessment is that there is a significant risk of a no-deal Brexit, which will have profound implications for Ireland. The Government has been preparing for Brexit for over three years to make sure that Irish citizens and businesses are as ready as possible for all scenarios. No-deal preparations have always had the highest priority and there has been intensive engagement with stakeholders across all sectors.

The Port of Cork is currently undertaking major development works including the construction of a new container terminal at Ringaskiddy. This work will a provide for future increases in trade and national port capacity requirements by facilitating larger sized vessels and increased
tonnage and throughput.

The establishment of the additional controls at ports that would be required in a no deal Brexit scenario is being co-ordinated by an interdepartmental group under the chairmanship of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, with representation from a range of stakeholders across Government. The group has focused on two locations for which we are heavily dependent on connectivity to the UK, namely, Dublin Port, and Rosslare Europort. The Office of Public Works has been tasked with delivering the required facilities for these agriculture, health and customs checks at these locations. I understand that Port of Cork is also engaging with these State Agencies.

My Department has also sought to assess the existing maritime capacity for direct sailings between Ireland and continental EU ports as a potential alternative route for trade currently using the Landbridge and has established that there is capacity in ports other than Dublin and Rosslare that could be of some assistance in the event of a no deal Brexit. The main spare capacity available in 2019 is in relation to Lift-on/ Lift-off (LOLO) traffic, in Cork, among others, and for bulk, rather than in respect of Roll-on/ Roll-off (RORO) traffic. Should there be a modal shift from RORO to LOLO, the port of Cork has spare capacity to cater for additional LOLO.

**Budget Submissions**

438. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider the issues raised in a budget 2020 submission (details supplied) taking into account the additional challenges facing the sector due to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38330/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** My Department continues to work with the haulage industry, including representative organisations, in relation to the sector. The haulage sector plays an important role in our economy and I recognise that it faces particular difficulties in the face of Brexit. Brexit preparedness and contingency work is being taken forward on a whole of Government basis, across all Government Departments and Agencies.

My Department is aware of the submission made the Irish Road Haulage Association in relation to Budget 2020. However, the issues and proposals therein are primarily for my colleague the Minister for Finance. I note that he has also received this question and can be expected to reply directly in this regard.

**Budget Submissions**

439. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration will be given to the issues raised in a budget 2020 submission by an organisation (details supplied) in respect of the tourism sector and concerns in relation to the difficulties that Brexit that will cause for the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38333/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I am aware of the severe negative effects that a no deal Brexit would have on the tourism sector, in particular in the border regions. Accordingly, while the Budget is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, I am making a strong case for tourism in all my pre-budget discussions with my Government colleagues to best mitigate the impact of Brexit on the tourism industry.
A number of the other issues raised such as taxation, local authority rates and insurance costs are not under the aegis of my Department, however I continue to represent tourism interests in the development of policies across Government on these and other matters that impact on the competitiveness of our tourism industry.

Question No. 440 answered with Question No. 437.

Question No. 441 answered with Question No. 436.

Electric Vehicles

442. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to regulate the use of e-scooters including through taxation; and if he will make a statement on the matter [38392/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I have launched a public consultation on the use of e-scooters and other forms of personal powered transporters. This consultation will run from 1st September 2019 to 1st November 2019 inclusive. The consultation document is available on my Department’s website.

I will not be making any decisions on legislating or regulating the use of personal powered transporters during the consultation period and their use on public roads and in public places will remain illegal.

Brexit Issues

443. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made in discussions with the European Commission on agreeing under Article 8(2) of the motor insurance directive a mechanism to avoid the need for green cards for cross-Border drivers in view of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38393/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The UK Government has confirmed that, in the event of a no-deal Brexit, Green Cards will not be necessary for Irish motorists entering the UK. Valid Irish insurance discs will be accepted as proof of insurance cover.

A number of small exceptions apply. In relation to Irish registered motorcycles or agricultural tractor vehicles, some of these vehicles display insurance discs and some do not. In these cases, no additional documentation is required if the vehicle displays a valid Irish insurance disc. However, if the vehicle does not display a valid Irish insurance disc, it is recommended that a motor insurance certificate or a Green Card is carried in the vehicle. Any policyholder with an Irish registered vehicle who requests a Green Card from their insurance provider will be issued with one.

EU law governs vehicles registered in non-EU countries travelling to the EU. Under the EU Motor Insurance Directive (2009/103/EC), the default position is that Green Cards will be required as proof of motor insurance for UK-registered vehicles entering the EU, including Ireland, post Brexit. This means that UK and Northern Ireland registered vehicles will require a Green Card if driving to Ireland.

My Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have made a number of
requests to the European Commission regarding its intentions to fix a date under Article 8(2) of
the Motor Insurance Directive from which the carrying of Green Cards would not be required
after the UK has exited the EU. While the Commission has confirmed that such a measure is
not part of its published Contingency Plan, my officials are continuing to pursue this matter
with the Commission.

Brexit Issues

444. Deputy Jonathan O’Brien asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the
audit carried out of the ferry and freight train capacity here in the context of Brexit and the pos-
sibility of tariffs applying on goods passing through Britain; and if he will make a statement on
the matter. [38394/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Brexit has been iden-
tified as my Department’s highest strategic risk and my Department along with other Gov-
ernment Departments and key Agencies, has been preparing for Brexit for three years. My
Department participates in the co-ordination structures established to facilitate a whole-of-Gov-
ernment response to the issues raised by Brexit, including participation in the interdepartmental
group on the EU and Brexit and the Brexit co-ordinators’ group.

Consultations by my Department regarding Brexit with key maritime stakeholders including
ports has included a Transport and Logistics All Island Sectorial meeting in Dundalk in January
2017, three Brexit Maritime Transport Workshops/Seminars (in April 2017, March 2018, and
in January 2019) with a further Maritime Transport Workshop/Seminar took place earlier this
month (September 2019) focussed on Maritime Connectivity and Brexit preparedness.

I do not believe that tariffs will apply on goods passing through the UK or using the UK
landbridge for transit to access the Continental EU market to and from Ireland, as such product
is going from one EU market to another and tariffs do not apply between EU countries. Some
tariffs could, of course, apply to goods exported to and imported from the UK.

There is potential for the use of the UK landbridge to become disrupted for Irish exporters
and importers in a scenario where the Dover - Calais route in particular may become heavily
congested in a no-deal Brexit to the extent that significant numbers of Irish businesses may
seek alternatives including direct routes to and from France. My Department together with
the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO) has examined the maritime capacity for direct
sailings between Ireland and continental EU ports as a potential alternative route for trade cur-
cently using the Landbridge. Based on extensive consultations with the shipping sector and
wider, I believe that sufficient capacity should be available on direct routes to continental ports
following a ‘No Deal’ Brexit and should demand for further capacity arise, because of disrup-
tion to the UK landbridge, the shipping sector have assured my Department and the IMDO that
they can and will respond quickly to meet such demands. In the context of Brexit, there has
already been an additional increased capacity over the past two years on direct routes with more
planned for 2020. My Department has also established that there is capacity in ports other than
the two main ports dealing with Roll-on / Roll-off traffic (RoRo) traffic, Dublin and Rosslare,
that could be of some assistance in the event of a hard Brexit. The main spare capacity available
in 2019 is in relation to Lift-on/ Lift-off (LO-LO), in particular at the ports of Waterford, Shan-
non Foynes, and Cork, and for bulk traffic. However, shipping services are market driven and
I believe that ferry operators will respond to economic developments and increase or decrease
capacity from particular ports in response to market developments. There have already been re-
sponses from the shipping companies adding additional freight capacity on direct sailings to the
continent. To take one example, the Port of Cork saw the addition of a new route in May 2018
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with Brittany Ferries’ commencing the service to Santander and Roscoff with the Connemara, whose capacity is 27,414 GT.

As regards freight train or rail freight capacity, Irish Rail is actively engaging with a number of parties regarding emerging rail freight opportunities within the container and bulk markets and will focus on the commercial, environmental and wider economic value that rail freight offers within these markets.

National Transport Authority Funding

445. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided to the NTA for an oversight delivery office in Cork for the delivery of the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy 2040; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38403/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I am not aware of any proposal by the National Transport Authority (NTA) to establish an oversight delivery office in Cork for the delivery of the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy 2040 and any such proposal would be a matter in the first instance for the NTA. I am aware that the NTA, in conjunction with Cork City Council, Cork County Council and Transport Infrastructure Ireland, has continued to work on the development of the Strategy, which I understand is in the process of finalisation.

Public Transport

446. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the commuter zone in Cork will be extended to include Mallow; if so, the estimated cost of such a measure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38404/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy’s question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Railway Stations

447. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the development at Kilbarry train station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38405/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding of public transport. The operation of the rail network and stations on the network including the development of any new stations, is a matter for Iarnród Éireann in the first instance.

In view of Iarnród Éireann’s responsibility in this matter, I have referred the Deputy’s question to the company for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.
448. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the body that has responsibility for the Tivoli dual carriageway including the N8, Lower Glanmire Road. [38437/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the maintenance and improvement of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. The section of road referred to by the Deputy is a national road and Cork City Council is the relevant Road Authority and TII is the relevant Oversight Authority.

**Road Traffic Legislation**

449. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the agency responsible for the issuing of licences for the operation of horse-drawn carriages in Dublin city; the body responsible with enforcement of legislation regarding the practice; the position regarding vetting, insurances and inspections of carriage drivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38446/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** In February 2011, Dublin City Council (DCC) took over responsibility for the licensing of horse-drawn carriage operators and drivers from the Garda Carriage Office. DCC made bye-laws in the same year for the licensing of horse-drawn carriages under the Local Government Act, 2001.

Part 19 of the Local Government Act 2001 provides a general power to a local authority to make bye-laws in relation to its own property or services or to regulate matters of local concern. It is under this Act that local authorities can choose to regulate horse-drawn carriages that operate for hire or reward. Some local authorities develop bye-laws to licence horse-drawn carriages operating commercially. Through bye-laws, these local authorities set their own rules and stipulations to govern such operations.

In 2018 DCC became aware that - specifically in relation to Dublin - this legal basis for making such bye-laws could be uncertain, as the Dublin Carriage Acts 1853-55 had vested the power to regulate horse-drawn carriages in Dublin with the Dublin Metropolitan Police Commissioners, to whom An Garda Síochána is the successor.

My Department examined this issue and, following legal advice, is now of the view that the Dublin Carriage Acts 1853-55 remain in force and preclude DCC from enacting the relevant bye-laws. Also, it seems that a simple repeal of the Victorian legislation alone may not be sufficient to enable DCC to enact bye-laws for horse-drawn carriages. Therefore, my Department is now working with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to identify how best to empower DCC to regulate this area.

**Rail Services Provision**

450. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to upgrade and increase the train service in Arklow and Wicklow in view of the severe overcrowding being experienced by commuters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38514/19]
Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The increased demand across the rail network is a sign of continued economic growth and is very welcome but it does bring challenges and there are pressures on the network in terms of matching current demand with available capacity, particularly in the Greater Dublin Area. Currently, with the existing rail fleet fully deployed at peak times, the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Irish Rail are examining options in the short, medium and longer term for additional train capacity to meet the increased commuter services demand across the network.

I have forwarded the Deputy’s specific question in relation to train service in Arklow and Wicklow to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Tourism Data

451. Deputy Jonathan O’Brien asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated yield of a bed night tax or levy of one euro per night in a hotel or bed and breakfast in a full year for each local authority, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38524/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): No calculations have been made by my Department in relation to a bed night tax or levy. Fáilte Ireland compile a range of accommodation statistics and I have asked the agency to reply directly to the Deputy with any available statistics they have in relation to the number of bed nights in question. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Trans European Transport Network Programme

452. Deputy James Browne asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the need to amend the TEN-T core network regulated requirements; if the need for further investment in transport projects, namely Rosslare Europort, the Dublin to Rosslare Europort railway line and the national roadways, which lead to Rosslare Europort, will be prioritised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38556/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The TEN-T core network is a subset of the comprehensive network and represents the strategically most important nodes and links of the trans-European transport networks.

On the Island of Ireland, the TEN-T core network links the main urban centres of Belfast-Dublin and Cork and encompasses the road, rail and other transport modes on this route. There is also an offshoot to the core Port of Shannon Foynes. The Dublin-Rosslare Europort railway line and the national roadways, which lead to Rosslare Europort, will be prioritised; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The TEN-T core network is a subset of the comprehensive network and represents the strategically most important nodes and links of the trans-European transport networks.

On the Island of Ireland, the TEN-T core network links the main urban centres of Belfast-Dublin and Cork and encompasses the road, rail and other transport modes on this route. There is also an offshoot to the core Port of Shannon Foynes. The Dublin-Rosslare Europort railway line and the national roadways, which lead to Rosslare Europort, will be prioritised; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The TEN-T core network is a subset of the comprehensive network and represents the strategically most important nodes and links of the trans-European transport networks.

On the Island of Ireland, the TEN-T core network links the main urban centres of Belfast-Dublin and Cork and encompasses the road, rail and other transport modes on this route. There is also an offshoot to the core Port of Shannon Foynes. The Dublin-Rosslare Europort railway line, and roadways, link to Rosslare Harbour, a harbour which is on the TEN-T comprehensive Network but which does not meet the threshold for TEN-T core port status.

Rosslare Europort is unique among the State-owned ports, as it is not a commercial company operating under the Harbours Acts, but is instead operated on a commercial basis as a division of Iarnród Éireann. While State investment in relation to the port is not permitted under EU Regulations on State Aid, Project 2040 sets out the Government’s plans in relation to roads projects such as the recently opened Gorey to Enniscorthy stretch of the M11 and the planned Oilgate to Rosslare stretch of the N11/N25.

In relation to the Port, I am satisfied that Rosslare Europort as a division of Iarnród Éireann
is effectively managing operations at the port and looking at the potential of the Port to develop further and take advantage of any new opportunities. The port is targeting growth and new business opportunities, and received the approval of the Iarnród Éireann Board for a strategic plan to grow the port’s business. This includes investment plans for up to €25 million in customer facilities and port infrastructure, port assets, and new technology. The Port is engaging with a number of potential new shipping customers to supplement existing operators and offer greater choice to freight and passenger business.

As regards the potential for EU funding for the development of Rosslare Europort going forward, the Deputy will be aware that Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) co-funding is available to projects on both the comprehensive and the core parts of the TEN-T Network, subject to such projects satisfying the eligibility criteria of a given call for proposals, and being selected in the evaluation process.

While the current CEF programme finishes at end 2020, a proposal for a new CEF Regulation for the period 2021–2027 was published by the European Commission in May 2018. Ireland has advocated at EU level for projects on our comprehensive network to continue to be eligible for co-funding during the period 2021–2027.

Ireland submitted written comments to the European Commission in conjunction with two other island Member States, Cyprus and Malta, calling for projects on the comprehensive network in Member States which have no land border with another Member State to be included as eligible actions. This position was accepted by the Commission during negotiations, and as a result the latest text of the proposal retains this amendment. Subject to the proposed Regulation being adopted, this means that during the period 2021–2027, projects on Ireland’s comprehensive TEN-T network, including the rail and road network, will be eligible to apply for CEF co-funding through relevant calls for proposals.

With regard to the amending the TEN-T network, the EU Transport Commissioner, Violeta Bulc, wrote to EU Transport Ministers in February 2019, announcing that the European Commission is advancing the review of the TEN-T Network, which was due to take place no later than December 2023. This review process will include: an evaluation study, due to be completed in spring 2020; a public stakeholder consultation, which was open for contributions from April to July 2019; and targeted consultations with Member States and a wide range of stakeholders later this year. Following the conclusion of the Commission’s review, a legislative proposal to amend the TEN-T Regulation may follow.

The Deputy may also wish to note that, in August 2019, honouring a Programme for a Partnership Government commitment, I made a submission to Commissioner Bulc on the matter of reviewing the TEN-T network. A copy of that submission is available on my Department’s website at the following link: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/3c921e-submission-to-commissioner-bulc-for-a-revision-of-the-core-ten-t-net/
construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

**Road Projects Status**

454. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the construction of the Cork city north ring road project; the timeline for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38578/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

**Driver Licensing Exchange Agreements**

455. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a person can hold a UK driver licence and a European and-or Irish licence simultaneously; and if not, if there are force majeure circumstances in which dual application can be considered. [38604/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Irish driving licensing law operates within a framework of EU law. Under the EU Directive on driving licences and the relevant Irish regulations, driving licences issued by Member States are mutually recognised. The Directive stipulates that a person may not hold more than one driving licence, thus requiring that a person must surrender their UK licence when exchanging it for an Irish one.

**Transport Infrastructure Ireland**

456. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the next steps regarding consultation and decision-making in relation to a recent scoping report prepared by Transport Infrastructure Ireland (details supplied); and if funding will be provided for road developments which emerge as the preferred option of this scoping exercise. [38606/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and securing capital funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Given that scoping report, referred to by the Deputy, was prepared at the request of TII I believe that TII is best placed to set out the context for the report and the intended purpose.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.
Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel on the Luas. [38649/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel on the DART. [38650/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel on Dublin Bus. [38651/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel on Bus Éireann. [38652/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel on Irish Rail. [38653/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel on all privately operated public transport buses. [38654/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for five to 15 year old children on the Luas. [38655/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for five to 15 year old children on the DART. [38656/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for five to 15 year old children on Dublin Bus. [38657/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for five to 15 year old children on Bus Éireann. [38658/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for five to 15 year old children on Irish Rail. [38659/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for five to 15 year old children on all privately operated public transport buses. [38660/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for 16 to 18 year olds on the DART. [38661/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for 16 to 18 year olds on Dublin Bus. [38662/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for 16 to 18 year olds on Bus Éireann. [38663/19]

Deputy David Cullinane asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for 16 to 18 year olds on Irish Rail. [38664/19]
473. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for 16 to 18 year olds on all privately operated public transport buses. [38665/19]

474. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for third-level students on the DART. [38666/19]

475. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for third-level students on Dublin Bus. [38667/19]

476. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for third-level students on Bus Éireann. [38668/19]

477. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for third-level students on Irish Rail. [38669/19]

478. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated full year cost of universal free travel for third-level students on all privately operated public transport buses. [38670/19]

479. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of reducing all public transport fares by 5%, 10%, 25%, 50% and 100%, respectively, in tabular form. [38860/19]

480. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of reducing all Dublin Bus fares by 5%, 10%, 25%, 50% and 100%, respectively, in tabular form. [38861/19]

481. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of reducing Iarnród Éireann fares by 5%, 10%, 25%, 50% and 100%, respectively, in tabular form. [38862/19]

482. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of reducing Luas fares by 5%, 10%, 25%, 50% and 100%, respectively, in tabular form. [38863/19]

483. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of reducing Bus Éireann fares by 5%, 10%, 25%, 50% and 100%, respectively, in tabular form. [38864/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 457 to 478, inclusive, and 485 to 489, inclusive, together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has the statutory responsibility for the regulation of fares in relation to public passenger transport services.

As the Deputy is aware, in Budget 2019 I secured an increase in the overall Exchequer funding available for Public Service Obligation (PSO) public transport services and €287 million is available this year to the National Transport Authority (NTA) for this purpose.

The overall PSO amount is set each year as part of the annual Estimates and Budget processes, and the 2019 allocation for the Vote was voted on and approved by this House as part of the “Further Revised Estimates for Public Services 2019”. It is the statutory remit of the NTA to make PSO payments to the public transport operators who provide PSO services, and the payments are made in accordance with the PSO contracts that the NTA has in place with
each of those operators.

I have therefore forwarded the Deputies questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles

479. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of wheelchair accessible buses operational in east County Cork particularly operating on the N25 Cork to Waterford and along the Waterford to Cork bus route, respectively. [38738/19]

**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. However, I am not involved in the day to day operations of public transport.

Under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, the National Transport Authority has statutory responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network. However, as the Deputy in this instance is referring to a specific Bus Éireann service, I have forwarded his question to Bus Éireann for direct reply to him. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

National Transport Authority Expenditure

480. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the budget expended by the National Transport Authority in 2018, and to date in 2019, in respect of the promotion of the BusConnects project; the details of each form of media and public event; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38751/19]

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

In light of the NTA’s responsibilities on this matter, I have referred the Deputy’s question to the company for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Proposed Legislation

481. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the railway safety (amendment) Bill will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38775/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Railway Safety (Amendment) Bill will amend the existing statutory limits in the Railway Safety Act 2005 for concentration of alcohol in blood, urine and breath for a railway safety critical worker and will update the associated procedures for sampling and testing for intoxicants, which includes alcohol and drugs.
My Department is working with the Office of the Attorney General to advance the drafting of this Bill with a view to publication later this year. It is my hope that, once published, the passage of the Bill will progress through the Houses of the Oireachtas without delay.

**Electric Vehicles**

482. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter regarding the transition from diesel to electric buses and coaches (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38818/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The transition to alternatively fuelled vehicles is a necessary step to effect a substantial reduction in transport emissions. The *Climate Action Plan* has set out measures to encourage a transition away from the use of petrol and diesel, particularly towards electrification in the light-duty (passenger car and van) fleets. In addition, Government will also play an important leadership role in promoting and normalising alternatives by investing in low-emissions technology in its bus fleet.

The transition is, however, not expected to be uniform across all vehicle sectors. The development of electrified fleet is not yet as advanced in the coach sector as it is for passenger cars, vans and low-floor buses. Thus, in the short to medium term, other alternative fuels which are already commercially available - such as compressed natural gas (CNG), liquefied natural gas (LNG) or biofuels - may have a role to play in the heavy-duty sectors where electrification is not yet commercially viable.

Generally, as new fuels and technologies advance, production levels increase and more vehicle models become available and cheaper in the coming years, so these new technologies are expected to reach total cost of ownership parity as we move towards 2030, making the switch easier and cost-effective for both business and private consumers. Also, developments in the cost of diesel over time, amongst other factors, may position ultra-low emission and zero-emissions fuels as an increasingly attractive and viable investment for Irish businesses.

I expect that the anticipated improvements in alternatively-fuelled vehicle technology, reductions in purchase prices, increased driving range and model availability, coupled with a strong Government commitment to invest in the recharging network, will have a positive impact in uptake and consequently in driving further market development.

Policy about the supports and measures to underpin the transition will be kept under constant consideration and I will continue to work closely with Ministers Bruton and Donohoe and their respective Departments to map out the new policy pathway that will be necessary to ensure that Ireland is well positioned to make the transition to electrification, and to other ultra-low emission alternatives, as efficiently as possible.

**Rural Transport Programme Funding**

483. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of increasing funding to Local Link by 10%, 20%, 33% and 50%, respectively in tabular form. [38858/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The total allocation to Local Link in 2019 is €21 million, and percentage amounts can be calculated from this base. Future funding levels for the programme will be subject to the annual Estimate and Budgetary
Public Service Obligation Data

484. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of increasing the public transport PSO by 5%, 10%, 25% and 50%, respectively, in tabular form. [38859/19]

**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 in Ireland.

The award of public service obligation (PSO) funding falls under the independent statutory remit of the National Transport Authority (NTA). The allocations to the transport companies are decided by the NTA in exercise of its statutory mandate and in accordance with the various contract arrangements that it has in place with PSO service providers.

The PSO subsidy represents one of a multiple of revenue streams to the operators of the public transport services; their other sources of income include passenger fare revenues, State funding under the Free Travel Scheme administered by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and commercial non-fare income such as advertising revenue. The main purpose of the PSO subvention payment is to meet the gap for an operator between income from fares and other sources and the cost of operating services.

The 2019 Exchequer allocation for PSO services is €287.467 million. Percentage amounts can be calculated from this base. Future funding levels for the programme will be subject to the annual Estimate and Budgetary processes.

*Questions Nos. 485 to 489, inclusive, answered with Question No. 457.*

Sports Capital Programme Applications

490. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant application (details supplied); the timeframe for the announcement of the grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38887/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on Friday 19th October last. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding.

186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January.

619 equipment only applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced to these organisations in May.

Work is now underway in assessing the remaining applications for capital works, including an application from the organisation referred to by the Deputy.
For the first time, applicants who submitted incorrect documentation under this round are being given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a further number of weeks to have all applications assessed with allocations announced shortly after that.

As soon as allocations have been made, my Department will carry out a review of all aspects of the 2018 round of the programme to include any possible improvements for the future. This review will include consideration of the timing and scale of the next round but I fully expect that the SCP will again be open for new applications before the end of this year.

Road Projects Status

491. Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a commitment given by TII to carry out road safety works at the junction for Cootehall along the N4 road connecting Carrick-on-Shannon and Boyle, County Roscommon, has not been followed through; the reason for the delay in the commencement of works; and when the project will be completed. [38894/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, maintenance and improvement of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days

Living Wage

492. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of workers employed by her Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of her Department who earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38249/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy may be aware, any adjustments to the salaries of public and civil servants are set out in the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA) 2018-2020.

A suggested living wage of €12.30 per hour would equate to an annual salary of €23,747, based on a standard civil service net working week of 37 hours. Details of the application of adjustments to civil service pay in accordance with the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 are available on www.circulars.gov.ie.

As the information requested is not readily available in respect of the agencies under my Department’s remit, I have asked the Adoption Authority of Ireland, the Children Detention School Campus and Tusla to furnish this information directly to the Deputy.

Domestic Violence Refuges Provision

198
493. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of adults and children in Tusla-funded domestic violence refuges and domestic violence step-down accommodation, respectively, in 2018; and the funding allocated to Tusla for the provision of such services for 2018 and 2019. [38337/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Tusla, the Child and Family Agency provides funding and coordination supports to some 59 organisations that deliver a range of services for victims of domestic, sexual and gender based violence throughout the country.

In 2019, €25.3 million is being allocated to Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence services, an increase of €1.5 million over 2018. The additional funding of €1.5m will be used for the further investment and development of these services. A proportion of this funding will allow for:

- 12 new outreach workers for women and children affected by domestic violence to improve access to support and services.
- The roll out of a 12 week healing programme for children who have been impacted by domestic abuse which also helps parents/guardians to understand their child’s experiences and support their recovery.

I have requested Tusla to respond directly to the Deputy with regard to the specific information required in relation to number of adults and children in Tusla funded domestic violence refuges in 2018 and the funding required for these services in 2018 and 2019.

**Ministerial Correspondence**

494. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if communication has been recently received from a group (details supplied); if she has received a report carried out by it outlining difficulties dealing with Tusla; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38494/19]

495. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has discussed a group (details supplied) with Tusla; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38495/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 494 and 495 together.

I can confirm that I have recently received the report “ABC Alliance of Birth Mothers Campaigning for Justice The triad Rules Tusla, Family Law Courts, An Garda Síochána”. I have not been in contact with Tusla, at this time, in relation to the report but officials in my Department have read the report and have provided me with the following update in relation to same.

The report makes a number of recommendations in relation to Tusla, An Garda Síochána and the Family Law Courts. Recommendations concerning the latter two bodies are a matter, as the Deputy will be aware, for my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality.

The report makes some recommendations regarding Tusla including (i) having an outside body established to hold Tusla to account; (ii) rectifying difficulties in relation to hiring and retaining staff; and (iii) the timely response to FOI requests.

In relation to the first recommendation, it should be noted that the Health Information and
Quality Authority is an independent body, established by the Health Act 2007, which inspects Tusla services against relevant statute (both primary and secondary) as well as agreed standards. Reports of their findings are published regularly on their website.

Tusla is proactively working on the challenges associated with the hiring and retention of staff. To this end it has established Tusla Recruit (in 2016) to assist in the recruitment and retention of qualified and experienced staff; it is in the process of developing multi-year workforce planning and is currently working with Third Level Institutions to provide additional study places for key Tusla grades. In addition, Tusla hosted its first ever national recruitment open day to hire additional social work staff in June 2019.

Finally, in common with all bodies to whom the Freedom of Information Act applies, Tusla is bound by the requirements and timescales as set out in that Act.

Children in Care

496. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to reduce public spending on private residential care companies involved in housing and protecting children in State care due to the profits these companies make; if there are appropriate minimum staffing levels and educational accreditation levels necessary for staff employed by these companies; the frequency with which HIQA inspects these facilities; her views on whether it is advisable to allow commercial entities be fully responsible for child protection and vulnerable children in care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38584/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The placement of vulnerable young people in private residential care services is one of the key drivers of costs for Tusla. Tusla continuously monitors expenditure in the area of private residential care, and my Department liaises with Tusla on an on-going basis in relation to this matter.

Continuous recruitment of foster carers is a crucial factor insuring children are not placed in residential care due to a shortage of available foster carers. HIQA inspections of Tusla’s fostering activities has frequently shown a range of creative approaches employed by Tusla areas to recruit and retain an appropriate range of experienced foster carers. These approaches include public events and workshops, and local media campaigns.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has responsibility for the care and protection of all children in the care of the State. Where the identified needs of a child cannot be met by foster care, a residential placement may be more appropriate. If the residential centres operated by Tusla cannot meet the needs of a child a private provider may be used. This may include children who require more intensive supports, or situations where Tusla-operated centres do not have available spaces.

I would like to assure the Deputy that children in private residential placements remain in the care of Tusla, and that Tusla continues to have responsibility for making sure that the needs of the child are met and that the best interests of the child are considered.

All residential centres for children are subject to, and inspected against, the National Standards for Children’s Residential Centres. HIQA are responsible for the inspection of centres operated by Tusla. All inspection reports are published, and available online.

Under part VIII of the Child Care Act 1991, non-statutory residential care centres for children are inspected and registered by Tusla. The registration cycle outlined under the legislation is three years, and centres are inspected at least twice per three-year cycle. Where concerns
are identified, or when conditions are attached to registrations by the inspectorate, follow up inspections are also conducted. Inspections can be announced or unannounced. Staffing and management of the centres are inspected against standards, which includes ensuring that an appropriate number of qualified staff are in place and that evidence of qualifications and CPD are on staff files.

**Recreational Facilities**

497. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will work with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and other relevant agencies to ensure that a supervised playground (details supplied) remains a supervised service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38764/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I regret to inform the Deputy that the only funding provided by my Department for playgrounds is in the area of capital grants for play and recreation. All applications for funding under this scheme are made through the Local Authority Play and Recreation Network member in the Local Authority.

In order to receive funding under this scheme the following criteria must be met:

- All spaces and facilities for which funding is granted must be available for use by all children and young people in the locality at times when they are free to use them, i.e. outside of school hours.

- All facilities and equipment funded must be accessible to children and young people with special needs.

- Applications should include facilities and equipment which are youth-friendly and safe.

- Confirmation that *No Smoking* signage will be displayed in play spaces and facilities.

- All projects funded under the scheme must provide evidence, or a commitment to providing evidence, that children and young people living locally who will have access to the facility have been consulted about the project for which funding is sought.

Funds under this scheme are for capital, not current spending, such as supervisory costs.

The supervisory posts referred to in the Deputy’s question would not meet the criteria for any funding scheme operated by my Department.

I regret that I could not give the Deputy a more favourable reply.

**Community Development Projects Funding**

498. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation to each local authority for community development functions in 2018 and 2019. [38341/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** I have provided the information in the table below which sets out funding to Local Authorities under functions of my Department’s Community Development Division in 2019 to date and in 2018.
In addition to the amounts outlined in the tables below my Department also provides other funding to Local Authorities, which includes:

- €35,000 annually to each of the 31 Local Authorities to part-fund the employment of local broadband officers. The broadband officers act as a single point of contact and ensure consistency in engagement with operators and assist in the rollout of telecommunications infrastructure.

- In 2018, funding of €30,000 was announced for each of the 10 Local Authorities that comprise the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC), to support the co-funding of an AEC Officer.

- The Libraries Capital Investment Programme will invest some €29 million in approximately 19 projects over the period 2016 to 2022. Funding of approximately €6 million is available under the programme this year, however, a set allocation per Local Authority is not available as funding is paid based on claims submitted for works completed by Local Authorities.

- My Department also provides some funding to help Local Authorities meet certain costs associated with libraries, including the cost of a small number of leased premises, technological capacity and resources, book-stock and other areas of activity that enhance local library services.

- In 2018 I also announced a major investment package of over €5.2 million from my Department for digital services and facilities in public libraries. This investment will enable ICT infrastructure upgrades and new software, meeting space technologies and digital learning suites in public libraries across the country. This year, funding of €650,000 has been approved for reaching out and engaging with marginalised, socially excluded and disadvantaged communities.

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<th>Allocation to Local Authority in 2019 for community development functions</th>
<th>Support to Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs)</th>
<th>Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme 2018-2022 (SICAP) &amp; Community Enhancement Programme</th>
<th>Libraries Development</th>
<th>Public Participation Networks (up to €50,000 per LA)</th>
<th>Total 2019 Allocation Per Local Authority</th>
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The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme 2018-2022 (SICAP) aims to reduce disadvantage and poverty in Ireland. It provides national funding for actions at local level to promote social inclusion and to strengthen communities.

The Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) provides grant funding towards enhancing the facilities available to communities. The CEP was launched in 2018, replacing and building on two existing schemes (Communities Facilities Scheme and RAPID). Combining the schemes makes a more flexible, streamlined and targeted approach to providing funding to those communities most in need.

Since 2015, funding of up to €50,000 is provided annually by the Department in respect of each Public Participation Network (PPN).

**Living Wage**

499. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of workers employed by his Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of his Department who earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38250/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** I can confirm that the number of workers employed by my Department that earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour is a total of 35 staff.

This is calculated in line with salary scales in Circular 17/2019, issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

In respect of the bodies under the aegis of my Department, information relating to pay in
those bodies is a matter for the bodies concerned.

**Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Scheme**

500. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to extend the carbon monoxide alarm pilot scheme as administered by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38557/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney):** On 13th of May last I announced an initiative to support the installation of carbon monoxide alarms in the homes of elderly, isolated and vulnerable people throughout rural Ireland. Alarms will be supplied through the organisation referred to by the Deputy, who will install them in people’s homes on a voluntary basis.

I have allocated €115,000 to support this initiative through the Dormant Accounts Fund which is administered by my Department. This funding complements the already established Community Smoke Alarm Scheme, so a suite of safety measures is available to those who otherwise might not be able to afford them.

It should be noted that the carbon monoxide alarms pilot programme anticipated the installation of 2,000 Carbon Monoxide alarms. However, I understand that savings secured through the procurement process will enable a significant number of additional alarms to be provided within the existing budget, and the scheme continues to remain open for further applications. There is therefore no need to extend the scheme at this time.

**Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme Funding**

501. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the budget allocation for the social inclusion and community activation programme in 2017, 2018 and 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38773/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018 – 2022 provides funding to tackle poverty and social exclusion at a local level through local engagement and partnerships between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies.

The budget allocation for the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme for 2017, 2018 and 2019 are contained in the following table.

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**Carer’s Allowance Eligibility**

502. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider increasing the hours a carer can work or study from 15 hours to 18.5 hours per week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38470/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer’s Allowance is a means-tested payment for carers who look after certain people in need of care and attention on a full time basis. As of end of July 2019, there were 82,015 people
Questions - Written Answers

in receipt of Carer’s Allowance. The projected expenditure on Carer’s Allowance in 2019 is almost €840 million.

A primary qualifying condition for the Carer’s Allowance payment is that the applicant provides full-time care and attention to a person in need of such care. However, in order to support a carer’s continued attachment to the workforce and broader social inclusion, carers may engage in some limited employment, education or training, while still being regarded as being in a position to provide full-time care. During this time of employment, education or training, adequate provision must be made for the care of the relevant person. Both the full-time care and attention requirement and the 15-hour limitation are contained in the respective legislative provisions of the Carer’s Allowance, Carer’s Benefit and Carer’s Support Grant schemes.

As part of Budget 2006, the number of hours per week that carers could engage in employment, education or training outside the home was increased from 10 to 15 hours per week.

Any further changes to this condition would need to be considered in a budgetary context and would also need to maintain a reasonable balance between the requirement to provide full-time care for the care recipient and the needs of the carer.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Living Wage

503. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of workers employed by her Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of her Department that earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38251/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): At 18th July, the number of staff in my Department on a wage less than €12.30 per hour is 1,185.

All staff in my Department are on pre-determined salary scales negotiated and agreed at central level.

Employment Data

504. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost and-or loss caused by bogus self-employment here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38257/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Work is ongoing in my Department to tackle false self-employment across the economy. In that regard I am currently reallocating resources to this issue to understand, measure and quantify better the prevalence of false self-employment and obtain a sectoral analysis of its level of incidence.

It is not possible to provide figures on money recouped on the sole basis of false self-employment cases alone. However, as an indication of the level of work going on in relation to PRSI inspections generally, a total of 1,931 employer inspections have been carried out across the country by my Inspectors this year up to the end of last month. The savings achieved so far this year from all PRSI inspections carried out comes to a total of €1.184m. False self-employment cases form a portion of those figures.
My Department is already focused on increasing the number of employer inspections it conducts nationwide. Based on experience from these inspections, and recognising that there is a particular challenge when dealing with large companies or companies with complex legal structures, I also established a dedicated team to work strategically in this area. This team has commenced its work, in parallel with other Inspectors across the country.

My officials work in cooperation with the inspectorates of the Workplace Relations Commission and Revenue Commissioners as necessary and strong liaisons have been established with those organisations to focus strategically on tackling false self-employment.

In addition to more rigorous policing of existing law, I intend to introduce a number of new legislative measures to further strengthen our powers. These measures include putting the ‘Guidance on Determining Employment Status’ – which is a revision of the former Code of Practice in this area – on a statutory footing.

I also will bring forward new provisions to address the potential victimisation of workers who seek a determination on their employment status.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

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**Youth Unemployment Data**

505. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of young persons aged between 18 and 24 years of age that remain unemployed; the actions being taken to assist such persons to find employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38259/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Government policy to reduce unemployment is twofold. Employment policies set out in the Action Plan for Jobs and Future Jobs Ireland strategies have created an environment in which business can succeed and has led to the creation of more than 500,000 jobs since 2012. Secondly, through the *Pathways to Work* strategy, my Department ensures that as many of these new jobs as possible are filled by jobseekers, particularly the young unemployed.

To date these policies have been effective in reducing youth unemployment. The number of young people in employment has increased by almost 25% since 2012, with 250,000 young people now at work.

Recently released data from the CSO, Labour Force Survey shows that youth unemployment has fallen from a peak of 31.2% (66,500) in 2012 to 15.7% (46,100) in the second quarter of 2019. Volatility is a big feature of the youth labour force structure, particularly in the context of youth unemployment, as young people are more inclined to move in and out of education or change jobs.

Under the Government’s policies to support the young unemployed, the first intervention is to provide case officer support to help newly unemployed young people find and secure sustainable jobs. There is monthly engagement with all young jobseekers by a case officer, and a personal progression plan is developed to chart the steps to be taken to facilitate a return to employment, which may include availing of further education and training opportunities.

For those who do not find employment through this process, additional offers are provided for through further education and training programmes or in existing community-based employment programmes/workplace based interventions such as Community Employment and
Tús; or in subsidies to employers, through JobsPlus Youth. Long-term unemployed jobseekers under-25 are also referred to JobPath, a contracted, payment-by-results employment service that provides additional resources and case managed supports to those long-term unemployed.

In October 2018, I introduced a new work experience programme targeted specifically at young jobseekers who are long term unemployed or who face significant barriers to employment. The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) provides young jobseekers with the opportunity to learn basic and social skills in a supportive work-based environment. Over 400 young jobseekers have participated in the scheme to date, receiving a payment of €229.50 per week. My Department is currently promoting the scheme to employers as part of a series of employer roadshow events.

My Department continues to review its activation programmes and policies to make sure that they remain aligned to labour market needs. Given the progress made during the life-cycle of Pathways to Work 2016-2020 and the improved nature of the labour market, preparations have begun to develop a revised activation framework for the coming period. The new Pathways to Work strategy, covering the period 2020-2024, will complement the ambitions of Future Jobs Ireland, with a particular focus on increasing participation levels among under-represented groups and those most distant from the labour market, including young jobseekers, ensuring that all jobseekers have the opportunity to compete for available job vacancies.

Over the coming years, we must ensure that our citizens are equipped with the skills to take up jobs of the future and avail of the opportunities arising from a modern economy. Future Jobs Ireland has been launched by Government replacing the Action Plan for Jobs to deliver the required policy reforms to build a resilient workforce and innovative and competitive economy in a changing world of work. The strategy includes a number of youth specific measures which will be delivered on a whole of Government basis.

**Invalidity Pension Applications**

506. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a social welfare claim by a person (details supplied) will be processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38261/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The Department received a claim for IP for the gentleman concerned on 2 August 2018. This claim was disallowed as the gentleman did not reply to requests for information required by the Department in order determine his eligibility for IP. He was notified on 12 March 2019 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal.

He requested a review of the decision on 11 July 2019. A Deciding Officer (DO) of the department wrote to him on 12 July 2019 and 25 July 2019 requesting further information relevant to his claim. As he has failed to provide the information requested, the DO wrote to him again on 17 September 2019 requesting the information be provided in order determine his eligibility for IP.

The review will be finalised as quickly as possible on receipt of the requested information.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.
507. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason for a cap of 1,040 for State contributory pension credits; and if same will be rectified in the case of a person (details supplied). [38280/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The interim Aggregated Contributions Method of Total Contribution Approach (TCA12) makes it easier for many post-2012 pensioners affected by the 2012 rate band changes and assessed under the yearly average model, to qualify for a higher rate of the State pension (contributory).

When the Government decided, in January 2018, to announce an interim TCA option for those who had been affected by the change in rate bands in September 2012, 40 years of contributions was set as the requirement for a full rate pension. Crucially though this interim TCA facilitates up to 20 years of HomeCaring periods to be added to paid contributions to increase a person’s rate. It effectively meant that the minimum number of paid contributions of 20 years needed for a full rate pension would be as the National Pensions Framework suggested. However the additional scope for home caring would potentially allow more people, particularly women who took time out of the work place to care for children and others, to earn a higher rate pension.

PRSI contributions can be credited to people in a number of contexts and as such up to 10 years of credits, for example Jobseekers or illness Benefit, may also be used subject to the total of such credits and HomeCaring periods not exceeding 20 years. For example a person might receive a maximum pension based on a record of 20 years paid PRSI contributions, 5 years jobseekers credits, and 15 years HomeCaring (before or after 1994), over a 50 year period, despite additional gaps of up to 10 years.

There will be some people who have contributed less frequently into the Social Insurance Fund (which pays for contributory pensions), and who will therefore be below the threshold required for a maximum rate of the State pension (contributory). However, for those with insufficient contributions to meet the requirements for a State pension (contributory), they may qualify for a means tested State pension (non-contributory), the maximum personal rate for which is €237 (over 95% of the maximum rate of the contributory pension). This rate of payment does not include rent allowance, household benefits or fuel allowance. Alternatively, if their spouse is a State pensioner and they have significant household means, their most beneficial payment may be an Increase for a Qualified Adult, based on their personal means, and amounting up to 90% of a full contributory pension.

Finally, it should be noted that the introduction of the interim TCA model will not bring all pensioners up to the maximum rate of State pension (contributory). However, if a pensioner does not qualify for an increased rate, they will continue to receive their existing rate of entitlement.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**Invalidity Pension Applications**

508. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an invalidity pension application will be approved for a person (details supplied). [38302/19]
Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The Department received a claim for IP for the gentleman concerned on 8 February 2019. His claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. He was notified on 17 May 2019 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review or appeal.

He requested a review of this decision and submitted further medical evidence in support of the review. Following a review of all the information available it was decided that there was no change to the original decision. He was notified on 19 September 2019 of the outcome of the review.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Redundancy Payments

509. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to reinstate supports to assist employers (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38369/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of the redundancy payments scheme is to compensate employees for the loss of their jobs, where the employer is unable to pay statutory redundancy due to financial difficulties or insolvency. The scheme is funded from the Social Insurance Fund (SIF).

Up to 2011, the scheme provided a rebate of 60 per cent to employers who provided statutory redundancy payments to their employees. I am advised by my Department that in Budget 2013, the rebate payment was abolished. This decision was made because of the high cost of the rebate and its impact on the financial sustainability of the Social Insurance Fund during a time of the economic crisis. Furthermore, the rebate to employers was paid regardless of a company’s financial situation and ability to pay, thus benefitting viable and profitable companies, including multinational companies. It was not a targeted use of the resources of the Social Insurance Fund.

The redundancy payments scheme as it now operates benefits employees whose employers are unable to make statutory redundancy payments. Employers who declare they cannot sustain the cost of redundancy payments, while continuing to trade, are required to submit verified financial information to prove this and are liable to the Social Insurance Fund for any redundancy payments made on their behalf. This ensures that the current scheme takes into account both an employer’s ability to pay redundancy payments and that the Social Insurance Fund can be reimbursed in the future, through debt repayment if an employer’s financial position improves.

Any proposals to restore the redundancy rebate scheme and any development of policy in this area would have to be considered in the overall budgetary context.

Gender Recognition

510. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of legislation that amends the Gender Recognition Act 2015 in view of the recom-
recommendations of the report of the review group of the Act; her plans to table the legislation in 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38399/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In July 2018, I published the Report of the Group Established to Review the Operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015. The recommendations in the report of the Review Group involve issues that are complex and it has been necessary to take some time to take advice and consider them in detail. That said, a number of recommendations are more administrative in nature and these are currently being progressed at official level.

A report is being prepared under section 7 of the Gender Recognition Act 2015, in response to the review, and I expect to be in a position to lay it before the Houses of the Oireachtas in the near future. I will set out any proposals for legislative change at that stage.

Invalidity Pension Payments

511. Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when arrears will issue to a person (details supplied) in respect of a social welfare payment; the reason for the delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38406/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The gentleman referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 5 April 2018. Payment will issue to his nominated bank account on 3 October 2019. He was notified of this decision on 19 September 2019.

The gentleman has applied for an increase for a qualified children on his claim and a request for information in relation to this increase was sent to him on 19 September 2019. On receipt of the requested information any arrears due from 5 April 2018 to 2 October 2019 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

512. Deputy Willie O’Dea asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38449/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 27 June 2019. Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds as it was not found that this lady was substantially restricted in taking up employment.

The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 18 September 2019 and was also notified of their right to request a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Carer’s Allowance Eligibility

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513. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will reform the means test for carer’s allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38466/19]

514. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will increase the income disregard for carer’s allowance from €332.50 to €450 for a single person and from €665 to €900 for a couple; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38467/19]

532. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to revise the means test for carer’s allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38827/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 513, 514 and 532 together.

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

Spending on these payments in 2019 is expected to exceed €1.2 billion.

Carers may also (subject to certain conditions) qualify for the Household Benefits Package and a Free Travel Pass.

I am advised that it is not possible to make a robust estimate of the costs requested on the level of additional programme costs using available administrative data, particularly as such a change would be highly sensitive to the income distribution in households at the time of implementation. However, analysis based on the SWITCH model (Simulating Welfare and Income Tax Changes) predicted that an increase in the disregard of €117.50 (single) and €235.00 (couple) per week could cost in the region of €73 million, which, when income tax and Working Family Payment offsets are taken into account, produces an estimated net expenditure of €55 million.

Any changes to qualifying criteria for these schemes, including income disregards, would have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

**Carer’s Allowance Eligibility**
515. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the formula for assessing means from capital savings, shares and property for carer’s allowance can be increased in line with the disability allowance in which the first €50,000 of capital is disregarded. [38468/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Department operates a range of means-tested social assistance payments. Social welfare legislation provides that the means test takes account of the income and assets of the person (and spouse/partner, if applicable) applying for the relevant scheme. Income and assets include income from employment, self-employment, occupational pensions, maintenance payments as well as property owned (other than the family home) and capital such as savings, shares and other investments.

In this regard, for most social assistance schemes, the first €20,000 of capital is fully disregarded; the next €10,000 assessed at €1 per thousand, the next €10,000 is assessed at €2 per thousand, with the remainder assessed at €4 per thousand.

The assessment of capital reflects the fact that there is an expectation that people with reasonable amounts of capital and property are in a position to use that capital or to realise the value of property to support themselves without having to rely solely on a means tested welfare payment.

In relation to carer’s allowance, as the first €332.50 of gross weekly income for single people and the first €665 for couples is disregarded, as well as a general disregard of €7.60 per week, 92% of the approximately 81,000 carer’s allowance recipients have their means assessed as zero and less than one per cent would be impacted by raising the capital disregard from €20,000 to €50,000. The estimated cost of this increase is approximately €2.5 million in 2020.

Any proposals to change the capital means assessment for means-tested social assistance schemes would have to be considered in the overall budgetary context.

**Working Family Payment Eligibility**

516. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider excluding carer payments in the financial assessment of the working family payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38469/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Working Family Payment (WFP) provides in-work income support for low-income employees with children. The payment is designed to preserve the financial incentive to take-up or remain in employment in circumstances where the employee might be marginally better off in employment than on social welfare payments. It also seeks to alleviate child poverty. To qualify for WFP, a person must be engaged in full-time insurable employment which is expected to last for at least 3 months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. The applicant must also have at least one qualified child who normally resides with them or is supported by them. The family income must also be below a specified amount which varies according to the number of qualified children in the family.

In assessing weekly family income for WFP purposes, most weekly social welfare payments are taken into consideration. Budget 2012 contained a measure which provided for the assessment of carer’s benefit and carer’s allowance payments in determining entitlement to WFP. This measure brought the treatment of these two payments for WFP purposes into line with the treatment of all other primary social welfare payments. It also provided for a more consistent
approach to the concurrent payment of WFP with other social welfare payments. Moreover, while this measure reduced a person’s secondary payment (WFP) it did so without affecting their primary payment, in this case carer’s benefit and carer’s allowance, therefore targeting available resources at those in most need.

The income disregard and means test for Carer’s Allowance is the most generous within the social welfare system. The amount of weekly earnings disregarded is €332.50 for a single person and €665 for a couple.

Welfare expenditure plays a vital role in protecting the most vulnerable people in Irish society. I am advised that an estimated cost of disregarding carer’s allowance and carer’s benefit in the means assessment of the working family payment is not readily available.

Any changes to the current arrangements regarding any social welfare payment would have expenditure implications, which could only be decided in a budgetary context.

Social Welfare Benefits Reviews

517. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which her Department plans to carry out a review of over 750,000 social welfare claims; the way in which this process will work and be undertaken; if particular payments will be examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38475/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** While it is acknowledged that the vast majority of people on social welfare are claiming the correct entitlement due to them, my Department has a duty to ensure that it pays the right person the right amount of money at the right time. Therefore, it is important that all schemes operated by my Department are subject to on-going control reviews and eligibility checks.

My Department conducted over 742,000 claims reviews during 2018. As part of the new Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy 2019-2023 published last week, my Department aims to conduct over 750,000 reviews in 2019. This is a key element of the “Detect” pillar in the Strategy where the overall goal is to detect instances of suspected fraud and error as quickly as possible.

Reviews take place across the range of schemes operated by my Department and can take a variety of forms. These include desk-based assessments of customer claims, face-to-face interviews with customers by trained investigators, home visits, audits of employers’ PRSI records, specialist investigations, self-declarations by customers and joint enquiries and operations with other State agencies, including Revenue. Reviews looking at the medical conditionality underpinning certain schemes will also be undertaken.

Reviews arise from both targeted and random case selections and where specific information comes to the attention of the Department. In this context, it should be noted that customers are under a legal obligation to report any change in their circumstances (income or means) to the Department and such notifications may also trigger a review of a person’s entitlement.

Control review work in my Department generated over €2.5 billion in control savings over the lifetime of the previous Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy 2014-2018. Control savings represent the value of prevented expenditure over a future period that would have been incurred if investigative, anti-fraud and control work had not been carried out across the range of schemes administered by the Department.
I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Brexit Issues

518. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if British pensions paid to persons living here will continue as normal post 31 October 2019 in the case of a no-deal Brexit; the plans in place in this scenario; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38476/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):**

Maintenance of the Common Travel Area (CTA) is one of the Government’s key Brexit priorities. The CTA pre-dates both Ireland’s and the United Kingdom’s membership of the European Union and is not dependent on it.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in relation to the CTA was signed by the Governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom in London on the 8 May 2019. The MOU reaffirmed that Irish and British citizens can move freely and reside in either jurisdiction and enjoy associated rights and entitlements which include social benefits.

My objective has been to ensure that the reciprocal social welfare rights and entitlements, which currently exist for Irish and UK citizens moving within the CTA are safeguarded and maintained. Because of the unique nature of the CTA, it was agreed that Ireland and the UK would formalise these pre-existing rights and entitlements in a legally binding agreement.

A Convention on Social Security was signed on 1 February 2019 and the Parliamentary ratification processes in both Ireland and the UK were completed in March of this year. Under the terms of the agreement the existing social security coordinating arrangements with regard to the recognition of, and access to, social insurance entitlements (including pensions) and the export of certain payments (such as child benefit) will be maintained in both countries. The Convention will enter into force on the 31 October 2019, in the event of a no-deal Brexit or following the end of the associated transitional period in the event of a deal being agreed.

This means that the rights of Irish or British citizens living in Ireland to benefit from social insurance contributions made when working in the UK, and to access social insurance payments if resident in the UK are protected and vice versa.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Brexit Issues

519. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the British winter fuel payment paid to persons living here will continue as normal post 31 October 2019 in the case of a no-deal Brexit; the plans in place in this scenario; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38477/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My key area of concern is the impact of Brexit on those current reciprocal arrangements for social insurance (which includes pensions) and social assistance (means tested schemes linked to residency rights) and child benefit between Ireland and the UK, including Northern Ireland.

I understand that the UK’s Winter Fuel Payment (WFP) is an annual tax-free payment made to eligible people to help towards their winter heating costs. It is a lump sum payment...
Questions - Written Answers

between £100stg and £300stg and in most cases it is paid automatically between November and December, to qualified persons. I also understand that as of winter 2012/13, people who live in the EEA or Switzerland who have “a genuine and sufficient link” to the UK are potentially eligible to receive the WFP, regardless of whether they previously had entitlement to it whilst living in the UK. This change occurred, following the 2011 European Court of Justice ruling (the ‘Stewart Case’). Prior to that, only people who had an entitlement to WFP before moving from the United Kingdom were eligible.

Our Fuel Allowance Scheme represents a contribution towards a person’s normal heating expenses. It is means tested and is paid only to customers who are getting a qualifying payment, either a State Pension or a means-assessed payment. The rate of fuel allowance is €22.50 per week or €630.00 annually. Currently the fuel season is 28 weeks, and the allowance can be paid weekly or in two lump sums of €315 each, being at the start of the fuel season in October and at the midway point in January.

Post-Brexit, including in the event of a no-deal Brexit, Irish and British citizens will continue to enjoy the right to travel, live and work between the UK and Ireland in the same manner as before. This is because of a long-standing arrangement known as the Common Travel Area (CTA). The CTA pre-dates Irish and UK membership of the EU and is not dependent on it. Both the Government of Ireland and the Government of the United Kingdom are committed to maintaining the CTA in all circumstances and we signed a Memorandum of Understanding to that effect on the 8 May 2019.

As part of that commitment, the Government entered into a Convention on Social Security with the Government of the United Kingdom signed on the 1st February 2019, which replicates the current arrangements that apply to the coordination of social security benefits between the two jurisdictions. The WFP is not paid on a reciprocal basis and I can confirm that there are no provisions in the Convention which will change the existing practices in relation to these payments.

**JobPath Programme**

520. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the plans in place for the JobPath scheme post 2019 in view of the fact that the report into the ongoing review of contracted public employment services to be carried out by external consultants will not be completed until early 2020; the position in this regard for referrals to JobPath post 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38478/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** JobPath is a service which supports people who are long-term unemployed to secure and sustain full time paid employment. Two companies, Seetec and Turas Nua, have been contracted by my Department to deliver the service.

The JobPath employment service commenced in 2015 and, under the terms of the contracts signed with the providers was to run for at least six years comprising two consecutive phases: phase one entailed four years’ of client referrals, while phase two entailed a ‘run off’ period during which time no additional clients were to be referred. Therefore client referrals were due to cease on 31st December 2019. The contract included an option to extend the term of referrals for a period no greater than two years.

This extension is important as it will ensure that the Government retains the necessary labour activation capacity to deal with any labour market uncertainty that arises as a result of
Brexit.

In addition, it provides my Department with the opportunity to review all contracted public employment services and to design and develop a comprehensive model that will incorporate various models of response and be fit for purpose for the Irish labour market from 2021 onwards.

As per the econometric review, JobPath has been and continues to be a successful service in providing a comprehensive and value for money activation service for the long-term unemployed. On this basis, my Department triggered the extension provisions of the existing contracts with the JobPath providers and secured agreement on the extension of these contracts on existing terms and conditions for a further twelve months.

This is not a renewal of the JobPath contracts but the execution of the extension clauses of the existing contracts.

In order to assist my Department in designing and developing an appropriate contracted public employment service model, external consultants are to be engaged and this procurement process is currently underway.

**Public Services Card**

521. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the third party legal advice received regarding the legality of the public services card will be published. [38487/19]

*Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):* Legal advice, whether from the Attorney General’s Office or from external counsel, is privileged and it is not intended to publish the legal advice received by my Department on this matter.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**Social Welfare Schemes**

522. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the measures she is taking to ensure workers on a worker’s permit who are being temporarily laid off due to the beef protests will get some support. [38528/19]

*Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):* The primary social welfare schemes available to individuals who have been laid off as a result of current layoffs in the meat processing industry are Jobseekers Benefit and Jobseekers Allowance. Both schemes are administered through my Department’s network of Intreo Centres and Social Welfare Branch Offices throughout the country.

Payment of Jobseekers Benefit and Assistance is contingent on a person satisfying the qualifying conditions. A principal requirement for entitlement to Jobseekers Benefit or Assistance is that an individual must be able to demonstrate his or her availability for full-time employment. In consideration of this condition, any factor which would place an unreasonable restriction on the acceptance of an offer of suitable employment would lead to the claim being disallowed.

Deciding Officers have been advised that non-EU nationals who are employed under work permits issued by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and who are in a
situation of involuntary unemployment due to the on-going effects of meat factory protests are considered to be available for employment.

My Department is advising all affected meat factory employees to make a claim for a job-seekers payment regardless of their work/employment permit status. Each claim will be decided in light of the facts of the situation and the particular circumstances of each individual. If they have not done so already, affected employees should contact their local Intreo Centre or Social Welfare Branch Office. Dedicated arrangements have been made to ensure that claims are processed in a timely manner once all supporting documentation is available.

Customers on non-EU work permits who satisfy the other conditions for receipt of Jobseekers Benefits, including having a satisfactory contribution record, can be paid Jobseekers Benefit.

Customers who do not have enough PRSI contributions can apply for Jobseekers Allowance where other conditions apply, including Habitual Residence and satisfying a means test. Any claim for Jobseeker’s Allowance in the case of involuntary short-term lay-offs represents a transient need for support and will be treated as such.

In the absence of entitlement to Jobseekers Allowance, supports may also be available under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Data

523. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the measures she has taken to reduce the long waiting times for processing certain welfare payments and the number of applications that are subsequently approved under appeal. [38529/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all of its customers. This includes ensuring that scheme applications are processed and decisions on entitlement made as quickly as possible.

Operational processes, procedures and the organisation of work are continually reviewed to ensure that processing capability is maximised with specific monthly targets set for responses within particular scheme area. This is to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources with a view to providing an efficient service to those who rely on the schemes operated by the Department.

As part of my Department’s ongoing programme of service modernisation, a range of initiatives aimed at streamlining the processing of claims, supported by modern technology, have and are been implemented in recent years.

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.

All claim decisions taken by the Department’s Deciding Officers and Designated Persons are appealable to the Chief Appeals Officer. In any year about 85% of all claims are awarded by the Department and just 1% are appealed. Nevertheless, the Department is concerned that these cases are dealt with as quickly as possible.

Accordingly, significant efforts and resources have been devoted to reforming the appeal
process in recent years. Appeal processing times for the year 2018 were 30 weeks for an oral hearing and 24.8 weeks for a summary decision. There has been some improvement in 2019. At the end of August, an oral hearing decision took 27.9 weeks and a summary decision took 23.2 weeks.

A number of new Appeals Officers have joined the Appeals Office over the past 12-18 months, to replace staff leaving on retirement. Given the complexity of the appeals process it takes some time for new staff to be trained up and develop expertise and this has led to somewhat longer processing times during this period. The Chief Appeals Officer has advised me that appeal processing times continue to be a priority for her Office.

There are a number of reasons why a decision which was refused at first instance might be successful on appeal and it is not necessarily the case that the first decision was incorrect. It is often the case that new evidence is provided with an appeal and that, as a result, the original decision may be revised by the Deciding Officer or Designated Person of the Department. This was the case in 58.8% of such successful outcomes in 2018 and 58% of such outcomes to the end of August 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Redundancy Payments

524. Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection his plans to update the Redundancy Payments Act 1967; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38570/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of the redundancy payments scheme is to compensate employees, under the Redundancy Payments Act 1967, as amended, for the loss of their jobs by reason of redundancy. Under the scheme, an eligible employee is entitled to two weeks’ pay for every year of service, plus a bonus week, subject to a gross weekly salary ceiling of €600.

In order to be eligible for a statutory redundancy payment, an employee must: have at least two years continuous service; be in employment which is insurable under the Social Welfare Acts; be over the age of 16; and have been made redundant as a result of a genuine redundancy situation meaning that the job no longer exists and he/she is not replaced.

It is the employer’s responsibility to pay statutory redundancy payments in the first instance. Where an employer can prove to the satisfaction of the Department that it is unable to pay statutory redundancy to its eligible employees the Department will make statutory redundancy payments directly to those employees. Payments are made from the Social Insurance Fund. Such payments raise a debt against the employer which the Department will seek to recover.

Any proposed changes in this area would have to be considered in the overall policy and budgetary context.

Invalidity Pension Applications

525. Deputy Tom Neville asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an invalidity pension application by a person (details supplied); when they will receive payment of same; and the details of the award. [38576/19]
Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The gentleman referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 20 September 2018. Payment will issue to his nominated bank account on 3 October 2019. Any arrears due from 20 September 2018 to 2 October 2019 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue as soon as possible. The gentleman in question was notified of this decision on 19 September 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card Data

526. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount spent on the roll-out and development of the public services card before and since October 2017 to date when the report by the Data Protection Commission into the card was initiated. [38607/19]

527. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of public services cards issued before and since October 2017 to date when the report by the Data Protection Commission into the card was initiated [38608/19]

528. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount spent on the roll-out and development of the public services card in the period before and since July 2018 to date. [38609/19]

529. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of public services cards issued before and since July 2018 to date. [38610/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 526 to 529, inclusive, together.

In total, my Department has issued just over 4 million Public Services Cards (PSC), of which there are currently 3.2 million active PSC users. The information the Deputy has requested relating to the number of PSCs that issued during various periods are set out in the tables below:

<table>
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<th>PSCs issued up to end-Oct 2017</th>
<th>PSCs issued Nov 2017 to date</th>
<th>PSCs issued to date</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>2,920,910</td>
<td>1,081,136</td>
<td>4,002,046</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSCs issued up to end-Jul 2018</th>
<th>PSCs issued Aug 2018 to date</th>
<th>PSCs issued to date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3,423,984</td>
<td>578,062</td>
<td>4,002,046</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To date, the costs for the development, testing, personalisation, production and distribution cost of the PSC from 2010 to date is €31.7m, excluding VAT. The identity authentication and registration functions involved in the PSC process have been incorporated into the day-to-day work of the Department and I am advised that the staffing costs associated with the PSC are not readily available.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card

530. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection
if a report is forthcoming from the Data Protection Commission regarding biometric data; and
if so, when it will be published. [38611/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The
Data Protection Commission (DPC) has advised that its recent report and findings are the first
of two reports on the Public Services Card (PSC) project that will issue to my Department.

The DPC has stated that she will shortly be submitting to my Department a further report
containing provisional findings relating to data security, arithmetic template generation (and
associated processing of personal data) for the SAFE registration process and the PSC, and in
relation to the Department’s processing of personal data generated in connection with the use
of the free travel variant of the PSC.

The DPC also stated that once it has considered any final submissions from my Department
in relation to that report’s provisional findings, she will finalise the report on those particular
issues.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker’s Benefit Appeals

531. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Pro-
tection if a decision will be made on an appeal for a jobseeker’s benefit in respect of a person
(details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38633/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The
Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was re-
ferred on 13 September 2019 to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the
appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment
Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals
against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Question No. 532 answered with Question No. 513.

JobPath Programme

533. Deputy Willie O’Dea asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-
tion the status of JobPath; her plans to renew the contracts of the two private companies tasked
with delivering same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38828/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Job-
Path is a service which supports people who are long-term unemployed to secure and sustain
full time paid employment. Two companies, Seetec and Turas Nua, have been contracted by
my Department to deliver the service.

The JobPath employment service commenced in 2015 and, under the terms of the contracts
signed with the providers was to run for at least six years comprising two consecutive phases:
phase one entailed four years’ of client referrals, while phase two entailed a ‘run off’ period dur-
ing which time no additional clients were to be referred. Therefore client referrals were due to cease on 31st December 2019. The contract included an option to extend the term of referrals for a period no greater than two years.

This extension is important as it will ensure that the Government retains the necessary labour activation capacity to deal with any labour market uncertainty that arises as a result of Brexit.

In addition, it provides my Department with the opportunity review all contracted public employment services and to design and develop a comprehensive model that will incorporate various models of response and be fit for purpose for the Irish labour market from 2021 onwards.

As per the econometric review, JobPath has been and continues to be a successful service in providing a comprehensive and value for money activation service for the long-term unemployed. On this basis, my Department triggered the extension provisions of the existing contracts with the JobPath providers and secured agreement on the extension of these contracts on existing terms and conditions for a further twelve months.

This is not a renewal of the JobPath contracts but the execution of the extension clauses of the existing contracts.

In order to assist my Department in designing and developing an appropriate contracted public employment service model, external consultants are to be engaged and this procurement process is currently underway.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

534. Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38850/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In February 2018, the Government announced a new interim Total Contribution Approach (TCA) option for state pension (contributory) for those affected by the Budget 2012 rate band changes. This interim pension calculation is based on a requirement of forty years of social insurance contributions for qualification for maximum rate pension. The measures also provide for inclusion of up to twenty years of HomeCaring periods for time spend out of the workforce for parenting or caring reasons.

Homecaring periods are not time bound, they can occur at any time during a claimant’s working life. This differs from the existing Homemakers scheme, which applies a disregard for periods out of the workforce for caring duties, after April 1994, under the yearly averaging system. This additional scope for homecaring periods provides an opportunity for those awarded under Budget 2012 rate bands, particularly women, who took time out of the work place to care for children and others, to achieve a higher rate of pension. The maximum number of combined HomeCaring periods and reckonable credits that can be used as part of the new pension calculation is 1,040 (or 20 years) as provided for under the Social Welfare Pensions & Civil Registration Act 2018.

The person concerned applied for and was awarded a reduced rate State pension (contributory) in 2016. As their spouse was already in receipt of an increase for qualified adult for them at a higher weekly rate of entitlement, their state pension (contributory) claim was subsequently...
In July 2019, the person submitted an application for HomeCaring Periods and was awarded 1,279, the maximum possible number of HomeCaring periods in respect of time spent parenting their children. The person concerned has 755 paid social insurance contributions, which, when combined with the maximum permissible number of HomeCaring periods and reckonable credits of 1,040, results in an overall usable total of 1,795. When this number (1,795) is divided by 2,080 (equivalent to 40 years), this results in a payment entitlement rate of 86.30% of the maximum rate of pension. As the person concerned is already in receipt of a rate equivalent to 89.6% of the maximum rate of pension, (or €222.50 per week), they are financially better off to remain as a qualified adult on their spouse’s pension.

A review outcome letter has issued to the person concerned, which includes a copy of their social insurance contribution record.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fire Service Staff

535. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce rent allowance payments for members of the retained fire services similar to those in full-time fire services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38358/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):
There are no plans at present to introduce rent allowance payments for retained firefighters.

Local Authority Funding

536. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the allocation to each local authority in each of the years from 2008 to 2018 and to date in 2019 by the LGF, different grants and LPT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38766/19]

553. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of funding allocated to each local authority in each of the years 2011 to 2019, in tabular form. [38594/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 536 and 553 together.

Local authorities derive their income from a variety of sources including commercial rates, charges for goods and services and funding from Central Government. Central Government funding of local authorities includes transfers, both current and capital, from a range of Departments and Offices for a variety of purposes. Some streams of funding are delivered directly from funding departments to local authorities, while others are routed through departmental agencies.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) publishes a report on the central government funding of local government. The most recent report refers to 2017 and is available at the following link:
The table attached details funding to local authorities from my Department as it was configured in each year from 2011 to 31 August 2019. The figures include funding from the Departmental Vote (as it was configured in that year), the Local Government Fund and the Environment Fund (until October 2016), when responsibility for the Environment Fund transferred to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment.

Details of local property tax payments to local authorities which are included in the Local Government Fund are available on my Department’s website at the following link;

https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/chargestaxes/local-property-tax/local-property-tax


**Living Wage**

537. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of workers employed by his Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of his Department who earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38252/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Payment of salaries to staff of my Department is made in line with pay scales approved by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Based on the civil service 37 hour standard net working week, there is just one employee of my Department earning less than €12.30 per hour.

The details requested in relation to bodies under the aegis of my Department are a matter for the individual bodies concerned. Arrangements have been put in place by each Agency to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for each agency is as below:

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<th>Email address</th>
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<td>Ervia, Gas Networks Ireland</td>
<td><a href="mailto:oireachtas@ervia.ie">oireachtas@ervia.ie</a></td>
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<td>Housing Sustainable Communities Agency</td>
<td><a href="mailto:publicreps@housingagency.ie">publicreps@housingagency.ie</a></td>
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<td>Housing Finance Agency</td>
<td><a href="mailto:oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie">oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie</a></td>
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<td>Irish Water</td>
<td><a href="mailto:oireachtasmembers@water.ie">oireachtasmembers@water.ie</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Government Management Agency</td>
<td><a href="mailto:corporate@lgma.ie">corporate@lgma.ie</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ordnance Survey Ireland</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Oirechta@osi.ie">Oirechta@osi.ie</a></td>
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<td>Property Registration Authority</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:oireachtas@opr.ie">oireachtas@opr.ie</a></td>
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</table>

**Derelict Sites Data**

224
538. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of voids for each local authority area by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38262/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Statistics in relation to social housing stock are published by the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) in their annual reports on Performance Indicators in Local Authorities. These reports provide a range of information in relation to social housing stock, including the number of dwellings in the ownership of each local authority and percentages vacant. The most recent report, relating to 2017, is available on the NOAC website at the following link: http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NOAC-Performance-Indicators-Report-2017.pdf.

While the NOAC statistics capture the number of voids at a particular point in time, the reality is that the number of void properties, both nationally and in each individual local authority area, changes on an ongoing daily basis. This is as would be expected in the management of over 130,000 homes, where tenants move in and out regularly. My Department is continuing to engage with local authorities, to support them in returning both short and longer-term vacant properties to use as swiftly as possible. Elected Councils also have a role to play in supporting this work by making adequate budgetary provision for housing repairs and maintenance, utilising the housing rental income available to them.

**Local Authority Funding**

539. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount allocated to each local authority for rental property inspections to date in 2019; and the projected increase in funding for this purpose for 2020 and 2021. [38336/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Between 2005 and 2018, over €39 million has been paid to local authorities to assist them in the performance of their functions under the Housing Acts, including the inspection of rented accommodation. Over 258,000 inspections were carried out during this period.

The Rental Strategy recognises the need for additional resources to be provided to local authorities to aid increased inspections of properties and ensure greater compliance with the Regulations. Provision has been made for €4.5 million of Exchequer funding to be made available to local authorities in 2019 for this purpose, with the intention of providing further increases each year in the period to 2021 to facilitate a targeted inspection coverage of 25% of rental properties annually at that stage. Funding is provided on the basis of inspections carried out rather than through advance allocations.

Detailed information in relation to inspections carried out by each Local Authority since 2005, can be found on my Department’s website at the following link:


Details of the amounts paid to each local authority to date in 2019 are set out in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>Total payment for H 1 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlow</td>
<td>€14,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan</td>
<td>€7,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Local Authority | Total payment for H 1 2019
---|---
Clare | €39,400
Cork County | €94,900
Donegal | €65,350
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown | €41,250
Fingal | €187,600
Galway | €28,350
Kerry | €67,700
Kildare | €35,700
Kilkenny | €25,750
Laois | €12,150
Leitrim | €19,200
Limerick | €92,000
Longford | €24,150
Louth | €56,000
Mayo | €33,250
Meath | €30,550
Monaghan | €19,500
Offaly | €3,100
Roscommon | €27,650
Sligo | €36,650
South Dublin | €123,550
Tipperary | €66,100
Waterford | €67,350
Westmeath | €24,500
Wexford | €50,350
Cork City Council | €48,050
Galway City Council | €3,650
Dublin City Council | €459,150
TOTALS | €1,804,250

**Local Authority Expenditure**

540. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the allocation to each local authority for estate management functions in 2018 and 2019. [38340/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department does not allocate specific funding for estate management purposes as this is a matter for each individual local authority.

Local authorities receive income from a variety of sources, including grants from Central Government, Local Property Tax, commercial rates and other locally-raised charges. Each authority is mandated to determine its own spending priorities, while having regard to locally identified needs and available resources.
541. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated cost in a full financial year of increasing the representational allowance for local councillors to €30,000, €35,000 and €40,000, respectively, per year. [38356/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** The Representational Payment that the 949 elected members of local authorities receive has a statutory link to the basic salary of a Senator and is adjusted in proportion to any adjustments made to a Senator’s salary. With effect from 1 September 2019 the Representational Payment is €17,359 per annum.

Based on a simple flat rate calculation of stand alone increases to the Representational Payment and assuming there are no corresponding restructuring to other supports or to the role of councillors themselves, the per annum estimated costs of increasing the Representational Payment to the amounts stated are set out in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Additional Cost per Annum</th>
<th>Total Cost Per Annum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>€17,359</td>
<td>€0</td>
<td>€16,473,691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€30,000</td>
<td>€11,996,309</td>
<td>€28,470,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€35,000</td>
<td>€16,741,309</td>
<td>€33,215,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€40,000</td>
<td>€21,486,309</td>
<td>€37,960,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Councillors currently receive a range of other payments and expenses allowances, in addition to the Representational Payment. Based on data from local authorities, my Department has estimated that the total cost of these other payments and expenses allowances was approximately €11.8 million in 2018.

Taking account of feedback from councillors and their representative bodies regarding their current remuneration regime, my colleague, the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, and I agreed to the appointment of Ms Sara Moorhead SC to carry out a review of the role and remuneration of local authority elected members.

The Review is at a very advanced stage of completion and once finalised will be the subject of discussion between my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform prior to consideration by Government. The overall aim of the Review is to ensure that the remuneration of councillors are commensurate with their evolving role as public representatives with responsibility for the carrying out of important local functions.

**Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding**

542. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of measures being funded through his Department under the Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021, particularly the measures included for the provision of grants for septic tank upgrades; the detail of the application process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38407/19]

**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. An Expert Panel has been put in place to support the evaluation process and its membership includes De-
The Expert Panel has made 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. I expect to conclude consideration of the Panel’s recommendations and to make an announcement of the allocations shortly.

As part of the Multi-annual Rural Water Programme, I have also approved changes to the funding scheme for domestic wastewater treatment systems, or septic tanks. The new funding scheme will replace the grant which was brought into operation by the Domestic Waste Water Treatment System (Financial Assistance) Regulations 2013. Under certain conditions, households can receive a grant to assist them in carrying out remediation, repair or upgrading works to, or replacement of, their individual domestic wastewater treatment system.

Work is at an advanced stage of development for the new scheme. I expect that the process will be completed shortly when the necessary regulations dealing with the financial assistance arrangements and related administrative matters are put in place. This will enable a circular letter, terms and conditions, guidance and the application form to issue to local authorities shortly thereafter.

**Shared Ownership Scheme**

543. **Deputy Darragh O’Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount spent under the shared ownership scheme from its inception to its abolition, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38409/19]

544. **Deputy Darragh O’Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to recommence the shared ownership scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38410/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 543 and 544 together.

In 2011, the Government announced the standing down of all affordable housing schemes, including the Shared Ownership scheme, given the changes in the property and lending markets. From 1991 to 2010, a total of 16,492 loans were issued under the scheme, of which 2,997 remained in place at the end of 2018.

Data in relation to the number of loans issued under the Shared Ownership scheme, broken down by year and local authority area is available on my Department’s website at the following link:


My Department also publishes the number and value of all local authority mortgages drawn down, broken down by year, at the following link: https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity, under the heading “Local authority loans approved/paid”. However, this data does not provide a specific breakdown in respect of the value of loans issued under the Shared Ownership scheme.

There are no plans at this time to develop a new Shared Ownership scheme. Affordable housing for purchase, on public lands, is being brought forward under a form of shared equity,
as provided for under Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009.

Local Authority Housing Data

545. Deputy Darragh O’Brien asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of low cost housing sites sold since the inception of the low cost site scheme per annum, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38411/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):
Local authority housing scheme statistics are published on my Department’s website, including data in relation to the Sale of Sites Scheme. Under this scheme, a local authority may make housing sites available at low cost.

Data relating to activity under the Sale of Sites Scheme in the period 2004 to 2018 in tabular form is available on my Department’s website at the following web link:


Referendum Campaigns

546. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to hold a referendum on reducing the voting age to 16 years of age prior to or on the same day as the next general election; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38417/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):
At its meeting on 4 December 2018, the Government reviewed further the progress on the overall programme of Bills to amend the Constitution. Having regard to other referenda that are proposed to be progressed in the short term and having particular regard to the heavy legislative programme scheduled for 2019 arising from the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, the Government agreed that further consideration would have to be given to the timing of a referendum on reducing the voting age to 16.

While the Government remains committed to the holding of a referendum to reduce the voting age to 16 years across all elections, no decision has been taken at this point in time on a date for the holding of the referendum other than it is not proposed that it will be held this year.

Rental Sector

547. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to an issue of rent discrepancy on the Laois and Carlow border (details supplied). [38438/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):
The housing to which the Deputy refers is leased by an Approved Housing Body (AHB). Payment and Availability Agreements in respect of each dwelling have been signed between the AHB and the particular local authority making the tenant allocation in respect of that dwelling. There are two local authorities involved in the referenced development.
It is a term of the agreement between the AHB and the local authorities involved that the AHB agrees to charge, collect and retain from the occupants of the dwellings the rent calculated in accordance with the relevant local authority’s Differential Rent Scheme. The two local authorities involved have different differential rent schemes and the calculation of rent is therefore different.

Local authorities have been able to make their own rent schemes since 1986 and different approaches have been taken to rent charging and setting across the country. There are currently 36 differential rents schemes in operation nationwide. This may result in a situation where housing authority tenants living quite close to each other, and having similar incomes, are paying different rents because they reside in different administrative areas. This is a feature of the local government system and of the fact that rent setting is currently a matter for each housing authority.

While the case of one development straddling a county border may be unusual, it is not, in principle, different from other situations where tenants on the same income pay different rents.

Considerable work has been carried out by my Department in developing a draft national differential rents framework for the purposes of section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009. Such a framework has as its main aim the harmonisation of local authority rents, including a set of standardised income disregards, whilst retaining the general principle of rents relating to household income.

This work is now being examined further in the light of the broader commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, to review the disparate systems of differential rent for social housing in place across local authorities. The overall objective is to ensure that housing supports are fair and sustainable and prioritise those on lowest incomes. I expect that the review will be completed in the near future.

**Housing Assistance Payment**

548. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the local authorities that have appointed a HAP pathfinder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38454/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I assume that the Deputy is referring to the Homeless HAP Place Finder Service.

The Place Finder Service is a targeted support for homeless households who are finding it difficult to secure HAP tenancies and has been successfully utilised by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) across the 4 Dublin local authorities since February 2015. The Place Finder Service assists homeless households in exiting emergency accommodation, primarily by sourcing suitable accommodation and by providing access to the payment of a deposit and up to two months advance rent, within the HAP limits, on the behalf of the HAP recipient.

It has been rolled out nationally, across all local authorities, with effect from January 2018 and all local authorities are entitled to apply for approval for a dedicated resource. It should be noted that a local authority does not need to have a dedicated Place Finder personnel resource in place to utilise the Homeless HAP structures such as deposit and advance rent.

More than 6,200 households have been supported by the Homeless HAP scheme in the Dublin region up to the end of Q2, 2019. Nationally, the corresponding figure was over 8,100 households.
My Department has, to date, approved funding for the appointment of 23 Place Finders. Currently, there are 22 Place Finders operating out of 24 local authorities. Other local authorities indicated that they are satisfied with their existing homeless service. The operation of local homeless services, including the Place Finder Service, is a matter for each local authority.

The information requested is set out in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authorities with a Place Finder Service</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlow County Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clare County Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cork City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cork County Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dublin City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fingal County Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Galway City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Galway County Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kerry County Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kildare County Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kilkenny County Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laois County Council - shared resource with Offaly County Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limerick City &amp; County Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford County Council - shared resource with Westmeath County Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meath County Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly County Council - shared resource with Laois County Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo County Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dublin County Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tipperary County Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterford City &amp; County Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath County Council - shared resource with Longford County Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wexford County Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wicklow County Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social and Affordable Housing Provision**

549. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of pre-committed expenditure for the serviced site fund in 2020, 2021 and 2022. [38491/19]

550. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the budget 2019 announcement of an additional €300 million in the serviced site fund over three years is pre-committed expenditure in each of the years concerned or if it will be announced separately as part of each budget. [38492/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 549 and 550 together.

As part of budget 2019 the Government has confirmed an overall allocation of €310 million under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) in order to support the delivery of more affordable homes
to buy or rent. This funding is being made available to local authorities to provide infrastructure support which will thereafter allow for the delivery of over 6,000 homes at prices with a significant discount on open market rates.

Over the period from 2019 to 2021, the available Exchequer contribution to the Serviced Site Fund will be €275 million, with €35 million to be contributed by local authorities. Over the course of this multi-annual funding stream, local authorities will be invited to submit project applications under periodic ‘Calls for Proposals’. Two calls have been made under the fund to date and details of all successful projects are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following links:


In summary, Approval in Principle has been granted to 35 projects and funding of approximately €127 million, to support the delivery of almost 3,200 homes. While more focused on urban areas, and building at scale on local authority sites, the Fund remains in place for the provision of housing in all locations where there is a proven affordability challenge. Further calls under the Serviced Sites Fund will be made in due course.

Any budgetary decisions relating to the period after 2021 will be a matter for the Government at that time.

Mayoral Election

551. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of preparations for the establishment of the office and elections for the position of directly elected mayor of Limerick City and County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38530/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** The people of Limerick City and County decided in a plebiscite held on 24 May 2019 to support the Government’s proposals for a directly elected mayor with executive functions for their Council area. Work is now well underway on the necessary preparatory work to deliver on the will of the people of Limerick.

Under Section 44 of the Local Government Act 2019, the Minister is required to prepare and submit to the Houses of the Oireachtas a report with legislative proposals for a directly elected mayor for Limerick, within two years of the plebiscite vote, i.e. 24 May 2021. However, my Department is prioritising this work with a view to bringing the report and legislative proposals forward at the earliest opportunity, targeting an election for directly elected mayor of Limerick City and County Council in 2021.

There is now significant work underway within my Department to analyse systematically all legislation under the Department’s responsibility conferring functions and powers on local authority chief executives. A similar exercise has also commenced within other Government Departments. An inter-Departmental working group has been established and met earlier this month to advance the project.

As part of the process, I also intend to establish an implementation advisory group, com-
praising representatives of the key stakeholders in Limerick, particularly the elected Council and management of Limerick City and County Council, to advise on the implementation of the mandate given by the people of Limerick. I expect this Group will meet for the first time in the second half of October.

Housing Adaptation Grant

552. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the provision of storage heating will be considered in the housing aid for older people scheme in view of climate action and the move away from oil fuelled central heating. [38581/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Under the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, support is provided in certain precise circumstances where an older person has no heating system in their home and requires it to remain living in their own home. My Department does not specify the type of heating system other than by reference to Part L of the Building Regulations (Conservation of Fuel and Energy – Dwellings), which sets the performance requirements for new or replacement heating systems. This could include storage heaters on the basis that they comply with Part L requirements with regard to minimum efficiency requirements, the required level of heat retention and appropriate controls on heat output.

*Question No. 553 answered with Question No. 536.*

Foreshore Issues

554. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the regulatory position regarding the machine cleaning of beaches by local authorities, and-or their contractors; if local authorities and-or their contractors must apply for and secure a foreshore licence for the machine cleaning of beaches; if there are particular measures required if the beach falls within a special area of conservation, special conservation area or natural heritage area; his Department’s role in regulating this activity in accordance with the Foreshore Acts 1933 to 2014 and other relevant legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38612/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The compliance with all relevant legislative or regulatory provisions is a matter in the first instance for the individual, company or local authority undertaking work.

Section 3 of the Foreshore Act provides for the licencing of removal or disturbance of beach material from State Owned Foreshore, the area from the mean high water mark to the seaward limit of the territorial seas, where it is in the public interest to do so. Section 6 of the Act provides for the making of prohibitory orders where in the Minister’s opinion removal and/or disturbance of beach material should be prohibited.

Where a foreshore licence is applied for, as part of my determination, I must ensure compliance with the relevant National and European legislative requirements.

Water Services
555. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there is grant aid available to drill a private water well. [38743/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):**
There is a grant currently available, which is funded by my Department through the local authorities, for the provision or necessary improvement of an individual water supply in a house. This is more commonly called the individual or private wells grant.

The grant, subject to certain conditions, assists households dependent on these supplies with the costs incurred in providing such a supply of water for domestic purposes or rectifying serious deficiencies with an existing supply.

Earlier this year I announced details of the new Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021. This included an improved funding scheme for individual wells.

The composition of the new multi-annual programme is based on recommendations from the Working Group that I established in April 2018 to conduct a review of investment needs and rural water services. The changes that I have approved to the individual wells grant scheme are as follows:

- A maximum grant for rehabilitation works of €3,000, which represents an increase of 47% on the current maximum grant amount;

- Where the local authority agrees that the most appropriate solution is to provide a new well, the maximum grant payable would be €5,000;

- Recognising the role of the grant in improving quality, the water quality treatment element (typically filtration and UV filtration) will qualify for 100% funding up to a maximum of €1,000;

- Up to 85% of other costs would be met, subject to the total combined maximum costs of €3,000 for well rehabilitation or €5,000 for a new well;

- For clarity, applicants would not be able to avail of both grant amounts, so they would not be able to avail of €3,000 for well rehabilitation as well as the €5,000 for a new well.

Work is at an advanced stage of development for the new scheme. I expect that the process will be completed shortly when the necessary regulations dealing with the financial assistance arrangements and related administrative matters are put in place. This will enable a circular letter, terms and conditions, guidance and the application form to issue to local authorities shortly thereafter.

Information on the existing grant scheme is available from local authorities and from my Department’s website at the following link. This will be updated once the new scheme comes into operation.


**Social and Affordable Housing**

556. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will work with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council to ensure that the apartments at a location (details supplied) that are the subject of eviction cases by an organisation are brought into public ownership in order to secure homes for these tenants, four of which
Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Acquisition of a property for social housing is a matter for each local authority to consider on a case by case basis. Households on HAP are given the opportunity when coming into the scheme to indicate whether they have an interest in going onto a transfer list for local authority or Approved Housing Body owned housing. Allocations to such housing are in accordance with the relevant local authority’s allocation scheme.

Under HAP, a tenant sources their own accommodation in the private rented market. The tenancy agreement is between the tenant and the landlord and is governed by the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended). Where a tenancy is ending, the household will need to seek alternative accommodation in the private rented market. If a household encounters challenges in securing alternative accommodation, my Department has put both financial and personnel resources in place in local authorities to assist through the HAP Placefinder.

In relation to the provision of HAP in the specified location, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council has confirmed that they are presently supporting three HAP tenancies at that location and that the Council has not, to date, had any contact from those tenants in respect of eviction notices or notices of termination.

As regards evictions, as you will be aware, the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2019, with one of its key functions being to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants. Due to the quasi-judicial and independent role of the RTB, it would be inappropriate for me, as Minister, to intervene in specific disputes.

A number of measures have been introduced in recent years with the objective of improving security of tenure for tenants under the Residential Tenancies Acts. Section 34 of the 2004 Act provides that a landlord must state a reason for the termination in any notice served, in accordance with the allowable grounds for terminations. Through an amendment introduced in 2016, where a landlord proposes to sell 10 or more units within a single development at the same time, that sale is subject to the existing tenants remaining in situ, other than in exceptional circumstances. In addition, the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 provides that where a landlord terminates a tenancy because he/she intends to sell the property, he/she must enter into a contract for sale within 9 months of the termination date and, if not, must offer to re-let to a former tenant who provides their contact details.

The 2019 Act also provides that where a landlord terminates a tenancy because he/she needs vacant possession to substantially refurbish/renovate the property, that property must be offered back to the former tenant who provides their contact details, upon completion of the works. Also, such a termination notice must contain or be accompanied by a written certificate of a registered professional under the Building Control Act 2007, such as an architect or surveyor, stating that the proposed substantial refurbishment/renovation works would pose a health and safety risk necessitating vacation by the tenants and that such a risk would be likely to exist for at least 3 weeks.

The 2019 Act provides additional powers for the RTB to investigate and sanction landlords who engage in improper conduct, including non-compliance with the tenancy termination provisions. My Department will continue to keep the effectiveness and enforcement of the security of tenure provisions in the Acts under review.
557. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied that the minimum annual target of 25,000 homes to be built will be reached for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38779/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):**
Among the targets set in the Government’s Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness was a target to secure a doubling of housing output to 25,000 homes p.a. by 2020.

Housing is, and will remain, a top priority for the Government. The CSO reports there were 18,016 new dwelling completions in Ireland in 2018, up 25% on 2017. When account is taken of the 817 homes completed in unfinished housing developments and the 2,627 homes that were vacant for at least two years and have been returned to use, the overall number of new homes becoming available for use in 2018 was 21,460, without counting the new student bed spaces that were also brought in during that time.

The number of residential completions for 2019 will not be known until early 2020. However, trends indicate the continued expansion of supply. For example, in the year to end June 2019, the number of new homes becoming available for use increased further to 22,609. In the same period, the number of new homes in respect of which commencement notices were served reached 24,226, a 29% year on year increase. Furthermore, the rolling annual total of planning permissions for residential dwellings has exceeded 30,000 units for the first time since early 2010, up more than 21% year on year. There has been particularly strong growth in apartment planning permissions, which is very welcome given the policy thrust toward more compact urban growth.

This data provides confidence that the increasing trend in new homes delivery will continue and that the target set in that regard in Rebuilding Ireland will be achieved, supported by a range of supply-focused actions, such as streamlined and updated planning arrangements, investments in infrastructure and new apartment development and heights guidelines, are delivering results.

**Rent Pressure Zones**

558. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if Athy, County Kildare, will be included as a rent pressure zone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38851/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):**
Section 24A of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004, as amended, provides that the Housing Agency, in consultation with housing authorities, may make a proposal to the Minister that an area should be considered for designation as a Rent Pressure Zone. Following receipt of such a proposal, the Minister requests the Director of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to conduct an assessment of the area to establish whether or not it meets the criteria for designation and to report to the Minister on whether the area should be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone. For the purpose of the Act, ‘area’ is defined as either the administrative area of a housing authority or a local electoral area within the meaning of section 2 of the Local Government Act 2001.

Previously, for an area to be designated a Rent Pressure Zone, it must have satisfied the criteria set out in section 24A(4) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as inserted by section 36 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016), as follows:

(i) the annual rate of rent inflation in the area must have been 7% or more in four of the last
six quarters; and 

(ii) the average rent for tenancies registered in the area with the RTB in the last quarter must be above the average national rent (i.e. the National Standardised Rent in the RTB’s Rent Index Report) in the last quarter (€1,169.12 per month in Q1 2019).

However, on 30 May 2019, I signed the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 (Commencement) Order 2019 which appointed 31 May 2019 and 4 June 2019 as the dates on which specified provisions of the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 came into effect, including provisions in respect of the average rent qualifying criterion for RPZ designation. Specifically, in relation to criteria (ii) above, the rent of a dwelling in the Greater Dublin Area (Kildare, Wicklow and Meath) will now be compared to the average rent across the country, excluding Dublin rents; and the rent of a dwelling outside of the Greater Dublin Area will be compared to the average rent across the country, excluding Greater Dublin Area rents.

Each quarterly RTB Rent Index Report includes a summary in Table 9 of the data used to establish whether each Local Electoral Area fulfils the criteria for designation as a Rent Pressure Zone. This ensures transparency in relation to the position of individual areas in terms of average rent levels and increases. The quarterly Rent Index Reports are available to view on the RTB’s website at the following link: https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/news/latest-data-from-rtb-quarterly-rent-index-2.

Further information on Rent Pressure Zones and designations is available on my Department’s website at https://www.housing.gov.ie/PUBLICATIONS, by searching ‘rent pressure zones - information’.

While rental inflation in the Athy LEA has been above 7% in 4 of the last 6 quarters, the standardised average rent in Athy in Q1 2019 was €801.55, which is below the Non-Dublin Standardised Average Rent of €879.25 per month, thereby not satisfying the criteria for designation as an RPZ.

Rent Pressure Zones

559. Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if Monasterevin, County Kildare, will be included as a rent pressure zone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38852/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Kildare- Newbridge Local Electoral Area (LEA) was designated a Rent Pressure Zone (RPZ) on 27 January 2017 under section 24 of the Residential Tenancies Acts (2004-2019). Subsequently, the Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee No 1 Report in 2018 recommended that Monasterevin be moved from the Athy LEA (which is not a designated Rent Pressure Zone) to a newly created Kildare LEA. New LEAs and Municipal Districts for County Kildare, which gave effect to this recommendation, were signed into law on 19 December 2018 through the County of Kildare Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018.

However, Section 24A(6) or the Residential Tenancies Acts provides that ‘Where a local electoral area is prescribed by order as an RPZ and, subsequently, any local electoral areas are duly amended in a manner that affects the area of the local electoral area so prescribed, then the order shall continue to have effect as if the local electoral area concerned had not been so amended.’

Therefore, under Section 24A(6), areas already designated as RPZs will remain designated
and areas that are not designated will retain their current undesignated status and as such will not become a RPZ by virtue of the change to the boundary. Monasterevin, which was previously in an undesignated LEA, therefore remained undesignated.

Under the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 the expiry date of all deemed and designated RPZs is extended to 31 December 2021.

Local Authority Funding

560. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the month the report on the local government funding baseline review was completed; and when he plans to publish same. [38869/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** In May 2018, a Local Government Funding (Baseline) Review Group was established to consider the methodology to determine local authority funding baselines, to inform the distribution of any additional funding that could become available for general, operational purposes.

Recommendations were received from the Review Group in August 2018 and these fall to be considered in the context of the review of Local Property Tax (LPT) undertaken by the Department of Finance. When the ongoing process in relation to the consideration of that Review of LPT is concluded by the Department of Finance, the work of the Baseline Review Group will be considered further and the issue of publication of the Review Group’s recommendations will be considered at that stage.

Departmental Funding

561. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the funding and staging of the procurement process of the new convention centre in Cork city; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38322/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The Taoiseach has indicated that a new simplified process is being put in place to ensure certainty over the levels of funding and delivery mechanisms for the Cork Event Centre project, which will provide a substantial addition to the cultural offering in Cork City and County when it is complete. Under the new arrangements it is intended that responsibility for oversight of the project will transfer to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and discussions in that regard are underway.

Living Wage

562. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of workers employed by her Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of her Department who earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38253/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I have been advised by my Department that there are 100 employees in this Department earning less than €12.30 per hour.
In respect of the State Agencies under the remit of my Department, there is an overall total of 81 officers earning less than €12.30 per hour. The is illustrated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>No. of Employees earning less than €12.30 per hour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts Council</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester Beatty Library</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford Art Gallery</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foras na Gaeilge</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage Council</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Museum of Modern Art</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Concert Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Gallery of Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Library of Ireland</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Museum of Ireland</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screen Ireland</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Údarás na Gaeltachta</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulster Scots Agency</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterways Ireland</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Animal Disease Controls

563. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the steps being taken to protect the wild hare population from rabbit haemorrhagic disease; and if animals that have been found with the disease have been sent for independent testing. [38274/19]

564. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the counties in which rabbit haemorrhagic disease has been found to date; and if a vaccination scheme for the wild hare population has been explored. [38275/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 563 and 564 together.

Rabbit haemorrhagic disease has caused deaths of domestic pet rabbits in Ireland for a number of years. It was first confirmed in the wild in Ireland in July 2019. The first two positive tests recorded were from rabbits – one in Wicklow, the other in Clare. The first report of and RHD2 positive test in an Irish hare came on the 9th August – an animal found dying in the Wexford Slobs Nature Reserve. The disease has now been confirmed from six different counties – Cork, Clare, Leitrim, Offaly, Wicklow and Wexford.

A post mortem of each dead animal has been carried out by qualified personnel in the regional laboratories of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM). Tissue samples have then been sent to that Department’s specialist virology lab in Backweston where the RHD tests take place.

Most of the research available on the particular strain of virus, RHD2, comes from rabbits to date. From this work, and some investigations in a number of hare populations around Europe, we know that the RHD2 strain is highly contagious and has led to significant declines in wild rabbit populations across Europe since it first appeared in 2010. It has also been reported from...
several different species of hares.

The disease is density-dependent (i.e. the higher the density of animals the higher the incidence of the disease). The virus is extremely resistant, remaining viable for up to two months in the environment. It can be passed on by direct contact, in faeces (including the faeces of predators that have consumed infected animals) and in urine. Infected carcasses can harbour infective virus for several months post mortem. The virus can also be transported on soil, shoes and on clothing. Environmental contamination presents significant difficulties in terms of any biosecurity responses. There is no cure for the disease and while some animals are believed to be carriers and thus apparently immune, mortality of up to 70% is possible.

In an effort to reduce the spread of the disease, biosecurity measures have been put in place at the two NPWS Nature Reserves where the disease has been located – Wexford Wildlife Reserve and Boora Bog. The Office of Public Works have also implemented biosecurity measures at Scattery Island – one of the locations in Clare where the disease has been confirmed.

There is an effective vaccine against RHD2 available for domestic rabbits. However, this has not been tested on wild rabbits and has not been tested on hares. Licensing of vaccines for use on wild hares would require authorisations from the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) and also potentially the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

My Department’s NPWS Staff are continuing to monitor reports of wild rabbit and hare deaths to gain a fuller understanding of the extent and impact of this disease in Ireland. At least 4 more hares from three different counties are currently with DAFM for testing.

Arts Funding

565. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the available funding for artists under 18 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38398/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The Creative Youth Plan under the Creative Ireland Programme commits to specific actions to increase and enhance access to a range of creative and cultural activities and practices for young people. The Creative Ireland Programme supports do not however provide funding directly to young artists, but are aimed at supporting projects and initiatives which engage young people in activities, as well as whole-of-school supports and support for teachers’ continuing professional development. Such supports include pilot projects aimed at increasing and enhancing access to drama and group singing activities for young people in partnership with Youth Theatre Ireland and Sing Ireland respectively.

Additionally, the Creative Ireland Programme’s National Creativity Fund is supporting a number of initiatives which are designed to support young performers, including the

- Royal Irish Academy of Music development of Le Chéile, music ensembles for young disabled musicians;

- Irish Chamber Orchestra’s establishment of the Limerick City Youth Orchestra for 12 to 18 year olds; and

- Ireland’s National Musical Instrument Resource which is seeking to ensure that no one, regardless of age or socio-economic background, is prevented from fulfilling their creative potential for lack of access to an appropriate musical instrument.
My Department has a range of other supports which may benefit young performers, such as the Music Capital Scheme which provides funding for the purchase of equipment by performing groups and individual talented musicians. At the same time, the Department of Education and Skills is supporting the national roll-out of Music Generation as part of the commitments under the Creative Youth Plan.

Animal Disease Controls

566. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a netting licence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38412/19]

567. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a licence (details supplied) will be granted. [38435/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 566 and 567 together.

I made the decision last month to suspend the licences in question.

Based on what we have been able to establish over the last 7 weeks, RHD2 appears to be widespread in Ireland. The virus is known to be highly contagious and easily spread and environmental contamination presents significant difficulties in terms of any biosecurity responses.

Netting and collecting hares for coursing meetings has been identified as a significant risk factor in spreading the disease.

The disease was first reported in Ireland from domestic rabbits in 2018 and was first reported in the wild in early August this year. The virus has now been confirmed in Counties Clare, Cork, Leitrim, Offaly, Wicklow and Wexford with some other animals still awaiting testing. My Department’s officials will continue to work closely with colleagues in the regional laboratories and virology unit of Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine to gain a fuller understanding of the extent and impact of the disease in Ireland. All post-mortems and RHD2 testing to date has been done in DAFM’s labs and I would like to acknowledge their ongoing support and cooperation in our efforts to date.

While most of the confirmed reports to date have been in rabbits, the disease has also been recorded to date in two Irish hares. The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department continue to monitor the situation.

The cooperation of farming groups, hunters, the coursing clubs and other rural land-users will be essential to ensure that a full picture of the disease’s extent and spread are achieved.

The decision to suspend the licences in question will be kept under ongoing review.