Written Answers.

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

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

Tax Collection

14. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that REITs and IREFs are paying a fair share of tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39082/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Institutional investors represent one aspect of the property market and have an important role in increasing supply.

Notwithstanding this, the Government monitors the actions of investors in the market and has taken action when abuses have been identified. In 2016, changes were introduced to address concerns regarding the use of collective investment vehicles by foreign investors to take profits derived from Irish real estate without paying Irish tax.

This resulted in the introduction of the IREF (Irish Real Estate Fund) framework in 2016. IREFs are investment undertakings, excluding UCITS, where at least 25% of the value of that undertaking is made up of Irish real estate assets. Where an IREF makes an actual distribution or on the redemption of units in the IREF, non-resident investors will be subject to a withholding tax of 20%. Certain investors such as pension funds, life assurance companies, charities and credit unions are exempt from the withholding tax as this is the norm for such bodies across the tax acts.

The Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) framework was introduced in 2013, to facilitate long-term, risk-diversified, collective investment in rental property. In order to be a REIT, a company must be listed on the main market of an EU stock exchange within three years of forming, and it must be widely held. Income and gains from Irish property are not taxed within the REIT but are instead taxed in the hands of the investor when distributed.

Dividend withholding tax at 20% must be applied to all distributions from REITs, other than distributions to certain limited classes of investors such as pension funds and charities as they are more generally exempt from tax.

Given the important implications which developments in the property market can have for the economy, my Department actively monitors developments in this sector on an ongoing basis. As part of the 2018 Finance Act process I committed to produce a report on REITs, IREFs and section 110 companies as they invest in the Irish property market. This report was prepared by officials in my Department and was presented to the Tax Strategy Group in July. This paper provides a basis for policy discussions in relation to institutional investment in the

Irish property market.

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

15. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which the condition for receiving section 481 tax relief, which requires the recipients to provide quality employment and training, can be met by the producer companies that apply for and receive the relief when those same producer companies are denying responsibility for employment and training on film productions but rather claiming that a designated activity company, which exists only for a time limited specific financial purpose, is the entity responsible for employment and training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38988/19]

16. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if the condition for receiving section 481 tax relief is being met by the producer companies in the film industry that apply for and receive the relief; and the way in which this is monitored by his Department. [39094/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 15 and 16 together.

The Deputies will be aware that a number of amendments were made to Section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 as part of Finance Act 2018.

I legislated to split the certification process between Revenue and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG). Production companies are now required to apply to the DCHG before commencement of Irish production to have the film certified as a qualifying film.

As part of the application process, applicants must provide a skills development plan and, if the amount of eligible expenditure is over €2m, that plan must be agreed with Screen Ireland. Additionally, a post project skills development report is required for each project.

In terms of quality employment, the monitoring of compliance with employment rights legislation is primarily a matter for the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, through the Workplace Relations Commission. However, as part of the new certification process to be undertaken by DCHG, an applicant company is required to sign an undertaking of compliance with all relevant employment legislation. This undertaking is required to be signed and furnished with every section 481 application.

These conditions shall be met not just by a producer company but also by the qualifying company. If a producer does not comply with the employment and skills development requirements set out by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht they may not be eligible for the corporation tax credit. Any amount already claimed may be recoverable, with interest.

I have further been advised by my officials that, following a joint request by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), the Services, Industry, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), and Screen Producers Ireland, the WRC has agreed to undertake an audit of the Republic of Ireland Independent Film and Television Drama Production Sector with a view to examining industrial relations generally, employment practices and procedure, assessing issues arising (if any), and making recommendations for their improvement where appropriate.

The WRC has published a Workplace Relations Notice on its website, inviting submissions from stakeholders on the above listed matters by 31 October 2019.

Credit Unions

17. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance if the proposed levy for credit unions will be scrapped; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39035/19]

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

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

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

The Central Bank indicated, in its Funding Strategy and 2018 Guide to the Industry Funding Levy, that it intended to seek my approval to increase the proportion of financial regulation costs to be recovered from credit unions on a phased basis setting out an initial target of 50% to be reached by 2021.

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

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

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

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

The Deputy might also wish to note that the Department of Finance, in collaboration with the Central Bank, held a public consultation on potential changes to the Credit Institutions Resolution Fund Levy, which is expected to reduce materially from 2020. The outcome, following the public consultation, will be published shortly.

It is also important to note that as Minister for Finance I have reduced the Stabilisation Scheme Levy materially and that since 2017 no further levies have been charged by the Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo). I have previously committed to a further review of the Stabilisation Scheme in 2020.

On 28th August last, I also held a meeting with the credit union representative bodies to discuss their views on the Industry Funding Levy and other credit union related matters.

Question No. 18 answered with Question No. 12.

Tax Code

19. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration is being given to the introduction of a green tax and dividend approach to decarbonising society and the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38767/19]

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. Having said that, the Deputy will be aware that the Climate Action Plan 2019 provided a commitment to assess a Carbon Tax trajectory of at least €80 per tonne by 2030, having regard to considerations on the social and economic impacts.

A carbon tax was introduced in Ireland on a phased basis beginning in 2009. Initially it applied to transport fuels, and was extended to other non-solid fuels (such as kerosene, green diesel, liquefied petroleum gas and natural gas) in May 2010. When introduced, the rate was €15 per tonne of CO2 emissions and this was increased to €20 per tonne in December 2011. Carbon tax was extended to solid fuels at a reduced rate of €10 per tonne from May 2013 which increased to €20 per tonne in May 2014. In 2018, the VAT exclusive yield from carbon tax was approximately €431 million.

While hypothecation is not a feature of the Irish taxation system in general as it can constrain the flexibility of the Government in expenditure decisions, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action recommended that hypothecation of carbon tax revenues be considered. To this end my Department conducted a public consultation on the options for use of revenues raised from increases in the carbon tax. Among the options presented were a “tax and dividend scheme”. There were 66 respondents to the consultation, representing businesses, private individuals as well as social, voluntary and community and “other” sectors.

The most favoured options were ring-fencing additional carbon tax revenues for the purposes of enhancing the current Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) grant scheme for household energy efficiency improvements and to fund sustainable transport infrastructure. The option of returning the proceeds by way of dividend to citizens or households through the social welfare and/or tax system received a negative response overall, being one of the least supported and most opposed options.

In the context of Budget 2020 and future tax policy, I will consider all options relating to the carbon tax.

Tax Code

20. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the review of the special assignee relief programme has been completed and published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39081/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Special Assignee Relief Programme (SARP) is an income tax incentive aimed at reducing the cost to employers of assigning key individuals in their companies from abroad to take up temporary, short-term positions in the Irish based operations of the employer with a view to transferring essential skills to Irish based workers. For example, such individuals may be transferred to head up new divisions of the company or take charge of new product development.

In accordance with the Department of Finance Tax Expenditure Guidelines, SARP is currently the subject of an independent review which is being carried out by Indecon Economic Consultants. The review exercise affords an opportunity to look at all elements of the relief and it also includes consultation with stakeholders.

The terms of reference of the review include:

- the continuing relevance of the programme;

- the performance of the programme in terms of meeting its objectives;

- the particular features of the programme;

- the annual cost and

- the overall impact of the programme.

The appropriateness of the present upper and the lower limit on the quantum of income that should benefit from the tax relief is also to be examined having regard to the objectives of the scheme and to the principles of tax equity.

I understand that the report is currently being finalised and I expect that it will be submitted to my Department in the next few days. It is my intention to publish the report in the context of the forthcoming Budget and Finance Bill.

Brexit Issues

21. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the effect of a no-deal hard Brexit on customs clearance and other requirements for importing from the UK mainland and Northern Ireland; his views on the implications of a no-deal hard Brexit for VAT and business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39045/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): When the UK leaves the EU, it will become a third country from a customs perspective and the free circulation and free movement of goods between the EU and the UK will end. This will increase substantially the number of businesses that will have to complete customs formalities and other related obligations for trade with the UK and through the UK landbridge to the EU. This will present a significant challenge for many of those businesses which have not had any experience of third country trade and customs formalities.

I am advised by Revenue that in the last few months as part of its ongoing multi-layered trader engagement programme, Revenue wrote to all businesses who traded with the UK in 2018 or in the first six months of 2019, outlining the practical preparatory steps to take based on their trade pattern with the U.K. In addition, businesses with significant or frequent trade with the UK received or will soon receive a follow up phone call from Revenue. I understand that follow up calls will be completed by Revenue by the end of September.

In regard to VAT, under existing rules, when the UK becomes a third country, VAT on import will be chargeable at the point of importation unless the importer is approved to use the current deferred payment system, which allows approved traders to defer payment of certain charges, including customs and VAT at import, until the 15th of the month following importation. The Deputy will be aware that I made provision in the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Act 2019 for the introduction of postponed accounting for VAT registered traders importing goods from non-EU countries, which will be implemented if the UK leaves the EU without a withdrawal agreement.

Revenue continue to assist businesses planning to register for VAT in Ireland for the first time as a result of Brexit, and for businesses that may choose to make their Mini One Stop Shop digital sales VAT returns through Ireland following a UK departure from the EU.

Tracker Mortgages

22. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on banks using the time limit for tracker mortgage appeals to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman; his further views on whether the banks should lift the time limits; if he has engaged with the banks about this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39058/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman (FSPO) is an independent statutory office which operates under its own legislative framework and presents customers with a statutory means of resolving their complaint against a regulated financial services provider in a fair and independent manner.

I am aware that the Deputy was recently in correspondence with the Ombudsman in relation to this matter. As outlined by the Ombudsman in his reply, before a formal investigation of a complaint can commence, this FSPO must assess whether the complaint has been made within the time limits set out in Section 51 the 2017 Act.

Section 51 of the 2017 Act provides that the complaint must be made, within whichever of the following periods is last to expire;

(i) 6 years from the date of the conduct giving rise to the complaint;

(ii) 3 years from the earlier of the date on which the Complainant became aware or ought reasonably to have become aware, of the conduct giving rise to the complaint;

(iii) Such longer periods as the Ombudsman may allow where it appears to him that there are reasonable grounds for requiring a longer period and that it would be just an equitable, in all of the circumstances to extend the period.

In order for the Ombudsman to exercise his discretion under Section 51(2)(a)(iii) there must be reasonable grounds in the particular complaint, for him to permit a longer period to enable the complaint to be made, and it must be just and equitable in all of the circumstances for him to do so.

When an assessment is conducted, it is open to a provider to express a view that the complaint was made within the time-periods in s51 of the 2017 Act. Some providers have taken this approach in relation to all tracker mortgage interest rate complaints. This is then taken into account in making a determination on the application of the time limits.

Property Tax

23. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if the local property tax will be abolished and replaced with a landlord's tax that increases in rate depending on the number of properties the landlord has; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38986/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Local Property Tax was introduced in 2013 to provide a stable and sustainable funding base for local authorities and is a significant base-broadening measure. LPT has yielded over €2.42 billion for local authorities since its introduction, with the annual LPT allocation currently standing at close to €465 million, which supplements other local authority income. The Local Property Tax is currently forecast to yield approximately €470 million this year.

The taxation of property through a recurring annual tax is less economically distortionary than tax imposed on either income or capital. This is supported by analysis and international experience where, for example, the OECD in 2011 suggested that tax on property is considered the least harmful to growth. It is also the International and European norm. At just 0.6% of national income, the LPT yield in Ireland is low when compared to rates of 2.8% in France and over 3% in the United Kingdom.

I am informed by Revenue that LPT returns require owners to indicate whether their properties are principal or non-principal primary residences (NPPR). However, the information does not distinguish whether NPPR properties are owned by commercial landlords or otherwise. Page 27 of the Revenue Ready Reckoner which is available online shows the effect of additional charges on NPPR properties. If Principal Private Residences were exempted from the tax as the Deputy seems to suggest, approximately €410 million currently collected under the LPT would be lost. The number of properties indicated as NPPRs, is approximately 260,000 and, consequently, for the Deputy's suggested replacement tax, a very high tax rate would have to be imposed on these properties in order to maintain the current yield.

Last April, the Report of the Inter-Departmental Review Group was published and, having considered the findings of the review report, I decided to defer valuation date from 1st November 2019 to 1st November 2020. This deferral gives sufficient time to build consensus about the best way forward for the tax and to prepare appropriate legislation. Therefore, I have no plans to abolish the Local Property Tax.

VAT Rate Application

24. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the VAT treatment of food supplements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39057/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Irish VAT legislation does not provide a zero rate for food supplement products; instead there is a legislative provision for zero rating food and drink. The zero 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.

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.

Corporation Tax Regime

25. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the OECD BEPS process; the next steps involved; when he expects an agreement among the OECD members; the progress made on a review as to the sustainability of corporation tax receipts here in the coming years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39059/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On 28 May 2019, the OECD BEPS Inclusive Framework adopted a Programme of Work to develop a consensus solution to the tax challenges raised by digitalisation. This was subsequently endorsed by G20 Finance Ministers at their meeting in Fukuoka on 8-9 June 2019, and by G20 Leaders in Osaka on 28-29 June 2019. This Programme of Work splits the continuing work among two separate Pillars.

Subsequently the OECD Secretariat has been working on a "unified approach" based on significant commonalities of the three proposals under Pillar One of the Programme of Work. This proposal will be published in October and it is anticipated that there will be a public consultation during November.

My position has consistently been that Pillar One proposals examining the issue of where companies generate their value and whether new concepts of value creation need to be recognised might provide a basis upon which a sustainable agreement could be found at the OECD. Nevertheless there remains many questions to be answered before we have a workable solution which achieves consensus on this proposal.

Pillar Two of the Programme of Work seeks to examine whether minimum effective tax rate rules should be agreed. As I have said previously, this Pillar remains problematic, not least because of a lack of clarity as to what it is the proposal is trying to achieve. I remain to be convinced of the validity and appropriateness of this proposal in reaching an agreed outcome to addressing the tax challenges of digitalisation.

I have long acknowledged that further change to the international tax framework is necessary to ensure that we reach a stable global consensus for how and where companies should be taxed. A certain, stable, and globally agreed international tax framework is vital to facilitate cross border trade and investment. The Programme of Work has targeted an agreed outcome by the end of 2020 although further time would then be required for any agreement to be implemented by countries whether domestically or multilaterally.

Work on assessing all of the issues around the sustainability of corporation tax receipts and the potential fiscal vulnerabilities this may cause is ongoing. At a recent sitting of the Budget Oversight Committee I indicated that I would consider whether the expected publication date of March 2020 could be brought forward.

Brexit Preparations

26. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he has taken to date and plans to take in preparation for post-Brexit customs checks at ports here, specifically Rosslare Europort; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38309/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that significant work has been undertaken in preparation for post-Brexit Customs checks at Rosslare Europort. The Office of Public Works are responsible for the delivery of the necessary infrastructure and in preparation for the no-deal scenario, temporary facilities in Rosslare Harbour will include public office facilities, basic driver comfort facilities and exam areas for SPS and Customs controls. OPW are working to provide permanent facilities that will be in place by 1 January 2021**.**

I am advised that Revenue appointed 30 additional staff to Rosslare Europort. These additional staff brought the total Revenue staff in Rosslare Europort to approximately 50. In order to facilitate trade, Revenue will operate extended opening hours to reflect current trade flows through the Europort.

Revenue has engaged directly with trade and business to provide advice and support in relation to the changes that will occur as a result of Brexit. On 30 January, Revenue, together with Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, hosted a Customs Brexit Information seminar in Wexford town. This provided an opportunity for traders to speak directly with experts across a range of specific Customs themes as well as from other Government Departments and agencies.

In April 2019, Revenue undertook direct engagement with truck drivers at both Dublin Port and Rosslare Europort. Customs Officers provided advice to drivers waiting to embark ferries and on-board a number of sailings. Information leaflets, providing key customs advice for truck drivers were distributed to ensure that drivers understand and are aware of the impact Brexit will have on their journeys. Revenue also made a presentation in Rosslare Europort to the haulage sector outlining the Customs procedures and obligations in relation to the flow of goods through Rosslare Europort. Revenue will continue to support initiatives to support trade preparations for Brexit.

Revenue Commissioners Data

27. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated increase in the number of high net worth persons dealt with by the Revenue Commissioners' large cases division if the threshold for inclusion was reduced to €30 million; the additional resources which would be required to provide for such a reduction; if such resources will be made available to the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39047/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it split its Large Cases Division into two divisions in 2018, one of which, Large Cases – High Wealth Individuals Division (LC-HWID), has a focus on HWIs, avoidance and pensions. As reflected in one of the recommendations in the 2017 Annual Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), this new Division reviewed the case base with a view to increasing the number of HWIs it manages. This review has been published on the Revenue website and sets out the revised criterion to be considered a HWI and to therefore come within the remit of the HWI branches of LC-HWID is net assets of €20 million and over.

I am advised by Revenue that as there is no statutory obligation on individuals to return details of their net worth on returns of income it is not possible to estimate the number of individuals with a net worth within the threshold requested by the Deputy.

The allocation of resources is a matter for Revenue, but I understand that Revenue's structural realignment, of which the setting up of the LC-HWID was a part, was supported by an expansion in the number of specialist and experienced staff assigned to the oversight of the new Division's case base. The number of staff currently assigned to the HWI branches is c.60.

Finally, I would like to say to the Deputy that over the last number of Budgets I supported the business case put forward by Revenue in relation to additional resources, both personnel and ICT, and I will continue to examine any proposal put forward by Revenue in the future.

Excise Duties

28. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to increase the excise duty on diesel fuel; his views on the impact of such an increase on the haulage industry in view of the threat posed by Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39083/19]

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.

Irish Fiscal Advisory Council

29. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which and when he will respond to the recent criticism from the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council that the Government needs to develop a more credible medium-term plan for budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38307/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The main point raised by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (IFAC) in relation to medium-term budgetary planning relates to expenditure ceilings. In this area, my view is that there is a balance to be struck.

In theory, fixing expenditure ceilings over the medium term has certain advantages, including higher levels of certainty.

In practice, however, experience shows the inherent risk of expenditure ceilings acting simply as a baseline (i.e. floor), with additional expenditure arising above and beyond this. The experience in the lead-up to the fiscal and economic crisis is testament to this: large and ultimately unsustainable increases in expenditure were implemented during the pre-crisis period, bringing our country to the verge of bankruptcy.

I am not prepared to go down this route.

What I have done, however, is to raise the medium-term projected annual growth rate in current expenditure from 2½ per cent to 3¼ per cent in the Summer Economic Statement (SES). Taking into account the increases set out in the National Development Plan and the additional allocation for the National Broadband Plan, this equates to an overall average annual increase of c.3¾ per cent in gross voted expenditure over the period 2020 - 2024.

This is a more plausible growth rate and a rate of expenditure growth that is consistent with the point of the economic cycle where the Irish economy is likely to be.

On the points raised in relation to corporation tax, I have requested my officials to examine potential policy options as to how vulnerabilities could be addressed. I will bring recommendations to Government in due course. Furthermore, my Department will undertake and publish an assessment of the sustainability of corporation tax receipts, in light of future multilateral policy changes in this area.

Finally, in relation to debt ratio targets, my Department's analysis of debt as published in its Annual Report on Public Debt in Ireland includes, amongst others, the debt-to-GNI* metric, as suggested by IFAC.

Insurance Costs

30. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Finance the measures taken to meet and engage with insurance companies regarding excessive premiums being charged to consumers, particularly in counties Carlow and Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38814/19]

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

However, I acknowledge the general problems faced by many consumers across the country in relation to the cost and availability of insurance. I also appreciate that there is some frustration about the perceived pace of reform. Unfortunately, there is no single policy or legislative "silver bullet" to immediately stem or reverse premium price rises. This is because there are many constraints faced by the Government in trying to address this issue in particular the fact that for constitutional reasons, it cannot direct the courts as to the award levels that should be applied and for legal reasons it cannot direct insurance companies as to the pricing level which they should apply in respect of businesses seeking insurance.

Notwithstanding the above, I wish to reemphasise how important this issue is for the Government. As the Deputy is aware, the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) was established in July 2016 and undertook an examination of the factors contributing to the increasing cost of insurance in order to identify what short, medium and long-term measures could be introduced to help reduce the cost of insurance for consumers and businesses. The Deputy will recall that the CIWG has produced two reports since its inception and has been working to implement the 33 recommendations of the Cost of Motor Insurance Report published in 2017, as well as the 15 Recommendations of the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance Report, published in 2018.

Quarterly progress updates on the implementation of both of the CIWG reports provide more detailed information on the implementation of each of the recommendations and actions. The ninth quarterly update was published in July and is available on the Department's website. It shows that vast majority of the recommendations due before Q2 2019 have been completed.

I believe that these reforms are having a significant impact with regard to private motor insurance (CSO figures from May 2019 show that the price of motor insurance is now 24.5% lower than the July 2016 peak). The Government is determined to continue working to ensure that these positive pricing trends can be extended to other forms of insurance.

As outlined to the Deputy in previous PQ responses (including PQs 25241/19, 17651/19, 9764/19, 7359/19, 48428/18 and 40780/18), stakeholder consultation formed the foundation upon which the two primary reports of the Cost of Insurance Working Group and the accompanying recommendations were developed. This consultation process involved a wide range of stakeholders representing the different voices within this sector, including representative bodies, the major individual motor insurance providers and interest groups. The impact of excessive premiums being charged to consumers from all counties across the country was a feature of this engagement process with industry.

In addition, Department officials regularly raise specific issues affecting consumers across the country during their ongoing engagement with Insurance Ireland. Furthermore, Minister of State D'Arcy has separately met with representatives from insurance companies and other stakeholders in relation to a number of issues and the problems resulting from high insurance premiums have been discussed during these engagements.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

31. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the divestment of public funding in the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund from fossil fuel companies since the enactment of the Fossil Fuel Divestment Act 2018; his plans as part of the climate action plan 2019 to encourage the private sector to divest from fossil fuel companies and offer investors fossil free alternatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38453/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Fossil Fuel Divestment Act 2018 provides for the divestment by the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) from fossil fuel undertakings, that is, companies that derive more than 20% of their revenues from the exploration, extraction and/or refinement of fossil fuels, within a practicable timeframe. Under the Act, fossil fuels are defined as oil, natural gas, peat, coal or any derivative thereof intended for use in the production of energy by combustion.

I am informed by ISIF that by early January 2019, it had sold approximately €72m worth of stocks and bonds in 38 individual fossil fuel undertakings.

Following enactment, ISIF published a Fossil Fuel exclusion list on its website, encompassing 148 companies in which it will not invest. The list is actively monitored and reviewed every 6 months, and so, in July 2019, was extended by a further 33 undertakings. As part of ongoing compliance with the Act, further divestments were therefore made.

The recently launched all of Government Action Plan contains a number of actions which aim to encourage private sector investment to assist in the low carbon transition. While I believe that questions relating to the Plan are more appropriately for answer by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, there are two actions which are broadly related to the Deputy's query which do fall under the remit of the Department of Finance.

Under action 10, the State will be exploring options for non-Exchequer sources of financing climate action and green investments and assessing the international sustainable and green finance environment for other potential solutions. The direct focus of the action is investment, not necessarily divestment, but, nonetheless, is part of the broader green finance agenda.

Action 11, meanwhile, includes the promotion of the sustainable finance sector in Ireland, through the new strategy for international financial services, ‘Ireland for Finance’. It also includes engagement at EU level on sustainable finance proposals, particularly regarding establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment by creating a unified classification system of environmentally sustainable economic activity. This will be an important step in advancing the connection between financial markets and private investors with a sustainability agenda.

Departmental Legal Cases

32. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when the appeal against a ruling by the EU Commission (details supplied) will conclude; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39084/19]

44. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to date and the projected costs for the entire case for the Irish legal team taking an appeal against an EU ruling (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38984/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 32 and 44 together.

The Government profoundly disagrees with the Commission’s analysis in the Apple State aid case. An appeal has therefore been brought before the European Courts. Such an appeal takes the form of an application to the General Court of the European Union, asking it to annul the Decision of the Commission.

The Attorney General prepared the legal grounds in support of the annulment proceedings and the application has been lodged in the General Court of the European Union.

As is normal practice, a summary of the legal grounds for the appeal have been published in the Official Journal of the European Union. They were also published on the Department of Finance’s website in December 2016. The oral hearing for the appeal took place at the General Court of the European Union on 17 and 18 September 2019 and an overview of Ireland’s position at the oral hearing was published on the Department’s website.

The cumulative cost to date in respect of the entire appeal and recovery in the Apple case is in the order of €7.2 million (including VAT). This includes all legal costs, consultancy fees and other associated costs. These fees have been paid by the Department of Finance, Revenue Commissioners, NTMA, Central Bank of Ireland, Attorney General’s Office and Chief State Solicitor’s Office.

It will most likely be several years before the full process of litigation, which may include engagement with the European Court of Justice, is ultimately concluded. For this reason, it is not possible to have a fixed projection of costs for the entire case.

This case has involved a significant degree of legal and technical complexity and additional expertise has been engaged where required. With regard to future anticipated costs, as it is and will continue to be an important issue for the State, it will continue to be appropriately resourced.

Capital Expenditure Programme

33. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he can support borrowing for capital purposes with particular reference to measures to address infrastructural deficits in the aftermath of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39010/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, it is not the practice of the Minister for Finance to discuss the details of measures which may be under consideration as part of the Budget and Finance Bill.

Insurance Fraud

34. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance the progress in developing legislation to create an integrated insurance fraud database; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39092/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Cost of Insurance Working Group Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance' (January 2017) includes a recommendation to establish a fully functioning integrated fraud database for industry to detect patterns of fraud managed by an independent not-for-profit body but funded by industry. This approach is designed to provide for complete and open access to the data held on any such database for all market participants.

The current position in relation to the development of this database is that the Insurance Fraud Database Working Group, chaired by the Crime Division of the Department of Justice and Equality (DJE)is continuing to meet in order to work through the various requirements of such a database including satisfactory data protection requirements.

In this regard, DJE submitted a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) on the current industry database 'Insurance Link' to the Office of the Data Protection Commission (ODPC) on behalf of Insurance Ireland in June 2019. DJE is continuing to engage with Insurance Ireland and the Office of the Data Protection Commission on this matter.

It is too early at this stage to consider whether legislation is needed to underpin such a database. A decision of this nature can only be made when all data protection-related issues have been addressed. If it becomes apparent that legislation is required, my Department will consider in conjunction with the Department of Justice and Equality how to progress this matter appropriately.

Subject to consultation with the ODPC, the next phase towards implementation of this recommendation will require the identification of an appropriate independent body to manage the database. The Cost of Insurance Working Group will continue to closely monitor progress of the implementation of this recommendation.

Tax Code

35. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to either increase the upper limit or reduce the lower threshold in the special assignee relief programme in budget

2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39090/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am currently awaiting the completion of a comprehensive review of the Special Assignee Relief Programme (SARP). The review is being carried out by Indecon Economic Consultants and my Department expects to receive the relevant report within the coming days. The review affords an opportunity to look at all elements of the relief, including the particular aspects to which the Deputy refers.

I propose to wait until the report is received and I have had a chance to consider its conclusions and recommendations before making decisions on any aspect of SARP.

However, I would remind the Deputy that the incentive as currently framed in the legislation is due to operate until the end of next year so that the timeframe within which decisions must be made relating to the relief, or aspects thereof, is a relatively long one.

Tax Code

36. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to increase carbon tax; his views on the impact of such an increase on the progressivity of the tax system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39089/19]

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.

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

37. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of days a person must be resident in the State to avail of the special assignee relief programme; the average number of days persons availing of the programme resided in the State in each of the years 2016, 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39046/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 825C of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for the Special Assignee Relief Programme (SARP). This relief provides a deduction from income tax for an employee who is assigned to work in the State by his or her employer.

There are certain conditions that must be met in order to qualify for SARP, including that the employee must be tax resident in the State for all tax years in which SARP relief is claimed. An individual is regarded as resident in the State for tax purposes for a tax year if he or she is present in the State for –

1. 183 days in that tax year, or

2. 280 days between that tax year and the previous tax year with a minimum of 30 days in any year.

In certain circumstances, an individual may also elect to be resident in the State for a tax year.

Revenue advise me that where SARP relief applies, the employee is regarded a chargeable person for the purposes of self-assessment. As a result, he or she is required to submit a return of income (Form 11) to Revenue for each year SARP relief is claimed. The return of income includes a reporting field for residence (i.e. tick a box if resident or non-resident). As the individual is not required to report the exact number of days present in the State in a tax year, it is not possible to provide the information requested by the Deputy regarding the average number of days persons availing of the programme resided in the State for the years 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Brexit Preparations

38. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he has taken to date and plans to take to upgrade customs posts in the event of a no-deal hard Brexit, specifically in respect of areas along the Border with Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39044/19]

53. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the additional measures he plans to implement to counteract cross-Border smuggling and illicit trade from overseas, taking into consideration the additional difficulties that may emerge following Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39043/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 38 and 53 together.

The Government is determined in the context of Brexit, deal or ‘no deal’, to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland. I am assured by Revenue that in line with that policy it has not upgraded any Customs posts in the vicinity of the border to deal with Customs formalities post-Brexit.

In preparation for Brexit, Revenue is recruiting an additional 600 staff across a range of grades and is confident that this additional resource will be in place by 31 October. This additional resource is primarily being recruited for the purposes of facilitating and supporting legitimate trade.

Revenue has assured me that it already implements a comprehensive risk-based intervention programme to identify, target and disrupt all forms of cross-border smuggling and criminality. Revenue’s focus on such activity will continue post Brexit.

Revenue’s risk-based approach to illegal cross-border activity is, facilitated and supported by very close cooperation with other agencies of the State, including An Garda Síochána, and also with colleagues in Northern Ireland through the North-South Joint Agency Task Force.

I am satisfied that Revenue’s focus on cross-border smuggling is appropriate and well targeted. I know that Revenue keeps such matters under active review and is committed to quickly confront any new risks as they emerge. I remain open to consider any request from Revenue for additional resources in that regard, if required.

Departmental Budgets

39. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance if more funding will be made available to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39041/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): This question is more appropriate to my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government as the allocation of funding to housing schemes is primarily his policy responsibility.

The Deputy may be aware that the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government already set out in his answer to PQ 25232 that he had received sanction to increase the funding of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme by €363 million for the remainder of 2019, bringing the total scheme funding to €563 million.

Any future changes to this or other housing schemes should be raised with the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Brexit Preparations

40. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he remains satisfied that all sectors throughout the country can be protected in so far as possible in the aftermath of Brexit; if there are specific issues that require attention in this regard at this juncture; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39009/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government has been actively preparing for Brexit since the Brexit referendum took place. While a no deal Brexit will never be Ireland or the EU's choice, the risk of a no deal remains significant and, therefore, no deal preparations have the highest priority across Government.

The aim of the Government's preparations is to make sure that Irish citizens and businesses are as ready as possible for a no deal Brexit, as set out in the Government's most recent Contingency Action Plan published in July. This plan sets out in detail the Government's analysis of the risks and impacts of a no deal outcome across the range of key issues and sectors and the extensive work ongoing across Government to mitigate these risks. This plan follows on the enactment of the Brexit Omnibus Act earlier this year and the roll-out of a comprehensive programme of engagement with stakeholders across all key sectors with over 1,200 events to date so that citizens and business take the necessary actions to prepare. This is in parallel with detailed contingency planning at EU level. However, as underlined in the Contingency Plan, notwithstanding Government preparations, a no deal Brexit will be highly disruptive for Ireland.

As Minister for Finance, my objective is to protect the economic and financial interests of the State and to support the work of the Revenue Commissioners so as to minimise the Brexit disruption to trade, to the greatest extent possible. My Departments and its agencies are advancing preparations within the whole of Government framework overseen by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of An Taoiseach.

The Government has already taken important steps to prepare our economy, including through dedicated measures announced in Budgets 2017, 2018 and 2019, supported by long-term planning through the National Development Plan and the National Planning Framework which will provide significant investment in Ireland's public capital infrastructure.

Budget 2020 is being prepared on the basis of Government assessments of the implications of a possible no deal – not because we are resigned to this outcome but because it is the only prudent way to prepare. It is important to give certainty to businesses and citizens that the Government is prepared for a no-deal Brexit and stands ready to support the economy in such a scenario. For the most affected sectors, a number of temporary, targeted support measures are under consideration and both the level and type of support will be finalised as part of the Budget 2020 negotiation. Assuming a no-deal Brexit ensures the Government has the necessary resources at its disposal to meet the impact of this exceptional challenge, whilst preserving the longer-term sustainability of the public finances. Finally, it is important to safeguard the hard won progress of recent years in stabilising the public finances.

In terms of the financial services sector, the Central Bank has been preparing extensively for Brexit. The Central Bank is satisfied that, from a financial stability perspective, the most material and immediate risks from a no-deal Brexit are manageable. Some level of market disruption would be inevitable in a no-deal scenario, but the system as a whole should be resilient enough to withstand these bumps.

The Revenue Commissioners are also prioritising Brexit preparations and have been taking measures aimed at facilitating and supporting legitimate trade with UK post Brexit, in close cooperation with other Government agencies. These measures include a significant upgrade of their national Customs ICT system to deal with increased volumes of customs declarations, the assignment and training of up to 600 additional staff for Brexit related roles across a range of functions and an ongoing extensive nationwide trader outreach programme. Additional physical capacity is also in place at ports and airports to apply checks and controls. Funding and training has also been provided to support the customs intermediary sector.

I am satisfied that my Department and its relevant agencies are continuing to give the highest priority to the work of preparing for a no deal Brexit, including encouraging and supporting preparedness by business and citizens across the county so that we can mitigate the impacts to the greatest extent possible.

Mortgage Interest Rates

41. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to take action or enact legislation that will bring rates of Irish banks into line with the European average rates for mortgages in view of the fact the current ECB interest rate for deposit facility is 0.5% and its marginal interest rate is 0.25%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39093/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The European Central Bank is responsible for the formulation and implementation of monetary policy for the eurozone and in that context it determines its key lending and deposit rates for monetary policy operations. The current ECB marginal facility lending rate is 0.25% and, effective from 18 September last, the ECB's deposit facility rate is currently -0.5%.

While the ECB is responsible for the setting of official interest rates for monetary policy purposes, it is a commercial matter for individual banks and other commercial lenders to set their own lending and deposit rates having regard to their credit policies, risk appetite and other commercial considerations when operating in the market. Neither I nor the Central Bank have a role in prescribing the interest rates that commercial lenders may charge on their loans, including mortgages, or pay for their deposits or other sources of funding.

However, it is important that Ireland has a healthy and competitive commercial banking system so that it is in a position to provide loan finance to households and businesses, whilst also being resilient to economic and financial market shocks. This means that the banking system must be in a position to generate sustainable profits over the medium term so that it will be in a position to sufficiently generate capital to absorb losses which may arise over the credit cycle. While Irish mortgage rates are currently high relative to the eurozone average interest rates, it is unfortunate that the past mis-pricing of risks in historical lending continues to be a burden on the system as evidenced by the continuing relatively high level of non-performing loans on the balance sheets of banks and the consequently high level of capital which has to be maintained by banks. It should also be borne in mind that different mortgage markets have their own individual characteristics which can impact on the level of mortgage rates in those markets.

I am of the view that increased competition within the context of an appropriately regulated mortgage market and making it easier to switch mortgages, as opposed to administrative controls, remains the best way to ensure that retail lending rates are reduced in a sustainable way for the market as a whole without giving rise to potentially undesirable consequences for the provision of new mortgage lending. In that context, it should be acknowledged that there have been some recent 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 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. These developments have increased the mortgage options for the benefit of existing and new borrowers.

European Central Bank

42. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has made submissions through the Council of Ministers to the European Central Bank on the failure of the bank to achieve appropriate goals in areas such as inflation, employment and growth in the context of a necessary stimulus for the EU economy in 2019 and 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38306/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The European Central Bank (ECB) has a very clear and limited mandate, given by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which is to maintain price stability in the euro area. The Treaty establishes the independence of the ECB by prohibiting it from seeking or taking instructions from EU institutions or bodies, from any government of an EU Member State, or from any other body. These requirements are set out in Article 130 of the Treaty and ensure that the principle of central bank independence is respected and there is no influence on the members of ECB's decision-making bodies. Clearly, therefore, it would not be appropriate for me to make submissions such as the Deputy suggests.

While the ECB is independent in carrying out its mandate and tasks, it is not unaccountable. As a European institution, the ECB is accountable in the first instance to the European Parliament. The President of the ECB regularly reports on the ECB's monetary policy and its other tasks at his hearings before the European Parliament Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs. In addition, the ECB replies to written questions from MEPs, which are published with the ECB's answers in the Official Journal of the EU and on the ECB's website.

The Central Bank of Ireland is part of the Eurosystem, which consists of the ECB and the National Central Banks of the nineteen Member States that have adopted the euro. The Central Bank contributes to the formulation of monetary policy at Eurosystem level, and further details of this are set out in the Bank's Annual Report.

Aside from issues of monetary policy, the Deputy might also consider the role of fiscal policy at the broader European level. The Commission is currently reviewing the fiscal rules and framework, and many of these issues were discussed at the recent Ecofin meeting. There is a general acceptance that the current framework can be improved and the recent report by the European Fiscal Board contained a number of interesting suggestions.

Question No. 43 answered with Question No. 12.

Question No. 44 answered with Question No. 32.

Home Building Finance Ireland

45. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance the amount loaned out by Home Building Finance Ireland to date; the estimated number of homes to be built; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37700/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): HBFI commenced operations on the 28th January this year and published its half-year progress update in mid-July. The update is available on the HBFI website (www.hbfi.ie/latest/home-building-finance-ireland-publishes-half-year-update) and I am advised that HBFI furnished a copy to all Deputies. The key highlights to end June (after 5 months of operations) are as follows:

- More than 100 Expressions of Interest (EOIs) received
- Over 30 full funding applications received
- €41m in funding approved, translating to 228 units
- 92% of full applications made to HBFI from outside of Dublin
- Projects range in size from 10 units to 73 units
- Average size of facilities provided to-date is €6m

Since its launch earlier this year HBFI has been actively engaging with small and medium sized builders and developers throughout the country through a range of market awareness raising initiatives. HBFI continues to benefit from a strong pipeline of interest from prospective borrowers as a result of these engagement activities.

The primary objective of HBFI is to increase the availability of funding in the market to developers for viable residential development projects. It is important that appropriate credit, due diligence and legal procedures are adhered to in all areas of the lending process - to safeguard, in so far as possible, the funding provided by HBFI. These procedures require adequate time to ensure the highest standards are met and it is important that HBFI have a consistent approach in all applications for funding.

Mortgage Interest Rates

46. **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; if so, the different amounts of interest a mortgage holder would pay over a 20 year lifetime on a €100,000, €200,000 and €300,000 loan, respectively, in the banks in which he is a majority shareholder in comparison to the amount they would pay if they were charged ECB rates, in view of the fact the current ECB interest rate for deposit facility is 0.5% and its marginal interest rate is 0.25%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38985/19]

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 independent 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 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: www.gov.ie/en/publication/ff6c0a-risk-weighted-assets-in-ireland-the-link-to-mortgage-interest-rates/.

Question No. 47 answered with Question No.12.

Help-To-Buy Scheme

48. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Finance the take-up of the help-to-buy incentive in County Kildare and nationally; the factors being taken into account in deciding whether to extend it; when a decision will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37663/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Help To Buy (HTB) incentive was announced in Budget 2017 and backdated to 19 July 2016. Revenue advise me that over the period 19 July 2016 to 30 August 2019 (the most recent month for which data are available), 14,722 claims for HTB were made on a national basis, of which 13,955 were approved. Out of the 14,722 claims made overall, 1,421 of the claims related to the County of Kildare.

The Help to Buy incentive is scheduled to expire on 31 December 2019. This is provided for in Section 477C of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. As is normal practice, the role and operation of the incentive is being examined in the context of the forthcoming Budget and Finance Bill process.

However, at this close proximity to the Budget, it would be inappropriate for me to be drawn in relation to the existence of the relief into the future.

Labour Market

49. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he has undertaken an economic evaluation of wage levels here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39048/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government has agreed to take the part of the question pertaining to rents. I will address the remaining part on the economic analysis of wage levels.

My Department monitors developments across all aspects of Ireland's economy on an ongoing basis. With regard to the labour market, my Department conducts regular analysis on wages and related matters, using official data from multiple sources.

Ireland's robust economic growth has seen consistent year-on-year growth in average wages since the beginning of 2016, with the pace of growth picking up through 2017 and 2018. The most recent data available show the average weekly wage grew by 3.5 per cent year-on-year in the second quarter of 2019. In the earlier stages of economic recovery, growth in weekly earnings was primarily as a result of growth in hours worked per week, but recent data have shown much stronger growth in average hourly pay. For instance, in 2018 average weekly earnings grew by 3.3 per cent, with average hourly earnings growing by 2.9 per cent.

Below the headline figure, the data show variation across sectors of the economy. For example, recent quarters have seen strong growth in weekly earnings for workers in the 'administrative and support services', 'information and communication technology' and 'transport and storage' sectors. Over the last 12 months, both weekly and hourly earnings are growing across all economic sectors reported by the CSO, showing the broad-based strength of Ireland's current economic performance.

The latest macroeconomic forecasts published by my Department as part of the Stability Programme Update in April this year projected continued growth in average wages of 3 per cent for 2019, with further wage growth expected in the medium-term. This is consistent with the other labour market elements of the forecast, such as continued growth in employment and a further decline in the unemployment rate. This also indicates the existence of a 'Phillips curve' in the Irish economy - with the labour market closing in on full employment and the supply of labour becoming scarce, wages are increasing in order to attract or retain employees. A new set of labour market projections and commentary will be published with Budget 2020.

Finally, I am fully alert to the possible risk of an overheating economy. Indeed the Government's Future Jobs Ireland strategy aims to maximise the supply of suitably skilled labour in our economy, boosting productivity and protecting our international competitiveness.

Tax Code

50. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which the perceived unfairness of the inheritance tax system as outlined in correspondence from a person (details supplied) can be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38959/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have received correspondence from the Deputy with regard to the treatment under Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT) of couples who are married, cohabiting or in a civil partnership and the CAT treatment of those who do not have children. The correspondence, which is an external legal opinion sought by the Deputy, suggests changes to the current CAT rules and treatment.

For the purposes of Capital Acquisitions Tax, the relationship between the person who provides the gift or inheritance and the person who receives the gift or inheritance determines the lifetime tax-free threshold (the Group Threshold) below which gift or inheritance tax does not arise. As Capital Acquisitions Tax is generally payable by the beneficiary, rather than the disponer, the system promotes horizontal equity in that all individuals with similar circumstances are treated in a similar manner.

It is a long-held principle of inheritance tax that transfers of assets between spouses are exempt. The spousal exemption from inheritance tax was extended to civil partners from 1 January 2011. Where a couple is cohabiting, rather than married or in a civil partnership, each partner is treated for the purposes of tax as a separate and unconnected individual.

Cohabitants do not have the same legal rights and obligations as a married couple or a couple in a civil partnership, which is why they are not accorded similar treatment to couples who have a civil status recognised in law. Any change in the tax treatment of cohabiting couples can only be addressed in the broader context of future social and legal policy development in relation to such couples.

I would say that where two people - irrespective of their relationship - share a home owned by one of them, and where the homeowner dies leaving that home to the other person, they can avail of the CAT dwelling house exemption, once other conditions of the relief are met.

As regards the treatment of individuals with no children, gifts or inheritances from them are subject to either category B or C thresholds irrespective of their individual status. There would be a significant potential Exchequer cost with the extension of the Category A threshold to allow individuals with no children to nominate a potential beneficiary.

Apart from the potential legal difficulties of any change in the treatment of cohabitants, which is a broader policy issue than just CAT, there would be potentially significant Exchequer costs in changing the current CAT rules.

NAMA Operations

51. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which he plans to use the projected surplus from NAMA; when the agency will wind up; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39060/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As part of its Annual Report for 2018, NAMA revised its projected surplus to be returned to the State upwards to €4 billion. The realisation of this surplus depends on the success of NAMA's ongoing deleveraging and completion of its Dublin Docklands SDZ and residential funding programmes.

Surplus funds may only be returned to the Central Fund once NAMA's debt has been redeemed in full by March 2020. It is estimated that €2 billion will be transferred in 2020 with a further €1.5 billion being transferred in 2021 and €0.5 billion in 2022. This timeline is contingent on NAMA's projected surplus of €4 billion remaining unchanged.

Any NAMA surplus paid, while Exchequer positive, will not impact the general government balance, in line with Eurostat rules. It will be a decision for the Government as to how any surplus returned by NAMA will be utilised within the framework of the fiscal rules at that time. The intention has always been to use such receipts from the resolution of the financial sector crisis to pay down our national debt and reduce our debt servicing costs.

In July I published the second Section 227 Review into the progress NAMA has made in achieving its objectives. Considering the advanced stage of NAMA's deleveraging activities I also took the opportunity to review the arrangements for the wind down of NAMA for the coming years. A copy of this review has been published on my Department's website.

On foot of the review I have recommended that NAMA be allowed additional time to work through a residual loan portfolio with a projected carrying value of c.1% of its originally acquired assets that is expected to remain at the end of 2021. A limited extension of NAMA will enable the Agency to maximise the value of this residual portfolio in the interest of the taxpayer and best fulfil the Agency's commercial obligations under Section 10 of the NAMA Act. NAMA shall submit a detailed wind-down plan for its ultimate dissolution to the Minister for Finance by the end of 2021, and its operations shall not continue past end-December 2025.

NAMA's extension will not impact upon the timeline for the transfer of its expected €4bn surplus.

Brexit Issues

52. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if, depending on the Brexit outcome by 31 October 2019, a second budget for 2020 and the medium term may be needed after 31 October 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38990/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I will present Budget 2020 to Dáil Éireann on the 8th of October and, as agreed by Government, this 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.

Question No. 53 answered with Question No. 38.

Tax Code

54. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to make changes to flat rate expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39040/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that their review of the flat rate expenses regime is ongoing and that it is intended to have the review completed by the end of 2019. The Deputy will be aware from my previous replies on this matter that Revenue confirmed an implementation date of 1 January 2020 in respect of any changes that may be made to the flat rate regime, to ensure they do not impact on any specific group earlier than the rest. Revenue has advised that this position is unchanged.

The flat rate expenses regime is a concessionary practice operated by Revenue where both specific commonality of expenditure exists across an employment category and the statutory requirement for the tax deduction as set out in section 114 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 is satisfied. To qualify for a deduction under that section, an expense must be "wholly, exclusively and necessarily" incurred in the performance of the duties of the employment and paid by the employee.

The purpose of the flat rate expenses regime is to simplify tax administration for both taxpayers and Revenue by making it easier for large groups of employees working in the same sector to avail of their entitlement to tax relief in respect of allowable expenses incurred in the performance of their employment duties. I understand that the purpose of the review is to ensure that the expenses granted to each employment category remain justified and appropriate to modern day employments and work practices. Each category is being examined separately in light of the legislative requirements and Revenue has engaged with relevant representative bodies in each of the cases under review.

The Deputy will be aware from my previous replies to questions on this matter that I am aware of Revenue's programme of work in this area. Furthermore, the Deputy will be aware that the administration of the tax code is exclusively a matter for Revenue who are independent in the performance of their functions. Any changes in practice to the flat rate expenses regime are therefore a matter for Revenue, but I understand that any withdrawal of the practice can only take place if Revenue are satisfied that there is no longer a legally valid basis to give the concession, after engagement with the relevant representative body acting on behalf of the various categories of workers.

As I have said on previous occasions, there has been no change to the general rule set out in legislation so all employees retain their statutory right to claim a deduction under section 114 TCA for any valid expenses incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of the duties of their employment, to the extent which the expenses are not reimbursed from any source. So while certain employees may no longer claim a deduction on a universal "flat rate" basis, they may still be able to still claim a deduction on a specific "vouched basis".

International Programmes

55. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on illicit flows of capital from development partner countries of Ireland in the global south; if his attention has been drawn to the issue of tax avoidance being linked to poverty in developing countries; if he will raise the matter with his EU counterparts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37369/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The flows of illicit capital out of developing countries represent diversions of resources from their most efficient uses in developing economies and are likely to adversely impact domestic resource mobilization and hamper sustainable economic growth.

Ireland's new international development policy 'A Better World' commits the Irish government to strengthening domestic resource mobilisation through effective bilateral and multilateral partnerships. Ireland has committed to undertake efforts to help developing countries to raise their own domestic revenue in ways that are more efficient, fairer and better promote good governance and equitable and inclusive development, and essential to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Ireland, in accordance with our International Tax Strategy, is committed to engaging constructively and respectfully with developing countries in relation to tax matters and to supporting such countries in raising domestic tax revenues in ways that are more efficient, that promote good governance and equitable development and that can allow them to eventually exit from a dependence on official development assistance. This has also informed our decision to join the Addis Tax Initiative (ATI) in 2017.

Through Ireland's International Development Cooperation programme we provide support to regional tax organisations that provide much needed assistance to developing countries tax administrations on technical issues such as transfer pricing and automatic exchange of information, to help developing countries combat tax avoidance and the illicit flows of capital.

In light of these commitments, my Department is working closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners to increase Ireland's work on domestic resource mobilisation through providing increased technical assistance and peer to peer learning to developing countries tax administrations, ensuring that increased revenue can support the furthest behind first.

Departmental Properties

56. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of houses owned by his Department in counties Cork, Limerick and Dublin. [39096/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department is compiling the data requested by the Deputy and I will arrange to have same forwarded as soon as available

Defence Forces Reports

57. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of the feasibility study on the proposed peace and leadership institute for the Curragh; when it will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39179/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The White Paper on Defence includes a commitment to evaluate the potential development of a new Institute for Peace Support and Leadership Training at the Defence Forces Training Centre in the Curragh and in this regard a formal feasibility study was undertaken. An interim report was presented to the project steering group in November 2018, and a final report is expected to be finalised in Q4 2019, which will inform the next steps to be taken.

Departmental Bodies Reports

58. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the minutes of the first working meeting of the business and human rights implementation group that took place on 3 April 2019 will be published on the website of his Department in view of the fact that the minutes of the inaugural meeting of the group in January 2019 are available on the website. [39130/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The minutes of the 3 April 2019 meeting of the Business and Human Rights Implementation Group will be published on my Department's website when they have been approved by the Implementation Group at its next meeting, which is scheduled for 9 October 2019.

Northern Ireland

59. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the plans to resume talks with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the political par-

ties in Northern Ireland regarding the need to have the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39220/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The continuing absence of the power-sharing Executive and Assembly in Northern Ireland and the North South Ministerial Council is of grave concern for the Government, as it is for the British Government.

I have engaged extensively with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland throughout the latest talks process, to encourage the parties to reach an accommodation. I continued this engagement over the summer months and I remain in regular and ongoing contact with Secretary of State Smith, meeting most recently last week, to work to secure agreement between the parties to get all of the institutions of the Agreement up and running again.

All five political parties have engaged constructively in the talks process with that objective over the last number of months. Progress has been made across a range of important issues. However, some key outstanding issues remain and finding final agreement on these issues will require genuine and courageous dialogue and leadership by the party leaders in Northern Ireland.

The awful murder of Lyra McKee and the outpouring of public feeling that followed demands a serious response at political level. People want the devolved power-sharing institutions up and running again to represent their interests and deal with the issues and challenges that Northern Ireland faces at present, not least the difficulties raised by the UK exit from the European Union. The functioning of the North South Ministerial Council is also urgently required, to bring together the Executive and the Government to oversee and develop co-operation on the island, and as a vital part of the Good Friday Agreement.

In this context, the political parties, in particular the two largest parties, must live up to their responsibilities and be open to fair and workable compromises on the small number of outstanding issues, to secure the overall interests of people in Northern Ireland and to protect and operate the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement again.

This will be difficult, but the two Governments believe that this can, and must, be achieved. Accordingly, the Government will continue to do everything possible to support continuing engagement and progress in discussions between the political parties, working with the UK Government in any scenario, as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement.

Mortgage Book Sales

60. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the reason he continues to allow banks that are majority owned by the State to sell and transfer mortgages to so-called vulture funds which in turn causes huge anxiety and worry to the mortgage holders; his plans to stop this practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39110/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that the reduction in the level of non-performing loans, or NPLs, across European banks is a major priority for the banking regulator, the SSM. The Irish banks have made huge progress in this regard since the height of the crisis. According to the Central Bank of Ireland, the average NPL ratio of the domestic Irish banks was 7.0% at end-June 2019 having stood at more than 30% at peak in 2013. In volume terms, NPLs in the domestic Irish banks have now fallen by €70.2 billion (82%), from peak in 2013. A major contributor to this has been the almost 109,000 mortgage restructures that are currently in place.

Despite this progress, more work is required before the NPL ratios at the Irish banks reach the European average of under 4%.

It is important to reiterate that the protections in place for all borrowers before a sale remain unchanged. For example, Start Mortgages and Pepper, the firms involved in the loan sales transacted by PTSB since 2018, are both regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. When dealing with borrowers, these firms are required to comply with the Consumer Protection Code and the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears. Furthermore, assurances have been given that the terms of a restructure agreed before these sales took place will continue to be honoured.

In addition, in 2018 I asked the Central Bank to carry out a review of the CCMA to ensure it remains as effective as possible. The result of this review was published last October and it is encouraging to note that the key findings included confirmation that for borrowers who engaged with the process, the CCMA is working effectively as it is intended in the context of the sale of loans by regulated lenders.

Finally, I wish to highlight that I cannot stop loan sales, even by the banks in which the State has a shareholding. These decisions are the responsibility of the Board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The banks' independence is protected by Relationship Frameworks, which are legally binding documents that I cannot change unilaterally.

Budget Submissions

61. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance if he received a submission from as association (details supplied) in relation to the necessity of putting in place a pilot training programme in 2020 as the commencement of a modern and sustainable continuous professional programme for all private agricultural consultants and advisers here; if the matter will be given consideration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39113/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My department has so far received in excess of 250 Pre-Budget Submissions from a wide range of groups and individuals. These are being considered by the relevant officials in the context of Budget and Finance Bill preparation.

I can confirm that a submission from the Association referred to has been received. However, as the Deputy will be aware, it is not the practice of the Minister for Finance to discuss the details of measures which may be under consideration as part of the Budget and Finance Bill.

Carbon Tax Implementation

62. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review a proposal (details supplied) from a haulage operator that deals with the issue of carbon taxes and the necessity to ensure that climate change issues are tackled in a planned way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39152/19]

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.

Ministerial Meetings

63. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the date, location and purpose of all meetings he and the Minister of State with responsibility for financial services have attended in the lifetime of the Government with insurance companies, insurance brokers or representative bodies in the insurance industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39159/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that due to the level of detail being requested in the question, it is not possible to provide acurately the information sought in the time available for reply. I have therefore instructed my officials to contact the Deputy's office with a view to providing the information requested, where possible, through alternative means.

Economic Growth

64. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which the economic fundamentals remain positive at present, notwithstanding the approach of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39162/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On the back of another strong year for the economy in 2018, growth in the first half of this year has moderated but remains positive with GDP growth of 6 ½ percent in year-on-year terms. Indeed as a barometer of how well our economy is performing, there is no story more positive than the one emanating from our labour market. The strong growth in employment over the last number of years has continued into this year, with total employment increasing by 63,100 (+2.8 per cent) in the first half of 2019. As a result, there are now 2.3 million people at work in Ireland.

Since the publication of my Department's last set of macroeconomic projections published as part of the Stability Programme Update (SPU) 2019, the possibility that the UK will leave the EU without a deal has increased substantially. To reflect this, for budgetary purposes, the Government has decided to base Budget 2020 on the assumption of a 'no-deal' Brexit. As part of Budget 2020 my Department will publish updated macroeconomic forecasts which will be based on the assumption that the UK leaves the EU without a deal.

My Department and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) recently published an updated model-based assessment of the economic impacts of a no-deal Brexit on the Irish economy. The research found that in aggregate terms compared to a scenario in which the UK did not leave the EU the level of GDP would be 3 per cent lower after 5 years. Despite the negative impact of no-deal Brexit, the Irish economy is still expected to grow but at a slower pace as a consequence of Brexit.

As we chart our way forward through the uncertain times ahead, careful management of the public finances is needed. Indeed the best way to mitigate the risks facing that we face is to improve the resilience of the economy through competitiveness orientated policies and prudent management of the public finances.

Economic Growth

65. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which economic growth here compares with other countries throughout the European Union with particular reference to the eurozone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39163/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As published in the Stability Programme Update 2019, my Department has forecast GDP growth of 3.9 per cent this year and 3.3 per cent in 2020. This growth is expected to be broad based, with both domestic demand and net exports making positive contributions. Indeed, modified domestic demand is forecast to grow by 4.0 per cent this year and by 3.3 per cent next year.

Indeed as a barometer of how well our economy is performing, there is no story more positive than the one emanating from our 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.

As part of Budget 2020 my Department will publish updated forecasts next month.

In an EU context, Ireland remains one of the fastest growing Member States. The strong growth and performance seen in our economy is also clearly illustrated by a comparison with the performance of our main trading partners – the Euro Area, the UK and the US.

For the Euro Area the European Commission is forecasting growth of 1.2 per cent this year, and 1.4 per cent next year. The GDP forecast for the EU28 is for growth of 1.4 per cent in 2019 and 1.6 per cent in 2020. This represents a significant slowdown from the growth rates seen in 2015-2017.

The performance of individual Member States is diverging with some areas (e.g. Central and Eastern Europe, Malta, and Ireland) expanding faster than others (e.g. Italy, Germany).

For the UK, modest GDP growth of 1.3 per cent is expected this year and 1.4 per cent next year, based on a technical assumption of status quo in terms of trading relations between the EU27 and the UK.

The US economy continues to benefit from several tailwinds, supporting GDP growth of 2.6 per cent is expected this year, although this is expected to moderate to 1.9 per cent in 2020 as fiscal stimulus unwinds.

In common with Ireland, there has been a recovery in employment growth in all our main export markets – though at a more modest pace – with a corresponding reduction in unemployment.

Brexit Supports

66. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has identified particularly vulnerable sectors for specific assistance in the wake of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39165/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Finance has been to the forefront in assessing the impact of Brexit on our economy, commissioning and publishing a number of studies, both before and following the referendum. In addition, regular updates of my Department's Macro-Economic forecasts take account of the impact of Brexit.

The UK is one of Ireland's most important trading partners. In 2017 the Department of Finance published a paper on trade exposures[1] which shows that relative to other EU Member States, Irish exports are substantially more exposed to the UK in a number of goods sectors.

The top five most exposed included the Irish agri-food sub-sectors Cereals, Vegetables and

Fruit, and Live Animal products. In services, Ireland is in the upper range of the most exposed EU Member States, particularly in Financial Services.

The paper also finds that the share of exports going to the UK has increased in a number of sectors over the past 15 years, including the agri-food sector, contrary to the trend decline in the importance of the UK as export destination for overall Irish exports.

The most recent Contingency Action Plan was 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. It underlines that Brexit will have profound and highly disruptive implications for Ireland, and sets out in detail the short-term risks associated with that.

Maintaining the closest possible trading relationship between the EU and the UK is therefore one of the Government's key Brexit priorities. The Government will continue to work to improve the business environment – to make it more competitive, to assist exporters to diversify markets, and to provide better infrastructure.

Longer-term, we need to mitigate against the potential of regulatory divergence between the UK and EU standards given its potential implications for trade, investment and the competitiveness of our businesses. We will therefore be working to minimise this impact and to ensure a level playing field.

Since the referendum result in 2016, we have 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 and reducing our debt burden - and establishing the Rainy Day Fund.

The Government is continuing to work to prepare our economy for the challenges of Brexit, including through the Ireland Connected Trade and Investment Strategy, the Future Jobs Ireland Strategy and the 10-year National Development Plan. In addition, recent budgets have introduced specific initiatives, such as loan supports for agri-businesses, aimed at supporting those businesses most affected by Brexit. The Brexit Loan Scheme assists firms to adapt and innovate in response to Brexit, to restructure their cost bases and give them the opportunity to diversify into other markets thereby reducing their exposure to the UK. The Future Growth Loan Scheme provides a longer-term scheme facility of up to €300m to support strategic capital investment for a post-Brexit environment by business at competitive rates.

The Government has also stepped up engagement with stakeholders across all sectors through targeted events and media campaigns aimed at getting both business and citizens Brexit ready. Our planning at home and at the EU level for all possible outcomes has increased and will continue to intensify.

[1] Department of Finance (2017) *Trade Exposures of Sectors of the Irish Economy in a European Context*.

Brexit Preparations

67. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he has taken or is likely to take to address issues of an economic nature which may need attention with the onset of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39166/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since the referendum result in 2016, we have 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.

The Government is continuing to work to prepare our economy for the challenges of Brexit, including through the Ireland Connected Trade and Investment Strategy, the Future Jobs Ireland Strategy and the 10-year National Development Plan.

In addition, recent budgets have introduced specific initiatives, such as loan supports for agri-businesses, aimed at supporting those businesses most affected by Brexit. The Brexit Loan Scheme assists firms to adapt and innovate in response to Brexit, to restructure their cost bases and give them the opportunity to diversify into other markets thereby reducing their exposure to the UK. The Future Growth Loan Scheme provides a longer-term scheme facility of up to €300m to support strategic capital investment for a post-Brexit environment by business at competitive rates.

Further, the Government has decided that Budget 2020 will be prepared on the assumption of a no deal Brexit in October. The approach being adopted for Budget 2020 involves a twin-track approach, namely:

- Funding services and making progress on particular policy areas; and

- Supporting sectors and regions most exposed to Brexit related disruption.

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.

While the precise impact will be difficult to estimate, this could lead to a deficit of the order of 0.5 to 1.5 per cent of GDP for 2020.

And while there is no doubt that this would be a significant fiscal setback, it is also important to place it in the context of our recent strong performance in restoring the public finances – for example moving from a 2% deficit in 2015 to balance last year while meeting the demands of a society recovering from nearly a decade of crisis.

As well as preparing for Budget 2020, priority areas will include additional infrastructure for ports and airports, and further Government Brexit communications including an intensified engagement programme by Revenue.

The Government has also stepped up engagement with stakeholders across all sectors through targeted events and media campaigns aimed at getting both business and citizens Brexit ready. Our planning at home and at the EU level for all possible outcomes has increased and will continue to intensify.

Brexit Preparations

68. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if he remains satisfied that the economy here is sufficiently soundly based to withstand the impact of Brexit; the emergency proposals in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39167/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since the referendum result in 2016, we have 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.

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 Government is continuing to work to prepare our economy for the challenges of Brexit, including through the Ireland Connected Trade and Investment Strategy, the Future Jobs Ireland Strategy and the 10-year National Development Plan.

In addition, recent budgets have introduced specific initiatives, such as loan supports for agri-businesses, aimed at supporting those businesses most affected by Brexit. The Brexit Loan Scheme assists firms to adapt and innovate in response to Brexit, to restructure their cost bases and give them the opportunity to diversify into other markets thereby reducing their exposure to the UK. The Future Growth Loan Scheme provides a longer-term scheme facility of up to €300m to support strategic capital investment for a post-Brexit environment by business at competitive rates.

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As well as preparing for Budget 2020, priority areas will include additional infrastructure for ports and airports, and further Government Brexit communications including an intensified engagement programme by Revenue.

The Government has also stepped up engagement with stakeholders across all sectors through targeted events and media campaigns aimed at getting both business and citizens Brexit ready. Our planning at home and at the EU level for all possible outcomes has increased and will continue to intensify.

Insurance Costs

69. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if reference can be made to comparisons with other jurisdictions in Europe in respect of insurance costs here with a view to ensuring the competitiveness of the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[39168/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Irish insurance sector is diverse, comprising life, non-life and reinsurance firms providing a range of products and operating across a number of 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 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. It also 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.

With regard to comparing insurance costs across jurisdictions in Europe, Insurance Europe, the European (re)insurance federation, produces reports on an on-going basis regarding the insurance industry across Europe. For example, the European Insurance in Figures (2017 data) and the European Motor Insurance Markets, both published in early 2019, contain some useful comparative information in respect of insurance up to 2017. The European Insurance — Key Facts published in October 2018, graphs the average premium level across European countries for a variety of insurance products for the year 2017. The varying levels of premiums across Europe is accounted for by a wide range of regulatory, risk and economic factors which differ across European jurisdictions (as noted on p. 16 of the European Motor Insurance Markets).

For example, other factors that may influence an insurance company's decision to operate or not in a particular country, could include the number of personal injury claims made, the level of awards granted, and the legal costs and time associated with settling/defending claims in that country. In this regard, there has been some sectors of our economy such as the leisure, adventure and hospitality sectors where insurance cover has either become unavailable or prohibitively expensive. Indeed, I understand that in recent meetings between Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Michael D'Arcy TD, and a number of UK insurers/underwriters in London who have recently left the Irish insurance market, the reasons above were mentioned as to why they had made this decision. Therefore, for these parts of the 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 focussing on implementing the recommendations of the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) including those of the second Personal Injuries Commission (PIC) Report which 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 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.

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 greater stability in the pricing of insurance for consumers and businesses and a more competitive insurance market overall.

Economic Policy

70. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which he can forecast economic prospects over the next five years in view of the variety of potential challenges globally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39169/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The period of robust economic growth has continued this year. GDP growth of 6 ½ per cent in the first half of the year and the relatively low rate of unemployment which stands at just over 5 per cent support this assessment. However it is also clear that there are dark clouds on the horizon, with the external environment continuing to deteriorate, and the risk of an adverse shock to the economy - for instance through a disorderly Brexit – rising all the time.

The macroeconomic projections published at Stability Programme Update (SPU) 2019 were based on the assumption the UK will leave the EU with a deal and that a transition 'status quo' period would be agreed that extends or replicates existing frameworks until end-2020. However, since the publication of SPU the possibility that the UK will leave the EU without a deal has increased substantially. To reflect this, for budgetary purposes, the Government has decided to base Budget 2020 on the assumption of a 'no-deal' Brexit.

In order to quantify the effects of a disorderly Brexit, my Department and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) recently published an updated model-based assessment of the economic impacts. The report found that in aggregate terms compared to a scenario in which the UK did not leave the EU the level of GDP would be 3 per cent lower after 5 years. The impact is expected to be greatest in the first year which is primarily explained by higher trade costs with the UK reducing the level of overall trade and short run disruption due to uncertainty.

Despite these impacts, the Irish economy is still expected to grow but at a slower pace as a consequence of Brexit. As part of Budget 2020 my Department will publish updated macroeconomic forecasts which will be based on the assumption that the UK leaves the EU without a deal.

Of course Brexit isn't the only risk faced by the economy. As a small open economy Ireland is particularly exposed to a slowdown in growth in key export markets, with a loss of momentum particularly evident in both the euro area and the UK in recent quarters.

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.

VAT Rate Application

71. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of reducing to 0% the VAT applied to sport and leisure activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39246/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the VAT rating of goods and services is subject to EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply. EU VAT law 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.

As there was no such legislative provision for sport and leisure activities in place on 1 January 1991 there is no discretion under the Directive for Ireland to introduce a zero rate of VAT to the supply of sport and leisure activities.

Insurance Costs

72. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance the progress made and steps to be taken to reduce the cost of insurance for sports and leisure bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39247/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am aware of the issues facing many sports and leisure bodies when it comes to the affordability and availability of insurance. Unfortunately, neither I, nor the Central Bank of Ireland, can compel any insurer to provide cover or to provide it at a particular price. 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, the Government cannot direct insurance companies to cover certain types of risk, such as that related to sports and leisure bodies. A further constraint is the fact that for constitutional reasons, Government 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.

That is not to say, 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 a 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 commencement and prioritisation by the Law Reform Commission (LRC) of its work to undertake 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 to increase transparency around the future cost of private motor insurance. The Bank is due to make its first report by the end of 2019, and will also make recommendations to me 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;

- Commencement of the 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 with GDPR time limits on the keeping of CCTV footage to make it easier for businesses and insurers to challenge cases where fraud or exaggeration is suspected;

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

I believe that these reforms are having a significant impact with regard to private motor insurance (CSO figures from August 2019 show that the price of motor insurance is now 24% lower than the July 2016 peak). The Government is determined to continue working to ensure that these positive pricing trends can be extended to other forms of insurance, particularly those relevant to sports and leisure bodies.

I believe it is important to emphasise that the single most essential challenge which must be overcome if there is to be a sustainable reduction in insurance costs is to bring the levels of personal injury damages awarded in this country more in line with those awarded in other jurisdictions, and the establishment of the Judicial Council in the coming months is very important in this regard.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Deputies that important reforms are taking place and that I am confident that if the level of awards are reduced as a results of the operationalisation of the Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee, then the issues that are being experienced by sports and leisure bodies should recede.

Carbon Tax Yield

73. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the amount collected to date in carbon tax; the methods of dispersing the revenue generated from the tax; the purposes for which the revenue collected from the tax has been used for the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39251/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The total annual net receipts from carbon tax are set out in the following table.

Year	Total Net Receipts
	€
2010	223,084,537
2011	298,231,058
2012	353,954,210
2013	388,376,990
2014	385,361,885
2015	418,996,237
2016	430,247,558
2017	419,603,362
2018	431,131,923
Total	3,348,987,760

Carbon tax receipts to end August 2019 were approximately €281,800,000, some €20 million (6.8%) behind forecast.

To date the revenue from carbon tax has been remitted to the central fund and therefore used to fund public services.

Corporation Tax Regime

74. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the expected tax yield from expanding transfer pricing rules to the SME sector; the number of Irish SMEs that could potentially be impacted by this move; the number of employees working for these SMEs; if the data is available; the reason put forward as to the reason the rules should be extended to SMEs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39260/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Ireland's Corporation Tax Roadmap includes a commitment to amend Ireland's transfer pricing regime in Finance Bill 2019. This commitment stems from recommendations made in the Review of Ireland's Corporation Tax Code by Mr Seamus Coffey.

One of the recommendations in that Review is that consideration be given to extending transfer pricing rules to SMEs, having regard to whether the associated burden of keeping transfer pricing documentation would be proportional to the risks of transfer mispricing occurring.

As part of the process of updating Ireland's transfer pricing rules, my Department recently published Ireland's Transfer Pricing Rules Feedback Statement to enable consultation with stakeholders on the approach I propose to take to meeting the commitments made in this area.

Being mindful of not imposing an undue administrative burden on SMEs, the Feedback Statement signals a proposed approach towards how transfer pricing rules could be applied to SMEs. That approach proposes that smaller enterprises will not be required to provide any transfer pricing documentation and that medium enterprises will only be required to provide simplified transfer pricing documentation in respect of very material cross border transactions with associated persons. I believe that this would strike an appropriate balance between the risk of mispricing and the compliance burden imposed.

Application of transfer pricing rules to SMEs, but with relaxed documentation requirements, is consistent with the approach adopted in many other OECD countries. Also, of note, where the associated person who is the other party to the transaction is located in a country which has transfer pricing rules, it is likely that there is already a requirement for the group to prepare transfer pricing documentation in relation to the transaction in that other country. Therefore, providing transfer pricing documentation in Ireland may not be a significant burden for many medium enterprises.

The Feedback Statement also proposes that the provisions for SMEs would not be commenced at the same time as the rest of the transfer pricing provisions. The rationale behind this approach is to ensure that SMEs do not face any additional compliance burden next year given other uncertainties faced by business at this time. This will have the added benefit of providing a window to allow SMEs to fully consider and understand how the application of transfer pricing rules could impact them and prepare for that eventuality.

I am advised by Revenue that it is unable to provide exact figures for the number of Irish SMEs that could be impacted by transfer pricing rules. However, Revenue estimate that approximately 1,500 companies from over 50 groups could be brought within the scope of the new rules when they eventually come into effect for SMEs. Revenue advise that it does not have estimated figures available for the number of employees working for SMEs that could potentially come within the scope of transfer pricing rules. Given that it is not intended to commence the extension of transfer pricing rules to SMEs in 2020, there are no immediate impacts on the tax yield as a result.

Mortgage Data

75. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of mortgage switches undertaken each year since 2003 and the associated value of those mortgage switches in tabular form; the work completed by his Department to make mortgage switching easier for the customer; the tangible measures being taken in that regard; the physical signatures that are required when it comes to mortgage switching under section 10 of the Electronic Commerce Act 2000; if he has reviewed this Act with a view to making mortgage switching easier for the customer by making electronic signatures available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39261/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Data provided by the Central Bank indicates that mortgage switching (defined, for the purposes of this response, as loans issued by one lender to refinance an existing mortgage with another lender) in Ireland peaked in 2006, when approximately 27,000 mortgages switched provider.

Between 2009 and 2014, switching decreased significantly, reflecting subdued lending activity in the overall Irish market at that time. From 2015 onwards, the number and value of switcher loans has increased and, in 2017, just under 5,400 mortgages switched provider.

The number and value of mortgage switches from 2003-2018 is detailed as follows in tabular form.

Year	Value €m	Re-mortgages
2003	1,775	14,247
2004	2,737	18,121
2005	5,038	25,944
2006	6,067	26,565
2007	6,675	25,937
2008	5,295	21,374
2009	1,130	5,774
2010	461	2,722
2011	174	1,137
2012	64	455
2013	51	292
2014	100	503
2015	319	1,433
2016	524	2,438
2017	703	3,070
2018	1,242	5,377

As part of a range of competition measures agreed with the European Commission under their respective EU-Restructuring plans, AIB and Permanent TSB were required to provide funding for a public awareness campaign to raise awareness and promote customer switching. A total of €1.8 million is committed as part of the restructuring of the banks. There is no cost to the taxpayer in relation to this public awareness campaign.

The Department of Finance oversaw a contract for the provision of research, design and media buy services for a public awareness and customer switching campaign in retail banking markets. This campaign has focused on encouraging people to compare financial products such as current accounts, credit cards and mortgages and directed them to the website www.switchyourbank.ie which provides information on how to switch. The campaign has run on a variety of media channels, including TV, radio and digital. Of the overall budget for the public awareness campaign of €1.8 million, over €1.5m has been spent to date. The Department of Finance is currently in consultation with the European Commission regarding how the remaining funds will be spent.

Section 10(1) (b) of the Electronic Commerce Act 2000 excludes "the law governing the manner in which an interest in real property (including a leasehold interest in such property) may be created, acquired, disposed of or registered, other than contracts (whether or not under seal) for the creation, acquisition or disposal of such interests,".

Subsections (2) and (3) of section 10 provide, however, that the scope of the Act may be extended to excluded areas or subjects by means of regulations made by the Minister for Communications, Climate Act and Environment where the Minister is of the opinion that:

"(a) technology has advanced to such an extent, and access to it is so widely available, or

(b) adequate procedures and practices have developed in public registration or other services, so as to warrant such action, or

(c) the public interest so requires,"

The Minister for Communications, Climate Act and Environment must consult with Ministers who have a sufficient interest or responsibility in relation to the area or subject being considered.

Garda Station Closures

76. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the reopening of a Garda station (details supplied); the timeline for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39263/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): As part of the Government programme, the Office of Public Works has been requested to progress the reopening of six former Garda Stations, including the Garda Station at Bawnboy, Co. Cavan. A brief of requirements was received from An Garda Síochána and a full technical assessment has been completed. The deliberative process between An Garda Síochána and OPW to finalise proposals for the re-opening is well underway. Upon final sign-off by An Garda Síochána, OPW expects to submit the necessary Part 9 planning application over the coming months and, on approval, will then progress the procurement of works required to re-open the Station. It is expected that all works will be undertaken and completed by mid 2020.

Garda Stations

77. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the works ongoing at the new Garda station for Bailieborough, County Cavan; the timeline for its delivery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39266/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Planning process for this project was completed in December 2018 and a full Design Team is now in place. Tender documentation is being prepared and it is envisaged that this will take a number of months to complete. It is not possible at this early stage of the project to be definitive about a completion date.

Public Sector Pensions Legislation

78. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 197 of 2 October 2018, when the new guidance on the implementation of section 52(6) and (7) of the 2012 Act will be finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39118/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 52 (6) and (7) of the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and other Provisions) Act 2012 imposes a limit, or ‘benefit cap’, on the total amount of pension benefits that can accrue where an individual has been a member of more than one public service pension scheme.

As a result of a number of issues that have arisen in relation to the benefit cap and the implementation of guidance on it, my Department carried out a review into the operation of those provisions. As part of the review, further legal advice from the Office of the Attorney General has been sought. Once that advice has been received, new/revised guidance will be developed and issued as appropriate.

I appreciate the patience that has been shown to date by individuals whose pension entitlements are effected by the benefit cap and, indeed, by the Deputy, who has raised the matter previously. Following receipt of advice from the Attorney General, implementation of the review findings will be finalized and new guidance issued as appropriate.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

79. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if funding is available in 2019 for local authorities to carry out low-cost flood relief schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39243/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Minor Works Scheme was introduced by my Office on an administrative, non-statutory basis in 2009. The purpose of the scheme is to provide funding to Local Authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation works or studies to address localised fluvial flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas. The scheme generally applies where a solution can be readily identified and achieved in a short time frame. The works to be funded are carried out under Local Authority powers and ongoing maintenance of the completed works is the responsibility of the Council.

Under the scheme, applications are considered for projects that are estimated to cost not more than €750,000 in each instance. Funding of up to 90% of the cost is available for approved projects. Applications are assessed by the OPW having regard to the specific economic, social and environmental criteria of the scheme, including a cost benefit ratio and having regard to the availability of funding for flood risk management.

Full details of this scheme are available on www.opw.ie

Voluntary Homeowners Relocation Scheme

80. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if financial assistance is available for persons who have to relocate their homes due to constant flooding; if so, the details of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39244/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): On 11 April 2017, the Government agreed the administrative arrangements for a once-off Voluntary Homeowners Relocation Scheme for those primary residential properties that flooded between 4 December, 2015 and 13 January, 2016. This is a national scheme of humanitarian assistance, targeting aid at those worst affected properties, for which there are no alternative feasible measures.

The Government decision confirmed that a homeowner had to meet a number of conditions to be eligible for assistance under this scheme, including:

- That floodwater entered and damaged the building during or as a result of flooding during relevant dates such as to render it uninhabitable.

- That the property was the homeowner's primary residence at the time of the floods.

- That the affected property must have a significant probability of the recurrence of the flood depth, duration or frequency on a scale that could cause further serious and similar damage to the home.

- That the property is not due to or may not benefit from a planned or possible future major, minor or individual flood defence scheme.

- That the property may not be protected adequately from being flooded in the future, at an economically feasible cost, through other flood mitigation works including minor works, individual property protection or other possible measures that can be considered at this time.

- That the homeowner is unable to obtain flood risk insurance.

An important element of the administrative arrangements for this scheme is an option for remedial works where a viable engineering solution is possible or known to protect homes from future flooding. Where this is not feasible, humanitarian assistance is offered to homeowners who meet all of the eligibility criteria for home relocation.

The OPW has been working in partnership with the relevant Local Authorities to undertake comprehensive assessments of 169 properties, individual information meetings with homeowners and a site inspection for those who applied for the scheme for which 38 homeowners were invited to make an application.

To date, engineering solutions have been identified to protect some homes from future flooding and work is continuing to explore possible engineering solutions for a further 35 homes. Offers of financial assistance towards relocation have recently been made to a number of homeowners who satisfy all of the eligibility criteria for this scheme.

Schools Building Projects Applications

81. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for a new school building for a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39095/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The project referred to by the Deputy has been devolved for delivery to the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA).

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that a request for tenders for the appointment of a programme manager and design team for the project has recently been issued by the NDFA.

While at this early stage it is not possible to provide a timeline for completion of the project, the NDFA will be engaging directly with the school authority to keep it informed of progress.

Schools Building Projects Status

82. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 177 of 10 July 2019, the progress being made on the project to provide a new build, extension and refurbishment of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39103/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The 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. The project will bring the school accommodation up to 16 mainstream classrooms and a 2-classroom Special Educational Needs Base.

This project is one of the school building projects on my Department's ADAPT 2 Programme which contains 16 school building projects. A Project Manager is appointed to this Programme.

The process to appoint a Design Team – (Architect, Quantity Surveyor, Civil & Structural Engineer and Mechanical & Electrical Engineer) for the school in question is ongoing. The appointment of the PSDP (Project Supervisor of the Design Process) was completed on 9 September.

The Board of Management attended Department offices on 18 September to assist in the final assessment of the quality criteria for the Design Team. The appointment process will be completed in the coming weeks.

The Design Team can then commence Stage 1 of Architectural Planning which includes the site report and producing sketch scheme options to be submitted to the Department for consideration.

Schools Building Projects Status

83. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 215 of 26 February 2019, if there is an expected completion date for a project at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39106/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The building contractor delivering the project referred to by the deputy has experienced a number of delay issues throughout the course of the works. The project had been scheduled for completion in March 2019; however, the contractor has now issued a revised programme targeting completion in the second quarter of 2020.

My Department is in regular contact with the Board of Management of the school and the Design Team for the project and held a meeting on 5th September with both parties to review progress on site.

Schools Building Projects Status

84. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 540 of 23 July 2019, if a preferred contractor has been chosen for the project; if so, when the letter of intent will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39107/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, the delivery of the project for Naas Community College has been devolved to Kildare and Wicklow Education & Training Board (KWETB).

I can confirm that a preferred contractor has been identified and we understand from KWETB that a letter of intent has now issued.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

85. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the threshold for a person who lives with his or her parents or guardians to become an independent applicant for

postgraduate SUSI assistance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39134/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The main financial support available for qualifying postgraduate students is the Student Grant Scheme.

Postgraduate students who meet the qualifying conditions for the special rate of grant under the Student Grant Scheme are eligible for a maintenance grant of up to €5,915; the income threshold in 2019/20 for this grant is €24,000. Qualifying postgraduate students may also be eligible to have their tuition fees paid up to a maximum fee limit of €6,270.

Alternatively, a postgraduate student may qualify to have a €2,000 contribution made towards the cost of his/her fees. The income threshold for this payment is €31,500 for the 2019/2020 academic year.

For student grant purposes, students are categorised according to their circumstances either as students dependent on parents or a legal guardian, or as independent mature students. An applicant's class is defined at his/her first point of entry to an approved higher or further education course and this will continue to apply for the duration of his/her studies.

For a dependent student, the reckonable income for grant purposes includes both his/her own income and that of his/her parents/legal guardians.

A student may be assessed as an independent mature student if he or she has attained the age of 23 on the 1st January of the year of first entry to an approved course, or of re-entry following a break in studies of at least three years, and is not ordinarily resident with his/her parents from the previous October. Otherwise he or she would continue to be assessed on the basis of parental income.

The re-entry provision of the scheme allows mature students who have previously attended an approved course and are now entering an approved course following a break in studies of at least three years, to have their status reclassified from dependent to independent student.

In terms of other supports, the main support is the Student Assistance Fund. This fund is available to students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need. This Fund assists students in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Details of this fund are available from the Access Office in the third level institution attended.

Tax relief also is available on postgraduate tuition fees. Details in relation to this relief are available from the Revenue Commissioners at www.revenue.ie

DEIS Data

86. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of capitation costs for DEIS schools at primary and secondary level, for level 1 and 2 DEIS status in each case in a tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39143/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department's overall annual spend on the DEIS Programme is approximately €125 million. Additional funding is provided by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection for the School Meals Programme and by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs for the School Completion Programme.

The information requested by the Deputy for this school year is set out in the following table. The classification of schools into DEIS Band 1, DEIS Band 2 and rural occurs only in the primary sector.

School Year	Total Primary €	Total Post Primary €
2019/2020	Urban B1 €7,098,994 Urban B2 €2,772,903 Rural €2,394,208 €12,266,105	€4,095,280

State Examinations Reviews

87. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the case of a student (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39155/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Please see attached response to the same PQ issued directly by the State Examinations Commission on 9th September.

[Exam Results]

Departmental Expenditure

88. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the breakdown of the net capital expenditure on primary and post-primary infrastructure to include expenditure on primary and secondary school replacement and new builds for each of the years 2010 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39170/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Development Plan 2018 to 2027 includes provision for an €8.4 billion investment programme in our school buildings infrastructure.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

Year	Primary (€m)	Post-Primary (€m)	Total (€m)
2019 (to date)	245.468	177.816	423.284
2018	297.223	249.89	547.113
2017	327.628	204.477	532.105
2016	286.335	243.455	529.79
2015	266.755	239.706	506.461
2014	276.942	161.485	438.427
2013	234.19	127.184	361.374
2012	204.428	142.45	346.878
2011	289.426	165.621	455.047
2010	312.264	213.468	525.732

Schools Site Acquisitions

89. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total spend per year on lands purchased for schools in each of the years 2010 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [39171/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As requested by the Deputy, the expenditure (including deposits and fees) on school site acquisitions for the years 2010 to 2018 is attached. I am not in a position to release the expenditure for 2019 due to commercial sensitivities.

EXPENDITURE (includes deposits and fees) ON SCHOOL SITE ACQUISITIONS 2010 - 2018

YEAR	EXPENDITURE (€m)
2018	53.737
2017	10.409
2016	31.634
2015	12.956
2014	21.000
2013	11.460
2012	21.525
2011	18.367
2010	56.748

Home Tuition Scheme

90. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of home tuition grants which were not processed within two weeks of receipt; the number of applications received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39172/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Departments 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 placement is currently available for a child. SENOs are processing home tuition applications as a matter of urgency.

My Department also provides a Home Tuition Scheme for 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. These applications can be complex and need to be considered on their individual merits.

The Home Tuition Schemes outline that it may take my Department up to 15 working days to process complete home tuition applications. All complete applications have been processed within this timeframe.

My Department has prioritised the processing of home tuition applications and the vast majority of complete applications were processed within a shorter timeframe.

Details of the number of complete applications received and processed are outlined in the following table.

Number of completed received	Approved	Being Processed
Medical	145	66
Early Intervention	275	24
SEN school aged no placement	124	14
Total	544	83

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.

School Transport Appeals

91. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when persons (details supplied) in County Leitrim will have a decision on their appeal lodged to the school transport appeals board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39177/19]

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 21st August 2019. The Board has requested the School Transport Section of the Department of Education and Skills 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.

Teaching Council of Ireland

92. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a teaching number will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39181/19]

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 registration of teachers in this State.

Under section 30 of the Teaching Council Acts, a teacher in a recognised school is required to be registered with the Teaching Council in order to be paid from Oireachtas-voted funds.

Where a registered teacher is not available SI 32/2014 enables a school managerial authority to employ a person who is not registered as a teacher for up to five consecutive days.

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

The Teaching Council advise that 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 the requirements are met, including fit and proper person requirements, including garda vetting and overseas police clearances, the registration process may be completed in less than the 6-8 week timeframe outlined. Full information on the application process and timeframes involved is available on the Teaching Council website.

The person referred to by the Deputy should continue to liaise with the Teaching Council regarding their application for registration as a teacher.

School Catchment Areas

93. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider extending the planning area of Blanchardstown west and Blanchardstown village, Dublin15, the subject of a second level school patronage competition being run to include locations (details supplied), in view of the fact that many residents will be excluded from the catchment area of the new school under its current boundaries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39185/19]

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.

Schools Building Projects

94. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the announced delay of the proposed opening of the permanent building for a school (details supplied) to September 2021 in view of the fact the trustees had been informed it would open by September 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39187/19]

95. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the necessary additional infrastructure will be put in place to enable a school (details supplied) to remain in its current temporary building from 2020 until 2021, in view of the recently announced delay in the opening date for the permanent building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39188/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 94 and 95 together.

The building project referred to by the Deputy is being delivered under my Department's Design & Build programme. This delivery programme uses a professional external Project Management team to progress the project through the stages of architectural planning, tendering and construction.

The next step in the process will be the application for planning permission which is expected to be lodged shortly. Thereafter, as with all school building projects, the exact timeframe for delivery of the school will be dependent on the grant of planning permission. My Department will be working to have the first phase of the school's permanent accommodation handed over by September of 2021 with phase 2 to follow in a matter of months.

A meeting was held between Department officials and representatives of the Board of Management of the school on September 3rd. In the course of the meeting the projected timelines for the progression of the project were outlined and the factors underpinning those timelines were explained in considerable detail. Following the meeting an email issued to the Board confirming the timelines for the project.

My Department will arrange for the necessary additional accommodation for the school referred to by the Deputy to be put in place in their current temporary building for September 2020 to meet their additional needs for the 2020/2021 academic year.

My Department officials will keep the Board of Management fully informed of developments as they occur.

Teacher Supply

96. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the issues regarding a school (details supplied); if additional funding will be provided in order to allow students learn through Irish; the steps he will take to prevent similar issues from arising elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39194/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department is aware of the issue raised by the Deputy. As the Deputy will be aware, the Teacher Supply Steering Group, chaired by the Secretary General of my Department, is considering the issues that impact on teacher supply in a number of policy areas. The Group is overseeing the delivery of the Teacher Supply Action Plan, which I published in November 2018. In undertaking its task, the Group is cognisant of the requirement that all persons wishing to teach in recognised schools must meet the professional registration standards and criteria set by the Teaching Council, which is the professional regulatory body for the teaching profession. I hope to be in a position to announce further measures to support the supply of teachers over the coming months.

A number of measures which support the supply of teachers to Irish-medium schools have been introduced as part of the implementation of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022. This includes the commencement in 2018 of a new Irish-medium Masters in Education (M.Ed.) for primary and post-primary teachers, including principals, in Mary Immaculate College and the commencement in 2019 of a new 4-year Irish-medium Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) for primary teachers in Marino Institute of Education. The new programmes provide for up to 60 new places for teacher education through Irish annually. Additional staffing has also been provided for the Professional Masters in Education (PME) in NUI, Galway to increase the supply of post-primary teachers who can deliver high quality Irish medium education across a range of subjects.

For Leaving Certificate Examination, candidates shall, except where otherwise directed, have the option of answering either in Irish or in English, except in the case of the subjects Irish and English and questions in other language subjects where the use of the target language is specified.

Candidates will be supplied with Irish or English versions of the examination papers as indicated on their entry forms. Candidates who have indicated in the examination entry process that they intend to answer through Irish are initially suppled with the Irish version of the paper only (by default). The English version may subsequently also be given to them by the superintendent at the request of the candidate.

Allowing provision of the paper in both languages allows them to check they have correctly interpreted any question asked of them by cross-referencing it with the paper in the other language.

A candidate who answers in Irish at the written examination in the various subjects may be given bonus marks in addition to the marks gained in the subject.

Candidates who answer partly in Irish and partly in English will receive no bonus marks.

School Services Staff

97. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the situation in which some caretakers in secondary schools are in a similar situation to school secretaries (details supplied); if an assessment of their conditions will be carried out to ensure that the perceived disadvantage they are now suffering will be remedied without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39209/19]

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.

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 9 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 in respect of grant-funded secretaries.

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 in respect of both caretakers and secretaries 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.

Schools Administration

98. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to correspondence from a person (details supplied) in respect of the requirement for schools to audit their accounts and his views on the matter. [39222/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): A reply to the correspondence referred to by the Deputy issued on 18th September 2019 by email.

The Deputy may request a copy from the individual concerned.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an exception exists to the rule which excludes the higher education grant from students who have previously attended a course of a similar level as in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39234/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Under the terms of the Student Grant Scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students attending an approved course in an approved institution who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, progression, previous academic attainment and means.

To satisfy the terms and conditions of the student grant scheme in relation to progression, a student must be moving from year to year within a course, having successfully completed the previous year or be transferring from one course to another where the award for the subsequent course is of a higher level than the previous course.

Under the progression/previous academic attainment criteria of the scheme, a grant will not be paid to a student for a repeat period of study on the same course, or for a different course at the same level, irrespective of whether or not a grant was paid previously. The objective of this policy is to help as many students as possible to obtain one qualification at each level of study.

If the person to whom the Deputy refers is ineligible for a SUSI grant, there are some other options which could be pursued.

Students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Details of this fund are available from the Access Office in the college attended. This fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

Also, tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education, including approved postgraduate courses in EU Member States and in non-EU countries. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners on www.revenue.ie.

Schools Building Contractors

100. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on matters raised in correspondence (details supplied). [39252/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I refer to your correspondence in relation to a payment issue for works completed by your company. A building project is a complex arrangement of contractual relationships between the client, the main contractor, specialist sub-contractors, domestic sub-contractors, suppliers of materials, suppliers of plant etc. In general, all sub-contractors employed on education sector building projects are employed directly by the main contractor or indirectly by the main contractor through other subcontractors.

It is a matter for all sub-contractors to agree terms and conditions and a schedule of payments with the main contractor as their direct employer. The specific issue outlined in the details provided by the Deputy involves a contractual matter between two private companies. As such, my Department has no authority to intervene in this matter

Garda Accommodation

101. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the new Sligo regional Garda headquarters will commence construction as part of the PPP programme with Macroom and Thurles as outlined under the capital investment plan for 2016 to 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39125/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation of €1.76 billion for 2019, as well as capital investment amounting to €92 million this year. These resources are being provided in support of the Government's commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

The Deputy will appreciate that the Office of Public Works has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation and works in relation to Garda accommodation are progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW).

The Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 programme is based on agreed Garda priorities. It continues to benefit over 30 locations around the country, underpinned by significant Exchequer funding across the Garda and OPW Votes. In addition to that programme, other major ongoing works to the Garda estate include the pilot Garda station reopening project, the development of a new facility at Military Road and the major refurbishment of Fitzgibbon Street station. The clear goal of this investment is to address deficiencies in the Garda estate and provide fit-for-purpose facilities for Garda members and staff, as well as the public interacting with them.

The Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangement included in the Building and Refurbishment Programme is intended to deliver new stations in Sligo, Macroom and Clonmel. The OPW has agreed to provide its expert services in the design of the three stations in question.

PPP projects are progressed under the auspices of the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA). My Department, An Garda Síochána, the OPW and the NDFA are working closely in order to progress this project.

The establishment of PPP projects can be complex and it is vital to get the projects right at the planning and design stage. Pending delivery of the new stations, I am informed that Garda management and the OPW have been working to improve conditions and facilities at the existing stations in Sligo, Macroom and Clonmel.

Travel Documents

102. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for a travel document by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39217/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Immigration Service of my Department that the travel document application for the person referred to by the Deputy has been completed and the document is currently awaiting printing by the Passport Office in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Printing of travel document booklets is done on behalf of the Immigration Service by the Passport Office and therefore the time-frame for this process is not within the control of my Department. However, I am advised that the current period for this type of process is approximately one month.

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.

Citizenship Status

103. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 700 of 6 September 2019, if the person (details supplied) should attend with the child at the INIS to register the citizenship of the child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39223/19]

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

Permission to remain in the State for parents of Irish Citizen Children may be granted where the applicant can show that they are playing an active role in the life of the Irish Citizen Child. The child must also be residing continuously in Ireland. If the person concerned is granted permission as the parent of an Irish Citizen Child, the child will need to attend the Immigration Service when their parent is registering their permission to reside in the State.

The Deputy may wish to note that 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 is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Deportation Orders

104. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the deportation order in the case of a person (details supplied) will be revoked; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39224/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Immigration Service of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 17 February 2017. This Order requires the person concerned to remove themselves from the State and remain outside the State. The enforcement of Deportation Orders is a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB).

Representations have been received on behalf of the person concerned requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This request will be considered as soon as possible. A decision will then be made to either affirm or revoke the existing Deportation Order. This decision will be communicated in writing. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

Requests for the revocation of Deportation Orders are non-suspensive and even where the persons concerned submit such a request, they are still required to present to the Garda National Immigration Bureau on the specified date.

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 is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Deportation Orders

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a proposal to deport will be revoked in the case of a person (details supplied); if the person is now entitled to a spousal dependency status in view of the fact that the person was married before the issue of form 3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39225/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Immigration Service of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the 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 is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Immigration Status

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if provisions will be made to facilitate the regularisation of residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39226/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I must inform the Deputy that the person referred to cannot be identified with any immigration related application or process from the information provided. I will be happy to follow up further on the matter if the Deputy can provide additional information on the nature of the immigration issue.

However, I must advise the Deputy that matters pertaining to the work permit system and the options available for obtaining a valid work permit is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

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 is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the restoration of stamp 4 will be considered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39227/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Immigration Service of my Department that the person referred to has no active applications ongoing with the Department at present.

The person concerned was granted permission as a family member of an EU citizen for a period of five years from 2012-2017. There is no application for renewal in this person's name at present. However, if this person continues to reside in the State they should contact the Immigration Service in writing without delay to outline their current circumstances.

Queries in relation to the status of individual Immigration cases may be made directly to the Immigration Service of my Department by email 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.

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) can remain in an accommodation centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39228/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) division of my Department, formerly the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), offers accommodation and related services to anyone claiming international protection who is without sufficient means to support themselves while their claim is being examined.

There is no obligation on anyone to accept the offer of accommodation and not every applicant takes up the offer of accommodation. Many choose not to do so and make other arrangements. Consideration of a person's international protection application is not affected by their accommodation arrangements provided that they keep the Department informed of their current accommodation address.

Accommodation, where required, is provided under the European Communities (Reception Conditions) Regulations 2018 which came in to effect in June 2018. A person offered accommodation under the Regulations is required to comply with the house rules of the accommodation centre.

Part of the role of both the International Protection Accommodation Service of my Department and individual accommodation centre management is to ensure that those who request and are allocated accommodation within the IPAS portfolio access it on a consistent basis. House rules require residents to keep the centre management informed if they are to be absent overnight. Regular absences would indicate that the person is not living there in the normal course. Clearly if a person is allocated accommodation but ceases using it consistently, it would be wrong not to re-allocate it to an international protection applicant who genuinely requires it.

When it comes to the attention of IPAS that a resident does not appear to be using their accommodation allocation consistently, and the person has not given centre management an explanation as to why this is the case, IPAS staff liaise with centre management to manage the situation. In a case where IPAS is satisfied that accommodation is not being used consistently, the resident will be issued a letter advising them that if they do not use their accommodation space, that space will be re-allocated to another applicant in need. If the resident continues to be absent from their accommodation without explanation, a letter will be sent to them (at that centre), advising them that their accommodation space has been deemed abandoned and will be reallocated to another protection applicant. This letter will be held by management until the person presents in the centre to collect their post.

It is open to residents to respond to the initial letter and provide any evidence that they are indeed availing of the accommodation. If IPAS is satisfied that this is the case then the matter will be closed at that stage and the accommodation will not be reallocated. Once the final letter is issued, advising the resident that the space has been deemed abandoned, the matter will not be re-opened for consideration. However, they resident can, if they choose, apply in writing to RIA asking to be re-accommodated. However, a subsequent offer of accommodation may not be for the same accommodation centre as had previously been provided.

Deportation Orders

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a request and accompanying supporting documentation to revoke deportation orders of persons (details supplied) will be accepted; if the temporary proposal to deport will be revoked and residency considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39229/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Immigration Service of my Department that the persons concerned are the subject of Deportation Orders signed on 27 June 2019. These Orders require the persons concerned to remove themselves from the State and remain outside the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Orders are a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

It is open to the persons concerned to submit representations requesting that the Deportation Orders be revoked, pursuant to Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). However, I wish to make clear that such applications would require substantial grounds to be successful. A decision on such a request would be to affirm or to revoke the existing Deportation Orders. In the mean-time, the Deportation Orders remain valid and in place.

Requests for the revocation of Deportation Orders are non-suspensive and if the persons concerned submit such a request, they are still required to present to the Garda National Immigration Bureau in the meantime. The persons concerned are next due to present on 17 October 2019.

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.

Naturalisation Applications

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if alterative arrangements will be made in the case of a person (details supplied); if an affidavit or other means will be used in lieu thereof; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39230/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Immigration Service of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is on-going.

A letter issued to the person concerned on 17 September 2019 requesting certain documentation and a reply is awaited. Upon receipt of the requested documentation the case will be further processed.

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

In rare circumstances, where an applicant cannot produce their current passport, or a previous passport, birth certificate or other supporting documents, the applicant will be required to provide a full explanation. Such explanation should, where possible, be supported by satisfactory evidence that they have attempted to obtain such documentation and correspondence from the relevant authorities or embassy responsible for the issuing of passports and birth certificates in their country, clearly stating the reasons the documentation cannot be provided. The Immigration Service will consider the explanation given and, if satisfied that it is for reasons genuinely beyond the applicant's control, may suggest alternative means to the person to assist in establishing their identity and nationality.

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.

Citizenship Status

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the termination of entitlement to citizenship in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39231/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Immigration Service of my Department that an application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy on 7 May 2019 and that processing of this application is on-going.

With regard to the Deputy's reference to termination of citizenship, I take this to refer to 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), which I am aware has given cause for concern to many applicants. 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 appeal 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.

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 is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Asylum Applications

112. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the case of persons (details supplied), who have been in direct provision in County Wicklow and are being

processed as failed asylum seekers, will be reviewed on humanitarian grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39248/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Immigration Service of my Department that the applicants referred to by the Deputy are subject to valid Deportation Orders. They are required to present to the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) on 2 October 2019. The enforcement of Deportation Orders is a matter for GNIB.

It is open to the persons' concerned to submit written representations under Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to have the Deportation Orders revoked. Requests seeking to revoke a Deportation Order must set out any new facts or circumstances, which have arisen since the original decision was made. Any request submitted would be considered on its own merits, having due regard to all relevant issues, including with respect to any refoulement considerations.

A decision would be made to affirm or to revoke the existing Deportation Order. In the meantime, the Deportation Orders remains valid and in place. Requests for the revocation of a Deportation Order are non-suspensive. If the persons' concerned decide to submit a request, they are still required to present to the GNIB in the interim.

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.

Employment Rights

113. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps available to parents if they are unhappy or disagree with a decision of the Workplace Relations Commission in respect of a case relating to their child in view of the fact the WRC is outside the remit of the Ombudsman for Children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39112/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is an independent statutory office under the aegis of my Department. The WRC is mandated to secure compliance with Ireland's employment, equality and industrial relations legislation. As part of its statutory functions, the WRC adjudicates on cases under employment rights, industrial relations and equal status legislation. If a party is dissatisfied with a decision of an adjudication officer of the WRC, then that decision may be appealed to either the Labour Court or the Circuit Court depending on the enactment.

The Labour Court hears appeals of WRC adjudication officers' decisions in all disputes arising under industrial relations and employment rights enactments. Such appeals must be notified to the Labour Court no later than 42 days from the date of the decision concerned.

The Circuit Court hears appeals of all decisions by adjudication officers of the WRC under the Equal Status Acts. Such appeals must be made to the Circuit Court within 6 weeks (42 days) of the decision concerned.

The High Court hears appeals only on a point of law of determinations made by the Labour

Court under the various employment rights enactments. It is also open to parties to have the WRC and Labour Court's proceedings judicially reviewed.

Research Funding Data

114. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of payments issued to date for successful applications made under the disruptive technologies innovation fund by county; the number of applications at grant agreement stage; the number of applications earmarked for pre-payment; the number of pre-financing payments that have issued to date to approved applications in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39253/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan): The Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF) is a €500 million fund established under Project Ireland 2040 and forms a key part in the delivery of the Pillar 1 goal of Future Jobs Ireland to embrace innovation and technological change. The DTIF has been established under the responsibility of my Department with Enterprise Ireland providing administrative support.

Given the unique nature of the Fund, which in Call 1 alone is supporting 27 consortia comprised of 104 organisations, including SMEs, Research Performing Organisations and multinationals, intensive contract negotiations have been ongoing since the successful projects were announced in December 2018. This is to ensure the contracts are in line with the provisions of the EU General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) and also the national legislation under which agencies of my Department can provide research funding to industry and other research performing entities. To facilitate payments to the constituent organisations, Enterprise Ireland have developed new consortia agreements and a new pre-finance framework was put in place. Letters of offer and consortia agreements have now issued to all of the successful project partners. Payments to those organisations, including those that are eligible for pre-financing, are being processed once the formal legal documentation is signed off and returned to Enterprise Ireland. It is not proposed to publish details of the pre-finance for small companies requested and approved as there are relatively small numbers involved and this could reveal information that is commercially sensitive to the companies concerned.

To date, payments have issued to organisations involved in 12 of the 27 successful projects. For the most part, enterprise partners in DTIF collaborations will receive grant payments retrospectively following submission of validated claims for vouched expenditure. From the start, my Department has indicated that €20m would be made available in 2019 to commence the first tranche of projects. That funding is currently being drawn down and it is expected that it will be allocated in full against profile by the end of the year.

Due to the collaborative nature of the projects, where the work is being carried out by the project partners across various locations, the funding allocations are not recorded on a county basis. However, the attached document provides details of the enterprise locations in each consortium.

[Funding Announcement - Awards]

Research Funding

115. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on issues raised in correspondence (details supplied) regarding the disruptive technologies innovation fund with respect to commercial activity not being funded under the fund issues in relation to pre-financing for SMEs under the fund and the absence of communication from the State agency under her remit regarding the funding process for the approved projects; and the reason there is such a lag in issuing funds to approved 2018 grant recipients. [39254/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan): The purpose of the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF) is to see investment in the development and deployment of disruptive innovative technologies, on a commercial basis, targeted at tackling national and global challenges. It is a significant investment by this Government in research, development and innovation in Ireland with an allocation of €500 million in the period to 2027. Call 1 of the DTIF opened on 29 June 2018 and 27 successful projects were announced on 10 December 2018. In total, over €75 million of Government funding was committed to 104 separate organisations within these 27 collaborative projects over a three-year period. From the start, my Department has indicated that €20 million would be made available in 2019 to commence the first tranche of projects. That funding is currently being drawn down and it is expected that it will be allocated in full against profile by the end of the year. For the most part, enterprise partners in DTIF collaborations will draw down funding retrospectively following the submission of validated claims for vouched expenditure.

As regards certain commercial activity not being funded, my Department officials engaged in extensive dialogue with our agencies in advance of defining the eligibility criteria for Call 1 of the DTIF to ensure compliance with the provisions of the General Block Exemption Regulation scheme for R&D funding and to the national legislation under which funding is provided. When DTIF Call 1 opened in June 2018, those rules were included in the call documentation published on my Department's website. For Call 1, project bids that focused on "industrial research" were sought in order to provide clarity to applicants and to provide the optimal rate of State support across the board to all eligible companies (i.e. 50% matched funding). All successful projects were awarded funding subject to contract negotiations and complying with these State Aid rules. Whilst some commercialisation costs were allowed, not all were allowable due to these rules.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) is administering DTIF Call 1 on my behalf and, given the unique nature of the Fund, it needed to develop new consortia agreements to facilitate payments to constituent organisations. EI has engaged in intensive contract negotiations with participants in each project, checking that costs submitted were eligible under these State Aid rules and also justifiable for the work packages involved.

As regards the pre-financing of certain project costs, the DTIF Call 1 guidance document had indicated that pre-finance of up to one-third, subject to certain criteria, could be made available to small companies only, in line with the legislation governing the enterprise agencies of my Department. EI established a new process for assessing pre-finance applications for the DTIF. This process is now in place and payments to the SMEs approved for pre-finance are being processed once the formal legal documentation is signed off and returned to EI.

Collaborations of the scale and nature funded through the DTIF are a first for Ireland. Due to the unique nature of the Fund and the complexities involved, it has taken longer than anticipated to put the necessary arrangements in place and to conclude contract negotiations with all 104 organisations.

I acknowledge that this is causing difficulties for a number of organisations involved but I am very pleased to see the overwhelming support for this new Fund from small and large companies and from across the research system. We have taken the opportunity in Call 2 to refine our rules and procedures based on learnings from Call 1 and I am confident that the DTIF will continue to be welcomed as a key instrument for Ireland in helping to embrace and prepare for the new wave of technologies that will underpin our economic development into the future.

Brexit Preparations

116. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason she did not write to the 222,000 companies to prepare for Brexit earlier in 2019. [39255/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the Brexit deadline of 31 October 2019 draws nearer, I am very conscious of the urgent need for businesses to take action to prepare and plan for Brexit, despite continuing political uncertainty. That is why Government has intensified efforts over the last number of weeks and months to communicate with companies to get engagement and encourage them to take the necessary steps to be best prepared for Brexit.

In relation to the specific initiative that the deputy refers to, I recently asked my officials to make contact with the 220,000 companies listed with the Companies Registration Office (CRO) to advise them of the array of supports and the organisations available to assist them with their Brexit preparations.

This outreach was in fact specifically timed to coincide with the key filing period during which companies file their annual returns at the CRO. Companies typically file their annual returns from the start of October over a 4 week period. My initiative was designed in order to get maximum impact with companies visiting the CRO website during that key filing period.

This latest initiative through the CRO was just one of the many channels and campaigns that my Department has been engaged in to communicate with businesses to get out the key messages in terms of steps they need to take to prepare for Brexit.

In addition, the enterprise and regulatory agencies under my Department have been working closely with businesses for months through their own engagement campaigns and client clinics. These include Enterprise Ireland, the Local Enterprise Boards, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI), the Health and Safety Authority, the Irish National Accreditation Board (INAB), the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission as well as Intertrade Ireland.

On 4 September, with the Tánaiste and Minister McEntee, I launched the ‘Getting Your Business Brexit Ready: Practical Steps Guide’ which focuses on the nine steps every business should take regardless of its size. This guide is available on www.gov.ie/brexit, along with other useful information for companies.

I recently collaborated with the Accountancy Bodies of Ireland on four breakfast Brexit briefing events covering a number of counties in the border regions that are likely to be most impacted by Brexit. These Brexit events covered a broad range of important topics to help businesses prepare for Brexit such as customs, supply chain, cashflow and accreditation.

Across all Government Departments, including the Departments of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Transport as well as Government agencies such as the Revenue Commissioners and other regulatory bodies, work has been ongoing and intensified over the summer period to engage with businesses to ensure that they are taking the necessary steps to meet the challenges of Brexit.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is currently running a number of outreach events with the first event taking place in Dublin on 10 September, and a further two events planned for Wexford on 27 September and in Cork on 30 September.

During the summer months, Revenue wrote to over 90,000 businesses in relation to new customs procedures that will apply post Brexit including the need to register with Revenue for an Economic Operators Registration and Identification number (EORI) to allow them to continue trading with the UK.

Through these various engagements and others, it is Government's clear intention to ensure that businesses are as well prepared as possible for Brexit, whenever that happens.

Small and Medium Enterprises

117. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department is examining proposals for small businesses; and the SME Bills being drafted in her Department, including those proposing to reduce the regulatory burden and enhancing access to EU funding and public procurement. [39256/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I am fully committed to improving the economic landscape, which will nurture the growth and development potential of our small businesses.

Future Jobs Ireland, which was launched in March 2019, focuses on meeting the challenges ahead in terms of ensuring Ireland is well positioned to adapt and prosper into the future by having skilled people working in quality jobs in sustainable sectors.

My Department is intent on simplifying the path to enterprise development and assisting the progression of our SMEs and entrepreneurs. My priority is to ensure our current and future business environment becomes more straightforward, while providing sufficient resources to aid these businesses to develop the tools they need to succeed, grow and create sustainable employment.

To determine the current climate of our enterprise ecosystem, I commissioned the OECD to conduct a Country Review of SME and Entrepreneurship Policies in Ireland in March 2018. The timescale for this review was 18 months and the final Report will be launched in Dublin by myself and the OECD Deputy Secretary General on the 23rd of October. The outcome of the review aims to provide tailored analysis and recommendations to Government on how to improve the design and implementation of national SME and entrepreneurship policies and programmes, based on an assessment of the country's current SME and entrepreneurship performance, framework conditions and policies, and informed by international comparisons.

My Department has played a central role supporting and facilitating the OECD during this intensive process. My officials have organised stakeholder events throughout the process to-date in order to facilitate detailed engagement between DBEI, other Government Departments, agencies, academia, business representatives and the small business sector. This engagement has enabled the OECD to gain insightful knowledge of our SME and entrepreneurship ecosystem at the various critical stages of building this report.

The OECD review has comprehensively examined all aspects of Ireland's SME and Entrepreneurship ecosystem. The Report and the accompanying Strategy Roadmap will assist my Department in developing a national SME Strategy which will be aligned within the overall

Future Jobs Framework.

I am keenly aware of the impact regulatory burdens and compliance costs can have on small businesses. Research indicates that where a large company may spend one euro per employee to comply with a regulatory duty, a medium-sized enterprise might have to spend around four euros and a small business up to ten euros. That is why my Department is leading on the development, roll out and implementation of the SME Test.

The main thrust of the SME Test is to assess the potential for less stringent requirements for smaller companies and the simplification of regulatory adherence, for example through the use of templates, reduced thresholds for SMEs and use of plain English in forms.

My Department sought best practice through other EU Member States regarding the development of the SME Test and a guidance approach was taken. In 2017, consultation took place with the Advisory Group on Small Business, which my colleague Minister of State Pat Breen TD chaired, and a public consultation followed thereafter.

I am pleased that the application and use of the SME Test across Government is now a deliverable action in the Future Jobs 2019 work programme. The adoption of the Test is included under action 2.3 which states:

“Raise awareness and promote the SME Test throughout Government Departments. Workshops will be available for policymakers”

In July 2019, my colleague Minister Breen wrote to each Government Department in his role as Minister of State for Business requesting that policymakers and those responsible for drafting relevant legislation in each Department utilise the Test. The nomination of a relevant official in each Department has also been sought so that my Department can engage and assist with the adoption of the SME Test in practice.

As a country, we want our Irish SMEs continue to grow and prosper and to become more innovative. Accessing finance is an integral part for the growth of any business. That is why my Department oversees EU sponsored programmes providing our diverse range of SME businesses with alternative financial solutions to those already available in the current market.

Microfinance Ireland provides loans between €2,000 and €25,000 to start-ups and existing micro enterprises who may be experiencing difficulty in accessing credit from other commercial lenders. The Brexit Loan Scheme is a €300 million loan fund available to eligible Irish businesses impacted by Brexit with loans available between €25,000 to €1.5 million and unsecured loans up to €500,000. The €40 million European Angel Fund is a joint initiative with the European Investment Fund designed to enhance the capacity of Business Angels to provide equity financing for innovative companies in the form of co-investments.

SMEs who participate in the public procurement process will be very aware of the financial and promotional opportunities that come with successfully winning all or part of a Government tender. Officials in my Department and that of the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) work together throughout the year to ensure a strong focus is maintained on promoting awareness amongst the SME sector. This commitment is reinforced by way of my Department participating on the OGP’s SME Procurement Advisory Group and their reciprocal participation in the DBEI chaired Interdepartmental SME Communication Group, which oversees the promotion of the www.supportingsmes.gov.ie website.

National Development Plan Data

118. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the projects mentioned in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 that come under her remit or bodies under her aegis by county in tabular form; the start dates and estimated completion dates for each project; the capital funds allocated to date for each project; the estimated total cost for each project over the 2018-27 period; and the amount expended to date for each such project. [39257/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Capital funding provided to my Department is mainly focussed on grants to support our multi-annual enterprise development and innovation programmes, rather than specific projects.

The Priority Investments under the National Strategic Objective in the National Development Plan (NDP) of a "Strong Economy supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills", for which my Department has primary responsibility, in the main build upon the Department's multi annual capital programmes. The specific Business, Enterprise and Innovation Investments identified in the NDP include;

- Expansion of Advanced Manufacturing Supports, linking centres and capacity across all regions

- New Regional Sectoral Clusters to scale and internationalise enterprise in all regions

- New regional 'Technology and Innovation Poles', led through the Institutes of Technologies

- Brexit Business Transformation through firm level supports

- Expanding Enterprise Ireland budget for research and development

- Expanding IDA Regional Property Programme, to attract investment to regions

- A National Design Centre

- Seed and Venture Capital Funding to support regional start-ups and growth

- eHubs for entrepreneurship and start-ups in every county

- New cycles of the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions, benefitting Higher Education in all regions

- Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund

- Strengthened SFI Research Centres and EI Technology Centres in higher education in all regions

- Participation in the EU High Performance Computing Programme

- Upgrading of the Tyndall National Institute in Cork

- New Space Technologies Programme, to the benefit of firms in the regions

- Membership of CERN

It will be seen that many of these investments are programme orientated and given the multi annual characteristics of such capital programmes, it will be appreciated that unlike specific projects they generally do not have fixed start and completion dates.

Insofar as the funding of these investments are concerned, the NDP as well as in setting out indicative capital allocations for each of the National Strategic Objectives in the Plan also set indicative Ministerial Vote capital allocations for the period 2018 -2022. The capital ceilings set for my Department under the NDP for that period are:

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
€555 million	€620 million	€630 million	€640 million	€715 million

The increased capital funding provided to my Department in the first two years of the NDP has enabled us to progress a number of the aforementioned Priority Investments including,

- the roll out the first phase of the Disruptive Technologies Fund

- the continued roll out of the IDA programme of providing property solutions, strategic sites and grants to deliver FDI across the regions of the country

- the establishment of the Future Growth Loan Scheme to assist business to access the finance necessary to enable them to strategically transform/adapt to the impact of Brexit

- the funding by Enterprise Ireland of a number of regionally focussed initiatives with Institutes of Technology through a programme of Regional Innovation and Technology Clusters to support regions across the country to build enterprise capability

- the launch by EI of a new €175million Seed and Venture Programme which will focus on fostering a strong pipeline of high growth innovative businesses by increasing the availability of risk capital for start-up/early stage enterprises

- the expansion and deepening of Ireland's membership of and collaborations with international research organisations such as the European Southern Observatory and the European Space Agency

- the establishment of new programmes for Postgraduate Research at Masters and PhD levels

- the refresh of SFI's Research Centres Programme thereby strengthening collaboration with enterprises across all regions of the country

- to commence the phased upgrade of the Tyndall Institute to enable it to continue to stay at the forefront of new technologies

I am confident that the capital funding allocated to my Department for the remaining years of the first phase of the NDP will ensure that we can continue to progress the delivery of the specific Business, Enterprise and Innovation Investments set out in the Plan.

National Development Plan Data

119. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount allocated to the upgrading of the Tyndall National Institute under the National Development Plan 2018-2027; the cost of the project over the 2018-27 period; the amount expended to date for the project; the status of the project; and the estimated date of completion. [39258/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan): Tyndall National Institute (TNI) is a leading research centre in integrated ICT (Information and Communications Technology) hardware and systems. The institute was established in 2004 under an agreement between the then Minister for Enterprise, Trade and

Employment and University College Cork. My Department continues to provide core funding for TNI (€5.5m in 2019) which it uses to leverage a total research budget of approximately €38m per annum.

The upgrade and expansion of TNI is identified as a strategic investment priority under the National Development Plan, Project Ireland 2040 and Future Jobs Ireland 2019.

The proposed development would see Tyndall National Institute substantially increase in size and capacity over the period to 2027, ensuring that the institute can stay at the forefront of new technologies, is positioned to avail of opportunities under European research programmes and can build on its successful industry engagement model in sectors such as health and life sciences, ICT, energy and agri-tech.

I am aware that UCC and Tyndall are undertaking preparatory actions for the upgrade and expansion including a design study. My Department will engage with UCC and Tyndall on receipt of their proposal

National Development Plan Data

120. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount allocated to the national design centre under the National Development Plan 2018-2027; the cost of the project over the 2018-27 period; the amount expended to date for the project; if all funds allocated to the project are coming from existing financial streams such as for the national design centre; if so, the details of same; the status of the project; and the estimated end date. [39259/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): One of my Department's commitments as part of Project Ireland 2040 is to develop plans for a National Design Centre (NDC) to support the potential of the design sector to drive innovation and competitiveness and as a source of future job growth potential.

My Department officials are currently consulting with stakeholders and drafting a Request for Tender for the development of a business plan for a National Design Centre, setting out a business model, appropriate budget and funding requirements, management structures and drawing upon best practice and international precedents. There has been no expenditure to date. The tenderer will be required to estimate the cost of the initiative, as part of the development of the business plan.

The Request for Tender will be published shortly.

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

121. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the status of the construction and commissioning of the 60 bed modular unit at University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39099/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare infrastructure projects and has advised that the enabling works for the modular unit have been completed and the main construction contractor is due to commence work on site this week. The construction is anticipated to be completed in mid 2020. The equipping and commissioning of the unit will be carried out once the construction has been completed.

Vaccination Programme

122. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if a HPV catch-up programme will be provided free of charge to all girls who were previously eligible but chose not to take up the vaccine or catch-up programmes in view of the fact that funding was allocated but not spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39109/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). The committee's recommendations are based on the prevalence of the relevant disease in Ireland and international best practice in relation to immunisation. It makes recommendations on vaccination policy to my Department. NIAC continues to revise recommendations to allow for the introduction of new vaccines in Ireland and to keep abreast of changes in the patterns of disease. Therefore, the immunisation schedule will continue to be amended over time.

In 2009 the NIAC recommended HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccination for all 12-13 year old girls to reduce their risk of developing cervical cancer when they are adults. In September 2010 the HPV vaccination programme was introduced for all girls in first year of secondary school. Gardasil is the vaccine used by the HSE in the School Immunisation Programme and is provided free of charge to girls in secondary school.

During the 2019/20 school year, girls who previously declined the HPV vaccine and are still attending secondary school can join the HPV girls only programme. By contacting your local HSE Health Office appointments will be offered to girls to receive the HPV vaccine in HSE mop up clinics. However, it must be noted that vaccinated girls may still be at risk from other high risk types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer and will therefore need to continue to have regular cervical smear tests.

Oireachtas Joint Committee Recommendations

123. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in implementing the recommendations of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, namely, the provision of exclusion zones and the availability of free contraception; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39115/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy may be aware exclusion zones were not part of the recommendations made by the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, however, it is my intention that people can access termination of pregnancy services safely. I wish to assure women and healthcare staff that there is existing legislation in place to protect them and to protect patients.

My Department and An Garda Síochána have also been closely monitoring the situation since the service commenced in January. I recently met with Garda Commissioner Drew Harris to discuss the issues.

The result of the referendum last year gave the Government a strong mandate to introduce termination of pregnancy services and it remains my priority that the legislation is fully implemented so that all women in Ireland can access these services quickly and easily, without bias or judgment.

I established a Working Group to examine the various policy, regulatory and legislative issues arising in relation to improving access to contraception. The Group has recently held a public consultation exercise and has engaged directly with numerous stakeholders. It is currently preparing a report, which I understand will be submitted for my consideration shortly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

124. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39124/19]

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

125. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of extra home help for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39128/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

126. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health when the Sheil hospital development in Ballyshannon will progress to the next stage of its development; when construction will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39131/19]

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 provides for €220m capital funding to the Community Nursing Unit programme over the period 2019 to 2021 and also sets out the current status of all projects within the programme, including new CNU in Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal.

The Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare infrastructure projects and has advised that the tender for the new South Donegal CNU in Ballyshannon was issued to contractors in April 2019. Subject to approval of the tender, it is intended to proceed to construction later this year with completion due in early 2021.

The delivery of capital projects is a dynamic process and is subject to the successful completion of the various approval stages, in line with the Public Spending Code, which can impact on the timeline for delivery.

Cancer Screening Programmes

127. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the inquiries into the CervicalCheck screening programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39132/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In May 2018, Government agreed to establish a Scoping Inquiry into the CervicalCheck screening programme. The Scoping Inquiry was led by Dr Gabriel Scally, under Terms of Reference which are published on the website of my Department.

The Scoping Inquiry produced a First, Final and Supplementary Report. In total these reports set out 58 recommendations for improvements in our screening programmes and wider health services. These reports are available on my Department's website.

The Final Report of the Scoping Inquiry, published in September 2018, is unequivocal in stating that the widespread non-disclosure of the results of historical screening audits was a substantial breach of trust for the women and families concerned. It caused significant distress and additional suffering to those affected. However, Dr Scally is clear that the Inquiry is satisfied with the quality management processes in the labs contracted by CervicalCheck. His reports present no evidence that the rates of discordant smear reporting or the performance of the programme fell below what is expected in a cervical screening programme. Crucially, he confirmed that he found no reason why the existing contracts for laboratory services should not continue until the new HPV regime is introduced. This provided welcome reassurance for women in Ireland, given the importance of screening for women's health.

The Supplementary Report, published on 11 June 2019, addressed issues relating, broadly, to laboratories used for CervicalCheck screening, including the use of additional sites, laboratory accreditation schemes, and procurement and contracting of laboratory services by CervicalCheck. The Report identified issues in regard to contractual compliance, in particular the use of additional sites for screening of CervicalCheck sites without CervicalCheck's knowledge; procurement, including a reduced focus on quality in procurement; and contracting. However, the Supplementary Report stated that, on the basis of the information available to the Inquiry, the use of additional laboratories did not in fact result in a reduction in the quality of the screening provided to Irish women and there is no evidence to suggest deficiencies in screening quality in any laboratory.

Dr Scally confirmed to me in July this year that the work of the Scoping Inquiry is concluded. Government has accepted all 58 of the recommendations that were set out in Dr Scally's three reports into CervicalCheck. An implementation plan was approved by Government in December 2018 and work is ongoing in my Department, the HSE and the National Cancer Registry of Ireland on the range of actions within the Plan.

Dr Scally carried out a review of the implementation plan earlier this year, at my request, and he affirmed that the Implementation Plan is a comprehensive response to his report. He was clear that significant effort and resources are being committed to addressing the problems he identified and has acknowledged that substantial and important progress has been made to date in implementation of his recommendations. Quarterly reports against implementation are published on the website of my Department.

I have requested Dr Scally to undertake a further review of implementation of his recommendations, and this work is ongoing. Dr Scally has stated that he is confident that the recommendations which he has made are already facilitating the development of a cervical screening service that, in international terms, will be outstanding.

Also currently underway, following the Government decision in May 2018, is an Independent Clinical Expert Panel Review of cervical screening. This is being carried out by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), and will provide women with independent assurance about the timing of their diagnosis and treatment. Every woman who was diagnosed with cervical cancer since September 2008, whose cancer was registered with the National Cancer Registry of Ireland before 5 May 2018, and who had one or more tests under the CervicalCheck programme, was offered a review of her case.

As noted in a guidance document produced by Public Health England, "no matter how closely a review tries to reproduce the original screening conditions, the conditions of a review are different", and hence it is normally expected that any review such as this will have review results which disagree with their original review result (discordance). This is in line with international experience. For planning purposes, the HSE is estimating that up to 40% of participants may be identified by the RCOG Panel as having discordance.

Earlier this month the HSE sent a letter to all participants in the review to provide an update about the process, and to advise participants of when they may expect to receive their individual reports. This letter also provided women with options about how they may choose to receive their report. The feedback from participants has been positive, both in relation to the information pack and the options for receiving results. Women have started to receive their results and it is expected that the process will take a number of months to complete.

The Royal College will also prepare an aggregate report for the Minister, which will include recommendations, where appropriate, on improving care for women. The Royal College wrote to the Minister on the 6th of September last advising that, based on the provisional findings of its Review, the performance characteristics of the CervicalCheck Screening Programme that fall within the scope of the Review appear to be broadly in line with the experience in the UK.

Cancer Screening Programmes

128. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the current wait time for women awaiting smear test results; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39133/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Significant progress has been made in clearing the backlog of smear tests and reducing turnaround times. Medlab Pathology, which reported a backlog of 55,000 smear tests in May 2019, completed the processing of these tests in August this year, having ceased accepting new tests from 1 May. This marks a welcome milestone for the programme. All smear tests are now being read at two laboratories, the Coombe and Quest Diagnostics. As of 30 August, the HSE reported that average turnaround times for the Coombe and Quest were 4 weeks and 5 weeks respectively, and 96% of tests were being resulted within 7 weeks.

As the turnaround times for smear test results may fluctuate somewhat from week-to-week, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy with the most up-to-date figures available.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

129. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the external investigation into the NMBI; the terms of reference of the investigation; the person or organisation undertaking the investigation; the timeframe for delivery of the external review; the anticipated cost of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39136/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There is currently no external investigation underway into the NMBI. The Deputy may be referring to an independent investigation arising from a particular Protected Disclosure received by my Department in relation to the NMBI.

Given the fact that this is an ongoing case and that it relates to a Protected Disclosure, I am constrained in what I can say. However, following a tender competition, an external company has been engaged to conduct an investigation. The terms of reference have been agreed with the discloser.

Given the complex nature of this matter, and the need to conduct a full and comprehensive examination of the issues raised, it would be difficult at this time to give a definitive time frame for completion of this investigation.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

130. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** 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. [39137/19]

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

131. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** 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). [39138/19]

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.

Mental Health Services Data

132. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for community psychology services by CHO, LHO, age, category and time waiting.

[39141/19]

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 Staff

133. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of health service personnel assigned to community psychology services by staff category, CHO and LHO. [39142/19]

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.

Disability Services Funding

134. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the status of a funding application made by an association to the HSE for funding to allow a person (details supplied) to return to the person's residential home. [39144/19]

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.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

135. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement dataset will cover only HSE users (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39150/19]

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

136. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39151/19]

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.

General Practitioner Services

137. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health in he will consider introducing a lo-call number for out-of-hours doctor services rather than the existing 1890 number due to the cost to those using the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39173/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I understand the Deputy's question as referring to the use by out-of-hour GP co-operatives of local landline numbers rather than potentially more expensive to use Lo-Call numbers such as 1890 numbers.

Lo-Call numbers were introduced before there was major competition in the telephone market in Ireland. Initially a call to a 1890 number would have cost the same as calling a local landline number. Now calls to 1890 numbers can vary widely – from 4c per minute to 34c per minute on some mobiles.

Although part funded by the HSE, out-of-hours co-operatives are private entities, and as such it is a matter for each co-operative to determine whether to use a local landline number or a Lo-Call number. The majority of out-of-hours co-operatives use a Lo-Call number and an alternative local landline number.

Medical Card Reviews

138. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical cards reviewed in County Mayo in 2019, in tabular form; and the number refused on review. [39174/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy

General Practitioner Services

139. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding doctors' charges. [39175/19]

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."

The GMS contract stipulates that fees for medical and GP visit card holders are not paid to GPs in respect of certain medical certificates which may be required, for example, "under the Social Welfare Acts or for the purposes of insurance or assurance policies or for the issue of driving licences".

Any fees charged by GPs for services provided outside the terms of the GMS contract are a matter of private contract between the GP and their patients.

There are no plans at present to include the completion of forms required for driving licence applications as a service to be provided to GMS patients under the GMS or GP Visit Card scheme.

Health Services Staff Data

140. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of paediatric consultants employed by the HSE who specialise in the treatment of patients with ME; his plans to include ME on the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39182/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I wish to inform the Deputy that the Long Term Illness Scheme (LTI) was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of thalidomide.

Under the scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the scheme at this time. However, I wish to inform the Deputy that the LTI scheme will be included as part of a review of the basis for existing hospital and medication charges, to be carried out under commitments given in the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy.

In relation to the number of paediatric consultants employed by the HSE that specialise in the treatment of patients with ME, I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy in this instance.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

141. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the slowdown in the number of approved fair deal funding packages being released by the HSE Dublin north nursing home support scheme office and that the rate of release has dropped from ten approved packages being released per week to 3 to 4 approved packages being released per week; his views on whether this is a deliberate policy choice being taken to save money or for another reason; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39184/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme, commonly referred to as Fair Deal, is a system of financial support for people who require long-term residential care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost.

As outlined in the HSE's National Service Plan for 2019, the NHSS is expected to support 23,042 people in 2019. The NHSS budget for 2019 is €985.8m which is an increase of €24.3m over its 2018 budget.

Over the last two years, an additional €45 million has been provided to NHSS budget for the continued provision of services in line with pricing and demand. As part of normal governance and performance management arrangements The Department and the HSE maintain regular service area engagements, which also form part of ongoing collaborative work on issues relating to older persons policy and service delivery.

The HSE have noted that the number of residents in nursing homes whom are supported by the NHSS to be ahead of forecast for the year to date. The latest available performance reports indicate that there are 23,236 people supported in the Scheme at the end of July this year. This is significantly more people than forecast and this creates a challenge. The HSE has also advised that the cost of care continues to rise and the average weekly cost per bed is higher in 2019 than anticipated.

Having regard to the available budget and the demand for support, the HSE releases funding in a managed way to ensure that the operation of the NHSS remains within the budgetary allocation. The HSE cannot legally fund clients beyond the determined funding allocation, and the appropriate mechanism relating to funding allocations is through the estimates and budgetary process. To manage the available funds throughout the year, a national placement list for the release of funding is operated by the HSE, to enable it to operate within budget. Funding issues to applicants in chronological order, to ensure equity nationally. Approved applicants are placed on the national placement list in order of their approval date and funding is released to applicants in order of their place on this list. The length of time spent on the placement list depends on the number of applicants currently receiving financial support and the number of new applications. Where demand is higher, the time spent on the waiting list may increase having regard for the prudent management of the Scheme's budget.

The HSE has put in place arrangements that a monthly analysis of performance of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme continues to ensure that the maximum number of new entrants are approved with the shortest possible waiting times while remaining on track to deliver a balanced budgetary position by year end. In the context of planning for the winter months, the HSE released a significant number of funding approvals this month bringing the waiting time for the release of funding back to 3 to 4 weeks.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

142. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if the cross-Border health initiative will continue in the event of a deal or no-deal Brexit; if an agreement has been signed off in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39196/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE operates the EU Cross Border Directive (CBD) in Ireland. Patients in Ireland can seek to be referred to another EU/EEA member state, including Northern Ireland, for medical treatment that is available in the public health service in Ireland. The patient may access the overseas service in either the public or private health sector of the EU/EEA member state they choose to receive the service in. The patient pays for the treatment and claims reimbursement from the HSE at the cost of that treatment in Ireland or the cost of it abroad, whichever is the lesser.

It is important to emphasise that at present there are no changes to patient care in the UK and Northern Ireland under the CBD, as the UK continues to be a full member of the EU. Indeed, until the UK formally withdraws from the European Union, it remains a full Member with all its existing rights and obligations.

Nevertheless, as part of a whole of Government response to Brexit, my Department is working to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated set of preparations to ensure continuity of health services post-Brexit. This includes the enactment of the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Act 2019. This legislation contains provisions which, if required, will allow me to make Orders and Regulations to enable necessary healthcare arrangements, including analogous CBD arrangements, to be maintained between Ireland and the UK in a no-deal scenario.

Rare Diseases Strategy

143. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of sittings the rare diseases technology review committee has held since its establishment in tabular form; the dates of all future meetings scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39197/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In line with the recommendations of the National Rare Diseases Plan 2014-2018, the HSE established a Rare Diseases Technology Review Committee (RDTRC) in 2018. The Committee considers Orphan Medicinal Products that are referred to it from the HSE Drugs Group, particularly where there are issues relating to access to drugs for rare diseases.

The RDTRC is responsible for:

- reviewing proposals received from industry or expert groups in Ireland for funding of new products for rare diseases or expanded indications for existing products for rare diseases; and

- providing contributions to the development of clinical guidelines for relevant Orphan Medicinal Products (OMPs) and supporting the implementation of guidelines in conjunction with the National Drugs Management Programme Office where applicable.

The Committee's recommendations for reimbursement of OMPs are not intended to replace any part of the existing medicines appraisal or reimbursement process but rather to complement it.

Since the establishment of the RDTRC, it has held five face-to face meetings:

Date	Number of meetings
15 October 2018	1
31 October 2018	2
8 November 2018	1
26 March 2019	1
Total	5

As part of their work programme the RDTRC have considered a number of medicines to date including:

- Sapropterin (Kuvan) for the treatment of Phenylketonuria: this drug was approved for reimbursement following the development of prescribing guidance by the RDTRC;

- Nusinersen (Spinraza) for the treatment of Spinal Muscular Atrophy: this drug was approved for reimbursement following referral to the RDTRC for the development of prescribing guidance;

- Sebelipase alfa (Kanuma) for the treatment of Lysosomal acid lipase deficiency;

- Teduglutide (Revestive) for the treatment of patients aged 1 year and above with short bowel syndrome.

Future meetings will be scheduled as referrals are made to the Rare Disease Technology

Review Committee by the HSE Drugs Group.

Rare Diseases Strategy

144. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he plans to review the performance of the rare diseases technology review committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39198/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In line with the recommendations of the National Rare Diseases Plan 2014-2018, the HSE established the Rare Diseases Technology Review Committee (RDTRC) in 2018. The Committee provides additional support for the HSE in its decisions around the reimbursement of drugs for rare diseases. The RDTRC is responsible for:

- reviewing proposals received from industry or expert groups in Ireland for funding of new products for rare diseases or expanded indications for existing products for rare diseases; and

- providing contributions to the development of clinical guidelines for relevant Orphan Medicinal Products (OMPs) and supporting the implementation of guidelines in conjunction with the National Drugs Management Programme Office where applicable.

The Committee's recommendations for reimbursement of OMPs are not intended to replace any part of the existing medicines appraisal or reimbursement process but rather to complement it.

I am satisfied with the work which has been undertaken by the RDTRC to date and I do not propose any review of the RDTRC's performance at this time.

As part of their work programme the RDTRC have considered a number of medicines to date including:

- Sapropterin (Kuvan) for the treatment of Phenylketonuria: this drug was approved for reimbursement following the development of prescribing guidance by the RDTRC;

- Nusinersen (Spinraza) for the treatment of Spinal Muscular Atrophy: this drug was approved for reimbursement following referral to the RDTRC for the development of prescribing guidance;

- Sebelipase alfa (Kanuma) for the treatment of Lysosomal acid lipase deficiency;

- Teduglutide (Revestive®) for the treatment of patients aged 1 year and above with short bowel syndrome.

In addition, the RDTRC has also been involved in processing applications for access to Nusinersen (Spinraza).

Vaccination Programme

145. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if the HPV vaccination is available to boys in second and third year of secondary school; if they can be vaccinated through their general practitioners if they are medical card holders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39200/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) made a recommendation that the HPV vaccine should be given to boys. On foot of NIAC's recommendation, my Department asked the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to undertake a health technology assessment (HTA) to establish the clinical and cost-effectiveness of extending the current immunisation programme, which offers HPV vaccination to all girls in their first year of second level education (generally 12 to 13 year olds), to a programme that also offers the vaccination to boys in their first year of secondary school.

HIQA completed the HTA in December 2018, recommending that the HPV immunisation programme be extended to include boys. A policy decision was made to extend the HPV immunisation programme to include boys starting in September 2019 with the introduction of a 9-valent HPV vaccine. However, the HIQA report published in December 2018 did not recommend an HPV catch-up programme for older boys for several reasons:

- Vaccinating boys in the first year of secondary school provides the best possible protection against HPV infection;

- Boys are already benefitting from the indirect herd protection provided by the girls' HPV vaccination programme which started in 2010.

The ages at which vaccines are recommended in the immunisation schedule are chosen by NIAC in order to give each child the best possible protection against vaccine preventable diseases. As the HPV vaccine is preventative it is intended to be administered, if possible, before a person becomes sexually active, that is, before a person is first exposed to HPV infection. Therefore, the gender neutral HPV vaccination programme targets all girls and boys in first year of secondary school to provide maximum coverage. All vaccines administered through the School Immunisation Programme are provided free of charge.

Extending the HPV vaccine to boys will also provide direct protection to boys against HPV-related disease. It also provides indirect herd protection to girls who have not been vaccinated. Another important factor includes the additional protection provided by a gender neutral programme to vulnerable groups (for example, men who have sex with men) and the potential to improve the resilience of the immunisation programme to fluctuations in vaccine uptake and to the movement of individuals into and out of the country.

For older children who did not receive the vaccine as part of the School Immunisation Programme the HPV vaccine can only be obtained privately from a GP. If your child is 15 years of age or older they will require three doses of the HPV vaccine in order to be fully protected. Those who have a medical card are eligible to have the vaccine administered free of charge by their GP. However, the cost of purchasing the vaccine privately is not covered by the medical card.

My Department will continue to be guided by NIAC's recommendations on any emerging evidence on this issue in the future.

General Practitioner Services

146. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if the recruitment process has commenced for a new general practitioner for Cappoquin Health Centre, County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39201/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for it to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Funding

147. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health when mental health development funding for 2019 was released to the HSE; the breakdown on the allocation of this funding within the HSE; if part of this funding has been allocated to areas outside of mental health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39203/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Budget 2019 made allowance for an additional €55 million for Mental Health Services to build on existing services. This is made up of the €20m continuing cost in 2019 of developments initiated in 2018, combined with €35m for further new developments. Since 2012, the Mental Health HSE Budget has been increased by almost 40% to nearly €1 billion.

To date, the HSE has drawn down €30 million of the foregoing funding, and an application for a further €13 million is currently being processed. None of this funding has been allocated to areas outside mental health.

I am referring the remainder of your question, regarding the breakdown of the allocation, to the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as it is a service matter.

Nursing Staff Contracts

148. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if the independent verification process to determine the level of savings generated by productivity measures to offset the cost of the nurses' pay deal in February 2019 which was proposed in the Labour Court agreement that led to a resolution of the strike has been put in place; if so, the terms of reference and details of those who will serve on it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39211/19]

149. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if, in dealing with the recent nurses' pay dispute, verified savings and productivity do not materialise by the end of 2019 the initiatives set out under the agreement will be paused in keeping with the recommendation of the Labour Court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39212/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 148 and 149 together.

A core element of improved productivity and potential savings to be achieved is the new enhanced nurse/midwife role. In that context, the HSE has issued a circular opening the Enhanced Practice role to eligible applicants on 23rd August 2019.

It is important to allow time for eligible applicants to consider the circular and for the new enhanced practice roles to become established and for it to start to have the intended positive impact on the health services.

The establishment of an independent verification mechanism as set out in the Labour Court recommendation will be the subject of discussions between the parties to the agreement.

Health Service Management are committed to the full implementation this Labour Court recommendation and the implementation of all aspects of the agreement will be closely monitored through an agreed HSE Implementation Plan.

HSE Properties

150. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the future plans for a HSE property (details supplied) in County Dublin; if the property is no longer in use by the HSE; if he will consider transferring the property to the local authority for other uses such as housing, community or the arts; the steps he will take to secure the property to prevent further vandalism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39265/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive (HSE) is responsible for the management of the public healthcare property estate. Details of properties which have been vacated or are due to be vacated are captured as part of the annual service planning strategy. These properties are reviewed for future use and suitability. They may be refurbished immediately, retained for future use or sold if deemed surplus to requirements.

The HSE operates a protocol for the disposal of surplus property assets, in accordance with Government Policy for Disposal of Surplus Property. This protocol sets out three options:

1. Transfer to another public body or State agency;

2. Open market sale, subject to favourable market conditions;

3. Other uses such as community / voluntary use will be considered only if points 1 and 2 above do not materialise.

Any proposals for the disposal of surplus property assets must be considered in the context of the capital funding available to Health and the Government's Reform Plan relating to the State's property asset use and management. In this context, the HSE is required to obtain value for money when disposing of surplus property assets. These proceeds will be re-invested in delivering much needed health care infrastructure.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to the current status of the particular property raised in your question.

Aquaculture Licences

151. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the disappointment expressed by a company (details supplied) on receipt of the aquaculture and foreshore licences issued to it by his Department; if negotiations will be opened with the company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39139/19]

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/.

As appeals against these decisions may currently be submitted to ALAB and, in view of the independent status of ALAB, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter at this stage.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

152. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an ANC payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39157/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2019 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint Schemes application on the 10th April 2019. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases, remote sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection is currently being processed with the intention of issuing any payments due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise, officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations

153. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a payment for maintaining hedgerows will be included in the next round of CAP negotiations. [39178/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department recognises the importance of hedgerows and woodland habitats and their roles in biodiversity, agricultural management and potential carbon sequestration.

Hedgerows are an important feature of the Irish landscape with a network estimated in excess of 300,000km, providing multiple benefits such as: a distinctive character, important for wildlife, a barrier and shelter for livestock, as well as acting as important carbon stores. As such, they are recognised as valuable landscape features under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and thus are eligible for BPS payments. It is also recognised that such features must be appropriately managed and maintained by appropriate trimming to keep them in optimum condition, both as field boundary features and to help maintain the optimum structure and thickness to encourage bird nesting etc., and best practice prevails where this is done as part of an appropriate cutting rotation.

Their importance is further recognised through the inclusion of a number of hedgerow-specific actions within the GLAS (Agri-environment Scheme under pillar II). In addition, farmers in GLAS can select the action of coppicing of hedges and/or laying of hedges which seek to improve the biodiversity value of escaped or abandoned hedges.

The restriction on cutting hedgerows set out in Section 40 of the Wildlife Act 1976 as amended by the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Heritage Act 2018 falls under the remit of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

As regards the new regulations for the CAP 2021-27 which were launched in June 2018 by Commissioner Hogan, the proposals, as drafted, involve significant changes, including in relation to governance, the distribution of direct payments among farmers and the increasing environmental conditionality attaching to such payments.

Negotiations on the draft proposals are continuing at EU level. While significant progress has been made to date, decisions on key issues have yet to be agreed at EU level.

Grant Aid

154. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there are grants or funding available to suckler and sheep farmers who are struggling to pay bills. [39216/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The beef and sheep sectors are important elements of the Irish economy and I am conscious of the importance that these key sectors plays in rural Ireland.

I am keenly aware that the past year has been very challenging for beef farmers, following a difficult year for farm incomes in 2018 due to weather conditions. There has been a prolonged and exceptional period of depressed prices since autumn 2018, with the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the outcome of Brexit, among other factors, contributing to this market disturbance.

The Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM), which recently closed for applications, will 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 the market volatility and uncertainty. Over 34,500 farmers had applied for BEAM at its closing date of 20 September, representing potential commitments of almost €78 million.

The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is currently the main support specifically targeted for the suckler sector, which provides Irish beef farmers with some €300 million in funding over the current RDP period.

This year, I introduced the exchequer-funded Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP), a €20 million scheme which will provide suckler farmers with valuable data on the weaning efficiency of their animals.

The Deputy will also be aware that my Department has rolled out a range of schemes as part of the €4 billion Rural Development Programme (RDP), 2014 - 2020. In addition to the BDGP, other supports which are available for beef farmers under Pillar II of the CAP include GLAS, ANCs and Knowledge Transfer Groups. Sheep and suckler farmers also benefit from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Greening payments under CAP Pillar I.

In recognising the major challenges faced by the farming sector and the important role that various schemes operated by my Department play in underpinning the viability of many farms, last month I secured agreement from the European Commission that will allow for a higher rate of advance payments under the 2019 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and a number of Rural Development Schemes.

Additionally, I have secured a funding increase to the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme which brings the total budget this year to €250m. On foot of changes to EU Regulations, payments under the ANC Scheme will be made in two instalments this year. The initial instalment of 85% worth €168.5m was paid to almost 79,000 farmers last week, with the balancing payments of 15% commencing in early December. These supports provide a major injection of funds to the suckler and sheep sector at an important time.

As regards the sheep sector, I introduced the Sheep Welfare Scheme in December 2016 in order to provide support for sheep farmers in improving welfare standards in the national sheep flock. Participating farmers are paid €10 per eligible ewe, and some €36m issued to farmers in respect of the first two years of the Scheme.

In addition to supports which are available for sheep farmers under the Rural Development Programme, including GLAS, ANCs and Knowledge Transfer Groups, sheep farmers also benefit from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Greening payments under CAP Pillar I.

I have also made available financial support to sheep farmers for compliance with new sheep EID rules of €100 per farmer and I would like to remind farmers that the closing date for the Sheep EID Tag Subsidy Scheme is 30 September 2019.

The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is a constant and central component of the strategic development of the industry, as evidenced by its placement at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development. Food Wise 2025 prioritises the potential for growth in new and emerging markets, particularly in Asia, Africa, the Americas and the Gulf region.

Following my visit to Japan in June, the Japanese market was opened for Irish sheepmeat and the Deputy will be aware of the recent audit visit by Chinese officials to a number of sheep slaughtering plants as part of the on-going efforts to secure access to the Chinese market for Irish sheepmeat.

I am strongly of the view that the current range of supports available to farmers, together with ensuring market access to as many markets as possible, are appropriate supports for the continued development of the sector.

I will continue to argue for as strong a CAP budget as possible, post-2020. In particular, I am committed to ensuring that beef and sheep farmers continue to receive strong support in the next CAP. My view is that such payments should support and encourage farmers to make the best decisions possible to improve the economic and environmental efficiency, of their farming system.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

155. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if refusal to award partnership status and benefits under the TAMS and DES schemes to a person (details supplied) will be reviewed with a view to reappraisal and approval in view of the extent to which the proposal has been strengthened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39236/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named made an application under the Dairy Equipment Scheme 05 July 2019 and this application has now been transfered to the Registered Farm Partnership following set up with the Department's Registered Farm Partnership Section.

TAMS II is a demand-led scheme and, due to the high increase in application numbers, the ranking and selection system is being applied with a cut off mark of 39.57 in Tranche 14 for

Dairy Equipment. The application from the person named received a mark of 31.13 and will automatically rollover for consideration into Tranche 15.

The applicant also has the right to withdraw this application and submit a revised version for consideration if they so wish.

Beef Industry

156. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount involved if all applications submitted to the beef emergency aid measure scheme were approved; and the value for approved applicants to date. [39264/19]

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.

Applications for BEAM were accepted from 19 August until 20 September. In total 34,517 applications were recieved with a potential payment of €78,192,380.

A further 560 applicants who did not qualify for the support as they had failed to meet the eligibility criteria laid down in the scheme Terms and Conditions submitted an application under appeal in order to have their eligibility for the scheme reviewed.

Arrangements for the processing of these applications are in place in order to ensure the timely issuing of payments under the measure.

Energy Data

157. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of gas the Corrib gas field has produced each month in 2019 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39145/19]

158. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the percentage of the State's energy supply currently provided by gas; and the percentage of this gas which is imported from abroad. [39146/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 157 and 158 together.

The following table sets out the amount of gas the Corrib gas field has produced each month in 2019 and also sets out what percentage Corrib contributes to Ireland's total gas supply.

2019 Year to Date	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	August
Corrib (GWh)	2421	2112	2329	2195	2261	2144	2182	2142
Corrib (as % of Ireland's Gas Supply Mix)	43%	46%	43%	42%	43%	45%	46%	52%

In respect of the percentage of Ireland's energy supply being provided by gas, figures from

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland indicate that in 2018, 30.6% of Ireland's primary energy supply was provided by natural gas. Of the total natural gas supplied in 2018, 38.6% of it was imported.

Broadband Service Provision

159. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the roll-out of broadband to a person (details supplied) in view of the substantial number of houses without a reliable service. [39154/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Every home, farm, school and business in Ireland will have access to high speed broadband – no matter where they are located – following the Government's decision to approve the appointment of a preferred bidder to the National Broadband Plan. Under this plan, Ireland will become one of the first countries in the world to ensure that those in rural areas have the same digital opportunities as those in urban areas.

The premises referenced by the Deputy is located in the AMBER area on the NBP High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP.

The State intervention is the subject of the procurement process to engage a company to build, operate and maintain the NBP State intervention network. In May I brought a recommendation to Government to confer Preferred Bidder status on Granahan McCourt, the remaining bidder in the NBP procurement process and Government agreed to this.

The Government Decision of 7 May 2019 means that it is intended to award the State Intervention contract to the Bidder. This award is subject to contract close. The finalisation of financial closure and legal requirements are progressing towards contract award. Deployment of the NBP State Intervention network will commence shortly after that.

The Bidder has indicated that the NBP State intervention will take an estimated 7 years from the beginning of deployment.

A deployment plan will be made available by the Bidder once the contract is signed. In the first year of roll out, the Bidder will deploy approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) across all counties. It is anticipated that between 7 and 23 BCPs will be deployed in each county. BCPs will provide a community based high speed broadband service, enhancing online participation and allowing for the establishment of digital work hubs in these locations.

The Bidder is aiming to pass 133,000 premises at the end of the second year, with 70-100,000 passed each year thereafter until roll out is completed.

With regard to the Deputy's reference to a nearby commercial deployment of high speed broadband, this relates to eir's deployment of high speed broadband to 300,000 rural premises which has concluded its deployment in that area. eir's deployment is an entirely commercial undertaking, and not part of the planned State Intervention network. Although the deployment is monitored under the terms of a Commitment Agreement signed between the company and my Department, it is not funded by the State and it is not planned, designed or directed by my Department in any capacity.

Decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the roll out and siting of infrastructure to provide high speed broadband services throughout Ireland are undertaken on a commercial basis. I have no statutory role or function in such commercial decisions of private operators, and therefore cannot direct operators regarding infrastructure installation or delivery of services.

Work continues on finalising the contract and in parallel to this work, I am considering the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Communications Committee report which was published recently. I will bring my deliberations of the report to Government in due course.

Waste Disposal

160. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the percentage and estimated weight of recycled waste exported to the UK annually since 2016. [39190/19]

161. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the increased cost of exporting recycled waste to the UK has been estimated in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39191/19]

162. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a verification system is in place to ensure that all recycled goods exported to the UK are processed in the UK rather than a third country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39192/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 160 to 162, inclusive, together.

Statistics and information on shipments of waste to and from Ireland is maintained by the National Transfrontier Shipments Office (NTFSO) as the National Competent Authority for the export, import and transit of waste shipments under the Waste Management (Shipments of Waste) Regulations, 2007. The latest registers compiled by the NTFSO deal with 2018 and are available at http://www.dublincity.ie/main-menu-services-water-waste-and-environment-waste-and-recycling-national-tfs-office/ntfso-waste

The Waste Shipment Regulation, Regulation (EC) No. 1013/2006, on transfrontier shipments of waste, sets out the procedures to be followed when moving waste within, into and out of the EU. The Waste Shipment Regulation already includes those procedures to be followed when sending materials to “third countries”. Under current UK policy, waste is not permitted to travel between the EU and the UK for disposal and this will continue to be the case after Brexit. This is further enhanced by the provisions of the Waste Shipment Regulation which states ‘all exports of waste from the Community destined for disposal shall be prohibited’. Any waste travelling to or from Ireland to the UK for recycling or recovery will not be affected. In practical terms, there will be no change to current procedures or the paperwork used to organise shipments of waste so additional costs do not arise in this context.

Under the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, which the UK will remain party to post Brexit, international shipments of waste are controlled through a process of prior written consent. This allows countries exporting waste to verify that the authorities in destination countries are content to accept the proposed shipment and that the waste can be managed in an environmentally sound manner at its final destination. The OECD decision, which again the UK will remain party to post Brexit, provides the control framework for the transboundary movement of waste between OECD countries for energy recovery and recycling. The fundamental purpose of this system is to ensure that not only is waste moved to another country with that country's advance knowledge, but that wastes from developed countries are not dumped in developing nations.

Rail Services

163. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has sought approval for the purchase of an additional 41 railcar carriages by Iarnród Éireann; if so, the outcome of same; if not, when he will seek approval for the capital expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39101/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy is aware that all public expenditure must comply with the Public Spending Code which sets out the requirements to which sponsoring agencies and sanctioning authorities must adhere, including the requirement that any project with an expected cost of €100 million or more must obtain specific approval from Government.

I can confirm that my Department has now received a business case from the National Transport Authority-Iarnród Éireann in relation to the proposed purchase of 41 InterCity Rail Cars. In line with the Public Spending Code, that business case is currently being considered by my Department and once that consideration is complete I will seek Government's decision in relation to same.

Road Projects Contracts

164. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consultants have been appointed for the provision of technical advisory services to progress the planning and design work on the proposed M4 Maynooth to Leixlip road improvement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39102/19]

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, construction, and improvement/upgrading works for 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

Sports Funding

165. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 592 of 21 May 2019, when the projects to be grant aided under the large-scale sport infrastructure fund will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39105/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund opened for applications on 19th November 2018 and the closing date for receipt of applications was 17th April.

72 applications were received in total. Details of all applications received have been pub-

lished on the Department's website along with the evaluation procedures and guidelines.

Work is underway in assessing applications but in view of the detailed information contained in each application, it will take a number of months to have all of this work complete. Accordingly, as I advised the Deputy last May, I expect that it will be towards the end of this year before any allocations are announced.

Airlines Regulations

166. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of fifth freedom applications he has received from an airline (details supplied); the routes for these applications; the applications he has approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39111/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Ireland - Ethiopia Bilateral Air Services Agreement, signed in 2014, allows for the granting of fifth freedom air traffic rights for airlines of both countries, on a reciprocal basis, and subject to the approval of the respective aeronautical authorities.

With regards to Ethiopian Airlines operating fifth freedom passenger air services, in 2015, my Department approved an Addis Ababa - Dublin - Los Angeles return service, which operated until Q4 2018. In late 2018, my Department approved an Addis Ababa - Madrid - Dublin return service, with Madrid being a technical stop only. This was changed to a fifth freedom service for the summer 2019 season, once all aeronautical authorities granted approval.

My Department has recently received a formal application from Ethiopian Airlines to operate an Addis Ababa - Brussels - Dublin with return service for the winter 2019 season. This would replace the Madrid 5th freedom route. The Department is currently initiating a process of stakeholder engagement and evaluation before determining whether or not to grant an authorisation for this service.

Addis Ababa is a growing access hub on the African continent and the air services operated by Ethiopian Airlines are Irelands only direct flights to that continent. As such, this factors strongly in the evaluation of any application for 5th freedom services.

Ireland traditionally has a liberal aviation policy and remains positively disposed towards the development of competitive air services. In that context, my Department will continue to consider applications for fifth freedom air traffic rights under bilateral air services agreements, on a case-by-case basis.

Rural Transport Services

167. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a payment (details supplied) from the National Transport Authority for delivering complete TCU and bus operations under the LocalLink programme for June 2019 has been delayed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39114/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public transport services nationally. It also has responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme which now operates under the ‘Local Link’ brand.

In light of the NTA’s responsibilities in this matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

168. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when allocations under the sports capital programme will be announced; and the dates they were announced in each of the past three years. [39120/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme (SCP) 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.

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.

Details of all allocations under the SCP are available on the Department’s website. The dates of the general grant announcements (not including appeals) under the SCP over the last three years are as follows:-

- The 2017 SCP grants to local clubs and groups were announced on 30 November 2017 while grants to regional projects were annouced on 22 December 2017

- On 17 January 2019, grants were announced to applications that were previously invalid under the 2017 round of the programme but submitted corrected documentation as part of the 2018 SCP.

- Grants to “equipment only” applications under the 2018 round were announced on 21 May 2019.

Taxi Regulations

169. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his

views on whether there is an urgent need for reform of the taxi system at Dublin Airport and the requirement for taxi drivers to have permits to operate there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39121/19]

170. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeline for the reform of taxi operations at Dublin Airport following the recent DAA consultation process with the stakeholders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39122/19]

171. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he will take to intervene and liberalise the taxi system at Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39123/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 169 to 171, inclusive, together.

As daa has statutory responsibility for the management and operation of Dublin Airport, I have forwarded your question to the Company for direct reply. If the Deputy does not receive a reply within ten working days, please advise my Private Office.

National Development Plan Data

172. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his estimate of the changes in modal share of different traffic categories that will be brought about by planned investments in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 and the climate action plan 2019. [39147/19]

174. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding provided in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 specifically for the improvement of carrying capacity on public transport; and the projected percentage gain in carrying capacity arising from these investments by public transport mode. [39149/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 172 and 174 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the National Development Plan 2018-2027 provides an indicative allocation of €8.6 billion over the period 2018 to 2027 towards the delivery of National Strategic Outcome 4 – Sustainable Mobility, of which the following is allocated toward specific programmes:

- BusConnects - €2.4 billion

- MetroLink - €3 billion

- DART Expansion - €2 billion.

In tandem with the NDP commitments, the Climate Action Plan 2019 includes a range of actions in relation to public transport and active travel. These actions will be implemented in line with the commitments given within the Plan. The commitments in the NDP and the Climate Action Plan will deliver additional public and sustainable transport capacity over the short, medium and longer-term.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport and sustainable transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area and, on a non-statutory basis, has responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport and sustainable transport infrastructure in the regional cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford.

Noting the NTA's responsibilities for implementation of public and sustainable transport infrastructure, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for reply in relation to the specific questions on the planned investments under the NDP and Climate Action Plan. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

National Development Plan Funding

173. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding provided in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 specifically for the greening of public transport. [39148/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The transport sector has a critical role to play in the national mitigation effort and I am acutely aware of the specific challenges we face in transport where fossil fuel use is firmly established. An efficient and low emitting public transport system is a key priority in helping the transport sector contribute towards meeting our climate change goals. As part of a comprehensive programme of work to 'green' our transport system, investment in public and sustainable transport to support modal shift and accommodate growing travel demand has been substantially increased in recent years.

In Project Ireland 2040, €8.6billion has been indicatively allocated over the period 2018 to 2027 towards the delivery of an integrated and sustainable national public transport system. Improving public transport services and infrastructure is central to providing an alternative to private car travel, not only to reduce traffic congestion and carbon emissions, but also to enable the sector to cater for the increasing demands associated with growing population and employment in a greener and more environmentally sustainable way.

This funding will be provided for major programmes and projects, including MetroLink, the DART Expansion programme and BusConnects, with continued investment in bus fleet expansion, Local Link services, maintenance and renewal of heavy rail, as well as the multi-annual urban cycling and walking infrastructure investment of over €110 million underway for our main cities.

Within the umbrella figure of €8.6 billion, it is estimated that *c*. €2 billion will be spent on the delivery of the Dublin BusConnects programme, with a further *c*. €200 million respectively to be spent to deliver Cork and Galway BusConnects. This programme is expected to have a transformative effect on the operation of public bus services, enabling more people to travel by public and sustainable transport than ever before.

My strong commitment to transition our public transport fleet away from fossil fuels towards cleaner technologies was recently reaffirmed in the all-of-Government Climate Action Plan. The first one hundred low-emission buses will enter the urban bus fleet by the end of 2020. By 2023, under the BusConnects Programme, approximately half of the public urban bus fleet in the Greater Dublin Area will be low-emitting, with full conversion by 2030.

A similar comprehensive programme of work is underway to move the commuter rail fleet to low-emitting alternatives. We plan to electrify key heavily-used elements of the rail network by creating a full metropolitan area DART network for the Greater Dublin Area, which is the part of the national rail network that carries over 75% of total rail passengers each year. It will mean high-frequency electrified rail services to Drogheda, Celbridge/Hazelhatch, Maynooth and M3 Parkway, as well as new interchange stations with bus, LUAS and Metro networks. The

NTA and Iarnród Éireann are undertaking a procurement process for the establishment of a 10-year framework agreement for the purchase of the additional lower-emitting rail fleet required for this expansion of the DART network.

Our movement to low-emission alternatives for public transport will be important in helping to promote and normalise the use of alternative fuels and technologies in the transport sector. The measures will mitigate the carbon footprint of the public transport fleet, which currently accounts for less than 5% of Ireland's annual transport sector emissions (or roughly 1% of our overall emissions). By maintaining a focus on expanding the carrying capacity of our public transport over the coming years, we can help address the largest sustainability challenge in the transport sector - which is shifting more journeys from private motoring towards suitable alternatives in public transport and active travel.

Question No. 174 answered with Question No. 172.

Driver Licence Renewals

175. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the requirement for driver licences to be renewed only in their last three months of validity is required by law; and if so, if the rule will be changed in view of the imposition on those who wish to renew their licences in anticipation of working abroad temporarily. [39183/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The requirement for driver licences to be renewed in their past three months of validity is set out in regulation 12(3) of the Road Traffic (Licensing of Drivers) Regulations 2006 (S.I. number 537 of 2006) as amended. There are no proposals to amend this rule at present.

Rail Services Data

176. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of new train carriages ordered annually basis since 2014; the potential increased passenger capacity of each order; the delivery date of each order; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39189/19]

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 heavy rail network and for assessing rolling stock requirements for the network are a matter for Iarnród Éireann in conjunction with the National Transport Authority (NTA).

Noting the responsibility of the agencies, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply on the specific issues raised. Please advise my office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Sport Ireland

177. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will make contact with Sport Ireland to clarify the role of a member of its board (details supplied) regarding a matter and the appropriateness of this involvement in alcohol promotion while having a role in promoting sport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39205/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am informed by Sport Ireland that the involvement of the person mentioned by the Deputy was in a private and personal capacity and that Sport Ireland has no involvement in the matter and no relationship with the corporate entity involved in the matter.

Bus Services

178. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the five categories and sub-classes of bus passenger licences issued by the National Transport Authority. [39240/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the licensing of public bus passenger services under the provisions of the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009.

Accordingly, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Public Transport Initiatives

179. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the actions taken to improve accessibility arrangements for persons with a disability and mobility impairment in accessing heavy rail services; the way in which it is planned to provide 100% accessibility; and the timeframe and budget provided to achieve same. [39241/19]

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.

Under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network.

In light of the NTA’s responsibilities in this matter, I have forwarded your questions to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Public Transport

180. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the penalties in place for public and commercial transport service providers that fail to comply with accessibility requirements in respect of fleet, platforms and in other aspects of accessibility; and the enforcement activity and penalties applied in each of the past five years. [39242/19]

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.

Under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have forwarded your questions to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Early Childhood Care and Education

181. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if provision will be made for a person (details supplied) to be accommodated at preschool as opposed to having to wait until 2021. [39237/19]

184. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if provision will be made for a person (details supplied) to be accommodated at preschool as opposed to having to wait until 2021. [39238/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 181 and 184 together.

From September 2018, all children meeting the minimum age requirement of 2 years and 8 months have been eligible for a full two programme years on the Early Childhood Care and Education programme (ECCE). This measure refined the development introduced in 2017 and increased the eligibility of each registered child on ECCE from an average of 61 weeks, to a potential 76 weeks (two programme years). This delivers fully on a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government that is good for children, families and Early Years providers.

The minimum age was chosen based on national experience and a review of international practice. It also had regard to the regulatory environment for early years care and education in this country and issues such as child development readiness and adult-child ratios. The upper age limit remains the same (i.e. a child is not eligible if they will be 5 years and 6 months before the end of the programme year).

In order for a child to be eligible to be enrolled for free pre-school in September 2020 they must have been born between 1 January 2017 - 31 December 2017, i.e. they must have reached 2 years and 8 months on or before 31 August 2018.

In the example cited by the Deputy, the child will not be able to commence their ECCE in September 2020 as they will not have reached the age of 2 years and 8 months on or before 31st August 2020. However, they will be able to commence ECCE in September 2021, and continue for a further year from September 2022, commencing school in September 2023.

Some parents/guardians may prefer for their child to start school at age 4 rather than 5. These parents/guardians may therefore opt for 1 year of ECCE only. This decision is entirely at the discretion of the parent/s or guardians but it is important to reiterate that two full years of ECCE provision is available to all children.

It should be noted that the National Childcare Scheme will launch on 29th October 2019 and income-assessed subsidies will be available to families with children aged between 24 months and 15 years. This is a means-tested subsidy and is calculated based on a family's circumstances. The rate will vary depending on the level of family income, the child's age and educational stage, and the number of children in the family. Further details of the new scheme are available on the National Childcare Scheme website https://ncs.gov.ie/

Childcare Services Data

182. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of community crèche spaces available in the Dundrum and Ballinteer areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39193/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Each year Pobal conducts research on behalf of my Department to examine a number of factors related to early learning and care and school age childcare services services in Ireland, including the monitoring of capacity. As you are aware, such services are provided in Ireland by private services and not by my Department or the State.

The Early Years Sector Profile report, which was published in November 2018 and relates to the 2017/2018 programme year, provides my Department with valuable information. It indicates that existing childcare provision nationally broadly meets current needs in terms of capacity, whilst recognising that small pockets of under supply exist within this.

The following table shows the capacity (both community and private) for the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown area.

Pobal do not record this data by individual area/district, both areas referred to come under the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Childcare Committee area of responsibility. In addition Pobal do not distinguish between community and private providers when recording capacity.

County	Capacity – all age ranges (enrolled + vacancies)	Vacant places
Dublin – Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	6,581	224

There is a total of 188 childcare services in the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown area, of which 23 (12%) are community services. Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Childcare Committee may be able to provide you or any parent with more assistance if required.

As regards capacity more generally, the 117% increase in investment over the last four years has allowed us double the number of children receiving free or subsidised early learning and care and school age childcare. it has also supported the sector to double the number of places available. I secured €8.86m in capital funding for childcare in 2019 with the ultimate aim of benefiting parents and children through improving our childcare infrastructure and capacity. A particular focus is on expanding service provision for children under three years of age.

Under the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan published in 2018, I ensured that Childcare was identified as one of our nation's strategic priorities. I am delighted that €250 million in additional funding has been committed for the expansion of high quality, early learning and care and school age childcare over the duration of the Plan.

Finally, the draft Childminding Action Plan published recently, and currently out for consultation, sets out Government's draft proposal to further improve access to high quality and affordable childcare through childminders. Childminding is a much valued option for many parents In Ireland and the Plan seeks to support that sector to become registered and hence enable families and themselves to access greater supports, financial and otherwise.

Adoption Data

183. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of households with an adoption declaration that expired without adoption having occurred in each of the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39195/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the subject matter of the Deputy's question relates to an operational matter for the Adoption Authority of Ireland, I have referred the matter to it for a direct reply.

Question No. 184 answered with Question No. 181.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

185. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the 2019 town and village renewal scheme will be announced. [39098/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I launched the 2019 Town and Village Renewal Scheme on 16th April last. Local Authorities were invited to submit up to 12 applications each to my Department for consideration under the scheme. The closing date for receipt of applications was 28th June 2019.

Over 300 applications for funding were received from the Local Authorities.

My officials are currently assessing all of the applications received and the successful applicants will be announced shortly when the assessment process is fully completed.

Voluntary Sector Funding

186. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the current and capital expenditure allocated to each volunteering initiative and scheme administered by his Department in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the amount expended in each such volunteering initiative and scheme annually in tabular form; and the number of persons employed in the sector. [39250/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): My Department provides a cohesive framework of support for the community and voluntary sector. This programme supports 21 Volunteer Centres, 8 Volunteer Information Services in areas which do not currently have a full-time Volunteer Centre, as well as a number of national organisations such as Volunteer Ireland and Young Social Innovators.

Details of the allocations and amounts paid to the Volunteer Centres are set out in the following table. These allocations are paid in two annual tranches.

Not included in the table are two additional once-off grants provided in 2018, as follows: €85,000 for Boardmatch Ireland for the development of an on-line portal and training tool for potential Board members; and €115,000 to Volunteer Ireland for the upgrading of I-VOL and the development of an I-VOL smartphone app.

	2016	2017	2018	2019 to date
Carlow Volunteer Centre	€100,575	€110,600	€110,600	€110,600

	2016	2017	2018	2019 to date
Clare Volunteer Centre	€80,000	€103,000	€103,000	€103,000
Cork Volunteer Bureau	€112,603	€123,800	€123,800	€123,000
Donegal Volunteer Project	€117,986	€129,800	€129,800	€64,900
Dublin City Volunteer Centre	€256,758	€282,400	€282,400	€282,400
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Volunteer Centre	€86,901	€103,000	€103,000	€103,000
Fingal Volunteer Centre	€104,263	€114,700	€114,700	€114,700
Galway Volunteer Centre	€121,148	€133,200	€133,200	€133,200
Kerry Volunteer Bureau	€107,951	€118,800	€118,800	€59,400
Kildare Volunteer Bureau	€110,000	€121,000	€121,000	€121,000
Limerick Volunteer Centre	€133,312	€146,600	€146,600	€73,300
Longford Volunteer Centre	€64,923	€90,000	€95,000	€95,000
Louth Volunteer Centre	€103,730	€114,100	€114,100	€114,100
Mayo Volunteer Bureau	€102,242	€112,500	€112,500	€112,500
Meath Volunteer Centre	€100,552	€110,600	€110,600	€55,300
Monaghan Volunteer Centre	€65,457	€90,000	€95,000	€95,000
Sligo Volunteer Centre	€94,900	€106,400	€106,400	€106,400
South Dublin Volunteer Centre	€155,528	€171,100	€171,100	€171,100
Tipperary Volunteer Centre	€142,169	€156,400	€156,400	€156,400
Westmeath Volunteer Centre	€104,741	€115,200	€115,200	€115,200
Wicklow Volunteer Bureau	€117,096	€128,800	€128,800	€128,800
Other Organisations				
Volunteer Ireland – Core Funding	€410,000	€410,000	€351,800	€351,800

	2016	2017	2018	2019 to date
Volunteer Ireland – Volunteer Information Services	-		€100,000	€100,000
Boardmatch Ireland	€58,520	€58,520	€58,600	€58,600
Young Social Innovators	€210,000	€230,000	€240,000	€240,000
Focus Ireland	€57,210	-	-	-
Chambers Ireland	€30,100	€30,100	€30,100	€10,000
Other Award Ceremonies	-	-	-	€10,100
The Wheel	-	-	-	€5,000
Carmichael Centre	-	-	-	€5,000
Overall Total	€3,148,665	€3,410,620	€3,472,500	€3,218,800

My Department does not collect data on those directly employed in the volunteering sector. However, I can inform the Deputy that there are approximately 29,000 non-profit organisations in Ireland, 9,900 of which are registered charities. Research commissioned by the Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA) and carried out by Indecon in 2018 found that these charities directly employ 189,000 employees, with 100,000 of these directly supported by public funding.

Carer's Allowance Applications

187. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied). [39097/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 19 July 2019.

Means are any income belonging to the carer and their spouse, civil partner, or cohabitant, property, (except their own home) or an asset that could bring in money or provide them with an income, for example occupational pensions, or pensions or benefits from another country.

A person can be considered to be providing full-time care and attention where they are engaged in employment, self-employment or on training courses outside the home for a maximum of 15 hours per week, provided that they can show to the satisfaction of a deciding officer that adequate care has been provided for the care recipient in their absence.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that although a certain level of care was being provided the level involved did not amount to full-time care. It was also determined that the means of the person concerned were not less than the statutory limit and that she was therefore not entitled to CA.

The person concerned was notified on 24 September 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy**.**

Working Family Payment Applications

188. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on a working family payment for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39117/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly in work payment which provides additional financial support to employees on low earnings with children relative to family size.

The person concerned recently resumed paid employment as an employee.

Following receipt of requested employment details from their current employer, WFP has been reinstated to the person concerned with effect to 01 January 2020 (expiry date of current WFP award period). A weekly payment and all arrears owing will issue to their nominated financial account on 26 September 2019.

The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 23 September 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

189. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if referrals to JobPath are expected to continue beyond 2019; the plans in place for the scheme in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39119/19]

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 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.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

190. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the names and addresses of persons in receipt of long-term disability payments are verified on a regular basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39129/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department is committed to ensuring that only those people who are eligible receive welfare and other payments. Our overriding objective is to ensure that that we pay the right people, the right amount, through the right scheme/programme, at the right time. All schemes operated by my Department are subject to ongoing control reviews and continuing eligibility checks which include the verification of our customers name and address.

In line with other Social Welfare schemes, persons in receipt of long-term disability payments are subject to periodic reviews to ensure there is continued entitlement. Carrying our appropriate checks, including verification of name and address, at the new application stage as well as the establishment of continued ongoing entitlement to payments ensures that claims are processed in accordance with the legislation and that customers receive their correct entitlement. These controls are also designed to quality assure the work undertaken by the department and to prevent fraud and error in the schemes administered.

It is also important to note that Social Welfare legislation obliges every claimant or beneficiary to notify the Department of any change in circumstances which may affect their entitlement to that benefit/assistance, this includes change of name and address. The Department informs claimants of this requirement when a payment is awarded.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Code

191. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps she will take to relax the 15 hour rule, which applies to persons in receipt of carer's allowance and-or carer's benefit (details supplied); if same could be increased to 19 hours in line with criteria applicable to such participation in other social welfare schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39153/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit are payments for carers who look after certain people in need of full-time care and attention on a full time basis. As of end of August 2019, there were

82,233 people in receipt of Carer's Allowance and 2,967 beneficiaries of Carer's Benefit. The projected combined expenditure on Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit in 2019 is approximately €878 million.

A primary qualifying condition for the Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit payments 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.

The only social welfare scheme with a criteria of 19 hours is the Working Family Payment (WFP). A threshold of 19 hours (or 38 hours per fortnight) is applied as a minimum for the Working Family Payment. It should be noted that, for WFP purposes, any combination of hours that reaches 38 hours each fortnight is acceptable. A person can combine their weekly hours with their spouse, civil partner or cohabitant's hours to meet the condition. Therefore a carer's working hours can be taken into account for WFP purposes.

In assessing weekly family income for Working Family Payment (WFP) purposes, most weekly social welfare payments are assessed. 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.

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.

Social Welfare Appeals

192. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39156/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 16 September 2019. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. When these papers are received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will then 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.

Back to Education Allowance Data

193. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of participants on the back to education allowance scheme on third level courses of education in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the percentage of those participants who did not complete the course in each year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39199/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Back to Education Allowance Scheme (BTEA) is designed to support second chance education. It enables eligible persons to pursue education and to continue to receive income support for the duration of a course of study. The weekly rate of payment is linked to the persons' underlying payment, for example jobseekers allowance, and all budget increases in these rates are applied to BTEA recipients.

Government has provided almost €62 million for BTEA in 2019. This represents a considerable investment in supporting participants to acquire the necessary education and skills to re-enter the labour market.

The following table details the number of students attending 3rd level, supported with a weekly BTEA allowance for each academic year (as of March each year):

Date	Third Level Participants
2014/15	13,106
2015/16	11,167
2016/17	8,676
2017/18	6,681
2018/19	5,428

My Department does not maintain statistics on the number of BTEA participants that do not complete their course of studies.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

194. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [39208/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Based on the evidence supplied in support of this person's application, his application for disability allowance (DA) was disallowed on the grounds that the medical qualifying condition was not satisfied. The person in question was notified in writing of this decision on 29 July 2019.

They requested a review of the decision by a deciding officer (DO) and submitted additional medical evidence for consideration on 19 August 2019. This additional evidence is currently being reviewed.

Once the review is complete the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Departmental Strategies

195. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the date for the publication of a roadmap for social inclusion; and the reason it has taken so long to finalise and publish the strategy. [39215/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The new social inclusion strategy "Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2019-2025", is being finalised and I expect that the new strategy will be published shortly.

Social Welfare Appeals

196. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39221/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 13 August 2019. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 23 September 2019 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office has also advised me that the documentation associated with this question will be added to this file and brought to the attention of the Appeals Officer dealing with this case.

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.

Working Family Payment Payments

197. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when arrears of a working family payment will be payable in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39233/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Working Family Payment (WFP) is an in-work payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

A review of the Working Family Payment entitlement for the person concerned was carried out recently. A revised decision was issued to the person concerned on 05 September 2019 and Working Family Payment arrears were paid to the person concerned on the 12 September 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

198. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the most appropriate route to proceed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39235/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Disability allowance (DA) is a means tested scheme and means are assessed in line with the provisions specified in the relevant social welfare legislation. In summary, any income, with some exceptions, belonging to the person is assessable as means for DA purposes.

The DA scheme is structured to encourage recipients to avail of opportunities to engage in work where this is appropriate, either in self-employment or in insurable employment. When an individual engages in or is already engaged in work, they can avail of an income disregard of €120 per week, and 50% of earnings between €120 and €350 are also disregarded, for the purpose of the means test. The person concerned would need to submit payslips in order for his entitlement to be reviewed.

People who have been in receipt of DA are entitled to retain their free travel for a period of 5 years after returning to work providing all other qualifying conditions for the free travel scheme are satisfied.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Pension Provisions

199. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding representation rights for former employees of companies that query matters related to their pensions and pension funds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39239/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Scheme trustees have a range of duties and responsibilities under trust law, under the Pensions Act 1990, as amended, and under other relevant legislation. The duties of pension scheme trustees include administering the scheme in accordance with the law and the terms of the trust deed and scheme rules as well as ensuring compliance with the requirements that apply to these schemes. Trustees must act in the best financial interest of all scheme members, whether active, deferred or retired, and must serve all beneficiaries of the scheme impartially. If there is a conflict of interest then a person's duty as a trustee must take precedence over other interests.

Measures were introduced in 2015 to facilitate engagement between the trustees of a pension scheme and groups representing the interests of pensioner and deferred scheme members. Changes to guidance issued by the Pensions Authority require the trustees of a pension scheme to notify groups representing the interest of scheme members of proposals to issue a direction under section 50 of the Pensions Act to restructure scheme benefits. This affords the representative group an opportunity to make a submission to the trustees of a pension scheme in relation to proposals to restructure scheme benefits. These changes facilitate engagement between groups representing the interests of pensioner and deferred scheme members and the trustees of a pension scheme. Groups representing the interests of pensioners and deferred scheme members have a right to appeal a section 50 direction by the Pensions Authority to the High Court on a point of law.

The Pensions Authority is the regulatory body charged with the supervision of pension schemes and has the necessary powers under statute to investigate the conduct of a pension scheme should it become aware that a scheme is not in compliance with the provisions of the Pensions Act. Where a pension scheme member is of the view that the scheme is not in compliance with legislative requirements he or she may make a formal complaint to the Pensions Authority.

Any questions relating to access to the State's industrial relations machinery is a matter for the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

200. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has examined the prospect of a major capital investment to provide affordable housing (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39160/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 was commenced in June 2018 to provide a new statutory basis for affordable dwelling purchase arrangements. Initial regulations in relation to schemes of priorities were made subsequently and further regulations will be put in place over the coming months regarding eligibility and other matters.

In order to support the delivery of discounted homes to buy or rent, this Government has committed €310 million under the Serviced Sites Fund, from 2019 to 2021, to provide infrastructure to support the delivery of some 6,200 homes. To date, funding of €127 million, in support of 35 projects in 13 local authority areas, has been allocated for infrastructure works on sites that will support the delivery of almost 3,200 homes.

The overall cost and the timing of delivery for these projects is contingent upon the completion of design, planning and procurement in the first instance, and local authorities are working to achieve delivery as quickly as possible.

In addition to making discounted homes available for purchase, the Government is also committed to the development of a new 'Cost Rental' sector in Ireland. Under the Cost Rental model, rents cover the cost of delivering, managing, and maintaining the homes only, less both the profit margin seen in the private rental sector and any financial supports provided by the State/local authorities. With the resulting rents significantly below market levels, this would mean that many households on moderate incomes will have access to a more affordable and stable form of rental tenure than would otherwise have been the case.

The rents for Cost Rental units will obviously depend upon the overall cost of each development and will vary according to the site and design specifics. However, my Department has identified several factors that can put downward pressure on costs and make Cost Rental more affordable for tenants – these include low/zero land costs; a design approach with value engineering and long-term maintenance in mind; and capital subvention to individual developments through the Serviced Sites Fund.

More competitive rental levels under the model can also be supported by accessing low-cost, stable finance that is paid back over an extended period of time. This long-term financing has, for example, been accessed via the European Investment Bank (EIB).

A pilot Cost rental project is currently on site in Enniskerry Road, Stepaside, Co. Dublin. It involves a collaboration between the Department, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, the Housing Agency, Approved Housing Bodies, Respond and Túath, and the Housing Finance Agency.

I officially launched the Enniskerry Road development earlier this month. It comprises of 155 homes, a community facility, along with green spaces and car parking (including underground car parking). The 155 homes include 50 cost rental units, all of which will be 2-bedroom apartments. It is anticipated that at €1,200, rents for these units will be significantly below the market rates for the area.

While the cost rental element of this project is relatively small in scale (50 units), it will act as the first example of how this model can work in an Irish context, and will provide us with invaluable lessons when designing a larger-scale system. It will help to shape the contractual model and specifications for future larger-scale projects.

The second Cost Rental pilot project will be delivered on a Dublin City Council-owned site at St. Michael's Estate, Emmet Road, Inchicore. It is estimated that this site can accommodate over 470 homes in a high quality mixed tenure development. The current tenure mix as agreed with the Department will be 70% Cost Rental and 30% Social.

These new schemes are set in the context of significant moderation in the growth in house prices and complement other key Government affordability initiatives. Included among these are the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, under which over 1,000 loans had been drawn down by end June this year, and the Help to Buy Scheme, under which some 14,000 applications have been approved. In addition, the Land Development Agency's initial portfolio of sites will have the potential to deliver 3,000 affordable homes and the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) will support more than 2,300 affordable homes on mainly publicly owned lands, while 5,600 further homes will benefit from a LIHAF-related cost reduction, some of which have already come on stream. Details of all SSF and LIHAF funded infrastructure projects can be found on the www.rebuildingireland.ie website at

https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-approves-10-local-authority-sites-affordable-housing-serviced-sites-fund/.

https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-approves-funding-of-e84m-to-support-delivery-of-1770-affordable-homes-under-the-ssf/.

https://rebuildingireland.ie/lihaf/.

In overall terms, programmes are in place under which some 18,000 affordable homes or homes with a LIHAF-related reduction will be delivered, with 15,000 households already supported under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan or the Help to Buy Scheme.

Local Authority Housing

201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether the lack of adequate local authority housing might be considered an infrastructural deficit, with a view to prioritising capital investment and thereby reducing the number on the local authority housing list or the Rebuilding Ireland programme and having particular regard for the need to make a serious impact on the local authority housing list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39161/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The delivery of new social housing is a priority for the Government as can be seen in the targeted delivery, this year, of 10,000 new social homes through build, acquisition and lease, under the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness. In addition, the Government's commitment to the delivery of social housing homes is evident from the National Development Plan 2018-2027, which provides for the delivery of 112,000 new social homes over the next decade, supported by capital funding of €11.6 billion.

All local authorities are being funded to significantly increase their delivery of social housing under Rebuilding Ireland and a strong social housing construction pipeline is in place for local authorities and approved housing bodies. National social housing delivery targets have been set under Rebuilding Ireland to 2021 and are publicly available on a local authority basis, on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-targets-2019/. Progress against these targets is tracked on a quarterly basis and details are published on my Department's website at https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision.

The social housing delivery targets set for each local authority are in proportion to their waiting lists. Accordingly, as progress is made by each authority against their delivery targets, this will proportionally benefit those on individual waiting lists. The most recently available Summary of Social Housing Assessments relates to 2018 and, at national level, the number of households on the waiting list had decreased by 13,941 (-16.2%), compared to the previous assessment in June 2017, with 29 of the 31 local authorities reporting a decrease.

A strong social housing construction pipeline is in place and a detailed breakdown of this is contained in the Social Housing Construction Status Report which is updated and published on a quarterly basis. The report covering the period up to end Quarter 2 2019 is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-for-q2-2019-2/, providing project details of the social housing construction pipeline in place at that stage for all local authorities.

The Quarter 2 report reflected an increase in the scale of the social housing build programme, with over 1,500 schemes (or phases of schemes) in place, delivering over 22,000 new social housing homes. Of this total, over 7,300 new homes have already been delivered up to Quarter 2 of 2019, while over 6,400 additional new homes were under construction. Over 2,700 further homes were at the final pre-construction stage and the remainder were progressing through the various stages of planning, design and procurement.

The timing, delivery and tenanting of schemes is a matter in the first place for each local authority. I am pleased to see the progress being made on projects, building on what has been already delivered, but I am keen that all local authorities further accelerate their programmes and I have assured them that the necessary funding is available to support their work in this regard.

Local Authority Staff

202. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason local authority outdoor employees who are now retired are not linked to the cohort of outdoor employees in respect of their pension entitlements in view of the fact that they do not receive an increase in their pension when the wages of the local authority employees increase; if same will be reviewed with a view to addressing the anomaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39210/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform determines central public service pensions policy. The most recent position in relation to Public Service Pensions is set out in Circular 19/2019 which is available at the following link:

www.gov.ie/en/circular/b5d982-circular-192019-further-instruction-on-the-pension-increase-policy-i/.

The determination of pension entitlements in individual cases is a matter for each local authority.

Brexit Preparations

203. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a Brexit impact assessment has been undertaken to assess the impact that a no-deal Brexit will have on the construction of residential property and the credit environment for both buyers and developers in a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39262/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Since my Department started its Brexit planning, the question of the impact on the housing sector has been under consideration and has also been the subject of discussions at the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government.

The Government has indicated clearly, on foot of analysis undertaken, that the UK's exit from the European Union will have a detrimental impact on our economy and public finances, whatever form it takes. This may result in a lowering in the demand for housing. However, it is also possible that Brexit may impact net migration to Ireland in the short-term, particularly if a slow-down in the UK economy diverts a proportion of UK based-enterprises and employees as well as EU migrants who might otherwise have migrated to the UK, to Ireland.

Short-term phenomena, both immediately prior to and after a UK withdrawal from the EU, must be distinguished from the likely long-term picture. The National Planning Framework is based on long-term, mid-range demographic and econometric projections over the period to 2040. If a significant trend becomes apparent that is likely to continue in the long-run, national strategy would need to be reviewed accordingly. In the meantime, the Rebuilding Ireland housing delivery target of 25,000 homes per annum by 2020 will be met, with the National Planning Framework, published in 2018, identifying a need for this number to increase to 30-35,000 homes in the years to 2027. Any post-Brexit impact will be closely monitored and factored in accordingly.

In December 2018, the Government published its Contingency Action Plan which outlined the many risks of a no deal scenario, and the work underway at national and EU level to mitigate these risks as much as possible. My Department contributed to the process and identified the areas within its remit. On 9 July the Government published the Brexit Contingency Action Plan Update which reflects the extensive work that has taken place at EU level and on a whole-of-Government basis. The Action Plan emphasises the need for stepped up preparedness measures, by exposed businesses in particular. In that regard, approximately one third of the Irish construction industry's inputs are imported, a significant proportion of which comes from the UK.

The preparedness measures for the construction sector span across a number of Government Department and Offices. These include the Department of Education and Skills (construction workers/professional qualifications), the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation & NSAI (the trade of goods and services) and the Revenue Commissioners (customs, duties and levies) and each is engaging on the issues in their areas.

One of the key areas under my Department's remit is the implementation of the Construction Products Regulation (EU) No 305/2011 (CPR), which sets the rules for placing certain construction products on the EU market and the requirement for a CE Marking. On the date of withdrawal, the UK becomes a third country. This has implications for the certification of certain construction products, for manufacturers, importers, distributors and authorised representatives when placing products on the Irish/EU Market and builders, building professionals and others when specifying and using certain construction products.

Since January 2018, my Department has been engaging with the construction sector in relation to the impact of Brexit for the CPR and the actions that should be taken before the UK leaves the EU. In collaboration with the Revenue Commissioners, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and NSAI, my Department set up a working group with key stakeholders (including the Construction Industry Federation, IBEC/Building Materials Federation, Hardware Association of Ireland, Irish Concrete Federation, the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland, Engineers Ireland and others) to further raise awareness of the business continuity requirements and provide clarity where necessary. The Department is also engaged in presenting at industry events, providing information on its website and disseminating updates to registered users of the Building Control Management System (over 100,000 users).

Issues in relation to the credit environment are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Finance.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

204. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 988 of 11 June 2019, the progress being made in 2019 in delivering the project which received URDF funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39104/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As part of this first tranche of approvals under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, Kildare County Council was allocated URDF support of €400,000 towards its Category B proposal to progress the technical and preparatory element of the Celbridge Southern Relief Road & Second Liffey Crossing.

The advancement and completion of this project is, in the first instance, a matter for Kildare County Council.

Notwithstanding this, I am advised by the Council that they have recently completed the preliminary appraisal stage of the project in accordance with Transport Infrastructure Ireland's Project Management Guidelines 2019. This is the first of eight phases in the overall project. The Council are currently in the process of engaging an Engineering Consultancy to assist with the progression of the scheme through the next four phases of the project.

Construction Industry Register Ireland

205. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the general scheme of the building control (construction industry register Ireland) Bill; if a register (details supplied) has been placed on a statutory footing; if so, if it is a legal requirement for all builders and contractors; if the registration fee of an organisation will be included in the subscription fee of a federation; if not, if it will it be an additional payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39108/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Government has committed to placing the Construction Industry Register Ireland, or CIRI, on a statutory footing. CIRI was established on a voluntary basis in 2014 and over 850 building and contracting entities are currently included on the register.

The Government approved the draft heads of a Bill to place the CIRI on a statutory footing and the Bill was referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government for pre-legislative scrutiny. The Committee's report has since been received and my Department is currently working through the Committee's recommendations. The General Scheme is available on my Department's website at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/legislations/general_scheme_of_the_building_control_construction_industry_register_ireland_bill_2017.pdf.

The main objective of the legislation is to develop and promote a culture of competence, good practice and compliance with Building Regulations within the builder community of the construction sector. The establishment of a robust, mandatory, statutory register of builders and specialist contractors is an essential consumer protection measure giving those who engage a registered builder the assurance that they are dealing with a competent and compliant operator. In addition, it will complement the reforms made through the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 and contribute to the development of an enhanced culture of competence and compliance in the construction sector.

It is proposed that the operation of CIRI will be vested in the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) in the same way that statutory registration of Architects was vested in the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI), pursuant to the Building Control Act 2007. The independence and objectivity of the registration board will be critical to the success of CIRI and a number of provisions are included in the draft Bill to uphold the independence of the registration system, including in relation to fees. My Department is working with the Attorney General's Office with a view to achieving publication of the Bill in early 2020.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

206. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a decision will be made on an appeal or review relating to the refusal by his Department to fund a project applied for under the urban regeneration and development fund (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39140/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) launched last year has an overall provision of €2 billion to 2027. Under the stewardship of DHPLG the URDF has funding available in 2019 to provide initial support for the 88 projects announced last November on foot of the first call for proposals. A first call for proposals from public bodies issued in July 2018

As part of the original application process a rigorous assessment was undertaken and all applicants both successful and unsuccessful received a detailed breakdown of the assessment of their proposal. Where the decision in respect of a proposal was unfavourable, applicants were offered the opportunity to request a review of the Departments decision. Requests for a review were submitted in respect of seven proposals. Those reviews have now been completed and the outcome of that process will be notified to the lead authority in respect of those seven proposals shortly.

Home Loan Scheme

207. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loan applications by local authority; the number of such loans approved by each local authority; and the number of loans drawn down by each local authority to date in 2019, in tabular form. [39158/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses applications for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan on behalf of local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities to approve or refuse applications.

I have asked the Agency to compile figures on the numbers of valid applications that it has assessed and recommended to approve for this year. From 1st January 2019 to the end of August 2019, the Housing Agency had assessed 1,864 applications. Of these, it had recommended 940 for approval.

Local Authority	Applications Underwritten	Recommended to Approve
Carlow County Council	19	8
Cavan County Council	6	2
Clare County Council	31	14
Cork City Council	102	41
Cork County Council	154	68
Donegal County Council	20	4
Dublin City Council	219	127
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	53	26
Fingal County Council	257	164
Galway City Council	40	25
Galway County Council	66	19
Kerry County Council	45	15
Kildare County Council	8	3
Kilkenny County Council	24	11
Laois County Council	42	22
Leitrim County Council	6	2

Local Authority	Applications Underwritten	Recommended to Approve
Limerick City & County Council	51	32
Longford County Council	21	8
Louth County Council	52	14
Mayo County Council	33	13
Meath County Council	121	85
Monaghan County Council	32	12
Offaly County Council	12	5
Roscommon County Council	27	9
Sligo County Council	18	7
South Dublin County Council	149	78
Tipperary County Council	54	31
Waterford City & County Council	58	22
Westmeath County Council	20	11
Wexford County Council	65	31
Wicklow County Council	59	31
Total	1,864	940

My Department publishes information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Information for Quarter 1 2019, including in relation to the number and value of mortgage drawdowns, is available on the Department's website at the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity.