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 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 11 to 37, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 38 and 39 answered orally.

Mental Health Services

40. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the measures being taken to improve mental health services for adults and children with intellectual disabilities and for those with autism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49073/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** The needs of adults and children with intellectual disabilities and autism are generally best met in services such as HSE Primary Care and HSE Disability services.

However, people may have mild, moderate or severe mental health difficulties in addition to their intellectual disability or autism, which can mean their treatment needs are more complex. The HSE service best suited to an individual patient is determined by the level of the intellectual disability and of the mental health difficulty.

The mental health policy, A Vision for Change, recommended the development of mental health intellectual disability (MHID) teams, to provide population-wide coverage and ensure fair and equal access to mental healthcare for people of all ages with an intellectual disability and autism.

In 2017, the HSE’s national mental health service, in co-operation with social care services, initiated a new service improvement programme, to develop both adult and CAMHS MHID services nationally, and to further the operationalisation of A Vision for Change for this speciality.

Increased Government investment in mental health has enabled this person-centred MHID team model of care, to ensure consistent service delivery. This model is being adopted nationally and will augment existing mental health teams, as needed.

Since 2012, the Government has added €315 million to the mental health budget. This is an increase of 45% over this time. This investment has enabled the enhancement of specialist mental health services in areas such as MHID, eating disorders and ADHD.

A Vision for Change also recommended the development of acute beds and day hospital services for MHID treatment. 10 beds have been specifically dedicated for MHID in the new 170-bed state-of-the-art complex in Portrane, which will replace the Central Mental Hospital
in Dundrum. The new facility will modernise the forensic mental health service in Ireland. The complex will also contain a 10 bedroom forensic child and adolescent mental health unit and a 30 bedroom intensive care rehabilitation unit will be co-located on the site.

Investment in acute MHID services will continue to be prioritised and developed as part of the HSE MHID service improvement programme, in conjunction with HSE social care and Section 38 and 39 voluntary agencies. The development of innovative acute treatment services including therapeutic respite for children with intellectual disabilities and significant mental health and behavioural support needs, will also be explored.

*Questions Nos. 41 to 46, inclusive, answered orally.*

**Ambulance Service**

47. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the significant deterioration in ambulance turnaround times in the Midlands Regional Hospital between September 2017 and September 2019. [48781/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Ambulance turnaround times provide the time interval from ambulance arrival time at a hospital, to when the ambulance crew declares readiness to accept another call. The performance target for 2019 is that 95% of all ambulances have an interval of less than 60 minutes from arrival at the ED to when the ambulance crew declares readiness to accept another call. As of September 2019, 87.3% of ambulances at Midlands Regional Hospital Tullamore achieved a turnaround time of 60 minutes of less.

When the emergency care system at Hospitals are under pressure, there is the potential for delay in the transfer of care of patients from ambulance to Emergency Department personnel. An Ambulance Turnaround Framework was developed which sets out the process that alerts management, to increases in emergency demand and activity resulting in the delayed transfer of care of patients and delays in the release of ambulance resources. A management process is then employed to ensure the timely release of all ambulance resources in a safe manner allowing timely service delivery to patients.

My Department has engaged extensively with the HSE this year to identify mitigating actions to bring down trolley numbers and waiting times in the ED in the face of growing demand. The HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November in preparation for the anticipated increase in demand over the winter period and is supported by an additional €26m in winter funding nationally, with specific funding allocated to the Winter Action Teams to support initiatives at local level.

I have been assured that the HSE is committed to ensuring that patient care remains seamless and that patients are clinically handed over in a safe, professional and timely manner; with the safety and dignity of the patient being of paramount importance.

*Question No. 48 answered orally.*

**Emergency Departments Waiting Times**

49. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the reason to date in 2019 more than 850 persons over 75 years of age have endured emergency department wait times of more than 24 hours at Naas General Hospital. [48777/19]
Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The hospital system is currently operating at close to full capacity. The number of patients attending Emergency Departments continues to increase year on year. HSE figures show that for the first ten months of 2019, the number of patients attending Naas Hospital decreased by 1%, however, the number of attendances of patients over the age of 75 increased by 6% compared to the same period in 2018. Similarly, admissions in Naas Hospital decreased by 2.1% while admissions of patients over the age of 75 increased by 3.5% compared to the same period last year. This reflects increasing demand for unscheduled care, especially by patients in the 75 years and over age group. The HSE has indicated that people in this age cohort attending hospital emergency departments are more likely to be admitted and generally stay twice as long as the general population.

The HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November in preparation for the anticipated increase in demand over the winter period. The Government has allocated an additional 26m to fund the Plan. Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals. Each Action Team has set out a range of initiatives it will undertake within its area to implement the Plan.

I am confident that with the immediate measures being undertaken under the Winter Plan and the strategic approach undertaken by the Government under Sláintecare that progress will be made in addressing the difficulties in the emergency departments.

Question No. 50 answered orally.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

51. Deputy Darragh O’Brien asked the Minister for Health when progress will be made on reducing waiting times in north Dublin for occupational therapy assessments especially for those under 18 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48881/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that the current time to access Occupational Therapy services in North Dublin, and indeed nationally, can be too long and that this may cause anxiety for parents and patients who are seeking to obtain services.

The fact that people are waiting too long to access therapy services such as OT is a reflection of the historical under-investment in the primary and community sector in Ireland. The Government is committed to addressing this deficit and transforming how we deliver health services by implementing the vision set out in the Sláintecare Action Plan. I am determined that we develop a more comprehensive and integrated community and primary care system and shift the focus of our system so that the majority of healthcare is provided, where possible, either at home or close to home in the community.

The Government’s commitment to reform can be seen in Budget 2020 with the allocation of €10m to provide for the enhancement of Community Services, building to a full-year allocation of €60m in 2021. This significant investment by Government will enable the recruitment of up to 1,000 therapists, nurses and other frontline staff. North Dublin, like the rest of the country, will benefit from this investment which will support the development of a more integrated and comprehensive primary and community care system.

Turning specifically to the situation in North Dublin, I understand that the recruitment of six OTs has been approved by the local Head of Service for Primary Care to fill vacancies that
currently exist. Derogation from temporary employment controls has been sought and once received all vacant posts will be offered out as appropriate and without delay. It is expected that waiting time will be reduced significantly once extra resources are in place.

I also understand that North Dublin, along with other CHOs, are implementing local action plans to address waiting times and that these include a focus on long waiters, cross cover arrangements and maximisation of the supports available from administrative staff and OT Assistants.

*Question No. 52 answered orally.*

**Emergency Departments Waiting Times**

53. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the reason to date in 2019 more than 1,530 persons over 75 years of age have endured emergency department wait times of more than 24 hours at University Hospital Galway. [48773/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The hospital system is currently operating at close to full capacity. The number of patients attending emergency departments continues to increase year on year. HSE figures show that for the first ten months of 2019, the number of patients attending Galway University Hospital increased by 4.1% and the number of attendances of patients over the age of 75 increased by 7.9% compared to the same period in 2018. This reflects increasing demand for unscheduled care, especially by patients in the 75 years and over age group.

There are a number of factors which may affect the waiting times for older patients. In particular, people in the older age category presenting to EDs are more likely to have complex needs and be admitted than the population generally.

In preparation for the anticipated increase in demand over the winter period the HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November. Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals. Each Action Team has set out a range of initiatives it will undertake within its area to implement the Plan.

There are challenges facing the emergency departments in our hospitals. The Government is tackling these issues through providing funding of €26m for the immediate measures being undertaken in the Winter Plan this year, through the Sláintecare Strategy and the investment being made in accordance Project Ireland 2040. These measures are addressing the issues of access to healthcare and capacity in the system.

I am confident that together with the more immediate measures being undertaken under the Winter Plan and the strategic approach undertaken by the Government under Sláintecare and Project Ireland that progress will be made in addressing the difficulties in the emergency departments.

**Primary Care Centres Provision**

54. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed new primary care centres in Arklow and Rathdrum, County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the
344. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health the status of the primary care centre for Rathdrum, County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49115/19]

348. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health the status of the development of the Arklow primary care centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49145/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 54, 344 and 348 together.

I am pleased to be able to inform the Deputy that the development of the Primary Care Centres in Arklow and Rathdrum is being progressed.

I know that there has been some concern around the development of Arklow Primary Care Centre given the decision by the original preferred bidder not to proceed with the project. However, I am pleased to say that an alternative developer has been identified, and a Letter of Intent to develop a centre via operational lease was issued in July 2019. I understand that a review of the existing building design and planning conditions has been undertaken and that a new planning application to amend the existing grant of planning has been submitted.

The Rathdrum Primary Care Centre is further advanced and I understand that the HSE is in contract discussions with the developer.

Unfortunately, it is not possible at this stage to provide a definitive operational date for the two centres. Nonetheless, delivering these projects is representative of this Government’s support for the development of the primary care sector. There are now 128 Primary Care Centres in operation with a further 20 centres expected to open by the end of 2020.

These modern, well-equipped and accessible premises support the development of primary care services in line with the vision of Sláintecare.

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55. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the impact of the waiting list for home help on delayed discharges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48896/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** Homecare is an increasingly important part of the supports enabling older people to remain in their own homes and communities for as long as possible and for facilitating their discharge from acute hospitals. While we have seen significant investment in recent years in home support there is unmet need and demand is growing for the service. Nationally, at the end of August 7,255 people had been assessed and were waiting for either new or additional home support services.

The HSE has assured the Department that those people who are on a waiting list are reviewed, as funding becomes available, to ensure that individual cases continue to be dealt with on a priority basis within the available resources and as determined by the local front line staff who know and understand the clients’ needs, and who undertake regular reviews of those care needs to ensure that the services being provided remain appropriate. In addition, people being discharged from acute hospitals, who are in a position to return home with supports, are prioritised.

We have made improved access to home support services a priority and an additional investment of €52 million brings the total funding for home supports to approximately €487 million
in 2020. Next year the HSE aims to deliver over 19.2 million hours of home support, representing a substantial increase of 1 million hours more than this year’s target.

Delayed Transfers of Care is a complex and challenging issue and a wide range of factors may contribute to this, including process and service-related matters. The Report of the Independent Expert Review of Delayed Discharges, published last year, highlights the complexities involved. The latest data available (19th November) indicates that nationally there were 29 people in hospital classified as delayed and waiting funding for a home support package. This represents about 4% of all cases. Nevertheless, home support along with other community measures are a long established and recognised feature of support timely egress from our acute hospitals.

The importance of these supports is further recognised in the HSE’s recently published winter plan. The Winter Plan provides additional resources to facilitate a reduction in Delayed Transfers of Care by supporting the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, Transitional Care and Home Supports. €2 million of this funding has been allocated for the provision of an additional 1,110 home support packages with 600 of these allocated across the CHO’s to deal specifically with clients assessed and waiting for home supports.

Following the 2018 publication of the Independent Expert Review of Delayed Discharges, an implementation group has been established by the HSE to progress the recommendations. I have also established a Cross Divisional Oversight Group within the Department of Health to oversee the HSE’s implementation of the recommendations. Work is progressing in this regard.

*Question No. 56 answered orally.*

**Emergency Departments Waiting Times**

57. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health the reason to date in 2019 over 2,300 people over 75 years of age have endured emergency department wait times of more than 24 hours in the two hospitals in north Dublin. [48767/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The hospital system is currently operating at close to full capacity. The number of patients attending Emergency Departments continues to increase year on year. HSE figures show that for the first ten months of 2019, the number of patients attending Beaumont Hospital increased by 0.9% and the number of attendances of patients over the age of 75 increased by 7.1% compared to the same period in 2018. However it should also be highlighted that the number of patients recorded as waiting on trolleys in Beaumont Hospital decreased by 1.6% this year compared to 2018 and have remained consistently low throughout 2019.

In relation to the Mater University hospital, HSE figures show that for the first ten months of 2019, the number of patients attending the Hospital increased by 2.5%, however, the number of attendances of patients over the age of 75 decreased by 1.6% compared to the same period in 2018.

The figures for both hospitals show the continued high level of demand for services at emergency departments.

The HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November in preparation for the anticipated increase in demand over the winter period. The Government has provided additional funding of €26m to support the implementation of the Plan. Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital
Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals. Each Action Team has set out a range of initiatives it will undertake within its area to implement the Plan.

I acknowledge the challenges that are facing the emergency departments in our hospitals. In addition to the immediate measures being undertaken in the Winter Plan the Government through the Sláintecare Strategy is addressing the issues of access to healthcare. The Sláintecare Action Plan for 2019 has a specific workstream on access and waiting lists. The Government is also increasing investment in health infrastructure and capacity in the system in line with Project Ireland 2040.

I am confident that together with the more immediate measures being undertaken under the Winter Plan and the strategic approach undertaken by the Government under Sláintecare that progress will be made in addressing the difficulties in the emergency departments.

**Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data**

58. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for a CAMHS appointment at 31 October 2019 or the latest date available in north County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48894/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** Enhancement of the specialist CAMHS service, including improved access and reducing waiting lists, remains a priority for both the Government and the HSE.

Cases assessed by professionals as urgent are seen as a matter of priority. There are now 70 CAMHS teams nationally, compared to 49 in 2008, and 3 Paediatric Liaison Teams. All aspects of CAMHS nationally are being improved by the HSE under its annual Service Plans. This includes better out-of-hours and 7/7 day cover, progression of Day Hospital care, developing specialist teams such as Eating Disorders, and improved Prevention and Early Intervention services.

HSE Mental Health services will receive €1.026 billion in funding in 2020, an increase of €315m since 2012.

The national CAMHS waiting list has reduced by around 500 so far this year, from around 2,500 in December 2018 to around 2,000 in August 2019.

There were 63 children awaiting an appointment for the Balbriggan and Swords CAMHS teams at the end of October last, of which, 31 (or just under half) are waiting up to 3 months and 50 (or 80%) are waiting up to 6 months with the remainder waiting between 6 and 12 months.

CAMHS in North County Dublin, which includes Balbriggan and Swords, serves one of the fastest growing catchment areas in Ireland, including a significant young population. Based on Census data, Balbriggan CAMHS serves an under 18 population of nearly 18,000 and Swords CAMHS serves an under 18 population of around 25,000.

Both North County Dublin CAMHS teams have reported higher volumes of referrals this year, of up to 10% to the end of October last along with increased levels of more acute presentations. Both teams have had staffing challenges during this year. This has been addressed by the HSE with posts being replaced and filled across Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy, Psychology, Social Work and Administration support.
This will greatly assist the teams in reducing waiting lists in a defined, coordinated and sustainable manner. The CAMHS service will continue to strive to reduce waiting lists across all of North Dublin.

Ambulance Service

59. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the significant deterioration in ambulance turnaround times in Mayo University Hospital between September 2017 and September 2019. [48779/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Ambulance turnaround times provide the time interval from ambulance arrival time at a hospital, to when the ambulance crew declares readiness to accept another call. The performance target for 2019 is that 95% of all ambulances have an interval of less than 60 minutes from arrival at the ED to when the ambulance crew declares readiness to accept another call. As of September 2019, 77.6% of ambulances at Mayo University Hospital achieved a turnaround time of 60 minutes of less.

When the emergency care system at Hospitals are under pressure, there is the potential for delay in the transfer of care of patients from ambulance to Emergency Department personnel. An Ambulance Turnaround Framework was developed which sets out the process that alerts management, to increases in emergency demand and activity resulting in the delayed transfer of care of patients and delays in the release of ambulance resources. A management process is then employed to ensure the timely release of all ambulance resources in a safe manner allowing timely service delivery to patients.

My Department has engaged extensively with the HSE this year to identify mitigating actions to bring down trolley numbers and waiting times in the ED in the face of growing demand. The HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November in preparation for the anticipated increase in demand over the winter period and is supported by an additional €26m in winter funding nationally, with specific funding allocated to the Winter Action Teams to support initiatives at local level.

I have been assured that the HSE is committed to ensuring that patient care remains seamless and that patients are clinically handed over in a safe, professional and timely manner; with the safety and dignity of the patient being of paramount importance.

Vaccination Programme

60. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on the safety of the HPV vaccine (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48571/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As Minister for Health I have no responsibility for vaccine trials.

The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is responsible for monitoring the safety and quality of all medicines including vaccines that are licensed in Ireland. All HPV vaccines available in the EU are authorised by the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

The HPRA has advised that the specific HPV vaccine trial has not been identified in this query. This response is therefore only made in relation to the HPV vaccine that been chosen by the HSE for use in current HPV schools immunisation programme, which is Gardasil 9. The EMA website provides information on the authorisation of Gardasil 9 including information for
The safety of HPV vaccines have been studied for over 13 years. Over 1 million people have been studied during clinical trials since the vaccine was licensed in 2006. No country has raised concerns about the safety of the HPV vaccine. There is no scientific evidence in Ireland or in any other country that the HPV vaccine causes any long-term medical condition.

All international bodies have continually reported that the vaccines used in Ireland have no long-term side effects. Most people have no problems after the vaccine. The HPV vaccine has many of the same, mild side effects as other vaccines. Some people have an area of soreness, swelling and redness in their arm where the injection was given. This is nothing to worry about as this usually passes after a day or two. Some people may get a headache, feel sick in their tummy or have a slight temperature. If this happens, paracetamol or ibuprofen will help. Occasionally, some people may feel unwell and faint after getting their injection. To prevent this, they should sit down and rest for 15 minutes after the vaccination. Severe allergic reactions to vaccines are very rare. School vaccination teams are trained to treat any severe allergic reaction. If you are worried, you should talk to your GP or a member of the school vaccination team.

All medicines, including vaccines are subject to on-going review and evaluation of all available data from a range of sources, including systematic scientific literature review, to consider any impact that their data may have on the overall assessment of the benefits and risks of a medicinal product.

The HPRA and the EMA continually monitor adverse events to vaccination. The HPRA operates a national adverse reaction reporting system, which members of the public and healthcare professionals are encouraged to submit any suspected adverse reactions to. All Reports received by the HPRA are routinely transmitted to the EMA’s adverse reaction database for inclusion in global signal detection and monitoring activities.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

61. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health the reason to date in 2019 more than 1,100 persons over 75 years of age have endured emergency department wait times of more than 24 hours at St. Vincent’s University Hospital. [48774/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The number of patients attending emergency departments across the hospital system continues to increase annually, with the result that the system is currently operating at close to full capacity. HSE figures show that for the first ten months of 2019, the number of patients attending St. Vincent’s University Hospital increased by 4.9% and the number of attendances of patients over the age of 75 increased by 3.5% compared to the same period in 2018. This reflects increasing demand for unscheduled care, especially by patients in the 75 years and over age group. Similarly, admissions in St. Vincent’s University Hospital increased by 5.8% and admissions of patients over the age of 75 increased by 1.3% compared to the same period last year.

There are a number of factors which may affect the waiting times for older patients. In particular, people in the older age category presenting to EDs are more likely to have complex needs and be admitted then the population generally.

The HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November in preparation for the anticipated increase in demand over the winter period. I have allocated an additional €26m to fund the implementation of the Plan. Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community
Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals. Each Action Team has set out a range of initiatives it will undertake within its area to implement the Plan.

I am confident that together with the more immediate measures being undertaken under the Winter Plan and the strategic approach undertaken by the Government under Sláintecare and Project Ireland that progress will be made in addressing the difficulties in the emergency departments.

Emergency Departments Services

62. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which he continues to make progress in addressing the issue of overcrowding at accident and emergency departments in hospitals nationwide; the extent to which the issues affecting the situation have been identified and addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48819/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I acknowledge the challenges facing the emergency departments in our hospitals.

According to HSE, there was a 2.7% increase in ED attendances nationally this year up to the end of October 2019 compared to the same period last year. The number of attendances for patients in the over 75 age group also increased by 3.3% nationally. My Department has engaged extensively with the HSE this year to identify mitigating actions to bring down trolley numbers and waiting times in the ED in the face of growing demand.

The HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November in preparation for the anticipated increase in demand over the winter period. The Government allocated an additional €26m to fund the implementation of the Plan. Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals.

Each Action Team has set out a range of initiatives it will undertake within its area to implement the Plan. Specific funding has been allocated to support initiatives at local level. These include:

- Additional medical, nursing, therapies support, pharmacy and lab staff to improve patient experience time, improve senior clinical decision making, reduce length of stay, and facilitate weekend discharges;

- Additional Aids and Appliances to facilitate timely discharge;

- Additional home support hours to facilitate early hospital to community transfers;

- Communications to facilitate hospital avoidance and public health awareness;

- Implementing Frail Intervention Therapy Teams for admission avoidance and reduced admissions of patients over-75;

- Additional Flu testing kits to improve Patient Experience Time.
Steady progress is also being made in increasing bed capacity with the number of available inpatient beds expected to increase to above 11,000 following the investment planned in the National Service Plan 2019.

In addition to the immediate measures being undertaken in the Winter Plan the Government through the Sláintecare Strategy is addressing the issues of access to healthcare. The Sláintecare Action Plan for 2019 has a specific workstream on access and waiting lists. The Government is also increasing investment in health infrastructure and capacity in the system in line with Project Ireland 2040.

I am confident that together with the more immediate measures being undertaken under the Winter Plan and the strategic approach undertaken by the Government under Sláintecare that progress will be made in addressing the difficulties in the emergency departments.

**Hospital Facilities**

63. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the status of progress on a new endoscopy unit for Naas General Hospital; the next steps in the delivery of a new stand alone mental health unit to replace Lakeview on the site of the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48865/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A new endoscopy unit for Naas General Hospital is included for progression in the 2019 Capital Plan. An extension to planning permission was sought and has been extended for a further 5 years to December 2024. It is proposed to tender the works in 2020, with construction to commence early 2021 and to complete in late 2022.

The original development proposal for a new standalone mental health unit to replace Lakeview comprised the provision of an 8-bed intensive care unit at the existing 30 bed Lakeview Mental Health unit on the grounds of Naas General Hospital.

Following a review of the proposal, a significant expansion of the project scope is now proposed, with an associated increase in project value. This has meant the original design team’s engagement had to be terminated and a new procurement process undertaken.

The HSE has now appointed a new design team for this much expanded project.

The revised proposal is expected to deliver 50 bed spaces including a 9 bed intensive care area and significantly upgraded infrastructure. The timeframe for the completion of the new Acute Mental Health Unit project will be informed by the work of the project team and this work will be undertaken in conjunction with Naas General Hospital and the HSE.

It is important to recognise that all capital development proposals must progress through a number of approval stages, in line with the Public Spending Code, including detailed appraisal, planning, design and procurement before a firm timeline or funding requirement can be established. The final decision to proceed with the construction of a project cannot be made until the tender process has been completed and the costings reviewed to ensure that the proposal delivers value for money and remains affordable, and that sufficient funding is available to fund the project to completion, including equipping and commissioning costs.

**Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists**
64. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the measures being taken to improve waiting times for speech and language assessments in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48878/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Each child that presents to the Health Service Executive’s (HSE) Speech and Language Therapy Service has an initial assessment to determine the individuals presenting need and requirements for therapy. The therapist in conjunction with the parents or carer will determine the severity of the child’s difficulties and prioritize for therapy accordingly.

Many children can have their speech and language needs adequately met through uni-disciplinary Speech and Language therapy services in Primary Care. Children with more complex needs requiring multi-disciplinary intervention, are referred to specialist disability services.

I have been advised by the HSE that the following measures are in place to reduce waiting times to access Speech and Language Therapy services in County Meath.

A cross divisional monthly Speech and Language referral forum is in operation. Between August and November 2019 this resulted in 99 children being moved from the Disability waiting list, to have their therapy service provided in Primary Care, where the waiting list is less lengthy. This ensures that children with complex needs continue to receive specialist Disability services but in a more timely manner, whilst those who can have their needs met in Primary Care benefit from the shorter waiting times.

Two vacant Speech and Language therapy posts were filled with both new staff starting work in November. The HSE expect that to see an improvement in waiting times in early 2020 following the induction of these two therapists. The HSE also allocated 1 WTE new Speech and Language Therapy post to County Meath under Progressing Disability for Children and Young People Programme and this post has been assigned to the Trim Network where waiting times are longest.

The Speech and Language therapy services in County Meath monitor all staff’s statistics on a monthly basis (based on agreed caseloads), and are subject to review and supervision by the Speech and Language Therapy Manager. In addition the Speech and Language Therapy services in County Meath regularly review and update service models to ensure adherence to best, evidence-based practice.

The service have also implemented ‘Parent Power’, a programme of workshops that run regularly throughout the year to support parents in managing their child’s communication at home whilst awaiting one to one Speech and Language Therapy. These workshops were designed based on solution focused interviews with a cohort of parents awaiting services, to ensure they would meet the needs of families in this area.

I acknowledge that timely access to Speech and language Therapy is vital for every child’s development and I understand how delays in accessing assessment and intervention are a source of great concern for both children and their families. While not addressing all needs, the filling of the new post and the two vacant posts along with the other initiatives I have outlined will have a significant positive impact in reducing waiting times for Speech and Language Therapy services in County Meath over the course of the next year.

**Genetically Modified Organisms**

65. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the future production and regula-
Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Responsibility for the deliberate release, use of feed and food and the labelling and traceability of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is divided between a number of Departments and their Agencies. Generally, responsibility for issues relating to the cultivation of GM crops rests with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE), while the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) is responsible for GM animal feed and the coexistence of authorised GM crops alongside non-GM crops. The Department of Health’s remit relates to the safety of GM food.

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) has responsibility for policy matters in relation to EU Directives on the deliberate release of GMOs into the environment and the contained use of GMOs. It regulates the cultivation and field trials, of any EU-authorised GM crops. The Environmental Protection Agency advises DCCAE and is responsible for the implementation of Government policy in this area. In 2018, DCCAE obtained Cabinet approval to prohibit or restrict the cultivation of GM crops in Ireland, enabling Ireland to opt out of the cultivation of GMO crops approved for cultivation elsewhere in the EU.

DAFM is responsible for GM animal feeds, the coexistence of authorised GM crops alongside non-GM crops and the seed certification related to GM products. DAFM’s sole responsibility in relation to the deliberate release of GM crops relates to the implementation of coexistence measures in the event that commercial GM crops are authorised for cultivation alongside conventional crops. DAFM has advised that there is only one GM crop authorised for cultivation in the EU, namely GM maize ‘MON 810’, which is mainly grown in Spain for animal feed. MON 810 is not suited for cultivation in Ireland.

The Department of Health’s remit in this area relates to policy on the safety of food. The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) provides scientific and technical advice; it is the Competent Authority responsible for the implementation of GM food legislation in Ireland. Under Regulation (EC) No. 1829/2003, only EU-authorised GM foods may be placed on the market in Ireland. Stringent traceability and labelling rules must be observed for the marketing of these foods. The FSAI coordinates annual checks to ensure that any authorised GM foods present on the Irish market are labelled as required. There is no indication at present that EU legislation related to GM foods will change in the immediate future.

GM crops, food and feed are subject to a comprehensive risk assessment by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and subsequent regulatory votes by Member States before they are authorised for use in the EU. The risk assessment is designed to ensure GM crops and GM food and feed do not pose a risk to human health, animal health and the environment.

HSE Staff Recruitment

66. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 82 of 10 October 2019, the reason sanction has not been given by the HSE in respect of the 48 vacant posts in which interviews have been held, posts offered and accepted and for which the sanction remains outstanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48891/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised by the HSE that while there is no national recruitment embargo or moratorium in place, there is a priority requirement for all HSE services to maintain, or get to, an affordable staffing level that is sustainable in 2019 and 2020, while also prioritising the delivery of safe services.
In light of this, the HSE advise that they have introduced control measures relating to staffing and recruitment to ensure that they live within the available resources provided to them. This does mean that in some Hospital Groups and Community Healthcare Organisations non-critical replacement posts will be paused.

The HSE report that there is on-going capacity for recruitment of newly funded posts and replacement of critical clinical posts within frontline services throughout this period.

With regard to these posts specifically, I am advised by Community Healthcare West that once derogation is received from the appropriate National Directors Office, the HSE Recruitment Office will be instructed immediately to proceed with the appointments.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

67. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the status of reforms of the nursing homes support scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48618/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** The proposed policy change to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), to cap contributions based on farm and business assets at 3 years where a family successor commits to working the productive asset, has been approved by Government. The Department developed draft Heads of Bill while considering a number of complex ancillary policy and operational matters which may need to be addressed in the proposed legislation.

The General Scheme of Bill for the NHSS was approved by Government on 11 June 2019 and subsequently published. The changes to the Scheme will come into effect as soon as the legislative process is successfully complete. The Department will progress this as quickly as possible, however, the timeline for completion of the legislation will also depend on how it passes through the Houses. The General Scheme was sent to the relevant Joint Committee and the Department participated in pre-legislative scrutiny on 13 November 2019. The Department looks forward to the report of the Committee following from this engagement. In the meantime, engagements with the Office of the Attorney General will continue with a view to progressing the legislative development process.

It is intended that this proposed policy change, the 3 year cap, will be extended to eligible existing participants in long term residential care so that they are not disadvantaged, but that there would be no retrospective recoupment of contributions for those who have paid contributions over and above the 3 year period.

Disease Management

68. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health his views on the length of time on average it is taking to diagnose endometriosis and the impact this has on women suffering from the disease including their mental, emotional and physical health and ultimately fertility; his further views on introducing a comprehensive endometriosis education programme for general practitioners and other medical professionals including referring patients to gynaecologists at the earliest opportunity to improve diagnosis; his plans to put in place supports for women with the disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48737/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am advised that the majority of cases of endometriosis are within the scope of a general gynaecologist to see, diagnose and treat. A GP
referral to a gynaecologist is the standard pathway of care for the management of endometriosis in Ireland. This is similar to the pathway in place for the management of other gynaecological conditions.

Information provided by the HSE indicates that endometriosis is a difficult condition to diagnose and treat because of the variation of presentations, impacting the physical and mental wellbeing of patients at varying levels. Treatment may include pain medications, hormone treatment and surgical interventions. The time to diagnose endometriosis varies by patient due to its varying and ambiguous symptom presentation. The HSE’s National Women & Infants Health Programme has advised that the best way to help the majority of patients with endometriosis is to improve access to gynaecology services.

As such, I am advised that the Programme has developed a plan to increase the capacity and reduce waiting times for women awaiting general gynaecology, which includes patients with endometriosis. The plan aims to re-orient general gynaecology service to an ambulatory (see and treat) model rather than the traditional outpatient referral model. The HSE anticipates that funding available to the Programme in 2020 will support the establishment of three ambulatory services and future sites are envisaged.

The Programme has advised that the provision of training in the management and diagnosis of endometriosis forms an integral part of the specialist medical training programme provided by the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. In addition, some clinicians may have developed a subspecialty interest in the disease and may treat patients who have a more complex form of the disease.

Disability Services Provision

69. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to address increased demand for disability services in County Kildare due to the growing population and the growing number of complex cases requiring residential care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48866/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports to 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.

Significant resources have been invested by the health sector in disability services over the past number of years. In 2019, over €1.9 billion was allocated to the HSE’s Disability Service Programme. This has funded a wide range of services and supports for people with disabilities, including over 8,300 residential places across the country.

The allocation for disability services will rise to over €2 billion in 2020, as compared to €1.9 billion this year. The additional €133.7 million represents an increase of 7% on the 2019 Disability Services Budget. €25 million in additional funding has been provided for new service developments in 2020 with a specific focus on those with more complex needs, including:

- €5 million for emergency protocols to support people with disabilities who have high support needs.
- €5 million for intensive support packages for children and young people in response to the changing needs of service users and their families.
- €2m to support implementation of the Autism Plan, which includes a range of measures to improve services for people with Autism and their families.

In terms of CHO Area 7 specifically, every effort is being made to support families to keep their family member safe at home, within available resources. I am advised by the HSE that 13 new therapy posts were allocated to the region in 2019 to help address waiting lists for Assessment of Need and therapy interventions for children with complex disabilities. All of these posts are now filled. It is anticipated that further additional funding will be provided to the region in 2020 to support children with behaviours of concern to stay in their own homes and to facilitate the unblocking of 1 respite bed.

Hospital Staff

70. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health when he is planning for safe staffing levels in hospitals to be reached for nurses, midwives and doctors including ceasing of the new entrant pay disparity for consultants; the timeline for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48855/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I must clarify at the outset that the HSE’s overriding requirement is to prioritise the delivery of safe services, within available resources, and frontline staffing numbers continue to grow in support of this priority.

Over the past five years the numbers of whole-time equivalent consultants, nurses and midwives working in the public health sector have increased significantly. In the consultant category there has been an increase of over 600 whole time equivalents in the past five years, while for nurses and midwives the figure is over 3,500.

This incremental growth in frontline staffing numbers is ongoing, and in the 12-month period to end October 2019, there continued to be increases with circa 150 additional consultants and 650 extra nurses and midwives.

Regarding consultants, the recommendations of the 2017 Sláintecare Report re-orientates the Irish health system towards one that prioritises fair and equal access to consultant led care for all patients. My Department recently published the de Buitléir report, following the establishment of a Group to examine how to give effect to the Sláintecare recommendation on the removal of private practice from the public hospital system. The recommendations of this report provide the pathway to deliver on the Sláintecare vision of a consultant delivered model of care and addressing issues with regard to safe staffing levels.

The Government is committed to the implementation of Sláintecare. In this regard, my Department, together with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the HSE, recently met with both the IMO and the IHCA, and will be seeking to continue to engage with both bodies on Sláintecare and the de Buitléir report. As the Taoiseach outlined recently to the House, progress is being made between my Department, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of An Taoiseach on the approach to implement the de Buitléir recommendations. It is through the implementation of this major reform that issues in relation to Consultant recruitment, retention, pay and other conditions will be addressed.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

71. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the estimated costs of the
external consultant reviews of major infrastructural projects such as the national children’s hospital in 2019 and 2020. [45801/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to the new children’s hospital, the Department of Health incurred no cost for external consultant reviews in 2019, and has no planned external consultant reviews for the remainder of 2019 and for 2020 for which to provide estimated costs.

However, an independent review into the cost escalation associated with the new children’s hospital construction project was commissioned by the HSE and published on 9 April 2019. As such, I have referred this question to the HSE to provide details of any further external consultancy estimates which relate to this project.

**Hospital Waiting Lists**

72. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for the National Rehabilitation Hospital; the number of persons on the waiting list for the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48895/19]

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

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

**Home Help Service**

73. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health when the new statutory scheme will be introduced in view of the substantial deficit in the provision of home help hours. [48814/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** The Sláintecare Implementation Strategy commits to the introduction of a statutory homecare scheme by the end of 2021. As part of this, work is on-going to determine the optimal approach to the development of the scheme within the broader context of the Sláintecare reforms and in 2019 work has focussed on the design of the scheme, the options for regulation, and a review of existing services. Stakeholder-consultation will continue throughout the development of the new scheme.

In 2020 the HSE will deliver over 19.2 million hours of home support. This represents a substantial increase of 1 million hours more than this year’s target. This investment is focused on enabling older people to remain at home, where they want to be, and reducing the current waiting lists for the service being experienced in almost all areas.

Of the additional €52m allocated in Budget 2020 for home support services, a proportion of this funding will be used to test a reformed model of service delivery in 2020 at pilot sites. My Department is currently working with the HSE to identify the pilot sites and to agree the approach to testing.
Questions - Written Answers

General Practitioner Services

74. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the action being taken to protect general practitioner services in Milltown, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48762/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government is aware of the workforce issues facing general practice, including the difficulties in filling certain GMS vacancies. I would like to assure the Deputy that the Government is committed to the continued development of GP capacity, that patients across the country have access to GP services, and has undertaken a number of measures to improve GP recruitment.

The recent Agreement on GP contractual reforms will see an increase in expenditure on GP services of €210 million annually by 2023, providing significant increases in capitation fees for participating GPs, and increases in supports for rural practices and practices in urban areas of deprivation.

In addition, the number of medical graduates undertaking GP training has increased from 120 in 2009 to 192 filled places in 2019, with a further increase expected next year. In a recent press release, the Irish College of General Practitioners stated it had received the highest ever number of applications for its 2020 GP training programme.

Currently there are 2,508 GPs contracted to provide services under the GMS Scheme and as at 1 November 2019, 22 panels, or less than 1%, are vacant.

In relation to the vacant GMS panel in Milltown Co Kerry, the HSE has repeatedly advertised this GMS list of 380 patients in an effort to put in place a permanent GP to serve the practice. However, the financial viability of a practice of this size is a challenge for GPs and it has not been possible to find a replacement.

As a result of this, the HSE wrote to the GMS patients served by this practice in early November 2019 advising them that the practice would close in December 2019 and providing them with information on how to find an alternative GP.

In light of the community reaction to this announcement, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare held a meeting with the local community and public representatives on Monday November 18 to listen to local concerns and to discuss any possible additional measures that could be taken to attract a GP to the GMS contract in Milltown. Cork Kerry Community Healthcare has also postponed the closure of the practice to early 2020 to provide time to the local community to work on possible additional measures.

National Children’s Hospital Administration

75. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if the estimates to date for the annual operating costs of the national children’s hospital will be provided; the reason for changes in the estimates; the current estimate being used; if a revised estimate is being prepared; if so, when it will be ready; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48852/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The most recent (Dec 2018) updated operating expenditure forecast for the new children’s hospital and urgent care centres when open is estimated at €366m for 2023.

These costings are subject to continuous revision in the light of nationally agreed pay in-
creases, non-pay inflation and other external policy factors arising in the interim.

Operation costs beyond 2023 will be dealt with through the normal annual estimates process and will be affected by pay and non-pay inflation and normal service developments.

**Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans**

76. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health when he expects to see a reduction in the number of persons waiting more than a year for an outpatient appointment in Sligo University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48880/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government. In this regard, the Government is committed to improving waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures.

The latest published National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) figures for October show that there are 16,705 patients on the Sligo University Hospital Outpatient waiting list. Of these, 63% (10,555) are waiting 9 months or less and 72% (12,103) are waiting 12 months or less.

The NTPF has advised my Department that they have approved a number of Outpatient proposals for Sligo University Hospital in 2019, providing up to 100 additional clinics for 1,088 patient appointments.

More broadly, Budget 2020 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the NTPF increasing from €75 million in 2019 to €100 million in 2020.

My Department is working with the HSE and National Treatment Purchase Fund to develop the Scheduled Care Access Plan 2020. The National Service Plan 2020 will set out HSE planned activity level for the year ahead, while the NTPF will work with the hospital system to provide additionality to improve access to inpatient/daycase treatment and with a particular focus on hospital outpatient services.

In this regard, I would encourage all hospital groups and individual hospitals to engage with the NTPF to identify waiting list proposals for the remainder of this year and for 2020.

**Ambulance Service**

77. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the significant deterioration in ambulance turnaround times in Kerry University Hospital between September 2017 and September 2019. [48763/19]

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

**Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists**

78. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health when progress will be made on reducing waiting times in County Mayo for occupational therapy assessments especially for those under 18 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48874/19]
Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

79. Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher asked the Minister for Health his plans for each community hospital in County Donegal; his future plans for each of the community hospitals; if funding is ring-fenced for each of the projects proposed; the timeline for the delivery of each of the planned improvements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48527/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

80. Deputy Dara Calleary asked the Minister for Health when he expects to see a reduction in the number of persons waiting more than a year for an outpatient appointment in Mayo University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48873/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government. In this regard, the Government is committed to improving waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures.

The latest published National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) figures for October show that there are 8,629 patients on the Mayo University Hospital Outpatient waiting list. Of these, 60% (5,198) are waiting 12 months or less. The Mayo University Hospital Outpatient waiting list has decreased by 1% when compared to the same period last year.

The NTPF has advised my Department that they have approved a number of Outpatient proposals for Mayo University Hospital in 2019, providing up to 83 clinics for 1,065 patient appointments.

More broadly, Budget 2020 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the NTPF increasing from €75 million in 2019 to €100 million in 2020.

My Department is working with the HSE and NTPF to develop the Scheduled Care Access Plan 2020. The National Service Plan 2020 will set out HSE planned activity level for the year ahead, while the NTPF will work with the hospital system to provide additionality to improve access to inpatient/daycase treatment and with a particular focus on hospital outpatient services.

In this regard, I would encourage all hospital groups and individual hospitals to engage with the NTPF to identify waiting list proposals for the remainder of this year and for 2020.

General Practitioner Services Provision

81. Deputy Paul Murphy asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure a general practitioner service is provided in Fettercairn, Tallaght, Dublin 24. [48837/19]
Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for it to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Equipment

82. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health when the second MRI scanner at the Midlands Regional Hospital, Mullingar, will be operational; and when necessary works to accommodate the scanner will be completed (details supplied). [48818/19]

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

Disability Services Provision

83. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health his plans to improve paediatric health and disability services in counties Carlow and Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48871/19]

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

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

General Practitioner Services

84. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the measures being taken to meet the demand for general practitioner services in counties Carlow and Kilkenny, with many persons unable to access them on a regular basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48872/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is aware of the workforce issues facing general practice, including the difficulties in filling certain GMS vacancies. I would like to assure the Deputy that the Government is committed to the continued development of GP capacity to ensure that patients across the country continue to have access to GP services and has taken a number of measures to improve GP recruitment.

The recent Agreement on GP contractual reforms will see an increase in expenditure on GP services of €210 million annually by 2023, providing significant increases in capitation fees for participating GPs, and increases in supports for rural practices and practices in urban areas of deprivation.

Improved family friendly arrangements are an important feature of the revised contractual arrangements, with an increase in the locum rate for maternity and paternity cover, and an
increase in the paternity leave allowance from 3 days to 2 weeks. This is in recognition of the need to ensure that general practice is compatible with doctors’ family commitments.

In addition, the number of medical graduates undertaking GP training has increased from 120 in 2009 to 192 filled places in 2019, with a further increase expected next year. In a recent press release, the Irish College of General Practitioners stated it had received the highest ever number of applications for its 2020 GP training programme.

I am confident that the measures outlined in the Agreement with GPs on contractual reform and service developments will make general practice more sustainable and a more attractive career option for doctors, thus increasing GP capacity and helping to ensure that all patients have access to GP services.

In relation to the availability of GP services in Carlow and Kilkenny, as this is an operational issue I have asked the HSE to reply to the directly to the Deputy in relation to this issue.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

85. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason to date in 2019 more than 1,640 persons over 75 years of age have endured emergency department wait times of more than 24 hours at University Hospital Limerick. [48771/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Figures provided by the HSE show that for the first ten months of 2019, the number of patients attending University Hospital Limerick decreased by 1.1% and the number of attendances of patients over the age of 75 decreased by 1.5% compared to the same period in 2018. Similarly, admissions in University Hospital Limerick decreased by 11.3%.

Notwithstanding the decrease in attendances and admissions at UHL there has been an increase of 16% of the number of patients waiting on trolleys as compared to this time last year. There are a number of factors which may affect the waiting times for older patients. In particular, people in the older age category presenting to EDs are more likely to have complex needs and be admitted then the population generally. Consequently, a higher number of these patients may have to be accommodated on trolleys, pending their admission to a ward. There are also issues around delayed discharges of care which can cause congestion within hospital emergency departments. In the case of UHL there has been an increase of 185% in the number of delayed discharges of care.

The HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November in preparation for the anticipated increase in demand over the winter period. The Government allocated an additional €26m to fund the implementation of the Plan. Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals. Each Action Team has set out a range of initiatives it will undertake within its area to implement the Plan.

In relation to UHL a capital budget of €19.5 million has been approved for the provision of a modular 60-bed inpatient ward block at the Hospital, with funding of €10 million allocated in 2019. The HSE have advised that the enabling works are complete, and the main contractor is now commencing work. This important project will go some way towards addressing the acknowledged lack of bed capacity in the region.
I acknowledge the challenges that are facing the emergency departments in our hospitals. In addition to the immediate measures being undertaken in the Winter Plan, the Government through the Sláintecare Strategy and the investment being made in accordance Project Ireland 2040, is addressing the issues of access to healthcare and capacity in the system.

I am confident that together with the more immediate measures being undertaken under the Winter Plan and the strategic approach undertaken by the Government under Sláintecare and Project Ireland that progress will be made in addressing the difficulties in the emergency departments.

Mental Health Services Provision

86. Deputy James Browne asked the Minister for Health the measures being taken to improve mental health services for adults and children with intellectual disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48758/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The needs of adults and children with intellectual disabilities are generally best met in services such as HSE Primary Care and HSE Disability services.

However, people may have mild, moderate or severe mental health difficulties in addition to their intellectual disability, which can mean their treatment needs are more complex. The HSE service best suited to an individual patient is determined by the level of the intellectual disability and of the mental health difficulty.

The mental health policy, A Vision for Change, recommended the development of mental health intellectual disability (MHID) teams, to provide population-wide coverage and ensure fair and equal access to mental healthcare for people of all ages with an intellectual disability.

In 2017, the HSE’s national mental health service, in co-operation with social care services, initiated a new service improvement programme, to develop both adult and CAMHS MHID services nationally, and to further the operationalisation of A Vision for Change for this speciality.

Increased Government investment in mental health has enabled this person-centred MHID team model of care, to ensure consistent service delivery. This model is being adopted nationally and will augment existing mental health teams, as needed.

Since 2012, the Government has added €315 million to the mental health budget. This is an increase of 45% over this time. This investment has enabled the enhancement of specialist mental health services in areas such as MHID, eating disorders and ADHD.

A Vision for Change also recommended the development of acute beds and day hospital services for MHID treatment. 10 beds have been specifically dedicated for MHID in the new 170-bed state-of-the-art complex in Portrane, which will replace the Central Mental Hospital in Dundrum. The new facility will modernise the forensic mental health service in Ireland. The complex will also contain a 10 bedroom forensic child and adolescent mental health unit and a 30 bedroom intensive care rehabilitation unit will be co-located on the site.

Investment in acute MHID services will continue to be prioritised and developed as part of the HSE MHID service improvement programme, in conjunction with HSE social care and Section 38 and 39 voluntary agencies. The development of innovative acute treatment services, including therapeutic respite for children with intellectual disabilities and significant mental
health and behavioural support needs, will also be explored.

**Hospital Services**

87. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health his plans to implement 24-7 cardiac care services for those living in the south east; his views on whether there is an equal provision of cardiac services in the region in comparison to the rest of the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48897/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In 2016, the Herity Report concluded that the needs of the effective catchment population of University Hospital Waterford (UHW) could be accommodated from a single cath lab and recommended that the operating hours of the existing cath lab should be extended. Approval and funding has been provided for the additional staff required to facilitate this service and recruitment is progressing.

A mobile cath lab has been deployed at UHW since October 2017 to conduct diagnostic cardiac procedures pending the recruitment of the additional staff required to extend the opening hours of the existing cath lab.

I remain committed to the provision of a second cath lab in University Hospital Waterford. The project has been included in the HSE’s Capital Programme 2019, the Design Team was appointed in June 2019 and the application for planning permission was lodged on 29 October.

The Herity Report also recommended that the current 9 to 5 provision of emergency pPCI services should cease to allow the hospital focus on the much larger volume of planned work. I asked my Department to address the implications of this recommendation by arranging for a National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services.

The aim of this Review is to achieve optimal patient outcomes at population level with particular emphasis on the safety, quality and sustainability of the services that patients receive by establishing the need for an optimal configuration of a national adult cardiac service.

Work is ongoing on finalisation of the Review and drafting of its recommendations has commenced.

**Emergency Departments Waiting Times**

88. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the reason to date in 2019 over 1,190 persons over 75 years of age have endured emergency department wait times of more than 24 hours at Waterford University Hospital. [48764/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The hospital system is currently operating at close to full capacity. The number of patients attending Emergency Departments continues to increase year on year. HSE figures show that for the first ten months of 2019, the number of patients attending University Hospital Waterford decreased by 0.9% while the number of attendances of patients over the age of 75 increased by 1.2% compared to the same period in 2018. Similarly, admissions in University Hospital Waterford decreased by 8.5% while admissions of patients over the age of 75 increased by 5.3% compared to the same period last year. This reflects increasing demand for unscheduled care, especially by patients in the 75 years and over age group.

There are a number of factors which may affect the waiting times for older patients. In
particular, people in the older age category presenting to EDs are more likely to have complex needs and be admitted than the population generally. Consequently, a higher number of these patients may have to be accommodated on trolleys, pending their admission to a ward. There are also issues around delayed discharges of care which can cause congestion within hospital emergency departments.

The HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November in preparation for the anticipated increase in demand over the winter period. The Government allocated an additional €26m to fund the implementation of the Plan. Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals. Each Action Team has set out a range of initiatives it will undertake within its area to implement the Plan.

I acknowledge the challenges that are facing the emergency departments in our hospitals. In addition to the immediate measures being undertaken in the Winter Plan, the Government through the Sláintecare Strategy and the investment being made in accordance Project Ireland 2040, is addressing the issues of access to healthcare and capacity in the system.

I am confident that together with the more immediate measures being undertaken under the Winter Plan and the strategic approach undertaken by the Government under Sláintecare and Project Ireland that progress will be made in addressing the difficulties in the emergency departments.

Ambulance Service

89. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to improve ambulance services on foot of recommendations in the report of the trauma steering group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48784/19]

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

Community Nursing Units

90. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if the service being offered by a community nursing unit (details supplied) in County Tipperary will be reviewed in order to ensure that persons in the area will have long-term stay care in their own town in view of plans by the HSE to have them seek care in Nenagh or Thurles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48572/19]

**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.

Dental Services Waiting Lists

91. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for a dental appointment at 31 October 2019 or the latest date available in north County Dublin.
Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

92. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the timeline for the new extension for Naas General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48735/19]

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

Primary Care Centres Provision

93. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the cause of the delay in the provision of the Rowlagh primary healthcare centre in north Clondalkin which was first announced in 2012; the timeline for the completion of the project which was granted planning permission in July 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48840/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

94. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been waiting five weeks for an operation. [48616/19]

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.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

95. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the status of, and definitive start date
for, the medicinal cannabis access programme in view of his most recent response with regard to two cannabis based products having been approved for the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48736/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy is aware, legislation was signed in June which will allow for the operation of the Medical Cannabis Access Programme (MCAP) on a pilot basis for five years.

Commercial medical cannabis suppliers whose cannabis products meet the specified requirements set out in the legislation, and which have been listed in Schedule 1 of the Misuse of Drugs (Prescription and Control of Supply of Cannabis for Medical Use) Regulations, will be able to supply these products into Ireland.

Cannabis products will only be listed in the Schedule once they have been accepted as being suitable for medical use under the Medical Cannabis Access Programme.

As yet no medical cannabis products are available for use under the MCAP but a number of suppliers have expressed an interest in supplying the Irish market. As soon as suitable products are approved for use the Department of Health will make this information available on their website.

Please see the link to all of the up to date information relating to the Medical Cannabis Access Programme, which includes a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) document. Please note the FAQ is a working document and will be updated as new information and developments emerge.

https://health.gov.ie/cannabis-for-medical-use/medical-cannabis-access-programme/

Hospital Consultant Data

96. Deputy Mattie McGrath asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant posts at South Tipperary General Hospital not on the Medical Council specialist register in each of the years 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the specialities involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48617/19]

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

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

97. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Health his long-term plans for a number of community hospitals in County Donegal including the community hospital in Lifford, Ramelton and St. Joseph’s Hospital, Stranorlar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48863/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, including the facilities at Lifford Community Hospital, Ramelton Community Hospital and St. Joseph’s Community Hospital Stranorlar I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to the issues you raised concerning these facilities.

Cancer Screening Programmes
98. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health when the review of CervicalCheck by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists due in May 2019 will be published; if his attention has been drawn to the report; the investigation he has undertaken to establish the way in which information from the report was leaked to the media; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48889/19]

116. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the review by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists was leaked before all participating women were informed; and the steps he will take regarding same. [48824/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 and 116 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the purpose of the Independent Clinical Expert Review being conducted by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) is to provide women, or their next of kin, with independent clinical assurance about the timing of their diagnosis and treatment.

The overriding focus throughout this process has been to ensure that Review results are communicated to women and families in the most appropriate and sensitive way possible. A core principle underpinning this process has been to ensure that individual participants would have had an opportunity to receive their results in advance of publication of the Expert Panel’s Aggregate Report. In keeping with this principle, I will only receive the aggregate report when I have been assured that all women or next of kin have had the opportunity to receive their individual report. I will then bring the aggregate report to Government and publish it.

While the aggregate report has not yet been received by my Department, the Royal College in a letter addressed to me in September 2019 advised 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 experience in the UK.

**Physiotherapy Provision**

99. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O’Mahony** asked the Minister for Health his plans to improve waiting times for physiotherapy assessments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48761/19]

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

**Ambulance Service Response Times**

100. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to improve ambulance response times in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48785/19]

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

**Health Services Provision**
101. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the measures being taken to address the podiatry waiting times in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48870/19]

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

**Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans**

102. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address hospital waiting lists for the remainder of 2019 and in 2020. [48525/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government. In this regard, the Government is committed to improving waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures.

The latest published National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) figures for October show that the Inpatient & Daycase (IPDC) waiting list has decreased by over 6% (-4,490) when compared to the same period last year. The Outpatient waiting list remains a significant challenge. However, the latest NTPF Outpatient figures show that the number of patients waiting has decreased by 2,277 since August 2019.

Budget 2020 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the NTPF increasing from €75 million in 2019 to €100 million in 2020.

My Department is working with the HSE and National Treatment Purchase Fund to develop the Scheduled Care Access Plan 2020. The National Service Plan 2020 will set out HSE planned activity level for the year ahead, while the NTPF will work with the hospital system to provide additionality to improve access to inpatient/daycase treatment and with a particular focus on hospital outpatient services.

In this regard, I would encourage all hospital groups and individual hospitals to engage with the NTPF to identify waiting list proposals for the remainder of this year and for 2020.

**Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Administration**

103. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health the initiatives being taken to improve CAMHS in CHO 8 and also to ensure there is no service gap when a transition to adult services occurs at 18 years of age. [48858/19]

**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.

**Cancer Services Provision**

104. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the promised new state-of-the-art oncology centre in view of the recognition by all stakeholders that the oncology day ward at Galway University Hospital has not been fit for purpose for over ten years;
and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48890/19]

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

### Disabilities Assessments

105. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health when he expects assessments of need under the Disability Act 2005 in County Tipperary to be provided within the statutory timeframe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48884/19]

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

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

### Disabilities Assessments

106. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his plans to clear the long waiting lists in many areas nationwide for additional needs assessments for children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48848/19]

124. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his plans to recruit more occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists to properly staff early intervention and school age assessment teams for children with additional needs. [48849/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 106 and 124 together.

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

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

### Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

107. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to
reduce waiting lists for gynaecological treatment at Cork University Maternity Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48861/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government.

The latest published National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) figures show that there 532 patients in the Cork University Maternity Hospital IPDC waiting list. Of these, 28% (148) are waiting 3 months or less, 66% (351) are waiting 9 months or less and 79% (419) are waiting 12 months or less.

I am aware that Cork University Maternity Hospital have made considerable improvements to their Outpatients Waiting List over the past year. As a result of the hard work of their dedicated staff and their positive engagement with the NTPF, the Outpatient Waiting List at Cork University Maternity Hospital has decreased by 66% (-2,182) when compared to the same period last year.

The NTPF figures show that at the end of October there were 1,115 patients the outpatient waiting list. Of these, 70% (780) are waiting 3 months or less and 91% (1,012) are waiting 6 months or less.

The NTPF has advised my Department that they have approved a number of IPDC and Outpatient proposals for Cork University Maternity Hospital in 2019, providing up to 1,720 procedures and appointments for patients. These initiatives include providing additional capacity at Cork University Maternity Hospital to facilitate 2-day (weekday) theatre service for the rest of this year to assist with addressing the longest waiters.

More broadly, Budget 2020 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the NTPF increasing from €75 million in 2019 to €100 million in 2019. The year-on-year increases to the NTPF since Budget 2017 reflect this Government’s priority to improve waiting times for patients to access hospital treatment. The Department of Health is working with the HSE and NTPF to develop the Scheduled Care Access Plan 2020, which will include gynaecology services.

In this regard, I would encourage all hospital groups and individual hospitals to engage with the NTPF to identify waiting list proposals for the remainder of this year and for 2020.

Mental Health Services Funding

108. Deputy Catherine Connolly asked the Minister for Health the reason the full allocation for mental health services was not released to the HSE in January 2019 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48887/19]

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 comprised €20 million continuing cost in 2019 of developments initiated in 2018, combined with €35 million for further new developments.

To date, the HSE has requested allocation of €40.246 million of this funding, which has been approved. In addition, €3 million has been paid to Pobal for the Community Mental Health Fund. An amount of €11.754 million remains under consideration.

The new development investment has enabled the HSE Mental Health Services to progress
initiatives agreed in the National Service Plan 2019. Initiatives such as e-mental health pilot programmes and an annual increase in psychiatric nurse undergraduate places continue to be developed and implemented with this funding. The relocation of the National Forensic Mental Health Service to Portrane is another significant investment undertaken by HSE Mental Health Services.

Budget 2020 saw the Government continue this commitment to mental health by increasing funding by €39m to €1.026bn. This represents an increase of over €315 million since 2012, or 45%.

This significant additional Government funding has provided for over 1,800 new development posts for mental health services, including CAMHS. Enhancement of the specialist CAMHS service, including improving access and reducing waiting lists, remains a priority for the Government. We have reduced the CAMHS waiting list by around 500 since December 2018, to around 2,000 today.

Ambulance Service

109. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the significant deterioration in ambulance turnaround times in Cavan General Hospital between September 2017 and September 2019. [48867/19]

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

Hospital Overcrowding

110. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to relieve the overcrowding in University Hospital Limerick for winter 2020. [48825/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I acknowledge the difficulties facing the emergency departments in our hospitals.

According to HSE TrolleyGAR data, there was a 16% increase in patients counted waiting on trolleys at University Hospital Limerick ED this year up to the end of October 2019 compared to the same period last year. My Department has engaged extensively with the HSE this year to identify mitigating actions to bring down trolley numbers and waiting times in the ED in the face of growing demand.

The HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November in preparation for the anticipated increase in demand over the winter period. The Government allocated an additional €26m to fund the implementation of the Plan. Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals.

Each Action Team has set out a range of initiatives it will undertake within its area to implement the Plan. The Integrated Winter Plan for University Hospital Limerick will be delivered by Winter Action Team 3 (WAT 3). The initiatives for WAT 3 include:

- additional home support hours to facilitate early hospital to community transfers;
- additional aids and appliances to facilitate early hospital discharges and ED avoidance;

- mobile doctor service units to manage increase demand for home visits and facilitate ED avoidance;

- low level Domiciliary Rehab team in Limerick city to facilitate early discharge and ED avoidance;

- added Triage nursing support in Shannondoc to support ED avoidance;

- added Registrar in UHL to assist in addressing workflow and improve PET times;

- added Health Care Assistants support in UHL to provide staffing at ward level to support additional surge patients.

It should also be noted in relation to UHL a capital budget of €19.5 million has been approved for the provision of a modular 60-bed inpatient ward block at the Hospital, with funding of €10 million allocated in 2019. The HSE have advised that the enabling works are complete, and the main contractor is now commencing work. This important project will go some way towards addressing the acknowledged lack of bed capacity in the region.

In addition to the immediate measures being undertaken in the Winter Plan the Government through the Sláintecare Strategy is addressing the issues of access to healthcare. The Sláintecare Action Plan for 2019 has a specific workstream on access and waiting lists. The Government is also increasing investment in health infrastructure and capacity in the system in line with Project Ireland 2040.

I am confident that together with the more immediate measures being undertaken under the Winter Plan and the strategic approach undertaken by the Government under Sláintecare that progress will be made in addressing the difficulties in the emergency departments.

**Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

111. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the status of works at Carndonagh Community Hospital; if a contractor has been appointed; when works are scheduled to commence; the timeline for completion of the works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48864/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the HSE is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, including Carndonagh Community Hospital I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this this matter.

**Respite Care Services Provision**

112. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide respite services on a seven day a week basis in the north west; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48869/19]

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

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

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

**Medical Card Administration**

113. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health the action being taken to expedite the provision of medical cards for cancer patients. [48857/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE’s Expert Group on Medical Need and Medical Card Eligibility examined the issue of awarding medical cards on the basis of illness and concluded that it was not feasible, desirable, nor ethically justifiable to list medical conditions in priority order for medical card eligibility. The Expert Group also concluded that a person’s means should remain the main qualifier for a medical card. This position remains unchanged.

However, every effort is made by the HSE, within the framework of the legislation, to support applicants in applying for a medical card and, in particular, to take full account of the difficult circumstances in the case of applicants who may be in excess of the income guidelines. The HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds the income threshold where they face difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from an illness. Social and medical issues are also considered when determining whether undue hardship exists for an individual accessing general practitioner or other medical services.

With regard to persons suffering from cancer and other serious medical conditions the HSE also has a system in place for the provision of medical cards in response to emergency situations i.e. in circumstances where persons are in need of urgent or on-going medical care that they cannot afford and also for persons in palliative care who are terminally ill. These medical cards are promptly issued on receipt of an application, which should include a medical report from a health care professional involved in the person’s care. In addition, since 1 July 2015, the HSE adopted the position that all children under 18 years of age with a diagnosis of cancer are awarded a medical card. This card is valid for a period of 5 years.

**HSE Investigations**

114. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the investigation that has taken place of the injuries sustained by a patient subsequent to an incident while in the care of Galway University Hospital on 19 and 20 September 2019; when it commenced; when it will conclude; the person or body undertaking the investigation; the engagement with the family of the patient; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48888/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.
115. Deputy Stephen Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the categories of cost escalations in regard to further potential cost escalations for the building and commissioning of the national children’s hospital; the provisional amounts being allocated for each category; the estimated amount or potential range of cost escalation for each category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48853/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I advised Government in December 2018 that the final cost of the design, build and equipment programme for which the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board is responsible was estimated to be €1,433 million. There has been no change to this figure advised to Government.

An independent review into the cost escalation associated with the new children’s hospital construction project was commissioned by the HSE and carried out by PwC. The PwC report makes clear that the Guaranteed Maximum Price established through the two-stage tender process does not provide a contractual ceiling on the project’s cost and significant residual risks remain. These include national construction inflation in excess of 4%, any changes in scope, legislative changes and the Sectoral Employment Order.

The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board manages the project, actively monitoring the performance of the contract. It also has a focus on identifying and managing risks, preventing further cost increases to the greatest extent possible. It has, for example, a robust process in place for the assessment of claims by the Contractor in accordance with the Construction Contract. All claims are independently assessed and determined by the Employers Representative. Where there is a dispute on the validity of a claim, the Construction Contract sets out the dispute management process.

As the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) has statutory responsibility for planning, designing, building and equipping the new children’s hospital, I have referred the further parts of your question to the NPHDB for direct reply.

*Question No. 116 answered with Question No. 98.*

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

117. Deputy Alan Kelly asked the Minister for Health his plans to build a new elderly care home in Roscrea, County Tipperary, to replace the Dean Maxwell home. [48826/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

118. Deputy Aindrias Moynihan asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to reduce the waiting list for ophthalmology treatment in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48862/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government. In recent years, my Depart-
ment has worked with the HSE and National Treatment Purchase Fund and made considerable improvements to improve access for patients waiting for high volume procedures and life limiting procedures including cataracts.

At the end of July 2017, the number of people waiting for a cataract procedure was 10,024. Since then the numbers waiting have consistently improved and at the end of October 2019 they stand at 4,480. Of these, 494 patients are waiting over 9 months which represents a reduction of 90% when compared to July 2017, when the number waiting over 9 months stood at 4,371.

A key development to improve access to Ophthalmology services was the opening of a stand-alone high-volume consultant-led cataract theatre by the University of Limerick Hospital Group in Nenagh Hospital in 2018, with the intention that it would facilitate patients from surrounding geographical areas to avail of their treatment there. In this context, the HSE has advised that University of Limerick Hospital Group is working collaboratively with the South South-West Hospital Group to review over 1,000 patients on Ophthalmology waiting lists that may be suitable for cataract procedures in Nenagh.

More broadly, Budget 2020 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase fund increasing from €75 million in 2019 to €100 million in 2019. The year-on-year increases to the National Treatment Purchase Fund since Budget 2017 reflect this Government’s priority to improve waiting times for patients to access hospital treatment. The Department of Health is working with the HSE and National Treatment Purchase Fund to develop the Scheduled Care Access Plan 2020, which will include ophthalmology services.

In this regard, I would encourage all hospital groups and individual hospitals to engage with the NTPF to identify waiting list proposals for the remainder of this year and for 2020.

**Emergency Departments Services**

119. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the action being taken to address the persistent overcrowding in the emergency department in University Hospital Limerick. [48782/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I acknowledge the challenges facing the emergency departments in our hospitals.

According to HSE TrolleyGAR data, there was a 16% increase in patients counted waiting on trolleys at 8am in University Hospital Limerick ED this year up to the end of October 2019 compared to the same period last year. My Department has engaged extensively with the HSE this year to identify mitigating actions to bring down trolley numbers and waiting times in the ED in the face of growing demand.

The HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November in preparation for the anticipated increase in demand over the winter period. The Government allocated an additional €26m to fund the implementation of the Plan. Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals.

Each Action Team has set out a range of initiatives it will undertake within its area to implement the Plan. The Integrated Winter Plan for University Hospital Limerick will be delivered
by Winter Action Team 3 (WAT 3). The initiatives for WAT 3 include:

- additional home support hours to facilitate early hospital to community transfers;
- additional aids and appliances to facilitate early hospital discharges and ED avoidance;
- mobile doctor service units to manage increase demand for home visits and facilitate ED avoidance;
- low level Domiciliary Rehab team in Limerick city to facilitate early discharge and ED avoidance;
- added Triage nursing support in Shannondoc to support ED avoidance;
- added Registrar in UHL to assist in addressing workflow and improve PET times;
- added Health Care Assistants support in UHL to provide staffing at ward level to support additional surge patients.

It should also be noted in relation to UHL a capital budget of €19.5 million has been approved for the provision of a modular 60-bed inpatient ward block at the Hospital, with funding of €10 million allocated in 2019. The HSE have advised that the enabling works are complete, and the main contractor is now commencing work. This important project will go some way towards addressing the acknowledged lack of bed capacity in the region.

In addition to the immediate measures being undertaken in the Winter Plan the Government through the Sláintecare Strategy is addressing the issues of access to healthcare. The Sláintecare Action Plan for 2019 has a specific workstream on access and waiting lists. The Government is also increasing investment in health infrastructure and capacity in the system in line with Project Ireland 2040.

I am confident that together with the more immediate measures being undertaken under the Winter Plan and the strategic approach undertaken by the Government under Sláintecare that progress will be made in addressing the difficulties in the emergency departments.

Hospital Car Parks

120. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the pay parking review that was being carried out in hospitals nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48734/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Hospitals which charge parking fees are cognisant of the financial implications parking costs can have on patients and their families, particularly those with long-term illnesses. Some hospitals have introduced a maximum daily fixed parking charge, thus capping this expense. I understand that some hospitals also provide reduced rate parking for long-term patients and visitors for whom the payment of the full rate would cause hardship.

I have made it clear I want to see progress made in this area and I am working with my Department and the HSE in this regard. As such, I requested the HSE to conduct a review of hospital car parking charges with a view to establishing clear national guidelines in the area. My Department and the HSE are currently engaging on a draft implementation plan to accompany the review report.
121. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) who needs supported living is still in St. James’s Hospital, Dublin, five weeks after being admitted. [48615/19]

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

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

**Mental Health Commission Reports**

122. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the action being taken to ensure that the findings of the Inspector of Mental Health Services report on Waterford department of psychiatry published in October 2019 are acted upon. [48765/19]

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

**Hospital Services**

123. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health his plans for Letterkenny University Hospital in the winter strategy and the need to provide additional bed capacity at the hospital; his views on the number of vacant posts within the CHO 1 area and the impact the embargo is having on staffing numbers; the steps he will take to deal with the waiting lists at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48526/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The number of patients attending emergency departments across the hospital system continues to increase annually, with the result that the system is currently operating at close to full capacity. I acknowledge the challenges that this poses to the emergency departments in our hospitals.

The HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November in preparation for the anticipated increase in demand over the winter period. The Government allocated an additional €26m to fund the implementation of the Plan. Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals. Each Action Team has set out a range of initiatives it will undertake within its area to implement the Plan. The Integrated Winter Plan for Letterkenny University Hospital will be delivered by Winter Action Team 1 (WAT 1).

The specific initiatives for WAT 1 include:
- added Medical Registrar for improved medical cover;
- rapid flu testing to reduce turnaround time to 2 hours;
- additional cleaning services to improve bed turnaround time out-of-hours;
- a reablement programme to decrease presentations and admissions;
- additional aids and appliances to facilitate timely discharge; and
- hospital avoidance measures to reduce the number of patients admitted for assessment.

The Health Service Capacity Review published last year was clear on the need for a major investment in additional capacity in both hospital and community services combined with a widescale reform of the manner and the location of where health services are provided.

Progress has been made on increasing capacity. An additional 267 acute hospital beds opened under the Winter Initiative 2017/2018.

The provision of an additional 75 acute beds and 70 community beds was a component of the Winter Plan 2018/19, including 5 additional beds in Letterkenny University Hospital.

There has been a sustained increase in the number of staff in the HSE in the last couple of years with approximately 10,000 more staff working in the HSE than in the same period three years ago. With regard to CHO1 specifically, employed numbers stand at 5,459 WTEs in September 2019. This is an increase of +66 WTEs since the same period last year. With regard to Letterkenny University Hospital specifically, employed numbers stand at 1,599 WTEs in September 2019. This is an increase of +29 WTEs since the same period last year. This hospital falls within the Saolta Hospital Group which has current staffing at 9,297 WTEs in September 2019. This is an increase of +214 WTEs since the same period last year.

The Government is tackling the challenges that are facing the emergency departments in our hospitals. In addition to the immediate measures being undertaken in the Winter Plan, the Government through the Sláintecare Strategy and the investment being made in accordance Project Ireland 2040, is addressing the issues of access to healthcare and capacity in the system.

I am confident that together with the more immediate measures being undertaken under the Winter Plan and the strategic approach undertaken by the Government under Sláintecare and Project Ireland that progress will be made in addressing the difficulties in the emergency departments.

Question No. 124 answered with Question No. 106.

**General Practitioner Services Provision**

125. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that all communities have local access to general practitioner services. [48838/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government is aware of the workforce issues facing general practice, including the difficulties in filling certain GMS vacancies. I would like to assure the Deputy that the Government is committed to the continued development of GP capacity to ensure that patients across the country continue to have access to GP services and has taken a number of measures to improve GP recruitment.

The recent Agreement on GP contractual reforms will see an increase in expenditure on GP
services of €210 million annually by 2023, providing significant increases in capitation fees for participating GPs, and increases in supports for rural practices and practices in urban areas of deprivation.

Improved family friendly arrangements are also an important feature of the revised contractual arrangements, with an increase in the locum rate for maternity and paternity cover, and an increase in the paternity leave allowance from 3 days to 2 weeks. This is in recognition of the need to ensure that general practice is compatible with doctors’ family commitments.

In addition, the number of medical graduates undertaking GP training has increased from 120 in 2009 to 192 filled places in 2019, with a further increase expected next year. In a recent press release, the Irish College of General Practitioners stated it had received the highest ever number of applications for its 2020 GP training programme.

I am confident that the measures outlined in the Agreement with GPs on contractual reform and service developments will make general practice more sustainable and a more attractive career option for doctors, thus increasing GP capacity and helping to ensure that all patients have access to GP services.

Cancer Screening Programmes

126. **Deputy Brid Smith** asked the Minister for Health if the review of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of the history of over 1,000 women with the CervicalCheck screening programme will detail the discordant reviewed slides with a breakdown as to the laboratory they originated from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48815/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy will be aware, the purpose of the Independent Clinical Expert Review being conducted by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) is to provide women, or their next of kin, with independent clinical assurance about the timing of their diagnosis and treatment. This is reflected in the Terms of Reference for the Review, which are published on the website of my Department.

Every woman who has been diagnosed with cervical cancer since September 2008 whose cancer was registered with the National Cancer Registry of Ireland before 5 May 2018, and who has had one or more tests under the CervicalCheck programme, was offered a review of her case.

Where the expert panel opinion of cytology results differs to the original results provided by CervicalCheck, the panel endeavoured to determine, wherever possible, any failures to prevent cancer or to intervene at an earlier stage, and the panel has prepared individual reports for those affected, setting out the facts and their expert and independent assessment of those facts.

As set out in the TOR, the Review will also produce an aggregate report, which shall include recommendations where appropriate, with the aim of improving care for women. While the aggregate report has not yet been received, the Royal College wrote to me in September 2019 and advised 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 experience in the UK.

Taoiseach’s Meetings and Engagements

127. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meeting with the
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at the British-Irish Council meeting held at Farmleigh recently. [48637/19]

128. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the issues he discussed when he met the First Minister of Scotland when attending the British-Irish Council meeting. [48642/19]

129. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the discussions held at the recent British-Irish Council on the future relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom particularly in the areas of education and research. [48645/19]

130. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on discussions regarding tariff and quota-free trade between Ireland and the UK at the recent British-Irish Council meeting. [48646/19]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 127 to 130, inclusive, together.

I was pleased to welcome the Administration Heads from Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey and the British Government to Dublin for the 33rd British Irish Council on 15th November. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the inaugural meeting of the British-Irish Council and it was agreed that the Council continues to be a valued institution of the Good Friday Agreement - it is a vital institution offering opportunities to engage on matters of mutual interest across our respective competencies.

The Summit provided an opportunity for Ministers to update the Council on their actions regarding Brexit and discuss the latest domestic political developments across their jurisdictions along with topics of mutual interest such as the economy, trade and ongoing relations with the EU.

The Council discussed the political situation in Northern Ireland, and regretted that Northern Ireland will not be represented politically at this important forum until the Executive is restored.

The Summit also heard from Health Ministers from each administration who met that morning to discuss Health and Social Initiatives to Combat Substance Misuse – in particular, the enhanced, innovative addiction treatment and rehabilitation services which will be central to tackling problematic drug and alcohol use in Dublin’s North East Inner City.

There were no discussions specifically relating to quotas and tariff free trade between Ireland and the UK or on the future relationship between Ireland and the UK in the areas of education and research.

While I did not have a dedicated bilateral meeting with Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, over the course of several conversations during the Summit we discussed our respective perspectives on the British Irish Council, political developments and agreed that we want to see the Good Friday institutions up and running again as soon as possible.

I had a bilateral meeting with First Minister Sturgeon, during which we discussed Brexit, political developments and the ongoing review of bilateral relations between Ireland and Scotland.

**Economic Data**

131. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the remittances from Ireland, net and gross as appropriate, to countries around the world in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in
Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Central Statistics Office (CSO) estimates worker remittances paid from Ireland as a small component of the current account of the balance of payments. The balance of payments is a complex accounting system which summarises economic transactions between Ireland and the rest of the world in a specific time period. The compilation of the balance of payments is based primarily on enterprise surveys. The framework includes also actual data and estimates of flows between resident and non-residents in the household, government, and non-profit institutions sectors.

In this context, workers’ remittances are all transfers between Irish resident households and non-resident households. A household is considered to be Irish resident if they have been present for one year or more in Ireland.

Remittance information is difficult to compile for National Statistics Offices and is usually based on administrative sources and modelling rather than direct collection. The current CSO data are estimated using Revenue data. Pay of non-national workers is used to estimate disposable income and to derive a remittance amount. The approach using indirect data sources is recognised as a standard approach in the IMF Guide for Compilers and Users of International Transactions in Remittances. The CSO is currently investigating new approaches to deriving remittance information.

The CSO currently makes no estimate for remittances made to Irish resident households from non-resident households. This is because: firstly, sources from which to compile such estimates are not readily available; secondly, it is believed that where such remittances are made, they are small in the context of the balance of payments and therefore there is not a pressing requirement to impute a value for them.

Data on remittances are published by Eurostat for all member states. The outflows from Ireland are presented in the table below for years 2016-2018 and the first two quarters of 2019.

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Source: CSO* Data not yet published

Naval Service Data

132. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of members of the Naval Service who spent more than 80 days at sea in each of the years 2016 to 2018. [48683/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I welcome the introduction of a new tax credit for sea going Naval Service personnel, which my colleague Mr Pascal Donohoe TD, Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform has introduced in the Finance Bill 2019.

It is the result of constructive engagement within Government, by my officials and Defence Forces management, including those within the Naval Service. The proposed tax credit is based on the design of the existing Fishers’ tax credit, which was introduced in 2017, for the purpose of incentivising the sea-fishing industry.

This is another positive step that builds on this Government’s commitment to addressing the challenges in the Defence Forces. The measures taken in recent months include:

- Members of the Defence Forces are receiving increases in certain Defence specific allowances which was recommended by the Public Service Pay Commission.

- They are also receiving increases in their pay scales under the terms of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020.

- A service commitment incentive scheme has been restored for Air Corps pilots

- Members of the Army Ranger Wing, cooks and NCO account holders are receiving increases in their allowances arising from adjudications.

- Charges for rations and accommodation for recruits and apprentices have been abolished.

I am advised by the Military authorities that the information requested in relation to the number of Naval service personnel who undertook 80 days or more at sea is not immediately available. I will write to the Deputy when I receive this information.

Defence Forces Transport

133. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of vehicles (details supplied) purchased in 2001 which are still in service; and his plans to replace same. [48692/19]
Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, is maintained to the greatest extent possible to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles as assigned by Government.

The acquisition of equipment for the Defence Forces remains a clear focus for me. Future equipment priorities for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service are considered in the context of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment priorities planning process. The principal aim over the period of the White Paper will be to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements, including response to security risks and other emergencies, both at home and overseas.

Following a tender competition, a contract was signed on 30 November 1999 for the supply by Mowag of Switzerland of 40 Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs), initial spares, special tools and training courses. These vehicles were delivered in 2001 and 2002. Subsequent contracts in 2002 and 2005 saw a further 25 and 15 vehicles respectively delivered, bringing the fleet to its current strength of 80 vehicles. The MOWAG Armoured People Carrier has been the cornerstone of Irish Defence Forces deployments overseas offering essential force protection to Defence Forces personnel. All of the 40 initial vehicles delivered in 2001 and 2002 are still in active service.

In 2016 a contract was signed with General Dynamics European Land Systems – Mowag for a multi-year mid-life maintenance and upgrade programme of the MOWAG APC fleet at a cost of €55m plus VAT. The terms of this contract allows for changes to the scope of work and configuration of certain variants of vehicles to be agreed between the parties during the lifetime of the contract. The first 29 refurbished vehicles have been delivered in 2018 and 2019 and a further 9 are scheduled for delivery early in 2020. This programme will extend the utility of the fleet and provide greater levels of protection, mobility and firepower and will seek to ensure viability of the fleet out to 2030.

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

Defence Forces Equipment

134. Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the renewal and replacement programme he and the military authorities have for weaponry and other military equipment over the next three years; and when tenders for same will be issued. [48693/19]

135. Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the weaponry or other military equipment in the Defence Forces that has been upgraded or replaced since 2011 to replace outdated or defunct equipment; the cost of same; and when the equipment was delivered. [48694/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 134 and 135 together.

My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, is maintained to the greatest extent possible to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles as assigned by Government, including overseas deployments.
The acquisition of new defensive equipment for the Defence Forces remains a clear focus for me. Future equipment priorities for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service are considered in the context of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment priorities planning process. The principal aim over the period of the White Paper will be to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements, including response to security risks and other emergencies, both at home and overseas.

The mid-life upgrade programme for the Army’s fleet of eighty MOWAG Armoured Personnel Carriers will extend the utility of the fleet and provide greater levels of protection, mobility and firepower. 29 vehicles have already been upgraded and delivered to the Defence Forces during 2018 and 2019. The remaining vehicles due for upgrade will be delivered between 2020 and 2022. A significant investment of €68m incl VAT has been made on this programme. The terms of this contract, signed in 2016 allows for changes to the scope of work and configuration of certain variants of vehicles to be agreed between the parties during the lifetime of the contract.

Additionally, twenty-four 4 x 4 Armoured Utility Vehicles were acquired in 2017, and in 2018 delivery was taken of ten new armoured logistic vehicles. These measures with a combined cost of €13.5m inclusive of VAT will provide essential force protection overseas. A capability requirement for additional Armoured Utility Vehicles has been identified and a procurement process is expected to commence in 2020 for these vehicles.

The Government is currently investing in updating the Air Corps fleet of aircraft with the replacement of the existing five Cessna aircraft with three larger and more capable fixed wing utility Pilatus PC 12 aircraft which are being equipped for ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance). It is expected that the three aircraft will be delivered during 2020 at a cost of €43m inclusive of VAT. Planning is also underway to replace the CASA Maritime Patrol aircraft and a tender competition recently been completed in my Department and a preferred bidder has been identified.

The on-going Naval Service ship replacement programme is evidence of the Government’s commitment to investment in the Naval Service. The most significant investment of recent years by the Defence Organisation has been on the procurement of the new Off-Shore Patrol Vessels for the Naval Service. This programme has seen the delivery of three new Naval Service vessels since 2014. The LÉ Samuel Beckett was commissioned in May 2014, LÉ James Joyce was commissioned in September 2015 and LÉ William Butler Yeats was commissioned into service in October 2016.

In June 2016, a contract for an additional sister ship was agreed, bringing investment in the new ships programme to some €270 million inclusive of VAT since 2010. This fourth ship, named LÉ George Bernard Shaw was commissioned into service in May 2019.

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

The Mid-Life Extension Programme of LÉ Róisín commenced in March 2019, with an initial dry-docking phase to be followed by an extended period of equipment upgrade and refit works. Works are progressing as planned. LÉ Niamh’s extension programme is due to commence in 2020. Over the course of their extension programmes, LÉ Róisín and LÉ Niamh will be out of operation for a period of some twelve months each. Contracts to the value of the €7.6m inclusive VAT have been awarded for the main works associated with the upgrade to LÉ
Róisín.

In addition, planning is ongoing for the replacement of the current Naval Service flagship LÉ Eithne with a multi role vessel.

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

The examples given, whilst not exhaustive, demonstrate my commitment to update and upgrade the Defence Forces equipment and capability, within the financial envelope available. In accordance with the National Development Plan, the capital allocation for Defence was increased to €113 million for 2020, an increase of €7 million from 2019. The National Development Plan provides for a total of €541 million for Defence over the period 2018-2022. This level of capital funding will allow the Defence Organisation to undertake a programme of sustained equipment replacement and infrastructural development across the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service as identified and prioritised in the Defence White Paper and builds on the significant investment programme over recent years.

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

**Defence Forces Remuneration**

136. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will clarify an issue regarding a delay in payment of a military allowance for Defence Force members who trained cadets (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48792/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Arrangements are being made to pay the Specialised Instructors Allowance to the relevant NCO Specialised Instructors. The payments will be processed on receipt of the required documentation from the Military authorities.

**Defence Forces Medical Services**

137. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if medical information sought by a person (details supplied) which is held by the Defence Forces will be released; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48977/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I am advised by the Military Authorities that the request has been received and the medical information sought will be released. Medical files have a privacy classification of medical in confidence and accordingly must be administered with due care and attention. The delay in releasing the file is due in the first instance to a current backlog in the processing of medical files as a result of a heavy volume of requests, many of which are under a statutory scheme for release of information. Therefore, precedence must be given to such applications. I have requested the Defence Forces to progress this request as quickly as possible.

**Air Corps**
138. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of pilots in the Defence Forces availing of the pilot retention scheme lump sum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49025/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The PSPC report on recruitment and retention in the Defence Forces recommended the reintroduction of the Air Corps Flying Officers Service Commitment Scheme that was discontinued in 2010.

The closing date for receipt of applications for the 2019 scheme is close of business on 29 November 2019. My Department has received a series of detailed queries seeking clarification of the operation of the scheme. My Officials are providing the clarifications sought.

**Defence Forces Medical Services**

139. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if funding will be allocated for the recruitment of an additional two full-time clinical psychologists for the Defence Forces. [49034/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** There are currently two full-time clinical psychologists employed by the Defence Forces. This number was increased following the review of mental health services for the Defence Forces in 2017, which recommended the appointment of a civilian psychologist in addition to the existing Defence Forces psychologist. There are no plans currently in place to recruit more clinical psychologists.

**Defence Forces Recruitment**

140. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a new recruitment campaign for both the Air Corps and Naval Service will commence before the end of 2019. [49035/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** General Service recruitment is ongoing throughout 2019.

Recruitment plans for 2020 have not yet been finalised.

**Army Barracks**

141. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if construction work on the new gymnasium at Sarsfield Barracks, County Limerick, and Stephen’s Barracks, County Kilkenny, has commenced; if so, the duration of the works; and the estimated cost of the projects. [49036/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As part of the ongoing Capital Building Programme designed to modernise and enhance the training, operational and accommodation facilities available to members of the Defence Forces, the need to provide modern training facilities for members of the Defence Forces stationed at Sarsfield Barracks in Limerick and Stephen’s Barracks in Kilkenny was recognised.

I am pleased to advise that I approved the Stephen’s Barracks Main Works contract in mid-
October with Kevin Moore (Building Contractor) Ltd for a contract sum of €3.2m. Construction work for this project has now commenced and works are expected to be completed by the end of 2020.

In relation to the Sarsfield Barracks gymnasium, I can advise that funding has been approved in the region of €3.3m. A competitive tendering process took place earlier this year and tenders are currently being evaluated. The outcome of that evaluation is expected in the coming weeks and a Contractor will be appointed thereafter.

**Defence Forces Properties**

142. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the engagement between his Department, local residents and Wicklow County Council regarding ongoing land management access and maintenance of the Glen of Imaal firing range; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49108/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Glen of Imaal is an operational training facility for the Defence Forces.

The civilian Lands Staff employed by my Department at that location deal mainly with the herding and removal of sheep from the ranges prior to exercises and when necessary assist with mountain rescues.

Throughout the year advertisements are placed in the main national and local Wicklow newspapers which give a general warning around military firing ranges and advising that red flags indicate live firing.

I have been advised by my officials that the Department has not been approached in the recent past by Wicklow County Council or by local residents in regard to the lands there.

**Air Navigation Orders**

143. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the transit through Irish airspace was approved for two aircraft (details supplied) on 19 November 2019; if these NATO aircraft were carrying weapons or munitions; if they were engaged in or coming from or to military operations at the time. [48822/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Air Navigation (Foreign Military Aircraft) Order 1952, made under the Air Navigation and Transport Act 1946, gives the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade primary responsibility for the regulation of activity by foreign military aircraft in and over Ireland.

Strict conditions apply to overflights by any and all foreign military aircraft through Irish sovereign airspace.

Overflights by US military aircraft are permitted without prior notification, on the basis that the aircraft are unarmed, carry only cargo and passengers and comply with navigational requirements. The US Embassy provides my Department with post hoc monthly returns on the total number of overflights and the types of aircraft involved. These US flights, which took place on 19 November, come under this arrangement and as such met these requirements.
**EU Budget Contribution**

144. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that on 10 October 2019 the European Parliament voted for a motion for a resolution to wind up the debate on the statements by the Council and the Commission on the MFF 2021-2027, a resolution which reiterated the fact that the next MFF should represent 1.3% of the EU GNI; the amount of a net increase this would amount to annually in the case of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48565/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The European Commission published its proposals for the 2021-2027 MFF on 2 May 2018. The Commission proposal envisaged a budget of 1.114% of EU 27 GNI, equivalent to €1.134 trillion over the seven-year period. The Commission proposal was the starting point for discussions that have been ongoing in the Council and European Parliament since then. The European Parliament is required to give its consent to the overall final MFF agreement.

I am aware that the European Parliament has published a number of Resolutions on the MFF proposals since early 2018, most recently its Resolution of 10 October, which reiterated its position that the next MFF should be 1.3% of EU 27 GNI.

At the October European Council, Heads of State and Government (HoSG) exchanged views on the MFF based on a Finnish Presidency discussion paper which proposed an MFF in the range of 1.03% - 1.08% of EU 27 GNI (including the European Development Fund). HoSG called on the Presidency to submit a Negotiating Box with figures ahead of the European Council on December 2019.

In the course of the discussions to date, the Government has said that Ireland is open to contributing more to the EU budget, provided that European Added Value is ensured and that our core interests - particularly CAP - are met. We will continue to seek to ensure that Ireland’s priorities are protected. The final overall level we can support will depend on the proposed balance between the main policy areas.

Ireland is likely to see significant growth in our contributions as part to the next MFF, largely as a result of our continued economic growth. The exact level of contributions will depend on the final MFF negotiations, in particular the overall level of expenditure and the Own Resources to be applied.

**Passport Services**

145. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the use of passport cards within the EU will be clarified in view of the fact that some airlines operate booking systems with them and others do not as indicated in correspondence (details supplied). [48632/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** It is disappointing to hear that the person in question experienced difficulties with an airline website when using the Passport Card.

The Irish Passport Card is valid for travel to 31 countries: all EU Member States, the members of the EEA (Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway) and Switzerland.

It is fully compliant with International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) regulations concerning requirements for passports in card format. Over 209,000 passport cards have been is-
sued to date and users have found it to be a highly convenient travel document.

Airport, port and immigration authorities in each of the countries for which the Card is valid for travel should be fully informed in relation to the Irish Passport Card. The Irish authorities have engaged extensively with our international partners in relation to the card and will continue to do so. We have made contact with the airline to inform them of the problems experienced using the Passport Card that are outlined in your question.

Air Navigation Orders

146. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department or another Department authorised a British RAF fighter jet (details supplied) to fly over Irish sovereign territory on 19 November 2019; if so the reason therefor; and if the aircraft was carrying weapons and ammunition. [48916/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Air Navigation (Foreign Military Aircraft) Order 1952, made under the Air Navigation and Transport Act 1946, gives the Minister for Foreign Affairs primary responsibility for the regulation of activity by foreign military aircraft in Ireland. Successive Ministers for Foreign Affairs have put in place strict conditions which must be satisfied before permission to overfly the territory of the State may be granted.

Thorough and robust procedures are in place in my Department with a view to ensuring that the conditions for securing permission for foreign military aircraft to overfly the State are clearly understood and properly applied. These procedures are kept under ongoing review. Comprehensive records on requests received and decisions made are retained for the purposes of monitoring and oversight, and are drawn on as needed including to provide information to this House as appropriate.

My Department did not receive any requests to approve an overflight by the British military aircraft detailed during the period in question. The Department has also consulted the Irish Aviation Authority who have confirmed that they have no record of such a flight in Irish sovereign airspace on that date.

Passport Applications Data

147. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of first-time passport applicants from Great Britain and Northern Ireland, respectively, in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49028/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The numbers of first time passport applications received from applicants who were resident in Great Britain and Northern Ireland at the time of application for the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019 are detailed in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>First time applications from Great Britain</th>
<th>First time applications from Northern Ireland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>6,011</td>
<td>20,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>18,263</td>
<td>29,923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>31,675</td>
<td>40,089</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All passport applications are subject to the provisions of the Passports Act, 2008, as amended. The Passports Act provides, among other things, that a person must be an Irish citizen before a passport can be issued to him or her. Entitlement to Irish citizenship is governed by Irish law and in particular the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended.

### Middle East Issues

148. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he discussed the change in US policy on Israeli settlements at his recent meeting with the US Ambassador to Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49029/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I met with the US Ambassador to Ireland, His Excellency Mr Crawford, and among other issues discussed, I raised the matter of the US statement on settlements. Ireland’s views on settlements have been made clear to the US administration in all meetings related to the Middle East Peace Process, including when I met Jared Kushner during UNGA high-level week in New York in September.

### Foreign Conflicts

149. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the situation in Georgia; the position of Ireland on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49030/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland, together with the EU, continues to reaffirm its unwavering support for Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, as and when the opportunity presents itself across all local, EU and international fora.

The appointment in 2018 of a EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, as well as the EU Monitoring Mission, in which Ireland has representatives, are visible and substantial signs of the Union’s commitment to helping Georgia address its security challenges.

Central to this support is the Eastern Partnership initiative, which provides a framework for cooperation between the EU and six countries in the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood, including Georgia. The aims of the Eastern Partnership are to promote peace and stability in the region and to enhance economic and political integration between the participating countries and the EU.

Ireland welcome’s the policy of the Government of Georgia towards peaceful conflict resolution based on the fundamental principles of international law and support Georgia’s peace initiative ‘A Step to a Better Future’ aimed at improving the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of people residing in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
However, Ireland remains concerned that 10 years after the Russia-Georgia war, the occupation of these regions still continues and that the security, human rights and humanitarian situation on the ground is deteriorating. Ireland regrets reports of recent escalations along the Administrative Boundary Line between Tbilisi-administered Georgia and South Ossetia, including the temporary detainment of EU Monitoring Mission staff by a South Ossetian patrol. Additionally, continuing reports of ‘border creep’, the installation of barbed wire fences, and arbitrary detainment of Georgian citizens is of deep concern to Ireland.

The Geneva International Discussions aimed at settling the conflicts have made little progress to date however we remain fully supportive of this format and encourage the participants to engage in good faith in order to find solutions for the safety and humanitarian needs of the population affected by the conflict.

Finally, Ireland shares the concerns of our EU Partners over the new security and humanitarian concerns which have emerged in the regions affected by the conflict. Of particular concern is the decision in Sokhumi of 4 April 2019 that provides for the punishment by death, under certain circumstances, of the so-called export/import and/or transit of drugs and we reiterate our opposition to the use of the death penalty in all circumstances.

**Human Rights**

150. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the practical toolkit on business and human rights for public and private entities has been developed as outlined in the national plan on business and human rights; and if not, the reason therefor in view of the fact that it was due to be developed within 12 months of the publication of the national plan. [49055/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Since the launch of the Government’s National Plan on Business and Human Rights at the end of 2017, work on a number of the initial priorities has been completed, including the establishment of the Business and Human Rights Implementation Group and the commissioning of the baseline study on the current legislative and regulatory framework for business and human rights in Ireland.

A number of sub-groups are being set up to take forward implementation of other key action points identified in the National Plan, including the development of a practical toolkit on business and human rights for public and private entities to assist them in their human rights due diligence and it is expected that this task will be completed within the next year.

A key consideration is the need to avoid duplication with resources that are already available. In this regard I would highlight the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises, which aim to promote positive contributions by enterprises to economic, environmental and social progress worldwide. The guidelines provide principles and standards for responsible business conduct in a global context and contain a comprehensive approach to due diligence and responsible supply chain management.

**Tax Credits**

151. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance if a reply will issue to matters raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) relating to the seafarers credit and tax allowances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48802/19]
172. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to extend to personnel serving on board the Irish Lights ship ILV Granuaile an entitlement to the tax credit given to qualifying Naval Service personnel in the Finance Bill 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49056/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 151 and 172 together.

Section 5 of Finance Bill 2019 provides for the introduction of a targeted and time bound income tax credit for permanent members of the Irish Naval Service. This is a once-off measure that will apply in 2020 only, in respect of service carried out in 2019. It is based on the design of the existing Fisher Tax Credit (s472BA of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997) and will provide an income tax credit of €1,270 to permanent members of the Irish Naval Service who spent at least 80 days at sea on a naval vessel in 2019.

As I outlined in my recent Finance Bill 2019 Report Stage speech, the intention is that this tax credit will act as a temporary device as we prepare for other measures in the context of future discussion on public pay. The Naval Service has particular challenges with regard to recruitment and retention, a fact that was acknowledged by Deputy McGrath during the Report Stage debates. As such, I believe it is appropriate that this measure is introduced at this time and with the particular restrictions that I have specified.

**State Claims Agency Data**

152. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance a breakdown of pay outs by the State Claims Agency by the various settlement channels including awards through the Personal Injuries Assessment Board, by court award or by settlement in each year since 2015, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48998/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The State Claims Agency (SCA) is part of the National Treasury Management Agency, which is a body under the aegis of the Minister for Finance. As such, the SCA have supplied the information included in this report, and confirmed that it is correct as of 31 October 2019.

The following figures relate to claims which have been concluded and where damages have been paid across the Clinical and General Indemnity Schemes.

The first table contains information regarding the damages paid on claims which have been concluded from 2015 to 2019 year to date, broken down by year the payment was issued. Here, damages refer to the compensation paid to a claimant in personal injury claims for the pain and suffering arising from a physical and/or mental injury (known as General Damages) and/or the compensation paid to a claimant for out of pocket expenses incurred such as loss of earnings, vehicle damage, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transaction Date</th>
<th>Number of Claims</th>
<th>Damages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1,101</td>
<td>€164,940,956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1,239</td>
<td>€180,141,716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>1,342</td>
<td>€216,282,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>1,574</td>
<td>€245,281,393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019 YTD</td>
<td>1,298</td>
<td>€249,277,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,326</td>
<td>€1,055,923,411</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The SCA has advised me that payments can be made during multiple years with respect to a single claim and as such will contribute to the claims counts in each of the relevant payment years over the life cycle of the claim. The Total Claim Count shows the number of claims for which payments were made between 2015 and 2019 without such reporting duplication. Total number of unique claims is 6,326.

The following table details damages paid from 2015 to 2019 year to date on claims concluded, broken down by case outcome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Outcome</th>
<th>Number of Claims</th>
<th>Damages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Settlement Agreed</td>
<td>5,637</td>
<td>€1,002,963,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injuries Board Assessment Accepted</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>€12,079,958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lodgement/tender accepted</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>€3,718,541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court Award</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>€35,025,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Discontinued/Claim Statue Barred</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>€1,809,102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Dismissed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>€125,045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indemnity Received</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>€135,886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 17 - Offer Accepted</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>€66,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,326</strong></td>
<td><strong>€1,055,923,411</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Case Outcome heading provides details with regards to the outcome of the claim. The subheadings are broken out as follows:

- **Settlement Agreed**: A negotiated settlement has been agreed with the Plaintiff for damages. This category includes some claims that go to court and are either settled on the steps of the court or are settled during the court case but before the case concludes.

- **Injuries Board Assessment Accepted**: A negotiated settlement has been agreed with the Plaintiff for damages or an Injuries Board award accepted.

- **Indemnity Received**: The SCA obtained a full indemnity, in respect of the claim, on behalf of the relevant State Authority from the Insurers of a negligent Third Party motorist.

- **Case Discontinued/Statute Barred**: The claim against the State Authority was discontinued and/or withdrawn by the Plaintiff, or the Statute of Limitations rendered the claim Statute Barred and prevented the claim from proceeding.

- **Outside SCA Remit**: These claims were not managed by the State Claims Agency.

- **Case Dismissed**: A judge has dismissed a Plaintiff’s claim at the conclusion of the trial.

- **Court Award**: A judge has made an award of damages to the Plaintiff at the conclusion of the trial.

- **Lodgement/tender accepted**: A lodgement is where a defendant paid money into Court while a tender is an offer to settle a claim for a specified amount and is based on a statutory provision.

- **Section 17 - Offer Accepted**: Section 17 is a settlement offer made pursuant to a statutory provision - Section 17 of the Civil Liability & Courts Act 2004.

**Tax Credits**
153. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Finance the rationale for the abolition of the one parent family tax credit announced in budget 2014. [49001/19]

154. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Finance if there is an alternative in place for separated parents who contribute to their children and share custody in view of the fact that they can no longer access the one parent family tax credit. [49002/19]

155. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Finance the amount saved from the one parent family tax credit being abolished. [49003/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 153 to 155, inclusive, together.

The One-Parent Family Tax Credit (OPFTC) was examined by the Commission on Taxation in 2009, and its role in supporting the labour market participation of single and widowed parents was acknowledged. The Commission therefore recommended that the credit should be retained, but that it should be allocated only to the primary carer of the child.

The OPFTC was replaced by the Single Person Child Carer Credit (SPCCC) in 2014. It is essential to review all tax reliefs, credits and incentives in order to ensure that they are properly targeted and, if necessary, re-focused in order that they can achieve their intended socio-economic objectives. A feature of the OPFTC was that it could be claimed by multiple individuals in respect of a single child, resulting in a considerable annual cost of over €141 million by 2013, attributable to over 104,000 claimants. This was unsustainable and the OPFTC was therefore replaced by the SPCCC from 1 January 2014. Since then, only one credit is available in respect of any qualifying child, and an individual who is a primary claimant in respect of more than one qualifying child can only receive one credit. Agreement as to who will be the primary carer of a child is a matter for the parents or guardians, and is defined for the purpose of the credit as being the person who the qualifying child is resident with for the greater part of the year. Where the custody of a child is shared equally between two individuals, the legislation provides that the primary claimant shall be the person in receipt of the child benefit payment from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. However this is a secondary provision, and the main criteria for allocation of the credit is the residence provision. If a child is resident with one parent for the greater part of the year (i.e. for a period greater than 6 months), that person should qualify as the primary carer of the child and therefore be entitled to claim the credit in their own right as primary claimant. If the primary claimant does not wish to claim the credit they may surrender their entitlement to a secondary claimant.

In 2017, the most recent year for which data are available, the cost of the SPCCC was almost €94 million, attributable to over 67,000 claimants. These figures, and costs for each year going back to 2004, are published in the Cost of Tax Expenditures document on Revenue’s website at the link: [https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-expenditures.aspx](https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-expenditures.aspx) Issues concerning this credit are outlined in detail in the review of the SPCCC conducted by my Department in 2015 contained in the Report on Tax Expenditures, available online at the link: [http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2016/Documents/Tax_Expenditures_Report_pub.pdf](http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2016/Documents/Tax_Expenditures_Report_pub.pdf)

I am satisfied that the SPCCC in its current form is targeting limited State resources to where they are most needed. However, I am conscious of the significant contribution made by taxpayers generally to the rebalancing of the public finances, and of the challenges that individuals continue to face notwithstanding the improving economic conditions.

It is the Government’s position that earners start to pay the marginal rate of tax at too low an income level and it is committed to reducing excessive tax rates for low and middle income
earners while also keeping the tax base broad. As a result of changes in recent Budgets, USC rates have been reduced to 0.5%, 2% and 4.5%. The income level at which taxpayers begin to pay the higher rate of tax has also been increased by €2,500 and there have been increases in both the Home Carer Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit.

**Tax Code**

156. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the allocation of flat rate expenses for teachers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49066/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Over the past 18 months, Revenue has been conducting a comprehensive review of the administratively based Flat Rate Expenses (FRE) regime. Revenue has advised me that the purpose of the FRE review, which involved engagement with relevant representative bodies, is to ensure that the expenses granted to each employment category remain justified and appropriate to modern day employments and work practices. Each category of FRE allowance is being examined separately in the light of the legislative requirements of section 114 TCA 1997, which provides expenses are tax deductible only if they are wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred by the employee in the performance of the duties of his or her employment and are not reimbursed by the employer.

Revenue has also advised me that its FRE review is ongoing but is now nearing conclusion, with an expected completion date by end year.

As I informed the House during the Report Stage debate on the Finance Bill last week, while I am aware of the effect this will have on those who are impacted by the change, I also need to respect the independence of the Revenue Commissioners. They are, though, keenly aware of the issues and concerns of those that may be affected by the outcome of the review.

Having regard to the fact that we are coming closer to the date on which any changes on foot of the review are due to be implemented, I have, as I committed previously to do, written to Revenue seeking a factual update on the review. Once this process of engagement with Revenue has been completed, I will be in a position to comment further on the matter, and conscious of the timeline involved, I anticipate that I will be able to do so very shortly.

**VAT Rate Application**

157. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the proposed VAT rate for food supplements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48558/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Irish VAT legislation does not provide a zero rate for food supplement products; instead they are subject to the standard rate of VAT (23%). 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 has acknowledged that the scope of its concessionary approach broadened progressively over time to the point that it had become increasingly difficult to maintain an effective distinction between food supplement products that could benefit from the zero rate and those that were standard rated. Revenue acknowledges that this concessionary approach was
unsatisfactory and led to diverging and inconsistent practices, and there were continuous efforts by elements in the industry to expand its scope.

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

The public consultation ran from 18 April to 24 May 2019 and sought input from a wide range of interested parties, including from health and nutrition experts and the Minister for Health. In total, 121 submissions were received. This included submissions from individuals, businesses, lobby groups and a political party. The results of the consultation were included in the 2019 Tax Strategy Group paper on VAT. The options set out in the TSG paper are the only options available; either the standard rate is maintained, or the reduced rate is introduced.

I am making provision in Finance Bill 2019 to apply the 13.5% rate of VAT to all food supplement products, which will take effect from 1 January 2020. Foods for specific groups such as infant follow-on formulae and infant foods, foods for special medical purposes and specially formulated foods (e.g. total diet replacement for weight control) will remain zero rated. These are well established and defined categories of food that are essential for vulnerable groups of the population. Fortified foods, such as yoghurts and cereals fortified with vitamins and minerals, will also remain zero rated as they are food.

Folic acid, vitamin and mineral products for human oral use which are licenced or authorised as medicines by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (‘HPRA’) will remain zero rated under a different VAT provision.

Property Tax Review

158. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Finance the status of his work in the context of the publication of the scrutiny report on the review of local property tax by the Oireachtas Committee on Budgetary Oversight. [48566/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Earlier this year, the review of the Local Property Tax was completed by my Department in conjunction with the Departments of the Taoiseach, Public Expenditure & Reform and Housing, Planning & Local Government and the Revenue Commissioners and the report was published in April (available at https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1e5c76-review-of-local-property-tax/). In accordance with its terms of reference, the review focused on the impact of house price movements on LPT liabilities under a series of scenarios involving different rate and tax band structures. The review also included
an examination of the outstanding recommendations of the 2015 Thornhill review of the Local Property Tax. It included a consultation process to enable all interested parties and individuals to submit their views on the future of the LPT.

The Review Group found significant but geographically uneven increases in residential property price levels which made it difficult to identify a scenario that would deliver on the condition I set that there should be relative stability for all taxpayers in their LPT liabilities and that any increases should be modest, affordable and fair.

Having considered the findings of the review report, I decided to defer the valuation date from 1st November 2019 to 1st November 2020, and this was effected by ministerial order (S.I. No. 166/2019 - Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (Section 13(3)) Order 2019). This gave sufficient time for the Budgetary Oversight Committee to consider the review report in the context of the Committee’s recommendations in its report on LPT of 21 March 2018. Importantly, as a result of my decision, the LPT bills of those liable for the tax will not be increasing in 2020.

I met with the Committee in June to discuss the review of the Local Property Tax. The Committee also had a separate meeting with officials of my Department. I received the Committee’s scrutiny report on the LPT review in September. In order to bring this matter forward we will need to introduce amending legislation and the Committee’s report will provide a valuable input to that work. I will revert to Government with proposals for changes to the Local Property Tax in a timely way. Any such change would need to be legislated for early in 2020 so that the Revenue Commissioners can be in a position to have the necessary administrative and technical arrangements in place in time in respect of the 2021 LPT year.

Central Bank of Ireland

159. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Finance the powers he has to direct the Central Bank to change or modify its macroprudential rules. [48600/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I assume the Deputy is specifically referring to the Central Bank macro prudential rules on residential mortgage lending.

These mortgage lending measures have been put in place by the Central Bank by way of regulations made by the under section 48 of the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013. While the 2013 Act requires the Bank to consult me before making any such regulation (including any amending regulation), the Central Bank is nevertheless the statutory authority for the making of these regulations and I do not have any authority to direct the Bank to change or otherwise modify regulations it makes under that statutory function.

In this context, the Deputy may wish to note that in a recent speech the new Governor, Gabriel Makhlouf, indicated that the macro prudential mortgage measures are now a permanent feature of the mortgage market and that it is also a core component of the Bank’s overall macro prudential toolkit. The Central Bank has committed itself to reviewing the calibration of the measures on an annual basis, to ensure they continue to meet their stated objectives of strengthening bank and borrower resilience and avoiding a damaging credit-house price spiral. I am advised that the outcome of the 2019 mortgage measures review can be expected from the Bank in early December.

Special Savings Incentive Scheme
160. Deputy Colm Brophy asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer of the special savings incentive accounts scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48621/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The special saving incentive account (SSIA) scheme opened on 1 May 2001 and entry closed on 30 April 2002. The accounts fully matured after a five year period between 1 May 2006 and 30 April 2007.

The total cost of the scheme was €3.061bn. The following is a breakdown of the yearly cost of the scheme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>€71m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>€433m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>€532m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>€548m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>€597m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>€440m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>€440m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>€3,061m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VAT Rate Application

161. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider waiving VAT on repair costs associated with properties affected by mica; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48685/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): VAT is a tax on consumption and is applied to supplies made by a person and not to supplies received by them. This is a feature of the VAT system itself, and as the Deputy will be aware it is not possible under EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply, to introduce VAT exemption based on services received, nor to introduce an exemption based on the recipient of a service. Therefore it is not possible to waive VAT on repair costs associated with properties affected by MICA.

Tax Yield

162. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Finance the value of capital gains tax, capital acquisition tax and dividend withholding tax collected in County Kerry in each of the years from 2015 to 2018 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48743/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the Capital Gains Tax receipts from individuals located in County Kerry for the years requested by the Deputy can be found at link: https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/receipts/net-receipts-by-county.pdf


Revenue has also confirmed that information on Dividend Withholding Tax paid in respect of dividends on shares held by shareholders located in County Kerry is not separately avail-
able. This is because the relevant information is returned by companies rather than individual shareholders.

In general, as the Deputy will be aware, ringfencing certain taxes collected to be used for a specific purpose and in a specific location reduces the flexibility of the Government to prioritise and allocate funds as necessary across the State.

**Insurance Industry**

163. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank monitors the number of insurance companies operating in the market; the number of insurance companies that have left the market each year since 2014, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48787/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy’s question, my officials contacted the Central Bank for the information requested. The Bank informed my Department that, since the Central Bank Reform Act 2010, which amended the Central Bank Act 1942, it has no role in promoting or monitoring competition in the Irish insurance market. However, the Central Bank was in a position to provide the number of insurance firms that have exited the market since 2014 (as notified to us under the relevant European Insurance Directives), on the basis of their historical registers. The Central Bank has provided the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head Offices and EC Branches</th>
<th>Freedom to Provide Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year Revoked</td>
<td>Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the figures do not show the number of entrants into the Irish market for those years, they do suggest that there has been an increased trend for non-life companies operating on a freedom of services basis to leave the Irish market, particularly between the years 2017 and 2019. There may be a number of factors related to this, including undoubtedly smaller operators not seeking to continue to do business because of requirements to seek a new authorisation as a result of the decision of the UK to exit the EU. However, it is also possible that the difficult financial position that a number of non-life insurers have found themselves in because of the problems being experienced from the unstable claims environment may also be a factor.

Regardless of what these figures suggest, I believe that if we are to attract new non-life insurers to operate into the Irish market, we must continue to implement the recommendations of the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG). In particular, I believe it is important to emphasise that the single most essential challenge that must be overcome if there is to be a sustainable increase in the availability and affordability of insurance is to bring the levels of personal injury damages awarded in this country more in line with those awarded in other jurisdictions. In this regard, the work of the soon-to-be-established Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee as part of the Judicial Council will be essential in achieving that objective.
The first important step required by the legislation is for the Chief Justice to make the necessary appointments to the Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee. I therefore welcome last week’s announcement by Chief Justice Clarke that he has designated the seven judges that will sit on the Committee. I understand that the designate committee will commence its activities on an informal basis shortly. This is an important development as it demonstrates that the Judiciary is giving this matter the priority I believe it deserves. While I appreciate that the development of a new set of personal injury award guidelines is the prerogative of the Judiciary, I believe that much work has already been done, in particular the PIC benchmarking exercise, which should assist the Judiciary in completing this work as soon as possible. The Government is willing to provide the Judiciary with any background assistance, such as input from the Cost of Insurance Working Group, should they think that necessary. I also understand that PIAB has written to the Judiciary to offer its expertise and assistance for the purpose of this recalibration exercise.

Finally, as I have stated before, I believe that if the issue of the level of awards in this country is addressed, that the problems facing particular businesses and community groups as a result of particular insurers either withdrawing from the market or increasing the price of insurance should recede.

### Insurance Data

164. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank attempts to monitor the number of businesses that cannot obtain a quote for public and employer liability insurance; the number of businesses that could not obtain insurance in each year since 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48788/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** My officials consulted with the Central Bank of Ireland on the Deputy’s question. In response, the Bank indicated that it does not have a role in monitoring the number of businesses that cannot obtain a quote for public and employer liability insurance and therefore does not have such data.

I am very much aware that there are certain businesses that are having difficulties arising from either the affordability or even the availability of insurance, particularly in specific sectors such as leisure, hospitality and recreation. In this regard, the work of the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG), particularly its Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance Report highlights these difficulties. Therefore, there is a clear understanding of the impact of this problem on businesses across the country.

As the Deputy is aware, neither I, nor the Central Bank, have any influence over the pricing of insurance products. 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. A further constraint is the fact that, for constitutional reasons, the Government cannot direct the courts as to the award levels that should be applied.

The Deputy should note however that through the work of the CIWG, there is a recognition that the single most essential challenge, which must be addressed if we are to overcome the current cost and availability problems, is to provide for a sustainable reduction in insurance costs. As you are aware, the Government with the support of all parties in the Oireachtas prioritised the passing of the Judicial Council Act 2019. This Act provides for the establishment of a Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee upon the formal establishment of the Judicial Council. This Committee is tasked with introducing new guidelines to replace the Book of Quantum.
A key step to moving this matter forward is for the Chief Justice to make the necessary appointments to the Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee. I therefore welcome last week’s announcement by Chief Justice Clarke that he has designated the seven judges that will sit on this Committee. I understand that the designate committee will commence its activities on an informal basis shortly. This is an important development as it demonstrates that the Judiciary are giving this matter the priority I believe it deserves. I also understand that PIAB has written to the Judiciary to offer its expertise and assistance for the purpose of this recalibration exercise.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Deputy that important reforms are taking place and that I am confident that if the level of awards are reduced as a result of the work of the Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee, then the insurance premium and coverage issues that are being experienced by certain businesses should recede.

Insurance Industry

165. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of customers impacted by the exit of a company (details supplied) from the market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48790/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** At the outset, it is important to note that as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation and therefore my Department does not have access to the type of information being sought by the Deputy.

My officials contacted the Central Bank on this matter and were advised that pursuant to Section 33AK of the Central Bank Act 1942, it is prevented from disclosing any confidential information obtained through the performance of its functions or the exercise of its powers. Therefore, they say that they cannot comment on individual firms or release supervisory information relating to regulated entities.

It also should be noted that the decision taken by the company in question to exit the Irish market was not communicated to me, Minister of State D’Arcy, nor my officials. Neither has there been any communication by the company to my Department subsequent to this decision.

From media reports which the Deputy will also be familiar with, I understand that the relevant company has decided to no longer write new business. However, it is reported that all existing policies will be honoured and claims will be paid. I also understand from the reports that the relevant company has blamed losses “caused by stiff competition and the high volume of claims in the Irish market” for its decision.

While insurers may enter and exit markets regularly, it would appear that there is a trend currently for insurers to exit the Irish market. The media reports in relation to this particular company corroborate what Minister of State D’Arcy has heard from other insurers, in particular when he met with a number of UK underwriters in London who had recently pulled out of the Irish leisure insurance market. It also reinforces why the single most essential challenge, which must be overcome if there is to be a sustainable increase in the availability and affordability of insurance, is to bring the levels of personal injury damages awarded in this country more in line with those awarded in other jurisdictions. In this regard, the work of the soon-to-be-established Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee as part of the Judicial Council will be essential in achieving that objective.

I therefore welcome last week’s announcement by Chief Justice Clarke that he has designated the seven judges that will sit on the Guidelines Committee. I understand that the designate
committee will commence its activities on an informal basis shortly. This is an important development as it demonstrates that the Judiciary are giving this matter the priority I believe it deserves. While I appreciate that the development of a new set of personal injury award guidelines is the prerogative of the Judiciary, I believe that much work has already been done, in particular the PIC benchmarking exercise, which should assist the Judiciary in completing this work as soon as possible. The Government is willing to provide the Judiciary with any background assistance, such as input from the Cost of Insurance Working Group, should they think that necessary. I also understand that PIAB has written to the Judiciary to offer its expertise and assistance for the purpose of this recalibration exercise.

Finally, as I have stated before, I believe that if the issue of the level of awards in this country is addressed, that the problems facing particular businesses and community groups should recede. Indeed, I would recall that those UK underwriters whom the Minister of State met expressed a willingness to return to the Irish market if this was achieved.

Corporation Tax

166. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the corporation tax received by industry or sector in each year since 2015, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48845/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Details of corporation tax received by industry sector for the years 2013 to 2018, the most recent year for which data are available, are published in tabular form on Revenue’s website at the following link: https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/receipts/receipts-sector.aspx

This publication also includes information on net income tax, VAT and capital gains tax receipts by industry sector.

The specific information requested by the Deputy is provided in the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>2018€ million</th>
<th>2017€ million</th>
<th>2016€ million</th>
<th>2015€ million</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, forestry &amp; fishing</td>
<td>76.47</td>
<td>43.95</td>
<td>39.40</td>
<td>41.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining &amp; Utilities</td>
<td>149.08</td>
<td>45.03</td>
<td>40.37</td>
<td>102.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>3,219.00</td>
<td>2,090.23</td>
<td>1,873.84</td>
<td>1,818.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>262.65</td>
<td>171.06</td>
<td>153.35</td>
<td>113.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale &amp; retail trade; repair of motor vehicles &amp; motorcycles</td>
<td>768.05</td>
<td>1,107.69</td>
<td>993.02</td>
<td>1,139.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation &amp; Storage</td>
<td>282.99</td>
<td>271.31</td>
<td>243.22</td>
<td>174.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation &amp; food services</td>
<td>118.61</td>
<td>93.26</td>
<td>83.60</td>
<td>57.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information &amp; communication</td>
<td>2,094.50</td>
<td>1,367.68</td>
<td>1,226.09</td>
<td>1,345.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial &amp; insurance activities</td>
<td>2,105.40</td>
<td>2,302.55</td>
<td>2,064.18</td>
<td>1,600.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate activities</td>
<td>129.47</td>
<td>100.78</td>
<td>90.34</td>
<td>91.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Money Laundering

167. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the remit his Department has with the newly established Register of Beneficial Ownership and the requirements of S.I. No. 110 of 2019. [48932/19]

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

The purpose of the Regulations is to prevent the use of corporate entities as vehicles for money laundering or terrorist financing and to provide competent authorities with access to information on the true ownership and control of corporate entities. Therefore, the obligation to file information with the central register applies to all companies formed under the Companies Act and societies registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts, with the exception of companies listed on regulated markets that are subject to disclosure requirements consistent with European Union law or subject to equivalent international standards which ensure adequate transparency of ownership information.

The remit of the Department of Finance was to develop the necessary Regulations in cooperation with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation as part of the measures taken to transpose the Fifth Anti-Money Laundering Directive. While the relevant legislation was signed by myself as Minister for Finance, the register is maintained by a “Registrar of Beneficial Ownership of Companies and Industrial and Provident Societies”, as provided for under Regulation 18 of SI 110/2019, who has been appointed by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.
Insurance Fraud

168. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; the measures he is taking to curb insurance fraud; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48969/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** At the outset, the Deputy should note that it would not be appropriate for me, as Minister for Finance, to comment on individual cases such as the one she refers to in the details supplied.

In relation to the Deputy’s question regarding measures being taken to curb insurance fraud, I would note that the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) examined this issue as part of its review of both motor and employer and public liability insurance and made recommendations aimed at addressing this problem.

In this respect, the CIWG made recommendations to strengthen the powers of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) around compliance with its procedures, and this was achieved through the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (Amendment) Act 2019. In addition, it recommended amendments to Sections 8 and 14 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 to make it easier for businesses and insurers to challenge cases where fraud or exaggeration is suspected. The changes provide that a letter of claim stating the nature of the wrong alleged must be provided to an alleged wrongdoer by a claimant who intends to pursue a claim for damages for personal injuries “one month from the date of the cause of action”. Previously, the period for issuing this letter was “two months from the date of the cause of action, or as soon as practicable thereafter.” If a claimant does not issue a letter within the first month (without a valid reason), the court “shall” draw inferences from this and penalise the plaintiff as to costs. These changes were brought in to help tackle fraud and exaggerated claims, but also to align the law with GDPR requirements (e.g. deletion of CCTV footage). These amendments were made as part of the Central Bank (National Claims Information Database) Act 2018.

I believe that one of the key achievements of the CIWG is increased coordination and cooperation between An Garda Síochána and the insurance industry with regard to tackling fraud. This includes the reporting of suspected fraud, as well as to how that fraud is recorded on the PULSE system. There has also been recent successes under Operation Coatee, which targets insurance-related criminality. In addition, Garda Commissioner Drew Harris has decided for operational reasons to investigate insurance fraud at the divisional level, rather than establish a centralised insurance investigation unit, which may not be in a position to investigate incidents at a local level to the same extent. This approach is aligned with a general divisional-focused Garda model and the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) will guide divisions and provide training in the investigation of insurance fraud.

I might conclude by saying that since the CIWG started its work in 2016, I believe that many insurers are taking a much more robust approach to challenging questionable claims. This can be seen in recent media reports detailing personal injuries cases which have been dismissed by the courts after extensive investigations surrounding the circumstances of the claim. This trend is encouraging in terms of tackling the problem of dubious or exaggerated claims from the personal injuries litigation system.

**Tax Data**

169. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the percentage of taxpayers who were exempt from income tax in each year since 2008 to 2018 and to date in 2019; his
views on whether taxpayers should be required to pay income tax irrespective of income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48983/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Ireland has one of the most progressive income tax systems in the developed world. A progressive system ensures that the burden of taxation falls most heavily on those with a higher ability to pay. It is my view that a broad-based, progressive income tax system, where the majority of income earners make some contribution but according to their means, is the most fair and sustainable income tax system in the long term.

As regards the factual elements of the Deputy’s question, I am advised by Revenue that the numbers of taxpayers in each tax band, including those who are exempt from paying income tax, for the years 2008 to 2017 inclusive are published on Revenue’s website at the link: https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/income-distributions/income-earners-it.aspx

2017 is the latest year for which data are available.

Using the data in this published document, the percentage of taxpayer units that were exempt from income tax in each year from 2008 to 2017 is set out in the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of Taxpayer Units Exempt from Income Tax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the Universal Social Charge (USC), the percentage of taxpayer units who were exempt from USC for the years 2012 to 2017 inclusive is published in a document on Revenue’s website at the link: https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/income-distributions/income-earners-usc-rates.aspx

2017 is the latest year for which data are available.

Using the data in this published document, the percentage of taxpayer units who were exempt from the USC in each year from 2012 to 2017 is set out in the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of Taxpayer Units Exempt from Universal Social Charge (USC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Revenue’s Post-Budget 2020 Ready Reckoner is available on Revenue’s website at the link: https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf Page 3 of the document shows that in 2020, 34 per cent of taxpayer units are projected to be exempt from income tax and 28 per cent are projected to be exempt from income tax and USC. These estimates have been generated by reference to 2020 incomes as calculated on the basis of actual data for the year 2017, the latest year for which returns are available, adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. The estimates are provisional and may be revised. They assume no behavioural change by taxpayers.

Prior to the introduction of the USC, the Irish income tax base had narrowed to a point where over 45% of income earners in the State were exempt from income tax and just over 13% were liable to the higher rate of income tax. When initially introduced in 2011, the entry threshold to USC was €4,004, with the result that just over 12% of income earners were exempt from a charge on their income. Notwithstanding the subsequent increase in the entry threshold from €4,004 to €13,000, of the three Irish charges on income (income tax, USC and PRSI), the USC currently has the broadest base. This is because, in general, entry into liability for the USC starts at income of €13,000 per year (compared with €16,500 for income tax and generally €18,304 (€352 per week) for PRSI). The USC base is broad because there are no credits and very few reliefs.

It is the Government’s position that earners start to pay the marginal rate of tax at too low an income level and it is committed to reducing excessive tax rates for low and middle income earners while also keeping the tax base broad. As a result of changes in recent Budgets, USC rates have been reduced to 0.5%, 2% and 4.5%. The income level at which taxpayers begin to pay the higher rate of tax has also been increased by €2,500 and there have been increases in both the Home Carer Tax Credit and the Earned Income Credit.

Banking Sector

170. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance if deferred tax assets on losses carried forward in banks are included in the calculations for CET1 and fully loaded CET1 ratios; if these ratios will deteriorate if the deferred tax assets were removed from the balance sheet; if it will mean that banks would have to hold more capital if these deferred tax assets were removed; if this will increase the costs facing the banks; if this will have an impact on retail interest rates for customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49041/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy may recall that my Department issued a Technical Note to the Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure & Reform and Taoiseach (FinPERT) in August 2018 which dealt with the potential consequences of changes to the treatment of Corporation Tax Loss relief in respect of banks. In answering the Deputy’s current parliamentary question I have used content included in this note where relevant.

Under CRD IV rules, deferred tax assets (DTAs), which are substantially made up of tax losses in the case of the Irish banks, are being phased out over a 10-year period which commenced in 2014. Accordingly, tax losses still make up a material portion of the transitional CET1 ratios of the Irish banks. It should be noted that transitional CET1 ratio is the ratio which the regulator uses when assessing compliance with the minimum ratio set for the bank.

In the Technical Note referred to above, it was estimated that the removal of DTAs from the banks’ balance sheets would have the following impact on the December 2017 CET1 ratios as follows:
As fully loaded CET1 ratios are calculated with the DTAs deducted in their entirety from regulatory capital, the removal of DTAs would not impact on the reported ratio in the reporting period in which they were removed. However, for subsequent reporting periods, fully loaded ratios would be negatively impacted as they would not have benefitted from the usage of the DTAs in the scenario where the banks continue to be profitable. This also applies beyond the transitional period.

The Deputy will be aware of the significant increase in regulatory capital which the banks are now required to hold since the financial crisis. It is not possible to estimate the potential reaction of the regulator should the DTAs be removed from the banks’ balance sheets in terms of addressing the impact of this on capital. However, as the impact would be significant, with the reported ratios at AIB, BOI and PTSB being reduced by an estimated 18%, 11% and 13% respectively, it would no doubt be a matter carefully considered.

In addition, it is difficult to estimate the precise impact of the removal of DTAs on the pricing of retail customer products. However, one of the key criteria used by banks when pricing products is the return on equity (ROE). ROE is an important metric for a number of stakeholders, including the regulator, when assessing the financial performance of a bank. Accordingly, should a bank be required to hold more capital arising from the removal of DTAs, this could put upward pressure on interest rates say, for example, in relation to loan products to ensure the bank is achieving an adequate ROE.

As a separate matter, it is important to highlight that the DTAs are a valuable asset on a bank’s balance sheet and the State benefits from this as it sells down its stakes in the banks. The original Technical Note estimated that the value of the DTAs, under current rules and on a discounted cash flow basis, was c. €2.283bn with the State’s share being c. €1.227bn (54%) reflecting its relative shareholdings in the banks.

During Committee Stage of Finance Bill 2019, I committed to providing the FinPERT Committee with updated figures on the Technical Note provided in August 2018. The updated figures will reflect the position at end-2018. Work is ongoing in this regard, and this information will be provided to the Committee members in due course.

For the convenience of the Deputy the following link is to the original Technical Note referred to above:


**Departmental Bodies**

171. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the membership of the cost of insurance working group; the meetings the group held since its inception; the date and purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49048/19]
Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) was established in July 2016 to undertake a detailed examination of the factors contributing to the 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, while bearing in mind the need to maintain a stable insurance sector. It was initially chaired by then-Minister of State Eoghan Murphy TD until June 2017, and has since been chaired by Minister of State Michael D’Arcy TD. The CIWG has met in plenary format 35 times since its inception, and a 36th meeting is to take place in early December. A list of these meetings and the dates are included in tabular format as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Insurance Working Group – 1st meeting</td>
<td>20 July 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Insurance Working Group – 2nd meeting</td>
<td>01 September 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Insurance Working Group – 3rd meeting</td>
<td>15 September 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Insurance Working Group – 4th meeting</td>
<td>23 September 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Insurance Working Group – 5th meeting</td>
<td>29 September 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Insurance Working Group – 6th meeting</td>
<td>13 October 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Insurance Working Group – 8th meeting</td>
<td>27 October 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Insurance Working Group – 9th meeting</td>
<td>08 November 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Insurance Working Group – 10th meeting</td>
<td>17 November 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Insurance Working Group – 11th meeting</td>
<td>29 November 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Insurance Working Group – 12th meeting</td>
<td>13 December 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Insurance Working Group – 13th meeting</td>
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The membership of the CIWG includes representatives from the following Departments and Offices:
The individual names of members are available in both of the Reports of the CIWG, which have been published on the Department of Finance’s website.

With regard to the purpose of these meetings, I do not believe it to be feasible to list this out on a meeting by meeting basis, however I would note that in general the purpose of the meetings was to ensure that the CIWG was able to produce its two primary reports on motor insurance and on employer and public liability insurance within the timeframes set out to it by Government. The production of these reports involved a considerable amount of input from members of the CIWG, who also met regularly through a number of sub-groups to look at specific areas for reform. It also involved an extensive consultation process and the CIWG met with various stakeholders, including Insurance Ireland, various insurance companies, AA Ireland, Auto Records Limited, the Consumers Association of Ireland, the Freight Transport Association of Ireland, the Irish Brokers Association, the Irish Car Rental Council, the Irish Road Haulage Association, the Law Society of Ireland and Tiomanai Tacsáí na hÉireann, in respect of its the Report on Motor Insurance. It also met with the Hotels Federation of Ireland, IBEC, ISME, the Vintners’ Federation of Ireland (VFI), the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA), the Retail Grocery Dairy & Allied Trades Association (RGDATA), Chambers Ireland, the Law Society of Ireland, and the Health and Safety Authority, Insurance Ireland, a number of CEOs from insurers operating in the employer liability and public liability insurance market and representatives from Lloyd’s of London as part of its consultations on the Report on Employer and Public Liability Insurance. In addition, submissions received from all interested parties were considered as part of the process.

Following publication of the two reports, in January 2017 and January 2018 respectively, the CIWG has continued to meet so as to ensure that progress is being made related to the implementation of the various recommendations by the relevant Departments and bodies, which make up its membership. The purpose of its meetings has therefore been to discuss issues related to implementation, including the Personal Injuries Commission’s recommendations, as well as to take stock of developments in the wider insurance reform agenda. The Minister of State, in his capacity as Chair of the CIWG, has also had an “open door” policy in relation to meeting various stakeholders such as businesses and community groups that have been experiencing difficulties in affording or being able to avail of insurance.

I think it is also important to mention that the relevant Ministers of State, as Chairs of the CIWG, have appeared before the FIN-PER Joint Oireachtas Committee to update them on the CIWG’s work, including progress it has made in relation to implementing its recommendations. This has happened on seven occasions since 2016 and I believe that this demonstrates the importance the CIWG places on ensuring the Oireachtas has been informed and involved throughout its work.

Finally, I would like to commend the CIWG and its members regarding the work they have
been taking to ensure that necessary reforms to the insurance sector are being carried out in line with the mandate that was given to it at the outset. I believe that these reforms are having a significant impact with regard to private motor insurance (CSO figures from October 2019 show that the price of motor insurance is now 27.1% lower than the July 2016 peak). However, I believe more needs to be done and in this context, I believe that the CIWG is as relevant now as it ever has been and it is likely to continue to meet into 2020 as implementation of remaining recommendations continues. The issue of the cost and availability of insurance, in particular to certain businesses and community groups, remains a priority for the Government.

*Question No. 172 answered with Question No. 151.*

**Public Spending Code**

173. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when a new public spending code will be issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48530/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As part of the ongoing reform of Ireland’s public investment management systems, my Department has undertaken extensive work on the updating of the Public Spending Code. The purpose of this update is to strengthen the existing guidance to better align with the realities of project delivery and with a particular focus on improved appraisal, cost estimation and management.

The update of the Public Spending Code was informed by an extensive consultation process involving engagement with over 150 public officials, a review of international best practice, consultation with international experts such as the OECD and the European Investment Bank, and incorporating lessons learned here in Ireland on a wider range of projects including the new National Children’s Hospital.

The key changes to the Code include:

- Improved structure and usability;
- Greater clarity on governance and roles and responsibilities;
- Robust decision gates requiring formal approvals and clearer governance arrangements as projects progress;
- A requirement to update the business case for a proposed project post tender and before contract award to consider affordability and value for money; and
- Increased transparency through publication of business cases and evaluation reports.

I anticipate that the revised central elements of the Public Spending Code relating to the appraisal and management of public capital projects will be published in the near future following consideration and approval by Government. Further technical guidance building upon these central elements will follow in 2020.

**EU Funding**

174. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to centralise European Regional Development Funds in Dublin; the implication of such
Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset it is important to remind the Deputy that Ireland’s allocation of European Regional Development Funds have in the past, and will continue in the future, to support projects in all parts of Ireland. Moreover, in accordance with the EU Regulatory requirement, stakeholders at local, regional and national level will continue to have a key role in the planning, monitoring and delivery of these programmes.

There are currently no plans or proposals before the Minister in relation to the current or future administration of European Regional Development Funds in Ireland.

However, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has commissioned a Review of Structures for the management of European Regional Development (ERDF) for the next programming round, for the period 2021 to 2027. The amount of funding available through the ERDF is expected to be reduced; the level of co-financing required to draw down these funds is expected to increase; and activities eligible for support has been concentrated further. Against this background, it is timely and appropriate to undertake a review of the structures in place for the administration of these funds, which have remained essentially unchanged since 2000. It is important to emphasise that, at this early stage in the exploratory and deliberative process, there are no recommendations on structures before the Minister.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

175. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the CFRAMS flood mitigation works at Lifford, Castlefinn, Ballybofey and Stranorlar, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48536/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Fifteen projects were identified in County Donegal arising from the Flood Risk Management Plans that I announced in May 2018. Following consultation and discussions between the Office of Public Works (OPW) and Donegal County Council (DCC), six of the Donegal projects have been selected to be progressed in the first phase of implementation.

Lifford, County Donegal

The proposed Lifford Flood Relief Scheme is part of the first phase of projects emanating from the Programme of Investment in Flood Relief Measures, which was announced in May 2018. The proposed measures consists of a series of flood embankments and walls with an estimated early indicative cost of €5.9m. The engineering and environmental consultants were appointed in October 2019 to develop and bring forward viable proposals for the areas that are affected by flooding.

Castlefinn, County Donegal

The proposed flood relief scheme for Castlefinn is in the first phase of implementation and has an estimated early indicative cost of €1.75m. It has been agreed that the scheme is to be progressed by DCC with funding to be provided by the OPW.

The proposed measures consists of a series of flood embankments and walls and associated drainage works. Tendering for the required design consultants is expected to commence shortly.
Ballybofey and Stranorlar, County Donegal

The proposed flood relief scheme for Ballybofey and Stranorlar has an estimated early indicative cost of €1.92m and consists of hard defences and improvement of channel conveyance.

While the proposed flood relief scheme for Ballybofey and Stranorlar is not in the first phase of projects to be advanced, both the OPW and DCC will work closely to ensure that the project will be progressed as early as possible in the coming years and within the 10-year timeframe for the programme of investment.

Funding of €157,500 was approved in 2018 under the OPW’s Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for a project at Ballybofey and Stranorlar. The works comprise the removal of vegetation and trees on the embankment, the removal of silt, gravels and boulder deposits and construction of pumps/pumping areas and Ground Investigation works along the Flood Embankments. The project is being led by Donegal County Council, who are proceeding with its planning.

Flood Prevention Measures

176. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans for the provision of flood defences for the city of Cork; the estimated cost of the plans; if a Thames barrier type structure is being considered; and if so, the estimated cost of such a structure. [48634/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** Work on developing a viable flood relief scheme for Cork city has been underway for about 13 years, beginning with the Lee CFRAMS pilot project, which was followed by the Lower Lee (Cork City) Project which has resulted in the currently proposed scheme for Cork, the Lower Lee (Cork City) Flood Relief Scheme. I am fully satisfied that the scheme as proposed by the Office of Public Works is the best solution for Cork and, in line with international best practice, will protect over 2100 properties (900 homes & 1200 businesses) from the 1 in 100 year river flood and the 1 in 200 year tidal flood event. The Scheme includes low riverside defences, an early flood warning system and new dam management procedures for the ESB dams at Carrigadrohid and Inniscarra. The Scheme will facilitate public realm improvements on a scale not previously seen in Cork city centre, making it more attractive to live in, work in, visit and invest in.

The current estimated whole life cost of the Scheme is circa €140m (2016 figures), although this is likely to be revised upwards when the various design changes introduced after the Public Exhibition feedback, and inflation, are taken into account. The final approved cost of the Scheme will only be known following the works tender process.

The option of a tidal barrier has been examined in detail by the project design team and is deemed not to be currently necessary or viable, and not likely to become viable for 50 years or more. If and when a tidal barrier becomes necessary and viable, the optimum location is likely to be at Great Island, where it would protect the wider urban areas in the harbour and have the least impact on the environment and navigation. The cost of a barrier at this location has an estimated whole life cost of in excess of €1.5bn.

Lower estimates put forward by other groups have been reviewed by the OPW and its consultants who can confirm that they are based on a concept barrier design which is neither technically viable nor likely to be environmentally acceptable and do not include for all whole life costs. In any event, a tidal barrier will not provide improved protection against fluvial flooding.
in Cork and would not have prevented the extreme flooding which occurred in Cork in 2009.

Further information on the option of a tidal barrier for Cork is available in the ‘Supplementary Report: Option of Tidal Barrier’ which can be downloaded from the project website:


Pension Provisions

177. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 153 of 1 October 2019, when a determination will be made on the appeal (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48654/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As stated previously this appeal case relates to the awarding of pension increases by the company concerned. A request from the company seeking a pension increase is being considered at present by my Department. The outcome of this request may feed into the deliberations on the determination in this case. Accordingly, a determination on this case will be made as soon as possible following the outcome of the pension increase request.

In the interim, my Department has been in contact with the complainant in order to take matters forward.

Garda Stations

178. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the separate vacant living quarters in a Garda station (details supplied) in County Kerry will be made available to the community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48709/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Garda station at Castlemaine, Co. Kerry and associated living quarters is assigned to An Garda Síochána for operational use. The premises has not been identified as surplus to requirements by An Garda Síochána and, therefore, the OPW has not been requested to manage its disposal either through intra State transfer, sale on the open market, or to lease/licence to a community group.

In that regard, the question of making the living quarters available to the OPW for disposal is a matter for An Garda Síochána to consider, subject to its current or future operational requirements for the area.

Office of Public Works Projects

179. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW can provide the finance for the external night time lighting of Nenagh Castle in order that the recent investment at the historical site can benefit tourism in the town to its full potential; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48786/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Floodlighting is generally not actively encouraged at National Monuments
sites from an ecological/energy consumption/light pollution point of view. In particular, there are swifts and bats in residence at Nenagh Castle and, as excessive artificial light can impact on these populations, it may be difficult to design a sustainable solution which does not affect them. In addition, because of the constraints on resources needed for conservation works elsewhere, OPW is not in a position to finance the floodlighting of the Castle.

Notwithstanding the above, the Deputy may wish to note that OPW has engaged with Tipperary County Council this year with a view to developing a number of offerings in Nenagh with the intent of enhancing the visitor experience and Nenagh Castle will form an important part of the town’s heritage visitor assets in this regard. While, as I have said, OPW is not in a position to go ahead with floodlighting of the Castle in the immediate term, we will be happy to continue to engage with both the Local Authority and local community groups in order to maximise the visitor potential of the Castle.

**Flood Relief Schemes Status**

180. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the Ballina flood relief scheme in County Mayo; the progress made in respect of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49109/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** A Project Steering Group comprising representatives of Mayo County Council and the Office of Public Works is overseeing the implementation of the Ballina flood relief project. A tender competition for the procurement of engineering design consultants for the project is underway and it is anticipated that the consultants will be appointed in January 2020. The consultants will be responsible for preparing a programme for the implementation of the flood relief scheme and for assessing all viable options to address the flood risk in the town.

**School Transport Eligibility**

181. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will be made on a remote area grant for a child (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48620/19]

**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 my Department’s 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.

Under the terms of the Post-Primary School Transport Scheme, children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest education centre as determined by the Department of Education/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who complete the application process
on time are accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation. Children who are eligible for school transport but for whom no service is available may be offered the Remote Area Grant towards the cost of making private transport arrangements. The Remote Area Grant is also payable for eligible children who may have to travel 3.2kms or more to or from a designated pick up/set down point.

The child referred to by the Deputy is eligible for transport and is also eligible for the Remote Area Grant to a designated pick up/set down point. The grant is payable annually following receipt of the pupil's statement of attendance at the end of the school year.

**School Therapy Services**

182. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a pilot project (details supplied); his plans for the future of this intervention model; his plans to roll out the project nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48659/19]

198. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a pilot project (details supplied); his plans for the future of this intervention model; his plans to roll out the project nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48658/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 182 and 198 together.

The Deputy will be aware that a demonstration project to provide in-school and pre-school therapy services was introduced for the 2018/19 school year.

The demonstration project has been developed by a Working Group which includes representatives from the Departments of Education, Children and Youth Affairs, Health, and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The project is being managed and co-ordinated by the National Council for Special Education with clinical support also being provided by two HSE Therapy Managers which have been assigned to the project.

The purpose of the project is to test a model of tailored therapeutic supports that allows for early intervention in terms of providing speech and language and occupational therapy within ‘educational settings’. This innovative pilot will complement existing HSE funded provision of essential therapy services.

The project is taking place in Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) 7 Region of South West Dublin, Kildare, and West Wicklow.

This region has been selected to ensure that the pre-school and in-school therapy model can be tested in both urban and rural locations and with a suitable mix of various types of schools and pre-schools.

75 schools, including a representative sample of primary, post primary, and special schools are taking part in the project.

75 Pre-school settings associated with primary schools participating in the project are being included in order to provide for therapy interventions to be made at the earliest possible time and to create linkages between pre-school and primary school provision.

In total, 150 settings are participating in the demonstration project.
Although initially designed as a one year pilot, a Government decision of 12th February, 2019, in relation to the Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme, also agreed to the establishment of a pilot of a new School Inclusion Model for children with special educational and additional care needs involving up to 75 participating schools in the CHO 7 region over the course of the 2019/20 school year.

The demonstration project to provide in-school and pre-school therapy services is therefore continuing, as part of the School Inclusion Model, over the course of the 2019/20 school year.

Decisions in relation to the extension of the service to other areas or Counties, or to extend the service nationally, will be taken following the evaluation of the existing informed pilot phase.

Special Educational Needs

183. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if guidance and training will be provided to primary and post-primary schools to enable teachers to support pupils who are living in emergency accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48531/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Identification of Need, Early Intervention and Prevention Strategies are considered key components to supporting children for whom there are concerns, including those who experiencing homelessness. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) works with schools through the DES Continuum of Support framework. The NEPS Model of Service works through a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to support school to meet the needs of individual pupils.

NEPS psychologists can provide advice and guidance to Principals and teachers in relation to individual students needs and in the development of whole school approaches to support inclusion, participation and integration.

In addition, NEPS psychologists support schools to implement early-intervention and prevention programmes, such as The Incredible Years Programme in Primary Schools and resilience building programmes, such as the FRIENDS Programmes at Primary and Post Primary levels.

NEPS supports the role of the school in identifying individual needs and at a systems level in the development of a culture and environment which supports connectedness and provides structure and stability, key elements which underpin learning and opportunity.

My Department is strongly supportive of the promotion of positive mental health awareness in schools. The Department adopts a holistic and integrated approach to supporting schools in promoting positive mental health and to supporting those with a broad range of problems including behavioural, emotional and social.

To support this holistic approach my Department has published a Wellbeing Policy and Framework for Practice (2018-2023) for all schools which will inform how schools can promote student wellbeing. The initiatives planned will provide schools with a framework to develop and promote the wellbeing of all children and young people in our schools, including those experiencing homelessness. The implementation of the framework for practice in schools is and will be supported by my Department and include a roll-out of comprehensive CPD programme for teachers at primary and post-primary levels currently in planning.
184. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if supports such as home-school liaison officers will be provided to support families who have children of schoolgoing age in emergency accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48532/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** A range of resources are available to support schools in dealing with identified additional educational needs, including needs which may arise for children who are experiencing homelessness. These include National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) supports and Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) supports.

The staff of schools are very sensitive to the needs of children who are experiencing disruption in their lives and make every effort to support the additional needs they experience. Where they are aware of homelessness and where it is impacting on school attendance and participation they can engage closely with the Educational Welfare Service of Tusla and with the support services of my own Department including the National Educational Psychological Service.

Identification of Need and Early Intervention Strategies are considered key components to supporting children who experience homelessness. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) works with schools through the DES Continuum of Support framework. NEPS psychologists are available to provide advice and guidance to Principals and teachers in relation to individual students’ needs and in the development of whole school approaches to support inclusion, participation and integration.

DEIS is the main policy initiative of my Department to tackle educational disadvantage. DEIS provides additional supports, through the DEIS School Support Programme, to schools identified as having the highest concentrations of pupils from disadvantaged communities. Schools can use these additional resources to meet the identified needs of their pupil cohort, including the additional needs that may arise for pupils experiencing homelessness.

DEIS Schools can also avail of Home School Community Liaison and School Completion supports provided by Tusla’s Educational Support Service in relation to school attendance, retention and progression which can be areas of particular challenge to pupils experiencing homelessness.

The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme is a school-based intervention provided to DEIS schools to address the needs of pupils and families through acknowledging and developing the role of the parent as primary educator.

All DEIS Urban Primary and DEIS Post Primary schools are included in the HSCL Scheme. The scheme is delivered by 415 full-time HSCL Coordinators who are teachers in these schools and assigned to HSCL duties either in individual schools or clusters of schools, catering for approximately 156,000 pupils.

Tusla Education Support Services (TESS) aims to address issues in relation to participation, retention and attendance in schools. Educational Welfare Officers of TUSLA Education Support Services work with young people and their families who are experiencing difficulty with school attendance and works with schools to put supports in place to assist families where needed.

TUSLA have also produced a guidance leaflet on school attendance information for families experiencing homelessness outlining how the educational welfare service can assist.
185. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a proposed beneficial land swap involving a school (detail supplied) and his Department; when a decision will be made on the proposal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48543/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has no current record of receiving correspondence in relation to this matter from the school referred to by the Deputy.

**Departmental Correspondence**

186. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the correspondence provided by his Department in connection with a planning application by a company (details supplied) to An Bord Pleanála for strategic housing development on a site; if the lands in the Killester, Raheny and Clontarf school planning area are required for future educational purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48556/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** A copy of the correspondence from my Department to An Bord Pleanála in connection with the Strategic Housing Development application to which the Deputy refers is at the link.


**Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

187. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure a child (details supplied) receives an adequate allocation of teaching hours following a section 29 appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48560/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for determining the appropriate staffing levels in relation to the support of students with special educational needs in special schools, in accordance with the policies of my Department. Special school staffing allocations are reviewed and updated each year by the NCSE.

Since 2012, special schools are staffed on the basis of their actual student profiles and the disability category of each student, as opposed to being based principally on school designation, in accordance with my Department’s Circular 0042/2011. It is a matter for special schools to deploy their teaching staff to cater for the needs of the student cohort and to ensure age-appropriate placement.

The NCSE has confirmed that having complied with the recommendations of the Section 29 Appeals Board in relation to the student referred to by the Deputy, they have had ongoing engagement with the school to date, with regard to the student’s re-integration back to school, which includes the development of a re-integration plan.

A number of steps have been taken as part of this process, including adaption to the school’s physical environment in order to accommodate the student which is nearing completion.

An additional teaching allocation has also been sanctioned to the school, as a short term
intervention, to support the student’s re-integration and in order to meet the identified needs of the student concerned. The purpose of this allocation to the school is to compliment the teaching and SNA provision already allocated to the school. The plan for re-integration will include one to one support and some periods supporting the student in the school community. The additional allocation and some of the existing staffing allocation will be deployed to support the student in this way.

The NCSE has advised that a plan is in place for the student to transition back to school full time within four weeks. The NCSE will review the additional allocation to the school on a regular basis.

**School Transport Eligibility**

188. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the remote school transport grant for a person (details supplied); when payment will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48562/19]

**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 my Department’s 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.

Under the terms of the Post-Primary School Transport Scheme, children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest education centre as determined by the Department of Education/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who complete the application process on time are accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation. Children who are eligible for school transport but for whom no service is available may be offered the Remote Area Grant towards the cost of making private transport arrangements.

The child referred to by the Deputy is eligible for transport and is also eligible for the Remote Area Grant. The grant is payable annually following receipt of the pupils statement of attendance at the end of the school year.

**School Transport**

189. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason he does not include children with diagnosed mental health issues in the transport scheme for children with special educational needs; the cost of including such children in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48567/19]

**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.
The purpose of my Department’s 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.

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 for Children with Special Educational Needs is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children with special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability. Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers.

Special transport arrangements on medical grounds may also be considered by the Department where a pupil has a medical condition, and the condition is such that it would prevent the child from making his/her own way to the school, or the pick-up point, as appropriate.

Where such applications are made, the Department requests that the pupil’s GP complete an Application for School Transport on Medical Grounds, which outlines the nature and severity of the medical condition. The form is then forwarded to the Medical Advisor, who, on the basis of the medical evidence submitted, determines whether the above conditions apply.

Further information in regard to the school transport scheme is available on my Department’s website.

School Transport Data

190. Deputy Jonathan O’Brien asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of reducing to 3 km, 2.5 km, 2 km and 1.5 km the distance above which primary school children must live away from their school to avail of the school transport scheme on the basis of free school transport; the extra number of children who would qualify in each instance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48568/19]

191. Deputy Jonathan O’Brien asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of reducing to 4 km, 3 km, 2 km and 1.5 km the distance above which post-primary school children must live away from their school to avail of the school transport scheme on the basis of free school transport; the extra number of children who would qualify in each instance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48569/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 190 and 191 together.

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

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

The annual charge for school transport services is €100 per annum for primary children and €350 for post primary children with a maximum family charge of €220 for primary children only or €650 overall.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who hold valid medical cards (GMS Scheme) are exempt from paying the annual charge. In addition, there is no charge for children who are eligible for school transport under the terms of my Department’s School Transport Scheme for children with Special Educational Needs.

In general the unit cost for transporting mainstream children is some €1,000 per annum, while the unit cost for transporting children with special educational needs is €7,000 or €9,000 when the provision of escorts are included.

In 2018, receipts from school transport charges amounted to some €15.9m or about 8% of the total cost of the scheme provided by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

The school transport scheme is a demand-led service based on the number of eligible children who apply to avail of transport. It is not possible to estimate the detail requested by the Deputy

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

192. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a child will receive the necessary SNA allocation to support the child’s needs (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48594/19]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Physical Education Facilities

193. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a new sports hall for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48595/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is in receipt of an application for capital funding for building works, including a new sports hall, from the school referred to by the Deputy.

Under the National Development Plan (NDP), increased funding has been provided for the school sector capital investment programme. This funding allows for a continued focus on the provision of new permanent school places to keep pace with demographic demand and also provides for an additional focus on the refurbishment of existing school buildings to include the building and modernisation of PE facilities in post-primary schools.

Under the Ireland Project 2040, we will invest €8.4 billion (compared to €4.9 billion in the previous decade) in primary and post primary school buildings.

The immediate priority of my Department is providing 20,000 new and replacement school places each year, to ensure that every child has a school place. The government will focus in the medium term on the provision of PE facilities in post primary schools.

Scrúduithe Stáit

194. D’fhiafraigh **Deputy James Browne** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an ndéanfafidh sé ráiteas faoina sheasamh i dtaca le scrúduithe Gaeilge an Teastais Shóisearaigh; cad é a thuairim faoi na deacrachtaí maidir le scrúduithe Gaeilge an Teastais Shóisearaigh (sonraí tugtha); agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [48629/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Daltaí a chuaigh isteach sa chéad bhliain i Meán Fómhair 2017 an chéad chohórt de dhaltaí a chuaigh i gceann na sonraíochta ábhair nua don Ghaeilge faoin gCreat don tSraith Shóisearach atá le scrúdú i Mei-theamh 2020.

Ós rud é go n-áiritear aiseolas leanúnach, measúnú múlnaitheach, MRBanna, tascanna measúnaithe le cois scrúduithe ceann cúrsa le gach sonraíocht ábhair nua, is gá ‘rómheasúnú’ a sheachaint agus uachar caighdeánachan a thugtar ar dhaltaí agus múinteoirí a laghdú a oiread agus is féidir i réimse iomlán na n-ábhar.

Sa chomhthéacs seo, tocfaidh na Measúnaithe Rangbhunaithe in ionad measúnaithe eile atá á ndéanamh faoi láthair ar scoil amhail scrúduithe inmheánacha. Ba chóir do scoileanna a
School Patronage

195. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will open admissions as a matter of urgency to a new secondary school opening in September 2020 for pupils in the Greystones and Kilcoole area of County Wicklow in view of the huge demand for places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48633/19]

206. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the patronage process for the new post-primary school for the Kilcoole and Greystones area is due
to be finalised; when the patron is due to be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48799/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 195 and 206 together.

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.

In April 2018, the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the four years from 2019 to 2022, including a new 800 pupil post-primary school to serve the Kilcoole and Greystones school planning areas as a regional solution which is due to be established in 2020.

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

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

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

The Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) closed for parental preferences on the 4th October 2019 for the six post-primary schools to be established in 2020, including the school referred to by the Deputies. It is anticipated that the successful patrons will be announced in the coming weeks. The assessment reports and the NSEG recommendations will be made available on my Department’s website. It will subsequently be a matter for the successful patron to make arrangements for enrolment for the following September.

**Broadband Service Provision**

196. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a solution will be provided for a school (details supplied) that is experiencing significant connectivity issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48635/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The policy of my Department is to offer the best quality connectivity to all schools in line with the technical solutions available in the market and financial constraints. Broadband capacity can vary due to geographical location and local infrastructure, and thus impact on the service that can be provided. Through the Schools Broadband Access Programme the Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for all recognised primary and post primary schools, and some 98% of schools are
included in this scheme. All post-primary schools and some special schools are now included in
the 100Mbps programme. The primary broadband scheme operates off existing infrastructure
on the whole and the providers on the Primary Broadband Framework access this infrastructure
to deliver the service to the schools. The Department does not put in place such infrastructure.

The school referred to by the Deputy was recently included in mini competition run by my
Department and the service to that school has been awarded to a provider of high speed broad-
band. The provider is currently working to provide this service to the school. The school will be
contacted by the provider in due course to arrange the installation.

Under the current primary schools programme the Department continually reviews the
availability of services and upgrades schools where the opportunity arises, in line with con-
tractual and budgetary requirements. A recent drawdown from the Framework of Providers of
Broadband Services saw some 1,600 primary schools awarded download speeds of 30Mbps
or greater (the baseline download speed required under the National Broadband Plan). Those
schools have now been upgraded to that connectivity. This represents more than one third of
all primary schools. This is a significant improvement over recent years, given that less than
100 primary schools were on those speeds in 2012. Further schools are likely to be upgraded
to those speeds in 2019 and 2020, through EIR’s 300K Rural Deployment commitment, and
planned industry provision.

The need to improve broadband connectivity to primary schools is recognised in the Digital
Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, and as noted access to high speed broadband is one of the in-
dicators identified in the Digital Strategy Action Plan. My Department continues to liaise with
the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to ensure that the needs
of primary schools are prioritised in the implementation of the National Broadband Plan.

Schools Building Projects Status

197. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will
address a matter regarding a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a
statement on the matter. [48655/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Deputy will be aware
that a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department’s Capital
Programme to be delivered as part of the National Development Plan.

The project brief is currently being finalised and this is expected to be completed short-
ly. The building project will include additional capacity to allow for the school’s future growth.

*Question No. 198 answered with Question No. 182.*

Employment Appeals Tribunal

199. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position of his
Department with regard to the recommendations of the Employment Appeals Tribunal on the
use of summer holidays in the context of maternity leave; and if he will make a statement on
the matter. [48672/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Following legal advice my
Department has appealed the decisions of the Employment Appeals Tribunal referred to by the
Deputy.
As the decisions are now the subject of ongoing legal proceedings it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

**Schools Building Projects Status**

200. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a new building for the relocation of a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48674/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The school referred to by the Deputy was approved a project under my Department’s Additional Accommodation Scheme in June 2018 for a new four classroom school.

The current position is that a Stage 1 Preliminary Design meeting has been arranged with Department officials on 28 November as the next step in moving this project forward.

**School Closures**

201. **Deputy Darragh O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a list of disused school buildings in the Fingal area of County Dublin will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48675/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Nationwide, there are over 4,000 school buildings and the majority are in private ownership, mainly by denominational patrons.

When a school building becomes vacant as a result of closure/amalgamation/replacement, the future use of the old building is in the first instance a matter for the property owner. When the property owner applies to the Minister for permission to either use the property for community purposes or to sell it, my Department makes an assessment as to whether the property is required for future educational use. If it is concluded that the property has no viable future educational use, my Department permits that it may be used for community or other purposes or may be sold. Therefore, my Department does not hold details of current usage of former school buildings in private ownership.

Any school buildings in the Minister’s direct ownership in the Fingal area are already planned for educational use.

**Student Support Schemes**

202. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the policies being developed to ensure that students with disabilities can complete their university education without incurring fees for deferring some of their coursework; and if a plan that would allocate funds to allow additional time for students with visual and hearing impairments and who use wheelchairs to complete their university degree will be supported. [48706/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Students with disabilities are one of the target groups identified in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (NAP).
Various access supports are available to students with disabilities such as:

- The Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) allocates funding to further and higher education colleges for the provision of services and supports to students with disabilities. The FSD was extended in 2018 to cover students studying on a part-time basis;

- Students are also able to apply for financial support through the Student Assistance Fund (SAF); and

- The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) has allocated a number of 1916 Bursaries to NAP target groups such as students with disabilities and students who wish to undertake their studies on a part-time basis.

All eligible undergraduate students are covered by the Free Fees Initiative whereby the State provides funding towards tuition fees for students undertaking approved courses in eligible higher education institutions. Under the rules of the initiative, tuition fees are not paid in respect of students undertaking a repeat year of study at the same level. However, this condition may be waived where there is evidence of exceptional circumstances, such as cases of certified serious illness. Decisions in such cases are made at a local level in each higher education institution in line with the criteria of the scheme. A similar approach applies in respect of grant support. In this regard, SUSI cannot extend funding past the normal duration of the course, unless the applicant is repeating the same year of a course under exceptional circumstances.

Schools Building Projects Status

203. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48715/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Deputy will be aware that this project has been devolved for delivery to Westmeath County Council (WCC).

The Deputy will also be aware that officials in my Department continue to support WCC in its engagement with the relevant contractor on progressing this project, including through a dispute resolution process under the Public Works Contract.

It does now seem likely that the project may not be completed until very early in the new year as it has not proven possible to address some technical issues in a shorter timeframe. I can also say that the speed of completion of this project is directly related to the level of resources employed on site, that resource levels have increased lately, and that a continued high level of resources is essential for the timely completion of this project. I can assure the Deputy that we are focussed on ensuring that all issues are progressed as quickly as possible while also ensuring that the quality and integrity of the project is fully protected.

School Transport Provision

204. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there will be a school bus service provided for the Curreeney, County Tipperary, area to a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48742/19]

**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.
The purpose of my Department’s 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.

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.

Under the terms of the Primary School Transport Scheme, children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kms from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

A minimum number of 10 eligible children residing in a distinct locality, as determined by Bus Éireann, are required before consideration may be given to the establishment or retention of school transport services, provided this can be done within reasonable cost limits.

Families who wish to avail of school transport and have their eligibility status assessed should apply on-line in a timely manner to Bus Éireann on Bus Éireann’s website at www.buseireann.ie.

Gaelscoil Issues

205. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of the provision of a new Gaelscoil for Donabate, County Dublin; the process by which the patronage will be decided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48754/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2018, the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the four years from 2019 to 2022, including a new 16 classroom school for Donabate to be established in 2020.

Following a review of the provision of Irish-medium education in the areas where new schools are to be established, on the 3rd September, 2019 I announced that five of the new primary schools being established from 2020-2022 are being designated for Irish-medium education, including the new school for Donabate.

I took this decision after amending criteria which are considered in determining the ethos and language of instruction of new primary schools as part of the patronage process for new schools. The change is being made following the pilot Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) for primary schools established in September 2019 and engagement by my Department with school patron bodies and other stakeholders.

The five new schools will serve areas of growing populations, where there is no existing Irish-medium primary school or where there is more than one new primary school to be established between 2019 and 2022.

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. Parental preferences for each patron, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.
The Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) has been developed by my Department to provide objective information to parents and guardians which will allow them to make an informed choice in expressing a preference for their preferred model of patronage for their child’s education.

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

The patronage process for new primary schools to be established in 2020, including Donabate, commenced with an invitation for applications from patrons on the 19th November 2019. It is envisaged that the Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) will open shortly for parental preferences. The assessment reports and the NSEG recommendations will be made available on my Department’s website.

*Question No. 206 answered with Question No. 195.*

**Schools Building Projects Status**

207. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when construction will commence and be completed in respect of a planned new school building (details supplied) in Cork city; the date the tender documentation will be published; the reason the school is not permitted to enrol a third junior infants class in the 2020-21 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48839/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The building project to provide permanent accommodation for the school is being delivered under my Department’s Design and Build Programme.

This project is included in the procurement process that is currently underway for a bundle of projects to be delivered under this programme. The Project Information Notice (PIN) was published recently and the contract notice is due to be published shortly which will determine a shortlist of interested contractors.

It is anticipated that construction of this school building project will commence in Q2 2020.

The Department is in discussions with the Patron Body with regard to the request to go to a third stream.

**Physical Education Facilities**

208. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department will contribute to the building of a school hall at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48904/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to advise the Deputy that an application for a PE hall has been received from the school authority in question.

As you are aware the National Development Plan (NDP) provides for an €8.4 billion investment in school buildings over the period 2018 to 2027 to deliver on NDP and National Planning Framework objectives through addressing the twin priorities of catering for demographics and
ensuring a strengthened focus on refurbishment of existing school stock. The announcement referred to the commitment to a PE hall build and modernisation programme in post primary schools, starting in the second half of the project Ireland 2040 period.

The immediate priority is to provide 20,000 new and replacement school places each year, to ensure that every child has a school place. My Department is not in a position, at this point, to consider the request from Glynn National School for a PE Hall. The school has been informed of this decision. The request will however be retained on file for future consideration.

**Schools Building Projects Data**

209. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the approved capital projects for new school buildings, refurbishments of existing school buildings and temporary class room provision in the Lucan area will be provided; the location of each project in the capital project process; and the estimated commencement and completion date for each project in tabular form. [48906/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the approved capital projects in the Lucan area is currently being collated. I will arrange for a response to issue directly to the Deputy in relation to this question shortly.

**School Transport Eligibility**

210. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied); the reason for the delay in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48918/19]

**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.

The purpose of my Department’s 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.

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.

Children are eligible for school transport where they reside 3.2 kilometres or over and are attending their nearest primary school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

The pupil referred by the Deputy was issued with a concessionary ticket for the 2019/2020 school as, at the time of application, the application was for transport to a school which was not the closest school to the family home. Confirmation has recently been received from the Patron of that school that the school has closed with effect from the start of the 2019/2020 school year.

Eligible children who hold valid medical cards (GMS Scheme) are exempt from paying the school transport charge. Bus Éireann has advised that the family referred to by the Deputy is at-
tending their nearest school and the Bus Éireann are liaising directly with this family regarding a refund of fees.

**Schools Building Projects Status**

211. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the planned redevelopment and provision of a new building for a school (details supplied) in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48943/19]

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

As the design team for this project is no longer available to carry on with the project, the Department will run a tender competition on the school’s behalf to appoint a new Design Team using the Department’s Framework for Consultant Appointments. The school will be involved in the assessment of tenders and the Department will notify the school in due course when their input is required.

The Department has assured the school community it is giving this matter its full attention and will keep the school community updated in respect of their major building project.

**Summer Works Scheme Applications**

212. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position of an application for funding under the summer works scheme by a school (details supplied) in County Cork for essential repairs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48944/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question applied for funding under SWS 2020 for Windows.

The Deputy may be aware that I recently announced details of the schools that will receive funding in summer 2020 in respect of applications submitted for ‘Life Safety Systems projects’.

Commensurate with the level of funding set aside for the Scheme, applications are being assessed on a top down basis in accordance with the prioritisation criteria outlined in the Circular accompanying the Scheme. In that regard, applications submitted for other works will be considered under future rounds of the Summer Works Scheme. The school in question will be considered in this regard.

**School Accommodation Provision**

213. **Deputy Darragh O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures he is taking to resolve the shortage of primary school places in Kinsealy, Malahide and Portmarnock, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48958/19]

214. **Deputy Darragh O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures he is taking to resolve the shortage of secondary school places in Kinsealy, Malahide and Portmarnock, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48959/19]

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

Major new residential developments in a school planning area have the potential to alter demand in that area. In that regard, as part of the demographic exercises, my Department engages with each of the local authorities to obtain the up-to-date information on significant new residential development in each area. This is necessary to ensure that schools infrastructure planning is keeping pace with demographic changes as there is a constantly evolving picture with planned new residential development.

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

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

As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2018 the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement followed nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country.

While the announcement did not include a new school for the Malahide_Nevinstown and Portmarnock school planning areas, the following new schools were established in recent years to serve the Malahide_Nevinstown and Portmarnock school planning areas:

- A new 1,000 pupil post-primary school (Malahide Portmarnock Educate Together Secondary School) established in 2018; and
- A new primary school (Malahide Portmarnock Educate Together NS) established in 2014.

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.

Under Project Ireland 2040, my Department continues to make progress to increase the infrastructural capacity in the schools sector, in order to meet demographic and other demands.

The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed under Project Ireland 2040. I wish to advise the Deputy that the current status of large-scale projects being delivered under Project Ireland 2040 may be viewed on my Department’s website, www.education.ie and this information is updated regularly. In addition, a list of large-scale projects completed from 2010 to date may also be viewed on the website.

The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed. Details of schools listed on this programme can be found on my Department’s website www.education.ie and this information is also updated regularly.
215. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the number of young persons being refused places in St. Farnan’s ASD unit in Prosperous, County Kildare, in view of the fact they reside in the locality; if alternative and suitable arrangements for such persons are being considered; his plans to provide additional resources at this school to meet the needs of persons being refused placement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48984/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The provision of education for children with special needs, including those with Autism, is an ongoing priority for Government.

Currently, almost 20% of the total Education Vote or €1.9bn is invested in supporting children with special needs.

Since 2011 investment in Special Education supports has increased by 50%, which is significantly above the 7% increase in total student numbers over the same period.

As a result the numbers of special education teachers, special needs assistants and special class and school places are at unprecedented levels.

The majority of children with Autism attend mainstream class, where they may access additional supports if required.

But some students may find it difficult to manage full-time placement in mainstream and so placement in a Special Class or Special School setting may be deemed appropriate where placement in mainstream class is not in the best interests of the child.

The NCSE has responsibility for coordinating and advising on the education provision for children nationwide and has well established structures in place for engaging with schools and parents.

Nationally, 167 new special classes opened this school year, which means there are 1,618 special classes in place, compared to 548 in 2011.

Of these 1,353 special classes cater for students diagnosed with ASD.

Provision in our 124 special schools has also increased from 6,848 placements in 2011 to 7,872 this year.

In Kildare alone, there are 75 special classes and 4 Special Schools providing specialist support to children with more complex special educational needs.

The NCSE is planning a further expansion of special class and school places in Kildare to meet identified need for next year. This process is ongoing.

All schools have the contact details of their local SENO, while Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child’s special educational needs and to identify appropriate educational placements, using the contact details available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie.

It is open to any school to make an application to the NCSE for the establishment of a specialised provision and where sanctioned, there is a range of supports including capital funding available to the school.
Normally, special class and school places are established with the full cooperation of the schools in areas where they are required. However there are some parts of the country where the Council has faced challenges in getting schools and their Patrons to voluntarily agree to provide special class or school places.

I know that this can cause much anguish for parents and families involved.

As Minister I have a power under Section 37A of the Education Act 1998 to direct a school to provide additional provision where all reasonable efforts have failed.

I would prefer to see schools volunteer to provide more places rather than places being secured on the back of an order or a direction from me. It is the right thing for the children in a community.

**Schools Building Projects Status**

216. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeline for the proposed development of a new post-primary school in Prosperous, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48985/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The delivery of a new building for the school to which the Deputy refers has been devolved to Kildare and Wicklow Education & Training Board (KWETB).

KWETB has appointed a design team for this project. The design team will now take the project through the various stages of architectural planning and onwards through the statutory planning requirements and construction.

As the project has not yet commenced architectural planning, it is too early in the process to provide a timeline for completion of the works.

**Schools Building Projects Status**

217. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeline for the proposed development of a new boys’ primary school in Clane, Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48986/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is currently at Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design.

The pre-qualification process to select a shortlist of suitable contractors has been completed and the Design Team is currently finalising the tender documentation.

Once this work is complete, my Department will be in contact with the Board of Management of the school regarding the progression of the project to the next stage of architectural planning, Stage 3 - tender stage.

**Schools Building Projects Status**

218. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a new school building for a school (details supplied); when the service level agreement will be signed;
the status of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48992/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the building project for the school to which he refers is being devolved for delivery to the local Educational Training Board (ETB).

A Service Level Agreement between my Department and the ETB has now been signed and sealed in that respect.

The Educational Training Board (ETB) will now procure a Design Team for the project to design the buildings, obtain the necessary statutory planning permissions, and move the project onward to tender and construction in due course.

### School Transport Provision

219. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter regarding persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49016/19]

**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 my Department’s 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.

Under the terms of the Primary School Transport Scheme, children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest primary school as determined by the Department of Education/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

A transport service has recently been sanctioned to the school referred to by the Deputy and Bus Éireann is in the process of establishing this service. Bus Éireann will be in contact with families who have applied for transport in regard to arrangements.

### Education and Training Boards

220. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when site work will commence at the planned Louth Meath Education and Training Board head office building in Drogheda, County Louth; the amount expended on the project in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the purpose of the spend; the timeline for the expected completion of the project; the number of staff the ETB envisages will be located in the building on completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49018/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy is aware, the project to which he refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (LMETB).
A number of design issues have arisen with this project. These have included issues relating to the need for additional security features for the proposed building that became apparent at tender stage and which required a change in brief with consequent design alterations. Currently, the capacity of the building, and the number of staff it is required to accommodate, is being reviewed to ensure it meets the needs of LMETB into the future.

I can assure the Deputy that every effort to progress the project has been made in 2018 and 2019 and will continue to be made. A number of meetings between officials from my Department and LMETB and its design team, with a view to addressing the relevant issues, have taken place in the last year. However, it is still too early at this stage to give a commencement date for construction.

To date, approximately €260k has been spent on costs related to the project including design team fees, planning and statutory consent fees and surveys for the project. Approximately €200k of this was expended in 2015 with the remainder spent last year.

Teaching Qualifications

221. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the acceptable requirements to receive approval for time served teaching outside the EU; the reason overseas private primary schools are considered acceptable and secondary schools are not; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49019/19]

222. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the acceptable requirements for time served teaching abroad outside the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49022/19]

223. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason teaching in overseas private primary schools is recognised when calculating teaching time served abroad but secondary schools are not; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49023/19]

224. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the categories of teaching abroad not recognised as prior experience for teaching here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49024/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 221 to 224, inclusive, together.

The criteria for the award of incremental credit to recognised teachers was agreed under the auspices of the Teachers Conciliation Council (TCC). This Council is comprised of representatives of teachers, school management, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Education and Skills and is chaired by an official of the Workplace Relations Commission.

The criteria for the award of incremental credit is laid out in my Department’s Circulars, 10/2001 for Primary teachers and 29/2007 & 29/2010 for Post-Primary teachers.

Third Level Institutions Governance

225. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied that an institution (details supplied) does not exert influence on universities outside of its remit;
and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49033/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Irish universities are independent and autonomous statutory bodies established under the Universities Act, 1997, which while guaranteeing the principle of academic freedom, also requires detailed institutional level governance arrangements for the management, operation, policies and strategy of the relevant institution to be in place. The issue raised by the Deputy is therefore a matter, in the first instance, for the governing body of the institution as part of its responsibility to ensure that it is conducting its activities consistent with statutory requirements, institutional statutes and the Code of Governance for Irish Universities. My Department will shortly be requesting the Higher Education Authority to ascertain from the relevant university that its Governing Body can confirm that all of these requirements continue to be satisfied in this particular case.

Home Tuition Scheme

226. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason persons who work as home tutors are not considered employees of his Department; the role of his Department in deducting income tax, USC and PRSI from the payments made to home tutors; the class of PRSI that is deducted and paid on their behalf by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49046/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Departments Home Tuition Grant Schemes provide funding towards the provision of a compensatory educational service for children who, for a number of specific reasons, are unable to attend school. By its nature, it is intended to be a short term intervention.

Under the Home Tuition Schemes, Home Tutors are engaged by the parents/guardian of the child who is to receive tuition. Home tutors do not have a contractual relationship with the Department of Education and Skills.

In accordance with instructions from the Revenue Commissioners, payments under the Home Tuition Grant Scheme are subject to statutory deductions at source. In order to facilitate parents, my Department acts solely as payroll agents on behalf of the parents/guardian.

Any further queries in relation to PAYE and USC should be directed to the Revenue Commissioners. The Department of Social Protection has determined that Home Tutors are engaged under a contract for service and are therefore self-employed and subject to PRSI Class S. Any further queries in relation to PRSI Class should be directed to the Department of Social Protection.

School Accommodation Provision

227. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the under capacity of second level education in Skerries, County Dublin; and if so, his plans to rectify the situation. [49049/19]

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 Government announced in April 2018, plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the four year period 2019 to 2022, including 5 new primary schools and 3 new post-primary schools in the North County Dublin/Fingal area. In addition, 4 new primary and 7 new post-primary schools were established in recent years in the 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 is aware of the enrolment issues in the Skerries area for 2020. In this context, my Department has been in direct contact with the Patron of Skerries Community College in respect of the capacity in the school. Skerries Community College has expressed a willingness to increase its long-term projected enrolment to 1,000 pupils. As a result a permanent extension consisting of 3 general classrooms, 3 SET/Offices, Science Laboratory and prep area, Art room and toilets has been approved by my Department.

Pending the delivery of the permanent extension my Department has also approved interim temporary accommodation consisting of 3 mainstream classrooms with toilets along with the converting an existing space to create a Science laboratory. This accommodation will be in place for September 2020.

School Accommodation Provision

228. Deputy James Browne asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to expand secondary school places in Wexford town in view of the fact that parents are having difficulty obtaining a place in a school (details supplied) for September 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49091/19]

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.

Major new residential developments in a school planning area have the potential to alter demand in that area. In that regard, as part of the demographic exercises, my Department engages with each of the local authorities to obtain the up-to-date information on significant new residential development in each area. This is necessary to ensure that schools infrastructure planning is keeping pace with demographic changes as there is a constantly evolving picture with planned new residential development.

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

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

In April 2018, the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools
over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country.

While the announcement did not include a new post primary school for Wexford Town (which is located in the Wexford 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.

As part of the Schools Bundle 5, a Public Private Partnership (PPP) project was completed in August 2018 in Wexford Town and can cater for 900 pupils. I can also confirm to the Deputy that my Department has recently approved an application for a second post-primary provider in the town to provide an additional mainstream classroom and a science laboratory. This project has been devolved to the school authority to deliver. It is open to an individual school to apply for accommodation under the Additional Accommodation Scheme if the school does not have sufficient capacity to meet school places.

My Department’s capital programme prioritises building projects for areas where significant additional school places are required. Details of the current status of the 7 major school projects (primary and post-primary) in County Wexford that are included on the capital programme may be viewed on my Department’s website www.education.gov.ie.

**Schools Building Projects Status**

229. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49135/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** A major school building project to provide new accommodation for the school referred to by the Deputy has recently been authorized to proceed to tender for the appointment of a Main Contractor and Reserved Specialists. The closing date for receipt of the completed tender for the Main Contractor is the end of December 2019.

Subject to no issues arising during the tender process, it is anticipated that the project will progress to site by early third quarter of 2020 with a construction period of approximately 24 months.

**Schools Building Projects Status**

230. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeframe for construction of a new school building for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49139/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB).

Under this arrangement, I can confirm that the ETB has appointed a design team for the project to design the buildings, obtain the necessary statutory planning permissions, and move the project onward to construction in due course.

As the project has not yet commenced architectural planning, it is too early in the process to
provide a timeline for completion of the works.

**Human Trafficking**

231. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of work on human trafficking; if Ireland can progress from its current status as a tier two country for trafficking; if his Department has reviewed the 2018 trafficking in persons report and the points made about Ireland; if more convictions are being sought against traffickers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48563/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Ireland is fully committed to addressing the challenges of human trafficking under Irish and EU legislation and through the principal international conventions and we are active nationally and internationally to do so.

With regard to international treaties, Ireland has ratified the principal international Human Trafficking treaties:

- The Palermo Protocol (2000) to the UN Convention against Organised Crime

As the Deputy may be aware, the EU Anti Trafficking Directive (2011/36/EU) and in Ireland, the Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008 and Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) (Amendment) Act 2013 are the relevant legislative measures.

In February this year, Ireland ratified the ILO Forced Labour Protocol, which reinforces the international legal framework for combating all forms of forced labour, including trafficking in persons. This initiative, by my colleague the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, puts Ireland among the group known as “50 for Freedom”, which stems from an ILO initiative to encourage member countries to ratify the Protocol by the end of 2019.

Domestically, the Second National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking was launched in 2016. The Action Plan involves a victim-centred and human rights based approach with the ultimate aims of preventing human trafficking, ensuring an effective criminal justice response and delivery of supports to victims.

An Garda Síochána has also committed significant resources to the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking in Ireland. A specialised Garda Unit, the Human Trafficking Investigation and Co-ordination Unit (HTICU), has been in place since 2009 to conduct investigations into human trafficking and provide advice, support and where necessary, operational assistance to investigations at district level. An Garda Síochána is also active in relation to trafficking gangs through work targeting organised crime - targeting their finances, their use of the internet and by working closely with other jurisdictions.

A number of State bodies also provide care and practical support to victims including the HSE, the Legal Aid Board, the Immigration Service and Tusla. My Department also provides funding to several NGOs for their work to provide support to victims of trafficking.

The Deputy may also wish to note that action is also being taken to raise public awareness in Ireland and help members of the public identify the signs of human trafficking. More information is available on the “Blue Blindfold” website: [http://www.blueblindfold.gov.ie](http://www.blueblindfold.gov.ie), maintained by my Department.

With regard to the report referred to by the Deputy, I note that the US State Department
downgraded Ireland from a Tier 1 to a Tier 2 ranking in its 2018 annual Trafficking in Persons (TIPs) Report. Ireland is among 14 EU and EEA States which the US State Department considers as Tier 2. The other relevant states are: Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

My Department continues to work closely with all relevant agencies in terms of following up on the recommendations outlined in the report.

As set out in the Annual Report of the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit of the Department of Justice and Equality, there were 64 recorded incidents of human trafficking in Ireland in 2018. Of this total, 13 are recorded as having occurred outside the jurisdiction and 51 are recorded as having occurred within the jurisdiction. I am informed An Garda Síochána continues to vigorously pursue a number of cases where action was initiated prior to 2018, and have commenced action in a number of new cases.

**Naturalisation Applications**

232. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a naturalisation application by a person (details supplied); when the application will be finalised; if the application will be expedited in view of the recent Court of Appeal judgment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48574/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Officials in my Department have confirmed that an application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy on 2 April 2019. Processing of this application is on-going, with a view to establishing whether the conditions for naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence, are satisfied. On completion of the necessary processing the application will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

I understand that, for applicants, their families and their friends, the past few months will have been quite stressful. I am satisfied however that the Court of Appeal has provided legal clarity, and upheld the lawfulness of our residency rules governing citizenship through naturalisation.

The processing of applications has continued throughout the period in which the appeal decision was awaited and applications continued to be accepted. While the ruling is being studied in detail in my Department, I have asked for preparations to begin for a citizenship ceremony to be held on Monday, 9th December in Killarney. Invitations have issued and further ceremonies will take place early in 2020 to ensure that everyone who has made a successful application for citizenship has an opportunity to attend a ceremony and receive their certificate of naturalisation at the earliest opportunity.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to 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.
233. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda vehicles available in each Garda division in each of the years 2010 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48580/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached record levels, with an allocation for 2019 of €1.76 billion and this is due to increase further to an unprecedented €1.88 billion for 2020. The capital budget for An Garda Síochána has also been significantly increased - a total of €92 million was provided this year, representing a 50% increase on capital investment in 2018. Capital investment will increase further to €116.5 million in 2020.

With regard to the Garda fleet specifically, an overall investment of €46 million has been agreed by Government between 2016 and 2021. €10 million was made available for the Garda fleet this year. A further €9 million will be provided next year as part of an overall investment of €46 million in the Garda fleet between 2016 and 2021.

It is important to be clear that under Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner has responsibility for management of An Garda Síochána. He is responsible for the allocation and efficient use of Garda resources, in light of operational demands. As Minister I have no direct role in these matters. I understand however, that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review, to ensure their optimum use.

The Deputy will appreciate that the size of the Garda fleet can fluctuate somewhat, as vehicles are added to and removed from the fleet. However in general, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the size of the Garda fleet has increased in recent years and is currently stable: including Divisions and National Units, the fleet on 1 January 2019 included 2,765 vehicles. As of 15 November 2019 the total strength of the fleet including Divisions and National Units is 2,775.

I am assured that the allocation of Garda vehicles is made on the basis of identified operational demands and that the allocation of Garda vehicles is monitored and reviewed on a continual basis. These are operational questions for policing experts and my Department is not involved.

It may also be noted that Garda management has informed me that this year’s funding is being used for the purchase and fit-out of over 300 vehicles, of which 289 vehicles have been allocated to date. I understand that orders have been placed for a further 59 vehicles which will be allocated before the end of this year or in Quarter 1 2020. As a result, the Garda authorities consider that it is likely that the Garda fleet will be slightly larger at the end of the year compared to the total number of vehicles at the beginning of the year.

Further, my intention is that a further €1 million funding for the fleet will be included in additional funding to be provided to the Garda Vote before the end of the year.

It is also important to point out that the age profile of the Garda fleet has significantly improved in recent years due to ongoing Government investment - 22% of the Garda fleet is now less than two years old, as compared to only 5% in 2012. And over 80% of the Garda fleet is now less than 6 years old.

Finally, the Deputy may be interested to know that the Garda authorities are developing a Fleet Strategy, which I expect to set out detail on matters including, for example, the optimum size and composition of the fleet. I expect that the new Governance function in my Department
will engage with An Garda Síochána, in that regard, as the process continues.

The number of Garda vehicles attached in each Garda Division in each of the years 2010 to 2018 and to date in 2019 is provided at the link, as requested by the Deputy. These tables reflect vehicles from the fleet assigned to Divisions and exclude vehicles assigned to National Units.


**Garda Stations**

234. **Deputy Darragh O’Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a list of disused Garda stations in the Fingal area of County Dublin will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48676/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached record levels, with an allocation for 2019 of €1.76 billion and this is due to increase further to an unprecedented €1.88 billion for 2020. The capital budget for An Garda Síochána has also been significantly increased - a total of €92 million was provided this year, representing a 50% increase on capital investment in 2018. Capital investment will increase further to €116.5 million in 2020.

The Garda Commissioner has responsibility for management of An Garda Síochána and is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of these resources. I understand however, that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review, to ensure their optimum use.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme developed and implemented in 2012 and 2013 resulted in the closure of a number of Garda stations nationwide. I am informed by the Garda authorities that one station in the Fingal area was closed under that programme, namely Rush Garda station. I am further informed that the Garda authorities further advise that they are not aware of any other disused Garda stations in the Fingal area.

Finally and as the Deputy may recall, the Programme for Government contained a commitment to reopen six Garda Stations on a pilot basis to determine possible positive impacts that such openings will have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order.

Rush Garda station is included in the project along with Ballinspittle, Co. Cork, Bawnboy, Co. Cavan, Donard, Co. Wicklow, Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow and Stepaside in Co. Dublin.

The Office of Public Works has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As a result, all works to the Garda estate involve close cooperation between the OPW and the Garda authorities. I am informed by the OPW and Garda authorities that the refurbishment of Rush Garda Station will be completed and the station handed over to An Garda Síochána by the end of 2019.

**Crime Data**

235. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons killed as a result of gangland violence in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in
26 November 2019

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Significant progress is being made by An Garda Síochána in targeting organised crime and associated violence. I understand from the Commissioner that since its establishment in March 2015 the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau has been responsible for:

- seizure of controlled substances with an estimated street value of approximately €167 million;
- seizure of cash, believed to be the proceeds of crime, to a value of €10 million; and
- seizure of 108 firearms and over 3,000 rounds of ammunition.

I further understand that in 2019 alone, the Garda Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau has been responsible for seizure of controlled substances to the value of €20 million; cash believed to the be the proceeds of crime to the value of €2.4 million; and 17 firearms.

I have requested the information sought by the Deputy in relation to the years 2015-2019 from the Garda authorities and I will write directly to the Deputy directly once I receive it.

Direct Provision Data

236. Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 89 of 14 November 2019, the allowances (details supplied) outside of accommodation received by the 1,693 applicants who indicated they have commenced employment or self-employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48702/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As stated in my reply to your previous question of 14 November, 2019, the weekly allowance payment for international protection applicants living in an accommodation centre stands at €38.80 per week for adults and €29.80 per week for children since 25 March 2019.

Our opt-in to the (recast) Receptions Conditions Directive, for the first time, places the provision of material reception conditions (accommodation, food and clothing) on a statutory basis, underpinned by EU law.

The European Communities (Reception Conditions) Regulations 2018 transposed the Directive into Irish law and under the whole-of-Government approach, a number of Government Departments and Agencies work closely together to ensure the necessary supports and services are provided to residents. For example, my Department offers accommodation and related services. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection pays a weekly personal allowance to each resident and covers any exceptional needs. The Department of Education and Skills provides school places for children resident in the centres. Children also have access to the free pre-school scheme, the Early Childhood Care and Education programme. In addition, children attending school may access the State school transport system. The HSE provides mainstreamed health services to residents.

Regulation 5 of the 2018 Regulations provides that where a resident has been working for a reasonable period of time (12 weeks), the Daily Expenses Allowance (paid weekly by DEASP) can be reduced or withdrawn and the applicant may be required to make a contribution towards the cost of their accommodation and related services. Schedule 2 of the Regulations sets out the charging schedule, which is calculated on the basis of the applicant’s earnings and is capped at
the cost to the State of providing the accommodation. My Department in consultation with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is currently examining how best to introduce an appropriate charging mechanism with the least administrative burden.

**Asylum Seeker Accommodation**

237. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the officials in his Department (details supplied) who were requested to arrange a visit to an asylum reception centre by a person; the procedures for similar visits by election candidates to reception centres; the officials who attended on the same visit; the details of the visit; if residents provided informed consent to meeting the person; the number of residents who agreed and refused, respectively, to meet the person; and if he will report to Dáil Éireann on the visit. [48703/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** Persons running for or in public office should ensure that they are familiar with the policy issues in relation to immigration and integration. To that end my Department is happy, subject to the constraints specified below, to facilitate visits to accommodation centres for asylum seekers and refugees. Such visits are organised on regular occasions, for example, for members of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality.

The House Rules for state-provided accommodation centres (including Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres) include the arrangements to be followed for any visitors to the centre. This is to ensure that visits are confined to public areas of centres only, ensuring that the privacy of residents take priority. Visits by elected representatives or candidates for public office to the centre must receive advance permission from the centre manager. This was the procedure followed in relation to the visit referred to by the Deputy.

During the visit and at the invitation of the centre manager, a number of residents of the centre took the opportunity to discuss their journey to Ireland and their views on the public discourse relating to immigration in Ireland. No resident was obliged to participate, and no resident invited to speak to the visitor refused to do so. No officials from my Department were in attendance at the centre during this visit.

Should the Deputy or any member of the Oireachtas wish to visit an accommodation centre, I would be happy to facilitate them, subject to the necessary constraints to respect the privacy of residents.

**Assisted Decision Making**

238. Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the urgent calls by families and interested parties to set up the decision support service to replace the ward of court system that many families feel to be inadequate; his plans to progress legislation in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48748/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Assisted Decision Making (ADM) (Capacity) Act 2015 was signed into law on 30 December 2015 but has not yet been fully commenced.

As the Deputy will be aware, the High Court has jurisdiction in Wards of Court matters. Management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998.
The ADM (Capacity) Act 2015 provides a modern statutory framework to support decision-making by adults with capacity difficulties. It provides for the establishment of new administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service (DSS) within the Mental Health Commission (a body under the Department of Health).

Some provisions of the Act were commenced in October 2016 and progress has been made on preparing for the establishment of the DSS and commencement of the remainder of the Act.

A high-level Steering Group comprising senior officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health, the Mental Health Commission and the Courts Service, together with the Director of the DSS, is overseeing the establishment and commissioning of the DSS and this work is ongoing.

The Director of the DSS is working towards being operational and ready for the commencement of the main provisions of the Act. This lead-in timeframe ensures that the necessary staff resources, processes, IT system, expert panels, codes of practice and regulations will be in place so that the Service will have the capacity to be up and running effectively. There are many complex strands to this work, including involvement of multiple organisations, and the situation is being kept under ongoing review as the preparatory work on implementation moves forward.

The commencement of Part 8 of the Act, which provides for a legislative framework for advance healthcare directives, is a matter for the Minister for Health.

My Department will continue to work closely with the Mental Health Commission and the Director of the DSS to deliver the full implementation of the Act.

When the Act is fully commenced, the law will be changed from the current “all or nothing” status approach to a flexible functional definition, whereby capacity is assessed only in relation to the matter in question and only at the time in question.

The Act provides for a functional definition of capacity which takes an issue-specific and time specific approach, focusing on the particular time when a decision has to be made and on the particular matter to which the decision relates. This allows for situations where the loss of capacity is temporary or partial and where there may be fluctuations in capacity.

Under the Act, the current adult wards of court system will be phased out and replaced by a less intrusive system which offers a continuum of options to support people in maximising their decision-making capability. Part 6 of the 2015 Act provides for the phased transition from adult wardship to this new support framework. It provides for the review by the wardship court of the capacity of all current adult wards within three years of the commencement of that Part of the Act. Following a review of his or her capacity, the ward will be discharged from wardship and depending on the outcome of the review the wardship court may:

- Declare that the ward does not lack capacity and immediately discharge the ward from wardship and order that the property of the former ward be returned to him/her.

- Declare that the ward lacks capacity unless a suitable person is made available as co-decision maker to make one or more decisions. Once a co-decision making agreement is registered the court shall immediately discharge the ward from wardship and order that the property of the former ward be returned to him/her. If there is no suitable person to act as co-decision maker or the co-decision making agreement has not been properly registered within a period set down by the court, then the court shall make orders as appropriate under Part 5 to appoint a decision making representative and order that the property of the former ward be returned to him/her once a decision making representative has been appointed.
- Declare that the ward lacks capacity even if a suitable person is made available as co-decision maker to make one or more decisions. The court shall make orders as appropriate under Part 5 to appoint a decision making representative and order that the property of the former ward be returned to him/her once a decision making representative has been appointed.

Family Law Cases

239. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide statistics for the delays in family law proceedings in each of the District and Circuit Courts and in the High Court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48791/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Courts Service Act 1998 provides that management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, including the provision of facilities for court users. The scheduling and hearing of court cases is a matter for the Presidents of the Courts and the presiding Judges.

The Presidents of the Courts, in consultation with the Courts Service, keep the distribution of business under regular review and where specific issues are identified appropriate action is taken bearing in mind any constraints imposed by the availability of judicial, administrative or structural resources. A key piece of data in this regard is the waiting times for hearings.

The Government is committed to significant reform of the courts, including the establishment of a family law court structure that is streamlined, more efficient, and less costly. My Department is working on the General Scheme of a Family Court Bill which will aim to streamline family law court processes, clarify jurisdictional issues and provide for a set of guiding principles to help ensure that the Family Court will operate in a user-friendly and efficient manner. The intention is to establish a dedicated Family Court within the existing court structures. The Family Court Bill will support the provisions of the Mediation Act 2017 by encouraging greater use of alternative dispute resolution to assist in more timely resolution of family law cases.

The waiting time for a Family Law hearing in the High Court is currently 2 months. The waiting times in the Circuit and District Family Courts are set out in the following tables.

**District Court Waiting Times November 2019** (All waiting times shown in weeks)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Family law domestic Violence Applications (1)</th>
<th>Family law Maintenance/Guardianship Applications (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athlone</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballina</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bray</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>3-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlow</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrick on Shannon</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>4-8 (Next sitting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castlebar</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>8 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clonakilty</td>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>4-6 (2-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clonmel</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>4-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>13 (14)</td>
<td>13 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dundalk</td>
<td>4-8 (Next sitting)</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ennis</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>6-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* Urgent interim applications are dealt with immediately i.e. on next sitting day in every District (1) Time from receipt of application to listing for hearing in domestic violence matters

(2) As (1) but for other family law applications

### Circuit Court

**Waiting times in November 2019** (All waiting times shown in months)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Family Law Contested</th>
<th>Family Law Non-contested</th>
<th>Family Law Appeals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlow</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrick on Shannon</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castlebar</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clonmel</td>
<td>3-6 (Next sitting)</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>0.5 - 4 (0.5 -3)</td>
<td>1 (1-2)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dundalk</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>6-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ennis</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilkenny</td>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letterkenny</td>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>6-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limerick</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>3-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monaghan</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mullingar</td>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>Next sitting</td>
<td>3-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
240. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of drivers disqualified in court in 2018 by District Court area; the number of licences surrendered to the Road Safety Authority in 2018; the number disqualified in court to date in 2019 by District Court area; the number of driver licences surrendered to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48800/19]

241. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to a Leader’s Question by this Deputy on 13 November 2019, if the GSOC report on the circumstances regarding the death of a person (details supplied) has been made available to the person’s family and solicitor; if not, when they will receive correspondence regarding the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48803/19]

242. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to a Leader’s Question by this Deputy on 13 November 2019, if the DPP now has the GSOC report regarding the case of a person (details supplied) and the investigations into the circumstances of the person’s death; if so, if further action will be taken on the recommendations of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48804/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 241 and 242 together.

The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC) is an independent body tasked with investigation of complaints in relation to members of An...
Garda Síochána.

I am informed that GSOC conducted a criminal investigation into the matters referred to and sent a file to the Director of Public Prosecutions and that the Director of Public Prosecutions directed that there be no prosecution in the matter.

I am further informed that the second report referred to by the Deputy relates to a report prepared by GSOC for the Garda Commissioner, following GSOC’s disciplinary investigation into the recording and publication of video footage of the arrest of the person referred to. I would point out that any decision around the application of the Garda Síochána (Discipline) Regulations 2007 following receipt of the GSOC report is a matter for the Garda Commissioner.

I am informed that GSOC has provided reasons in writing to the family referred to as to why they cannot be provided with a copy of the report in question.

As the matter is ongoing, the Deputy will appreciate that I cannot comment further on it.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems

243. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a CCTV application by a council (details supplied); the stage the application is at; when it will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48812/19]

244. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of CCTV schemes that have been approved for funding since the scheme commenced; the number of schemes approved to date in 2019; if each local authority is signed up to the scheme; the areas that have been successful with their applications in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48813/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 243 and 244 together.

Community-based CCTV is governed by section 38(3)(c) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and the Garda Síochána (CCTV) Order 2006. This legal framework requires that any proposed community CCTV scheme must:

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

This is the legal basis for all community CCTV schemes, regardless of how they are funded and these key legal requirements have not changed since 2006. The option to establish a Community CCTV scheme is available to groups that meet these legal requirements, anywhere in the country.

Since 2017, my Department has administered a grant aid scheme supporting groups wishing to establish a community-based CCTV system in their area. To date, 22 applications have been approved under the scheme, involving approved grants totalling more than €560,000. The location of the CCTV schemes which have been approved for funding are as follows:

- Carrick on Shannon, Co. Leitrim
I can confirm that an application for CCTV grant aid from the area referred to by the Deputy was received in my Department earlier this year. This application was refused in July 2019 as it did not meet the 3 statutory requirements for Community CCTV. The applicant was notified by letter of this decision - but I would emphasise that it remains open to them to reapply for funding once they apply for and secure the approvals required by the law for all Community CCTV systems.

Eligible groups, including community groups and local authorities nationwide, can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum total of €40,000.

As the Deputy may be aware, earlier this year I expanded the grant aid scheme to cover not only new CCTV systems but also to allow funding applications for extension or upgrade of existing Community CCTV systems which are incomplete or obsolete. Applicants can now also seek a once-off grant of up to €5,000 for minor maintenance costs.

The scheme remains open for applications from interested groups in 2019 and all fully completed applications received before the end of 2019 will be considered. Further, I am also pleased to announce that I have recently approved extension of the CCTV grant aid scheme for a further year in 2020.

I must emphasise that grant funding can be considered only for CCTV systems which meet the legal requirements for CCTV, in other words CCTV systems which have been approved by the relevant Joint Policing Committee, the relevant Local Authority (also acting as Data Controller) and which have received the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner.

If the Deputy is aware of groups wishing to avail of the scheme, further details are available to download from my Department’s website - www.justice.ie and support and guidance is available to help interested groups through a dedicated email address fundsadmin-comm-based-cctv@justice.ie.

Prison Accommodation

245. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional number of prison places made available in each year to date since March 2011 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48917/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The information sought by the Deputy is detailed and I regret that it has not been possible for the Irish Prison Service to collate the information requested in the timeframe available. I have requested the Irish Prison Service to collate this information and I will write directly to the Deputy as soon as it is avail-
able.

**Departmental Investigations**

246. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will extend the brief of an investigation (details supplied) into the payment of protection money to cover other building projects since 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48963/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy refers to a review by a Senior Counsel, appointed by my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government Eoghan Murphy TD, in relation to alleged payments by construction companies on specified social housing construction sites in order to address anti-social behaviour.

I understand from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government that the review is being conducted in accordance with Section 224 of the Local Government Act 2001.

The Deputy will appreciate that the review and its scope is a matter for my colleague Minister Murphy.

**Commissions of Investigation**

247. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will establish the two outstanding commissions of investigation which were recommended by the final report on the independent commission of inquiry into the murder of a person (details supplied) by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women’s Rights in March 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48964/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The murder of Seamus Ludlow was a callous and senseless act of random violence perpetrated against an innocent man. I have the utmost sympathy for the Ludlow family who feel the pain of his loss every day. It is a matter of profound regret that, in common with so many troubles related deaths, nobody has yet been brought to justice for his murder.

The Barron Commission of Inquiry carried out an extensive investigation into the circumstances of the Seamus Ludlow case and Judge Barron submitted his report to the then Taoiseach in 2004. The report was referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women’s Rights, a sub-committee of which held a series of public hearings and issued a report in March 2006.

That there were serious failures in the original Garda investigation is beyond question. In the course of the sub-committee hearings, the then former Garda Commissioner Pat Byrne, the then Commissioner, Noel Conroy, and the then Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Michael McDowell, apologised to the Ludlow family for the way in which they had been treated by the Gardaí at the time.

There have been four separate Garda investigations: the initial (and flawed investigation); in1979/1980; in 1996/1999; and following the Barron Report. The Garda investigation is not closed and if further evidence comes to light that might permit a prosecution then expect that the matter would be re-considered by the DPP.

A second Coroner’s inquest into Mr Ludlow’s death was directed by the Attorney General, in September 2005 which returned a verdict of unlawful killing.
Neither I, nor my predecessors have been of the view that this case meets the statutory threshold for the establishment of a Commission of Investigation. There are litigation proceedings underway in relation to this which are due to be heard before the Court of Appeal at a future date. As this matter is before the Courts, I cannot add anything further.

I again extend my deepest sympathies to the Ludlow family.

International Protection

248. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the date for the finalisation of the policy on the new inspection process for compliance with the national standards for accommodation of persons in the international protection process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48965/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**
On 15 August, Minister Flanagan and I published the National Standards for accommodation offered to people in the international protection process. The Standards were prepared by a Standards Advisory Group, established in 2017 and comprising officials from my Department, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the HSE National Office for Social Inclusion as well as representatives from UNHCR Ireland, AkiDwA, the Children’s Rights Alliance, the Core Group of Asylum Seekers and Refugees, the Jesuit Refugee Service and SPIRASI. The Standards will come into force in January 2021.

The Standards address a range of themes including accommodation; food and catering; individual, community and family life; health and wellbeing; governance; and meeting the special reception needs of applicants. They build upon the important work of the 2015 McMahon Report and implement the requirements of the EU recast Reception Conditions Directive, which we voluntarily opted into last year.

I am committed to developing a robust independent inspection process to monitor and ensure compliance with the Standards following their implementation. It is important to note, however, that at present all accommodation centres are subject to regular unannounced inspections by both staff of my Department and an independent inspector.

The on-going public procurement process for accommodation was also designed to ensure that all centres will adhere to the National Standards.

Work on the development of a suitable inspection process for the Standards is underway. The arrangements will be announced in due course when finalised.

Freedom of Information Requests

249. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a freedom of information request (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48972/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, I have no involvement in processing Freedom of Information requests nor am I involved in reviews of requests.

I can confirm that a response to the Freedom of Information request was issued by my Department on 25 November 2019 to the requester. If the requester is dissatisfied with the deci-
sion, they have the right to seek a review, details of which have been provided in their decision letter.

**Departmental Reviews**

250. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the review of the administration of civil justice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49031/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the Group reviewing the administration of civil justice in the State is continuing its work. Chaired by the President of the High Court, Mr. Justice Peter Kelly, the Group is expected to make recommendations for changes with a view to improving access to civil justice in the State, promoting early resolution of disputes, reducing the cost of litigation, creating a more responsive and proportionate system, and ensuring better outcomes for court users.

It will also take into account the body of work and range of initiatives already developed such as the 2010 Report of the Law Reform Commission on Consolidation and Reform of the Courts, as well as the legal costs provisions of the Legal Services Regulatory Act 2015, among others.

The Review Group includes representatives from the: judiciary; Courts Service; Departments of Justice and Equality, Taoiseach and Public Expenditure and Reform; Bar Council; Law Society; Office of the Chief State Solicitor and the Office of the Attorney General.

The Group requested submissions from interested persons or parties in relation to its work. The broad topical areas to be pursued by the Group will, in an overall context of improving access to justice and reducing costs of litigation, be:

(a) Improving procedures and practices and removal of obsolete, unnecessary or over-complex rules of procedure,

(b) Reviewing the law of discovery,

(c) Encouraging alternative methods of dispute resolution,

(d) Reviewing the use of electronic methods of communications including e-litigation and possibilities for making court documents (including submissions and pleadings) available or accessible on the internet,

(e) Achieving more effective outcomes for court users, particularly vulnerable court users.

I understand the Group received over 90 submissions including from individuals, Government Departments, legal practitioners and the judiciary. Those submissions are currently under consideration and a final report is being drafted.

**Legislative Programme**

251. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if legislation will be introduced to make it illegal to sell scrap metal for cash in view of the fact that there has been an increase in the theft of catalytic converters from cars in the Dublin area; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 was introduced in the United
Kingdom in 2013 to help prevent thefts along these lines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49037/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy referred to the theft of catalytic converters from cars.

The Deputy may wish to note that the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act 2001 provides for offences of theft, the handling of stolen property and the possession of stolen property. The offence of theft provided for by this legislation would, based on the broad nature of the offence, include the theft of ‘scrap metal’ and ‘catalytic converters.’ Maximum sentences of 10 years are provided for in the case of offences of theft and handling of stolen property; while maximum sentences of 5 years are provided for the offence of possession of stolen property.

Irish law relating to the sale and purchase of scrap metal is a matter for the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and arises under the Waste Management Act 1996. The Waste Management (Facility Permit and Registration) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No 320 of 2014) apply to the sale and purchase of scrap metals and were designed to improve the traceability of such scrap metal sales. The regulations impose an obligation on businesses to apply due diligence measures to ensure the traceability of any waste purchased.

Finally, the Deputy may wish to note that officials from my Department are also involved in the Metal Theft Forum, which is a collaborative working group between State stakeholders and industry representatives to improve information sharing around the issue of metal theft. The Forum is chaired by An Garda Síochána and includes representatives from my Department, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, the EPA, An Post and a wide range of non-State representatives including telecoms companies, the ESB and others.

**Residency Permits**

252. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if holders of the stamp 4S permission will be regarded as non-compliant with the conditions of the permission if they avail of a national childcare scheme subsidy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49146/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** In 2018, my Department launched a Scheme that was open to non-EEA nationals who held a student permission in the State during the period 1 January 2005 and 31 December 2010. This scheme applied to non-EEA persons who commenced their presence in the State lawfully under a student permission with a limited right to work and who maintained that lawful presence for at least two years.

The scheme permits qualifying persons to remain in the State with a right to work for 2 years on Stamp 4S conditions. After two years, if a person had adhered to the terms of their permission they may be granted a permission to reside in the State for a further year under Stamp 4 conditions.

My Department stopped accepting applications under this scheme on 20 January, 2019.

One of the criteria of this scheme was that the applicant must be able to support themselves without recourse to State funds and be tax compliant.

The access provided to holders of a Stamp 4 to the Irish employment market and the tangible benefits enjoyed by holders of this status are an acknowledgement by the State that, over time, those who migrate to Ireland contribute increasingly to society and the economy and have
earned this status and the stability it brings.

A person with a stamp 4 permission can:

- Take up employment and are not required to hold an Employment Permit.
- They can work in a profession, subject to conditions of the relevant professional or other bodies.
- They can establish and operate a business.
- They may access state funds and services as determined by Government departments or agencies.

If a person wishes to stay in Ireland past the expiry date of their immigration permission, they must apply to renew their permission and registration before they expire.

A decision to grant childcare support to a Stamp 4 holder is made by the Government Departments and agencies who administer the childcare support scheme and will be determined by those agencies. If a person with a Stamp 4S permission is approved for the subsidy, this will not negatively impact the requirement under the Student Scheme that the applicant must be able to support themselves without recourse to State funds.

**Brexit Supports**

253. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the details of supports that are in place for businesses and community groups in the Border region to prepare for the impact of Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48537/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department and its agencies have put in place extensive supports, schemes and advisory resources to ensure that businesses nationwide are prepared for Brexit. While we cannot yet know the form that Brexit will take, these measures aim to assist businesses in identifying key risk areas and practical preparatory actions regardless of the circumstances of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU.

InterTradeIreland’s [ITI] Brexit Advisory Service provides a focal point for SMEs working to navigate any changes in cross-border trading relationships arising as a result of Brexit. As part of this service, ITI has organised a series of awareness-raising events focused on improving knowledge of customs processes and procedures and identifying actions that can be taken in areas such as logistics and supply chain management. As of 8 November, more than 5,300 SMEs have directly engaged with the Brexit Advisory Service this year.

ITI’s Brexit Planning Voucher aims to enable businesses to seek professional advice on how best to plan and prepare for Brexit. This support helps businesses obtain advice on specific areas such as tariffs, currency management, and regulatory and customs issues. Vouchers are worth up to €2,250 (inclusive of VAT) each. To 8 November, 2,054 applications have been submitted for the Voucher, 1,747 of which have been approved.

ITI has also launched a further financial support in the form of the Brexit Implementation Voucher, which offers financial support up to £5,000/€5,625 (inclusive of VAT), with InterTradeIreland paying 50% towards implementing critical changes in relation to Brexit matters. As of 8 November, there have been 54 applications, of which 40 have been approved.
The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the first-stop-shop for anyone seeking guidance and support on starting or growing their business, including businesses in the border counties. The LEOs have organised various events to enable companies to learn about the potential impacts and opportunities of Brexit. As of 8 November, 1,198 LEO clients have received one-to-one mentoring solely focused on Brexit. Since February, the LEOs have also been offering customs training workshops to support businesses trading with third countries in advance of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. To 8 November this year, there have been 1,456 training participants.

The LEOs also engage in a number of other schemes to help businesses prepare for Brexit. The Technical Assistance Grant for Micro Export is offered as an incentive for LEO clients to explore and develop new market opportunities. As of 8th November, 800 LEO clients have been approved assistance under the grant.

In addition, the six LEOs in the Border region are working together with their Northern Ireland counterparts under the EU Co-Innovate Programme. The aim of Co-Innovate is to give SMEs from the manufacturing and tradable services sectors in the eligible regions the tools and tailored support to help them to innovate, differentiate and compete successfully. This month, it was announced that over €1 million of R&D funding has been awarded through Co-Innovate.

The Brexit Loan Scheme was launched in March 2018. It provides relatively short-term working capital, up to three years, to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees to help them innovate, change or adapt to mitigate their Brexit challenges. The scheme is open to eligible businesses from all regions of the country, including those in the Border counties. Dublin aside, the most recent quarterly report shows that the border region is the most active region in terms of eligibility applications for the scheme. As of 18 November, there have been 892 eligibility applications received, of which 804 have been approved and 212 loans progressed to sanction at bank level to a value of €46.6 million. It should be noted that 159 of total applications received relate to repeat/duplicate applications, as eligibility expires after six months.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme opened for eligibility applications in April 2019. This scheme provides a longer-term facility, 8-10 years, of up to €300m to support strategic capital investment for a post-Brexit environment at competitive rates. This scheme has been jointly funded by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to make available loans of €100,000 (€50,000 for primary agriculture) to €3 million, with loans of under €500,000 being provided on an unsecured basis. The scheme is open to eligible Irish businesses, including those in the primary agriculture and seafood sectors, to support strategic, long-term investment in a post-Brexit environment. As of 18 November, there have been 2,031 eligibility applications received, of which 1,925 have been approved and 595 loans progressed to sanction at bank level to a value of €122.5 million.

Enterprise Ireland [EI] has established a Prepare for Brexit online portal and communications campaign, as well as an online “Brexit SME Scorecard” to help Irish businesses self-asses their exposure to Brexit and a “Be Prepared Grant” to support SME clients in planning to mitigate risks arising from Brexit. It has also launched a new Eurozone Strategy to help SMEs broaden their export footprint beyond the UK.

EI’s Customs Insights course helps businesses looking at customs for the first time to understand the key customs concepts, documentation and processes. The course advises on the key actions companies can take to prepare for Brexit and highlights the various supports available. To 8 November, there have been 1,916 Customs Insights Course participants.

In quarter one of this year, I launched nine new Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020, including Plans for the North East and the North West. These Plans build on the very strong progress made on employment creation under the Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017. The new
Plans will ensure that regional stakeholders continue to work together to help achieve the Government’s 2020 targets for regional employment taking account of new and emerging opportunities and challenges, including Brexit.

In order to help build enterprise capability, under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) Enterprise Ireland invested in seven successful projects in the Border region with a total funding allocation of more than €10.6 million. This funding will help drive enterprise development and job creation in the Border Region. Enterprise Ireland will continue to engage with its clients to ensure they have the supports required to prepare for any kind of Brexit scenario.

In June, at a visit to the recently opened Cavan Digital Hub, I announced that a further €45 million is to be made available under a new third call of the REDF. The closing date for submission of eligible projects under this latest call was 25 September 2019. On 20 October 2019 an Evaluation Panel comprised of representatives from EI, my Department and other public and private bodies began to evaluate eligible projects. The evaluation of eligible projects has now been completed and the selected projects by the Evaluation panel will be recommended for funding to EI’s Investment Committee/Board for approval and I intend making an announcement on the successful projects before the end of the year.

My Department and I have also participated in the whole-of-Government ‘Getting Ireland Brexit Ready’ public information campaign. This campaign features workshop events throughout the country, aimed primarily at the businesses and people most impacted by Brexit, including events in Monaghan and Donegal. In addition to these events, Enterprise Ireland has rolled out a series of Brexit Advisory Clinics to help businesses across the country, including events in Dundalk, Letterkenny and Cootehill. In the last few weeks, the LEOs have held Brexit related events in Monaghan, Drogheda and Cavan.

While I have seen a very positive uptake of the supports available, I am conscious that the lasting uncertainty around the Brexit process may be leading businesses to defer their Brexit preparations. The UK’s exit from the EU will bring change for Irish businesses and I want businesses, particularly those around the Border counties to know my Department and agencies are here to help.

**Work Permits Data**

254. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of work permits for a company (details supplied); if the quotas for general employment permits for meat processing operatives will be extended; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48749/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** In 2018, at my request, following significant and ongoing engagement with the agri-food sector and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, a review of the emerging labour shortages being experienced in that sector was undertaken resulting in the introduction of a pilot scheme which provided for operatives for the horticulture, dairy farming and meat processing industries. A quota of 250 employment permits was introduced initially for meat processing operatives. This quota has been increased twice with provision made for a further 500 and 750 bringing the total to 1,500 permits. As part of the ongoing review of the occupation lists, my Department is currently considering a further business case submitted by meat industry employer representatives for an additional quota for meat processing operatives and is engaging with officials in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in this regard. I expect
recommendations arising from the ongoing review to be presented for my consideration in the coming weeks.

On 9th September 2019, my officials contacted the named company to inform them that the quota of 1,500 permits for Meat Processing Operatives had been exhausted. My officials explained that the company could withdraw some or all of its six employment permit applications, and apply for a 90% refund of the fees, or the relevant applications could remain in their current position in the processing queue pending the completion of the consideration of the request for a further extension to the quota. My officials inform me that the named company have, to date, sought a refund for one application.

Insurance Data

255. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that could not obtain insurance in each year since 2016, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48789/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I can confirm my Department does not collect the type of information sought by the Deputy. I am also advised that both the Department of Finance, which has policy responsibility for insurance, and the Central Bank of Ireland, which has regulatory responsibility for the insurance sector, do not collect this type of information either.

Money Laundering

256. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation a breakdown (details supplied) of companies that filed with the new Register of Beneficial Ownership that is overseen by the Companies Registration Office by 22 November 2019; if she will consider extending the filing deadline to the end of the calendar year in view of the fact that the register was due to go live on 22 June 2019 but the CRO was unable to accept filings until 29 July 2019 due to technical reasons; and if provision will be made for SMEs that have had to meet this additional administrative burden. [48930/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The objectives of the beneficial ownership provisions being implemented are to strengthen transparency over who ultimately owns and controls companies and trusts to effectively detect, disrupt and prevent money laundering and terrorist financing.

The European Union (Anti-Money Laundering: Beneficial Ownership of Corporate Entities) Regulations 2019 (S.I. No. 110 of 2019) were made by the Minister for Finance and provide that the Central Register of Beneficial Ownership of Companies and Industrial and Provident Societies (RBO) is the central repository of such information held by companies and industrial and provident societies. While the CRO homepage provides a link to the RBO, the RBO is a separate website and a statutorily separate Register from the Companies Registration Office. Obligations under S.I. No. 110 of 2019 on anti-money laundering and terrorist financing are legally separate to company law requirements under the Companies Act 2014.

The numbers filing increased steadily throughout last week as the deadline of November 22 approached. As of November 22 2019 126,060 companies had successfully registered beneficial ownership details. This represents 55% of the total. There are many thousands of submissions currently at processing stage and the RBO expect the numbers registered to increase further.
Further breakdown by size of company is not available at this time. The focus of the RBO staff is on processing the many thousands of submissions already received.

While I am sympathetic to the challenges being faced by small and micro enterprises in meeting their filing obligations, companies and industrial and provident societies have been legally obligated to be in possession of much of the information required for central filing since November 2016. The RBO was very concerned to ensure that relevant entities were aware of their obligations to file with the Register and undertook an extensive Public Awareness Campaign, in the period leading up to and around the opening of the Register on 29 July and in the period leading up to and around the deadline date.

Due to technical difficulties with the RBO portal on the evening of November 22, I understand some companies and industrial and provident societies may have been unable to file Beneficial Ownership details for a period of time. Any submissions filed with the RBO by midnight on November 25 will be treated by the RBO as having been received on time.

With regard to companies and industrial and provident societies that have missed the deadline for filing, I expect a practical and proportionate approach will be taken by the Registrar on a case by case basis to deal with those particular circumstances where companies and industrial and provident societies who have attempted to file in time with the RBO may have missed the deadline.

Money Laundering

257. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has lead responsibility for overseeing the operation of the new Register of Beneficial Ownership; and the meetings she has had to date in 2019 with the Minister for Finance on appointing the new registrar and meeting the requirements of S.I. No.110 of 2019. [48931/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): While S.I. No. 110 of 2019 was made by the Minister for Finance, Regulation 18 provides that the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation may, after consultation with the Minister for Finance, appoint a Registrar of Beneficial Ownership of Companies and Industrial and Provident Societies. Under Regulation 19, the Central Register of Beneficial Ownership of Companies and Industrial and Provident Societies shall be maintained by the Registrar and for the purposes of registration in the central register the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation shall maintain and administer an office or offices in the State at such places as the Minister thinks fit.

On 11 July 2019 I wrote to the Minister for Finance notifying him of my intention to appoint a Registrar of Beneficial Ownership of Companies and Industrial and Provident Societies, subject to any observations he may have. On 16 July 2019 the Minister for Finance provided written response, noting my intention and that he had no further observations to make in this regard.

Officials from my Department have and continue to communicate with officials from the Department of Finance to discuss the operation of the RBO and meeting the requirements of S.I. No. 110 of 2019. Communication takes place in several ways including e-mail, by telephone and by way of both formal and informal face to face meetings.

HSE Properties
258. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the person or body responsible for the maintenance of ten sheltered housing units (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49020/19]

**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.

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### Medicinal Products Licensing

259. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health if there are regulatory impediments to the growing of hemp here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49118/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under current legislation the Minister for Health can issue a licence for the growing of hemp from seed varieties specified by the Commission of the European Communities, as being eligible for the purposes of Article 1 of Regulation (EU) No. 1307/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 (OJ No. L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 608.).

The HPRA (Health Products Regulatory Authority) administers the hemp licencing process on behalf of the Dept of Health. Further information regarding the hemp licencing process for the above purposes is available from the HPRA at controlleddrugs@hpра.ie.

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### Health Services

260. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the treatment and community support services available to lymphedema patients in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48542/19]

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

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### Home Help Service Provision

261. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if an application for additional home help hours for a person (details supplied) will be expedited in view of the medical condition of the person. [48544/19]

**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.

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### Hospital Appointments Status

262. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will be considered for an earlier appointment in Letterkenny University Hospital outpatient clinic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48549/19]
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.

Departmental Reports

263. Deputy Stephen Donnelly asked the Minister for Health if the NTPF report on private healthcare in public hospitals will be made available. [48554/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Earlier this year, I published the Report of the Independent Review Group, which examined private activity in public hospitals.

The present mixed system in our public acute hospitals has evolved over decades, with an undue focus on responding to the needs of certain groups - consultants, private patients, generation of additional non-exchequer revenue by hospitals - over the needs of the broader patient cohort and the public good. Ireland is now an international outlier on private medicine in public hospitals. Other countries with strong public hospital systems do not tolerate the inefficiencies and perverse incentives that arise with having a stream of private patients. The Sláintecare and the de Buitléir reports together present an opportunity to design a public hospital service with a coherent vision, with the patient and the public good at its heart. I have committed to reverting to Government with proposals in this regard over the coming months.

As part of its consideration on the recommendations contained within the report, my officials consulted with a number of bodies including the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) on the implications of the recommendations. The NTPF was asked to consider the impact on capacity and waiting lists. The NTPF has advised my Department waiting times will decrease because of a reordering of queuing and a deprioritisation of private patients and will result in a modest increase in capacity. This work is ongoing and I will revert to Government in due course.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

264. Deputy Catherine Connolly asked the Minister for Health the status of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland Statement of Strategy 2017 to 2019, in particular the key milestones at pages 14 and 15; the status of each milestone noted for 2017 to 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48559/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to an operational matter, I have referred it to the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland for attention and direct
265. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to ensure that each person diagnosed with dementia has access to a dementia adviser; the counties which do not have a dementia adviser to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48575/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Dementia Adviser Service was established by the Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI) in mid-2014 and has been co-funded by the HSE since 2016. Dementia advisers provide information, advice and support to people with dementia and their families, or anyone concerned about their cognitive health, at all stages of their journey, from diagnosis through to end-of-life. A recent evaluation has shown that people with dementia and their families highly value the services provided.

In recognition of this, the Government has decided to fund an additional ten dementia advisers as part of an expansion of health care delivery in the community in Budget 2020 to deliver on the vision of Sláintecare. This will ensure the provision of enhanced support services for people with dementia.

In relation to the Deputy’s specific question about the counties which do not have a dementia adviser, as this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

266. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding funding for a State supported accessible holiday resort (details supplied) in County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48577/19]

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

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

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

267. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if a private room will be provided in the accident and emergency department of South Tipperary General Hospital in which patients presenting with mental health issues can wait to be seen in the private consultation room (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48578/19]
Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Lists

268. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); the length of time the person has been waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48579/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

269. Deputy Mary Butler asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for an operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48581/19]

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.

Health Insurance Regulation

270. Deputy Alan Kelly asked the Minister for Health the status of the Health Insurance
Act 2018; when it will be updated for risk and price equalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48589/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I brought forward the Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2019 on 19 November. The Bill will provide for new rates of risk equalisation credits and stamp duty levies on health insurance contracts to apply from 1 April 2020, and is expected to start Second Stage in Dáil Éireann this week.

**Disability Services Provision**

271. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48599/19]

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

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

**Hospital Waiting Lists**

272. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a date for surgery; the average waiting list time for such surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48603/19]

**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.

**Health Services Provision**

273. **Deputy Frank O’Rourke** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the necessary resources for the provision of psychology and occupational therapy to a person (details
supplied) as recommended by the HSE assessment of needs conducted in April 2019 but not being provided by the service provider (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48605/19]

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

Hospital Staff Data

274. Deputy John Brassil asked the Minister for Health the expenditure by public hospitals on locum pharmacists; the rate of pay paid to locum pharmacists in publicly funded hospitals; if locum agencies are used and the daily and weekly rates paid to those agencies in each of the years 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48613/19]

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

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

275. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Health the detailed design plans with respect to the upgrading of St Joseph’s Community Hospital, Stranorlar, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48625/19]

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

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

276. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Health the details of the plans to extend the dementia unit at St Joseph’s Hospital, Stranorlar, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48626/19]

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

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

277. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Health the status of plans for the proposed redevelopment of Lifford Community Hospital; his plans for the retention and development of existing health services based in the community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48627/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.
278. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a general practitioner can retrospectively sign a referral letter for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal wishing to avail of reimbursement for a procedure provided via the cross border directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48628/19]

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

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**Medicinal Products Licensing**

279. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the reason persons with multiple sclerosis have access to new medicines within weeks or months in many European countries but patients here can wait over four years for new medicines to be made available (details supplied); the reason for slower approval for new medicines here; the steps he is taking to ensure access is expedited; and the date same will be achieved. [48648/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions.

As a country, we invest heavily in medicines, to the tune of almost €2 billion annually. As of October 2019, there have been 29 new medicines and 5 new indications for existing medicines approved for reimbursement in the public healthcare system. The approvals to date represent an additional investment by the HSE over five years of approximately €220m in providing access to new and innovative treatment for Irish patients. It is expected that over 3,000 patients will benefit from access to these new medicines over the next 5 years.

Notwithstanding the significant progress on drug costs achieved from price reductions under the pricing framework agreed with industry and commercial negotiations conducted by the HSE, the Health Service is still facing very significant challenges in relation to the affordability of medicines. The industry continues to develop very expensive products, particularly in the high-tech medicines area and the costs involved are a challenge for health systems even in countries with much greater resources than Ireland.

The Government wants new and innovative medicines to be available to our citizens as quickly as possible, but this can only be achieved if medicines are priced by the pharmaceutical industry in a viable and sustainable manner. “League tables” comparing speed of reimbursement in Ireland with that of other countries are often misleading since several countries have quite different and often less rigorous assessment arrangements than Ireland. Furthermore, many of the newer products being licenced are falling well short of cost-effectiveness thresholds, with limited clinical benefits.

The current process for assessing applications works very well where the new medicines have strong evidence of clinical effectiveness and are priced in a cost-effective manner. Delays
in reimbursement decisions for new products do occur in cases where the evidence of clinical effectiveness is weak, and where prices are set well outside of cost effectiveness parameters.

The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because these commitments are often multi-million euro investments on an on-going basis, it must ensure that the best price is achieved. This can lead to a protracted negotiation and deliberation process.

My Department and the HSE are working on making greater efficiencies in medicines usage through a range of initiatives both domestically and internationally to ensure the greatest possible access to new treatments for patients in Ireland.

The HSE’s Medicines Management Programme (MMP), incorporating the Preferred Drugs initiative, is overseeing the implementation of a number of actions to bring about greater value for the taxpayer through cost-effective provision of medicines. These measures include the designation of preferred products with a focus on high-cost prescribing areas, in particular optimising the use of biosimilars.

I and officials have also been engaging over the past number of years with a number of voluntary EU forums. In June 2018, I signed the Beneluxa Initiative on Pharmaceutical Policy. This Agreement is in line with my objective to work with other European countries to identify workable solutions, in an increasingly challenging environment, to secure timely access for patients to new medicines in an affordable and sustainable way. In June 2019, Ireland became a Founding Member of the International Horizon Scanning Initiative which is being established as part of the work programme of Beneluxa.

Air Ambulance Service

280. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the action he will take to ensure that the air ambulance service does not close for a period of 16 days or for a period of time in view of the crucial role it plays in saving lives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48649/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Emergency Aeromedical Support (EAS) provides rapid access to appropriate treatment for very high acuity patients, specifically where land ambulance transit times would not be clinically appropriate. The service is particularly beneficial for time-dependent cardiovascular patients who constitute about one third of all EAS missions.

EAS services are provided primarily by the Air Corps with reserve capacity provided by the Irish Coast Guard. The service operates seven days a week in daylight hours and is specifically targeted at the West. The highest demand for the EAS comes from Galway, Mayo and Roscommon, and the service has successfully completed over 2,600 emergency missions since it commenced operations in 2012.

The Air Corps is not in a position to accept EAS taskings from the National Ambulance Service for four days per month for a period of four months, from November 2019 to February 2020. During the 16 days when the Air Corps will not accept taskings, the Irish Coast Guard will provide reserve cover for the National Ambulance Service. The Irish Community Rapid Response (ICRR), has agreed to provide additional cover using a second helicopter which will be based in Roscommon Hospital and will be tasked in the usual way, to 112/999 calls by the National Emergency Operations Centre, within the National Ambulance Service. This is in line with current National Ambulance Service priorities whereby the most appropriate and safe
services are provided for patients and staff.

This does not affect the current Munster Hems service in the South of Ireland.

Medical Card Reviews

281. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if review of discretionary medical cards will be ceased; if terminally ill patients will be permitted to have automatic entitlement to a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48650/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the provisions of the Health Act 1970 (as amended), eligibility for health services in Ireland is based primarily on residency and means. However, every effort is made by the HSE, within the framework of the legislation, to support applicants in applying for a medical card and, in particular, to take full account of the difficult circumstances in the case of applicants who may be in excess of the income guidelines.

The HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds the income threshold where they face difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from an illness. Social and medical issues are also considered when determining whether undue hardship exists for an individual accessing general practitioner or other medical services. There is currently no review underway into the processing of discretionary medical cards.

However regarding emergency medical cards, I announced as part of Budget 2020, that the HSE would undertake a review and extend arrangements regarding the provision of emergency medical cards in cases of terminal illness. A Clinical Advisory Group, established by the HSE, will carry out the review and provide a report on completion.

Mental Health Services

282. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) was not permitted access and admittance to the psychiatric unit at Roscommon University Hospital on the date specified in view of the nature of the person’s condition and the fact that the person posed a danger to the person and others and was accompanied by a member of An Garda Síochána on the date; if the person will be considered for admittance if the person presents at the psychiatric unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48653/19]

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

Health Services Staff

283. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the number of specialist Parkinson’s disease nurses nationally in order to have a specialist nurse in each county (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48663/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE Model of Care for Neurology, was developed by the HSE’s National Clinical Programme for Neurology in collaboration with consultants, nurses, health and social care professionals and patient support groups. It provides a framework for neurology services, including for Parkinson’s Disease patients, using inter-
national best practice and describes care provision using an integrated service approach. The model is fully aligned with the objectives of Slaintecare and proposes a hub and spoke model, with services provided as close to home as possible but with access to specialist services where required.

The roles performed by Parkinson’s Disease Nurse Specialists include identifying the patient’s needs and coordinating their care; monitoring symptoms; helping with drug management; and providing emotional and lifestyle support.

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

Pharmacy Services

284. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health when he plans to unwind FEMPI for pharmacists in view of the fact that this process has been initiated for other healthcare professionals; the proposed cuts in pharmacy fees from January 2020; if his Department has reviewed the way in which this will affect the community pharmacy industry especially in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48665/19]

334. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that rural and smaller independent pharmacies will be most affected by the proposed new pharmacy fee scheme; his plans to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49013/19]

335. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the current proposed changes to the pharmacy fee scheme; his views on whether this is fair and equitable in view of the understanding that most small independent pharmacies look set to be hit by over €35,000 per year as a result; his plans to amend the proposed fee scheme going forward in order that it gives back to the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49014/19]

339. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the status of the unwinding of FEMPI (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49044/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 284, 334, 335 and 339 together

I recognise the significant role community pharmacists play in the delivery of patient care and the potential for this role to be developed further in the context of health service reform and modernisation.

The regulations governing the current pharmacy fee structure were made under section 9 of the FEMPI Act 2009 and are set to expire at the end of 2019. Under the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, these regulations must be replaced on 1 January 2020 to maintain a statutory basis for contractor payments and to prescribe the fees payable from that date.

In keeping with my obligations under Section 43 of the 2017 Act, my officials have been undertaking a process of consultation with the IPU, as the representative body, prior to the introduction of new fee regulations. My officials have met with an IPU delegation on two occasions and a detailed submission was received from the IPU on 8 November.

That submission is currently being considered by my Department in the context of the statutory fee-setting process.
In May of this year I addressed the Irish Pharmaceutical Union at the National Pharmacy Conference and gave a commitment to move beyond the arrangements underpinned by the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009 (FEMPI) with a view to optimising the role of pharmacists in the years ahead. In that context, it is my intention to open discussions in 2020 on a root and branch review of the current contract. Issues such as those raised by the Deputy will form part of that review.

Disability Support Services Provision

285. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Health the status of the care service being provided to a person (details supplied). [48668/19]

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

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

Home Help Service Provision

286. Deputy Eugene Murphy asked the Minister for Health if additional home help support will be provided to a person (details supplied) in view of the person’s deteriorating health and advanced years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48671/19]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

287. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Health if equipment will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48673/19]

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

Patient Transfers

288. Deputy Timmy Dooley asked the Minister for Health when a patient (details supplied) in University Hospital Limerick will be transferred to Beaumont Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48677/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply.
26 November 2019

Home Help Service Provision

289. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if additional home help hours will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48684/19]

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

Nursing Staff Remuneration

290. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the estimated net cost for 2019 of implementing the nurses’ pay deal agreed in February 2019 based on the savings and productivity measures to be put in place; if the independent verification process to determine the level of savings generated by productivity measures to offset the cost of the deal 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; the details of those who will serve on it; and if the initiatives set out under the agreement will be paused if verified savings and productivity do not materialise by the end of the year in keeping with the recommendation of the Labour Court in dealing with the recent nurses’ pay dispute. [48691/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris)**: Implementation of the agreement reached in relation to nurses and midwives has commenced. Rather than a ‘pay deal’, the agreement is made up of a number of elements intended to improve the recruitment and retention of nurses and midwives.

It provides for the introduction of the Enhanced Practice nurse/midwife roles, as well as a range of other measures. It commits to the continued roll-out of the Framework on Safe Staffing and Skill Mix already underway. The initial focus has been on the introduction of the new enhanced roles. The HSE issued a circular opening the Enhanced Practice role to eligible applicants on 23rd August 2019.

The agreement also includes the recommendations of the Public Service Pay Commission in relation to allowances and accelerated progression for certain nursing and midwifery grades. The HSE has issued a circular giving effect to these allowance increases. The HSE is also continuing to work on the extension of the qualification/location allowance to medical surgical areas. Progress has been made in resolving outstanding issues in relation to psychiatric nurses and the enhanced practice contract and increased allowances will soon be made available to these nurses also.

The HSE has a detailed implementation plan in place and is monitoring the actions set out in this plan.

Labour Court recommendation LCR21900 provides for ‘independent verification mechanism’ to ensure that savings are delivered from this agreement. Consideration is still being given to how such a mechanism would operate and its membership. In the meantime, the agreement, in particular the enhanced practice roles, needs to be given time to have an impact on the health services, before consideration could be given to pausing elements of it.

Hospital Waiting Lists

133
291. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48695/19]

**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.

**Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

292. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the substantial recommendations in a study by a company (details supplied) of the medicines reimbursement system; if the recommendations will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48698/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Work on the review of the HSE reimbursement and pricing decision-making process is ongoing. The review, conducted by Mazars, is progressing and on completion my officials will consider its findings.

The review will make recommendations, as considered appropriate, in respect of any required improvements to the HSE’s systems, structures, processes, governance arrangements or use of specialist resources in respect of the review.

**Hospital Waiting Lists**

293. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is not being called for a MRI scan; the reason the person was provided with false information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48699/19]

**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.

**Health Services**

294. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the long waiting list for children who wear orthotics; if there is a problem with funding for same in mid-western areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48700/19]

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

**Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility**

295. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) is eligible for a long-term illness card. [48705/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The LTI Scheme 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 LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

Regulations were made in 1971, 1973 and 1975 specifying the conditions covered by the LTI Scheme, including mental illness in a person under 16 years of age.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme or the age limit in relation to mental illness at this time. However, I wish to inform the Deputy that it is proposed that the LTI Scheme would 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.

**Disability Services Provision**

296. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason children (details supplied) cannot obtain an appointment for speech, occupational and physiotherapy, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48707/19]

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

As the Deputy’s question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.
297. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the terms and conditions for a person who is entitled to respite care. [48711/19]

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

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

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

**Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

298. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48713/19]

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

**Hospital Waiting Lists**

299. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) is on the waiting list for cataract surgery in the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital, Dublin. [48728/19]

**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.
300. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether pharmacies are best placed to help reduce the burden on general practitioners and accident and emergency departments nationwide (details supplied); his further views on whether such schemes and services could have multiple benefits for the HSE and further support smaller and independent pharmacies financially in the event that the proposed cuts in the current draft of the new pharmacy contract are not removed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48738/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I value the role pharmacists play in the Irish health service. As you are aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government and the Sláintecare implementation strategy contain commitments to expanding the role of community pharmacy in managing patient health in the community.

Work has been done in recent years on wider healthcare roles for pharmacies, including the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland’s Future Pharmacy report, on the expansion of professional pharmacy practice. It is clear from this and other work that there is potential to increase the range of both private and publicly funded health services delivered through community pharmacy. Important new services, such as influenza vaccination and emergency contraception, have already been introduced.

To be funded by the taxpayer, new public health services in community pharmacy, as elsewhere, should improve health outcomes and provide value for money and benefits for patients. Any new or transferred services should be based on sound evidence, with matching improvements in governance and administration.

I have discussed these and other issues with the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU). My officials expect to engage in discussions with the IPU on future contractual and service arrangements early in the New Year.

**National Treatment Purchase Fund Data**

301. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the number of NTPF appointments provided to ENT patients to date in 2019; the effect this has had on individual hospital waiting lists; his plans to address such waiting lists in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48739/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government. In this regard, the Government is committed to improving waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures.

The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) supply additionality to HSE core activity in order to reduce waiting times experienced by patients for a hospital appointment, operation or procedure. In this context, the NTPF has advised my Department that they have approved a number of Outpatient proposals for ENT in 2019, which to date has provided over 4,400 patient appointments.

The latest National Treatment Purchase Fund figures show that there are 65,696 patients on the ENT Outpatient waiting list. Of these, 53% (34,507) are waiting 12 months or less. Overall, the ENT Outpatient waiting list has decreased by 0.6% (-383) when compared to the same period last year.

The figures for October also show that there are 4,401 patients on the ENT IPDC waiting list.
list. Of these, 63% (2,759) are waiting 6 months or less, 75% (3,286) are waiting 9 months or less and 82% (3,608) are waiting 12 months or less. Overall, the ENT IPDC waiting list has decreased by 18% (-971) when compared to the same period last year.

More broadly, Budget 2020 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the NTPF increasing from €75 million in 2019 to €100 million in 2020.

My Department is working with the HSE and National Treatment Purchase Fund to develop the Scheduled Care Access Plan 2020. The National Service Plan 2020 will set out HSE planned activity level for the year ahead, while the NTPF will work with the hospital system to provide additionality to improve access to inpatient/daycase treatment and with a particular focus on hospital outpatient services.

In this regard, I would encourage all hospital groups and individual hospitals to engage with the NTPF to identify waiting list proposals for the remainder of this year and for 2020.

Health Services

302. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48746/19]

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

HSE Properties

303. Deputy Mary Lou McDonald asked the Minister for Health the future plans of the HSE for a location (details supplied). [48753/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Dublin Simon Community has operated a Residential Recovery Service at Ushers Island since 2003 for people who are homeless. It is understood that they plan to develop Ushers Island to provide a purpose-built centre incorporating a range of existing and new services.

It is intended that the service provided at the Ushers island facility will re-locate to new premises while it undergoes the necessary reconstruction. My Department understands that the location referred to by the Deputy will continue to be used as residential long term housing for people who are experiencing homelessness. That location will not host any relocated services. Once the development at Ushers Island is completed it is anticipated that the Recovery service will return fully to that location.

As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Care Packages

304. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Minister for Health if there is a person here in receipt
of a direct payment from his Department or the HSE for the purchase of home care under the intensive home care package. [48796/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I would like to advise that officials from the Department of Health sought to liaise with the Deputy’s office in order to seek clarification around the matters raised in order to provide a satisfactory answer. On this occasion, we were not able to obtain the information we sought. If the Deputy would like to raise the matter again and also provide additional information, the Department would be happy to provide an answer to his question.

**Primary Care Centres Provision**

305. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for works to complete a primary care health centre at Church Street, Moate, County Westmeath, (details supplied); and if this work will be completed within the coming months. [48797/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

**Occupational Therapy Staff**

306. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when the moratorium on the recruitment of occupational therapists in County Kerry will be lifted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48798/19]

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

**Psychological Services**

307. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of the future of the HSE assistant psychologist scheme aimed at children and adolescents in primary care psychology; his plans to further extend the scheme past March 2020; his views on the success of the scheme in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48807/19]

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

**Hospital Facilities**

308. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the catheterisation laboratory development in University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48823/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In 2016, the Herity Report concluded that the needs of the effective catchment population of University Hospital Waterford (UHW) could
be accommodated from a single cath lab and recommended that the operating hours of the exist-isting cath lab should be extended. Approval and funding has been provided for the additional staff required to facilitate this service and recruitment is progressing.

A mobile cath lab has been deployed at UHW since October 2017 to conduct diagnostic cardiac procedures pending the recruitment of the additional staff required to extend the opening hours of the existing cath lab.

I remain committed to the provision of a second cath lab in University Hospital Waterford. The project has been included in the HSE’s Capital Programme 2019, the Design Team was appointed in June 2019 and the application for planning permission was lodged on 29 October.

The Herity Report also recommended that the current 9 to 5 provision of emergency pPCI services should cease to allow the hospital focus on the much larger volume of planned work. I asked my Department to address the implications of this recommendation by arranging for a National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services.

The aim of this Review is to achieve optimal patient outcomes at population level with particular emphasis on the safety, quality and sustainability of the services that patients receive by establishing the need for an optimal configuration of a national adult cardiac service.

Work is ongoing on finalisation of the Review and drafting of its recommendations has commenced.

Home Help Service Provision

309. *Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh* asked the Minister for Health the reason a person’s (details supplied) home help hours have been reduced from two hours per week to only one hour a week. [48827/19]

310. *Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh* asked the Minister for Health if the home help hours of a person (details supplied) will be reinstated back to two hours per week. [48828/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 309 and 310 together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

311. *Deputy Frank O’Rourke* asked the Minister for Health if he will reconsider approving the funding for a specialised bed for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48903/19]

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

Disability Services Provision

312. *Deputy Kathleen Funchion* asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in
a person (details supplied) receiving a day service in view of the fact the person has a person-
alised budget and should have no issues receiving the service. [48908/19]

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

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

Mental Health Services Staff

313. Deputy James Browne asked the Minister for Health the number of mental health
whole-time equivalents to be recruited as of November 2019 for the full implementation of A
Vision for Change taking account of demographic changes in each CHO; the teams and speci-
alities in which the additional staff are required by CHO in tabular form; and the estimated full
year cost of providing the additional staff. [48909/19]

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

National Children’s Hospital Expenditure

314. Deputy Barry Cowen asked the Minister for Health if he has received an update on
the cost of the national children’s hospital; the estimated amount it will cost in 2020, 2021 and
2022; the way in which it will be paid for from the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement
on the matter. [46968/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I advised Government in December 2018
that the final cost of the design, build and equipment programme for which the National Paedi-
atrict Hospital Development Board is responsible was estimated to be €1,433 million. There has
been no change to this figure advised to Government.

In relation to the estimated amount that this project will cost in 2020, 2021 and 2022, the
projected cash flow projection for this period is detailed as follows.

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<td>2022</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the way in which it will be paid for from the Exchequer, the amount allocated
to Health each year follows an extensive process of engagement between my Department and
the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Department of Public Expenditure and
Reform have responsibility for allocating public expenditure across all the relevant votes within
the overall envelope set by the Government.
315. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health when he expects assessments of need under the Disability Act 2005 in County Tipperary to be provided within the statutory timeframe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48883/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As this is a service issue the Deputy’s question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### Hospital Waiting Lists

316. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment. [48924/19]

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

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

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

### Medical Card Administration

317. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if laser eye surgery is covered by the medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48925/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides for two categories of eligibility for persons ordinarily resident in the country, i.e. full eligibility (medical cardholders) and limited eligibility (all others). Full eligibility is determined mainly by reference to income limits. Determination of an individual’s eligibility status is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive.

The HSE provides, or has provided on its behalf, a range of services including all in-patient public hospital services, including consultants services, all out-patient public hospital services including consultants services, dental, ophthalmic and aural services and appliances and a maternity and infant care service. Persons with full eligibility (medical card holders) are entitled to receive these services free of charge.

As the provision of the particular procedure mentioned is a service matter for the HSE I have referred the matter to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.
318. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of delayed discharges to date in 2019 by month and hospital; and the reason for delayed discharge in tabular form. [48933/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Delayed transfers of care (previously referred to as delayed discharges) occur when patients have been deemed clinically fit for discharge from an acute bed but their discharge is delayed because they are waiting for some form of ongoing support or care following their discharge. There are many reasons for this, such as a patient undertaking the application process for NHSS, awaiting assessment for a home support package, homelessness, ward of court application, and the availability of resources.

When possible, the HSE will use transitional care to accommodate the patient during the period between discharge and the finalisation of new care arrangements, but there can often be a delay, especially in cases where the patient and family are coming to terms with the new circumstances.

This year, services are being stretched more than ever, with demand consistently outstripping supply, and we have seen an increase in the number of delayed transfers of care. While the HSE maximises the use of resources, prioritising those requiring discharge from acute hospitals, there is a growing demand for egress support. In response, and in the context of planning and preparing for the challenges of the winter period, the Department and the HSE have been considering a comprehensive approach to the current high-level of DTOCs. However, recognising the urgency of the situation, approval was provided to the HSE to begin actions immediately to the value of €5m in 2019. As part of these measures the HSE released a significant number of funding approvals within NHSS in September, and provided additional home care and transitional care beds.

In addition, the HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November. The aim of the Winter Plan is to ensure that service providers are prepared for the additional external pressures associated with the winter period, including the prolonged holiday period, severe winter weather, seasonal influenza, and the spread of norovirus and other healthcare associated infections.

Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals.

The HSE Winter Plan is supported by an additional €26m in winter funding nationally. This winter funding will support access to the Fair Deal scheme, and will provide additional home support and transitional care to facilitate timely hospital discharge and reduce congestion in EDs over the winter period.

With regard to the Deputy’s specific question, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly with the requested information.

### Primary Care Centres

319. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide parking for disabled persons using the primary care centre in Balbriggan, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48934/19]
Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Cancer Awareness

320. Deputy Louise O’Reilly asked the Minister for Health the number of women issued letters by the HSE regarding their risk of breast implant associated anaplastic large cell lymphoma. [48935/19]

321. Deputy Louise O’Reilly asked the Minister for Health if supports have been put in place for women that were issued with letters by the HSE regarding their risk of breast implant associated anaplastic large cell lymphoma. [48936/19]

322. Deputy Louise O’Reilly asked the Minister for Health when the attention of the HSE was drawn to the risk to women of breast implant associated anaplastic large cell lymphoma. [48937/19]

324. Deputy Louise O’Reilly asked the Minister for Health his views on whether issuing letters instead of face-to-face dialogue with a clinician was the best way to deliver news to women that they are at risk of breast implant associated anaplastic large cell lymphoma. [48941/19]

325. Deputy Louise O’Reilly asked the Minister for Health the seriousness of the risk of breast implant associated anaplastic large cell lymphoma for women who are affected by implants (details supplied). [48942/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 320 to 322, inclusive, 324 and 325 together.

Breast Implant Associated Anaplastic Large Cell Lymphoma (BIA ALCL) is a new and emerging issue and while more specific to highly textured breast implants and tissue expanders, the risk exists for all types of textured breast implants and tissue expanders.

BIA-ALCL is not breast cancer, but a type of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma – a cancer of the immune system.

BIA-ALCL is a relatively new form of cancer and was given provisional recognition as a type of ALCL by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2016. As research has developed, there has been more awareness of this condition over the past number of years. When diagnosed and treated early, it has a very good recovery rate. It has been diagnosed in only a small number of people worldwide.

Most cases of BIA-ALCL have been diagnosed in patients who have implants, or have had tissues expanders manufactured by Allergan, with a specific textured surface called “BIOCELL.” These implants and expanders have not been used in Ireland since December 2018.

The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) has been updating my Department on this matter as further research is published and as evidence continues to emerge at both a European and international level and while the risk of developing BIA-ALCL has been shown to be more common than first thought, it still remains an uncommon condition.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has decided to communicate publicly on this matter in order to increase general awareness of BIA ALCL, ensure that women in Ireland are fully
informed on this issue and are given the appropriate advice and follow up as required. My Department has been and continues to work alongside the HSE in this regard.

The 8 national cancer centres are writing directly to their patients who have had breast implants or tissue expanders, including those who received Allergan ‘BIOCELL’ and patients without Allergan ‘BIOCELL’ breast implants/ tissue expanders. The distribution of these letters is an ongoing process, with letters being sent directly by the 8 cancer centres to their patients. As this is an ongoing communication process, I cannot inform the Deputy how many letters have issued.

The letters and the information on the HSE’s website, advise all individuals to be breast aware; describing the signs and symptoms to be aware of and monitor for and what to do if a patient finds a swelling or lump. It is important to note that for patients without any symptoms—no further action is needed apart from routine follow-up.

Dedicated telephone lines have been set up in the 8 cancer centres to provide assurance, encourage women to be breast aware and when necessary allocate clinical review. The phone numbers are included in each patient’s letter.

In December 2018, a French medical device notified body (which evaluates the conformity of products) decided not to renew the CE Certificates for certain breast implants and tissue expanders produced by the company Allergan. The HPRA made information available publicly when the product was withdrawn. The HSE advisory was issued in response to increased understanding of the incidence of the condition based on International studies over the past year.

This current HSE patient advisory programme was initiated in August last based on the evolving understanding of the disease internationally. Since then, my Department has been engaging with a range of national stakeholders, including the HSE, HPRA, clinical representatives and the private hospital sector on this issue to ensure that appropriate action is been taken.

**Treatment Abroad Scheme**

323. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if there is a delay by the HSE in reimbursing claimants availing of surgery under the cross-border directive; his plans to ensure that a person (details supplied) is paid as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48938/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE is responsible for the operation of the Cross-Border Directive and has a dedicated CBD office for this purpose. Since being introduced in 2014, awareness of the provisions of the Directive has grown steadily. In 2015, the first full year of operation of the scheme, 150 reimbursements were made at a cost of €585,863. In 2018, these figures had risen to 3,886 reimbursement claims processed, at a value in excess of €12m.

The significant growth in use of the scheme, and volume of applications submitted, has placed additional demands on the CBD office and given rise to a build-up of applications. over recent months. I have been advised by the HSE that additional resources are now being allocated and specific initiatives implemented to urgently address the backlog and delays in reimbursement.

Regarding the specific application referred to, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.
Questions - Written Answers

Questions Nos. 324 and 325 answered with Question No. 320.

Departmental Funding

326. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for funding for a feasibility study (details supplied) for second level school on-call therapeutic counselling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48945/19]

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

Health Services Provision

327. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his plans to establish dedicated, free, drop in sexual and mental health clinics in Cork city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48953/19]

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Staff

328. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the steps that have been taken to recruit staff for CAMHS in south County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48954/19]

**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.

Vaccine Damage Compensation Scheme

329. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the efforts being taken to ensure that the other 100 young persons affected by the swine influenza vaccine will not have to go through lengthy legal action to be compensated by the State in view of the recent swine influenza vaccination legal case taken against the HSE and his Department which came to a conclusion recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48961/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am pleased that the mediation process was successful in the recent case relating to the administration of the Pandemrix vaccine during the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic and that the parties have been able to come to a resolution without the necessity to continue with legal proceedings.

In October 2013, the Government approved (S180/46/01/0005B) the delegation to the State Claims Agency (SCA) of the management of claims in relation to individuals alleging the development of narcolepsy resulting from the administration of the pandemic vaccine. The management of the cases transferred to the SCA when the National Treasury Management Agency
(Delegation of Claims Management Functions) (Amendment) Order 2013 (S.I. no 405 of 2013) was signed by the then Taoiseach on 15 October 2013. As such, I have no role as regards the conduct of this or future cases, including as regards the issue of costs relating to them.

However, the Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to “…put in place a scheme, on a no-fault basis, that will respond to the needs of people with disability arising from vaccination” and work is progressing with regard to this. An Expert Group was established in June of last year, under Judge Meenan, to examine the law in relation to personal injuries arising in the healthcare context and to explore alternative mechanisms by which claims could be managed more effectively, particularly from the perspective of the person on whose behalf a claim has been made. A report from this Expert Group is expected in the coming weeks, the recommendations of which will be taken into account as part of the development of a vaccine compensation scheme.

In addition, the Health Research Board recently completed a review of the evidence on vaccine injury redress programmes in other jurisdictions and this report will also be considered in conjunction with the Expert Group’s recommendations.

Since 2012, the Department of Health, the HSE, and the Department of Education and Skills, and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection have worked together to provide a wide range of services and supports for those affected. The HSE’s Advocacy Unit acts as liaison with service and support providers and other Government Departments to facilitate access to required services. It is in regular contact with individuals affected and regularly meets with representatives of SOUND (Sufferers of Unique Narcolepsy Disorder). Regional co-ordinators have been appointed to assist individuals by providing advice, information and access to local services.

The ex-gratia health supports include:
- clinical care pathways to ensure access to diagnosis and treatment;
- multi-disciplinary assessments led by clinical experts;
- counselling services for both the individuals and their families;
- discretionary medical cards for those who have been diagnosed;
- physiotherapy and occupational therapy assessments.

Treatment and individual medical needs are reassessed over time to take account of changes in their condition or circumstances.

In conjunction with the above, a centre of excellence for narcolepsy (based in St. James’s Hospital) for treating all forms of narcolepsy in adults as well as children transitioning from paediatric services has been in development. A sleep lab is now complete at this facility, with equipment installed and commissioned. Additional sleep technicians have also been recruited. The sleep lab has opened and completed its first sleep studies in July 2019. Sleep studies are now continuing on a regular basis. A consultant neurologist with specialist interest in sleep medicine and two consultant respiratory physicians with specialist interest in sleep medicine have been appointed. They have all commenced their full-time positions and are seeing narcolepsy-related referrals in the clinic. A dietician has also joined the service as part of its multi-disciplinary team.

Disability Services Provision

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330. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is waiting a long time for an appointment; when they will be seen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48968/19]

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

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

**Disability Support Services**

331. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his plans to give parents and legal guardians of adults with a disability a legal right to be included in the preparation of a care plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48994/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** A wide range of disability services are provided to those with physical, sensory, intellectual disability and autism. Disability services focus on supporting and enabling people with disabilities to maximise their full potential, living ordinary lives in ordinary places, as independently as possible. Disability services strive to ensure the voices of service users and their families are heard, and are fully involved in planning and improving services to meet their needs.

Under the Health Act of 1970 (as amended) the “eligibility framework” places an obligation on the HSE to make a range of services available to people, rather than conferring on them an ‘absolute entitlement’ to access such services.

Section 7 of the Health Act of 2004 specifies that

“The object of the Executive is to use the resources available to it in the most beneficial, effective and efficient manner to improve, promote and protect the health and welfare of the public”

In short, at the moment our legislation does not confer a right to particular services, instead persons have eligibility to access services while there is a finite budget of money which the HSE allocates to best fit the needs of the population as a whole.

The overarching principle governing the planning and delivery of health services and supports for adults and children with disabilities is that they should be integrated, as much as possible, with services and supports for the rest of the population. The Government’s agenda in this regard is clearly set out in the current National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) which is based on a non-condition specific approach to the delivery of public services and the mainstreaming agenda.

For persons with disabilities receiving support services, person-centred planning is a key process to focus the delivery of services and supports on the person and how they want to live their life. As part of the Transforming Lives programme, a Person-Centred Planning Framework has now been developed. To commence the implementation of the framework a
Demonstration Project has been agreed with five provider organisations. The five organisations participating in the implementation of the Person-Centred Planning Framework during 2019 will be evaluating their current model of person-centred planning and its alignment with the Person-Centred Planning Framework. The experience learned through this demonstration project will inform the development of strategy and planning for the wider roll out of the framework throughout the adult disability service sector.

The Department can confirm that the overall Budget for health funded specialist disability services in 2020 is in excess of €2 billion. This is an increase of over €490 million since 2016. The increased level of funding in 2020 will enable the Health Services to continue to provide a broad range of services aimed at improving the quality of life of people with disabilities and their families. The policy is to provide person centred services based on need rather than diagnosis.

Home Care Packages Expenditure

332. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Health the breakdown of the extra funding provided for home care supports in budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48995/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The HSE National Service Plan 2020 has been submitted and is under consideration in my Department. The allocation of hours and targets to the Community Healthcare Organisations and Local Health Offices respectively is currently underway and I have been advised that this will be finalised in the coming weeks.

Disability Services Provision

333. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Health his plans to give adults with a disability a legal right to services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48996/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that the Health Service Executive (HSE) makes a range of services available to persons ordinarily resident in the State on a full or limited eligibility basis. In addition, Section 7 of the Health Act 2004 provides that the object of the Executive is to use the resources available to it in the most beneficial, effective and efficient manner to improve, promote and protect the health and welfare of the public.

Within this legislative framework, a wide range of disability services are provided to those with physical, sensory, intellectual disability and autism. Disability services focus on supporting and enabling people with disabilities to maximise their full potential, living ordinary lives in ordinary places, as independently as possible. Disability services strive to ensure the voices of service users and their families are heard, and are fully involved in planning and improving services to meet their needs.

The overarching principle governing the planning and delivery of health services and supports for adults and children with disabilities is that they should be integrated, as much as possible, with services and supports for the rest of the population. The Government’s agenda in this regard is clearly set out in the current National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) which is based on a non-condition specific approach to the delivery of public services and the mainstreaming agenda.
I can confirm that the overall Budget for health funded specialist disability services in 2020 is in excess of €2 billion. This is an increase of over €490 million since 2016. The increased level of funding in 2020 will enable the Health Services to continue to provide a broad range of services aimed at improving the quality of life of people with disabilities and their families. The policy is to provide person centred services based on need rather than diagnosis.

Questions Nos. 334 and 335 answered with Question No. 284.

Hospital Waiting Lists

336. Deputy Pat Deering asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 138 of 23 October 2019, if it is standard practice that a person (details supplied) would be waiting in excess of three and a half years to have a MRI; and if so, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49021/19]

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

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

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

Medical Card Eligibility

337. Deputy Anne Rabbitte asked the Minister for Health if a child with chronic recurrent multifocal osteomyelitis is entitled to a medical card regardless of the income of the parents in view of the fact it is a rare disorder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49026/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE’s Expert Group on Medical Need and Medical Card Eligibility examined the issue of awarding medical cards on the basis of illness and concluded that it was not feasible, desirable, nor ethically justifiable to list medical conditions in priority order for medical card eligibility. The Expert Group also concluded that a person’s means should remain the main qualifier for a medical card. This position remains unchanged.

Nevertheless, every effort is made by the HSE, within the framework of the legislation, to support applicants in applying for a medical card and, in particular, to take full account of the difficult circumstances in the case of applicants who may be in excess of the income guidelines. The HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds the income threshold where they face difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from an illness.

Social and medical issues are considered when determining whether undue hardship exists
for an individual accessing general practitioner or other medical services. The HSE affords applicants the opportunity to furnish supporting documentation to fully take account of all the relevant circumstances that may benefit them in the assessment including medical evidence of cost and necessary expenses.

Psychological Services

338. *Deputy Niamh Smyth* asked the Minister for Health if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); his views on whether it is acceptable that child psychology services would be stretched as a result of adult appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49032/19]

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

*Question No. 339 answered with Question No. 284.*

Disease Incidence

340. *Deputy John Curran* asked the Minister for Health the number of measles cases in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49093/19]

*Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris)*: I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Legislative Programme

341. *Deputy John Curran* asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce similar legislation relating to the promotion of unhealthy, sugary and junk foods to children in view of the new advertising laws which came into effect recently regarding the promotion of alcohol in the proximity of children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49094/19]

*Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne)*: Three sections of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 came into effect on 12 November 2019. From that date:

- Alcohol advertising in or on public service vehicles, at public transport stops or stations and within 200 metres of a school, a crèche or a local authority playground is prohibited;
- Alcohol advertising in a cinema is prohibited except around films with an 18 classification or in a licensed premises in a cinema;
- Children’s clothing that promotes alcohol is prohibited.

The question of introducing similar measures in relation to the types of foods proposed by the Deputy is complex. There are issues around defining the precise types of foods which would be included under such a measure. Furthermore, the forms of advertising that are prohibited under the Public Health (Alcohol) Act are only part of the problem in relation to the advertising and marketing of unhealthy food to children. There is a particular difficulty with
digital marketing which can be sophisticated, targeted and difficult to regulate.

‘A Healthy Weight for Ireland’, the Obesity Policy and Action Plan (OPAP), was launched in September 2016 under the auspices of the Healthy Ireland agenda. The OPAP covers a 10-year period up to 2025 and aims to reverse obesity trends, prevent health complications and reduce the overall burden for individuals, families, the health system, and the wider society and economy. Childhood obesity is a key priority under the Policy, as is reducing the inequalities seen in obesity rates, where children (and adults) from lower socioeconomic groups have higher levels of obesity. The OPAP is based on the best available evidence in the Irish and international literature, and is informed by established international models and frameworks. Evidence-based actions are being progressed under the Plan on a number of fronts, including the introduction of the Sugar Sweetened Drinks Tax and work underway in relation to the reformulation of unhealthy food and drink.

Issues relating to marketing and advertising of unhealthy foods are being progressed under the Obesity Policy and Action Plan, including through the Voluntary Codes of Practice on Non-Broadcast Media and the revision of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland’s Children’s Commercial Communications Code. The possibility of introducing legislative measures remains under consideration, but any such measures would need to have a strong evidence base in favour of legislation, and to address the difficulties inherent in introducing such measures.

Minister Harris met recently with the Irish Heart Foundation to explore some of the issues relevant to the regulation of marketing and advertising of unhealthy foods to children.

The current legislative priority relevant to these issues is the development of a General Scheme for a Public Health (Calorie Postings and Workplace Wellbeing) Bill. The primary purpose of the proposals in relation to calorie postings is to ensure that calorie information is available at the point of choice for food sold in restaurants, takeaways and other food service businesses. Its objective is to ensure that consumers will be empowered to make an informed choice about the food they consume and will have the information they need to manage their calorie intake. An industry consultation will be initiated shortly and it is intended that the draft General Scheme will be finalised in early 2020.

Primary Care Centres Provision

342. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the status of the development of a primary healthcare centre in Lucan, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49096/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Misuse of Drugs

343. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the funding that will be allocated to the HSE to commence a targeted national campaign to raise awareness of the risks associated with drug use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49097/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The Government is committed to a health-led approach to drug use and to developing harm reduction inter-
ventions for at risk groups, as set out in the national drugs strategy Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery, a health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2020.

The Department of Health works with the HSE to raise awareness of the dangers associated with drugs through the Drugs.ie website. The site provides a comprehensive range of information and supports related to substance use. The site also houses the National Directory of Drug and Alcohol Services which allows the person to locate information, support or treatment in their own area.

In 2019, the HSE developed and promoted two national campaigns aimed at students and the festival goers, who may not present at traditional addiction services.

I, along with the Minister for Health and the Minister for Justice and Equality, recently announced the introduction of a health diversion programme for persons in possession of drugs for personal use. This is a hugely important step in developing a health-led approach and in delivering on a key commitment in the national drugs strategy.

However, we cannot be complacent about the dangers of drugs. Therefore, the Department of Health is providing funding of €100,000 to the HSE in 2020 to develop a national harm reduction campaign to raise awareness of the risks associated with drug use. This will include information about club drugs, festival drug use, newer drugs as well as cannabis.

I am strongly supportive of measures that will reduce harm for people who take drugs.

*Question No. 344 answered with Question No. 54.*

**Hospital Appointments Status**

345. **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. [49136/19]

**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.

**Disability Services Provision**

346. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and if an urgent appointment will be scheduled. [49140/19]
Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

347. **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. [49144/19]

**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.

*Question No. 348 answered with Question No. 54.*

Medicinal Products Availability

349. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which patients here have ready access to modern drugs in line with their availability throughout the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49147/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

In line with the 2013 Act and the national framework agreed with industry, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE, the company must submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the reimbursement list. Reimbursement is for licenced indications which have been granted market authorisation by the European Medicines Agency or the Health Products Regulatory Authority.
HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

As a country, we invest heavily in medicines, to the tune of almost €2 billion annually. In 2019 to date, the HSE has approved 36 new drugs and newly licensed indications for existing drugs for reimbursement in the public healthcare system.

Notwithstanding the significant progress on drug costs achieved from price reductions under the IPHA Agreement and commercial negotiations conducted by the HSE, the Health Service is still facing very significant challenges in relation to the affordability of medicines. The industry continues to develop very expensive products, particularly in the high-tech medicines area and the costs involved are a challenge for health systems even in countries with much greater resources than Ireland. The Government wants new and innovative medicines to be available to our citizens as quickly as possible but this can only be achieved if medicines are priced by the pharmaceutical industry in a viable and sustainable manner.

My Department and the HSE are working on making greater efficiencies in medicines usage through a range of initiatives both domestically and internationally to ensure the greatest possible access to new treatments for patients in Ireland.

The HSE’s Medicines Management Programme (MMP), incorporating the Preferred Drugs initiative, is overseeing the implementation of a number of actions to bring about greater value for the taxpayer through cost-effective provision of medicines. Among the initiatives being pursued are improvements in practices for the procurement of drugs in hospitals and the designation of preferred products with a focus on high-cost prescribing areas, in particular optimising the use of biosimilars.

Department officials and I have also been engaging over the past number of years, with a number of voluntary EU forums. In June 2018, I signed the Beneluxa Initiative on Pharmaceutical Policy. This Agreement is in line with my objective to work with other European countries to identify workable solutions, in an increasingly challenging environment, to secure timely access for patients to new medicines in an affordable and sustainable way. In June 2019, Ireland became a Founding Member of the International Horizon Scanning Initiative which is being established as part of the work programme of Beneluxa.

**HSE Planning**

350. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which he expects the proposed winter action plan to deal with likely eventualities arising in the public hospital sector over the winter months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49148/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November. The aim of the Winter Plan is to ensure that service providers are prepared for the additional external pressures associated with the winter period, including the prolonged holiday period, severe winter weather, seasonal influenza, and the spread of norovirus and other healthcare associated infections. The Plan is supported by an additional €26m in winter funding nationally. This winter funding will support access to the Fair Deal scheme and will provide additional home support and transitional care to facilitate timely hospital discharge and help reduce congestion in EDs over the winter period.

Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans
focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals. Each Action Team has set out a range of initiatives it will undertake within its area to implement the Plan.

The funding which has been allocated to the WATs will support initiatives at local level including:

- Additional medical, nursing, therapies support, pharmacy and lab staff to improve patient experience time, improve senior clinical decision making, reduce length of stay, and facilitate weekend discharges;

- Additional Aids and Appliances to facilitate timely discharge;

- Additional home support hours to facilitate early hospital to community transfers;

- Communications to facilitate hospital avoidance and public health awareness;

- Implementing Frail Intervention Therapy Teams for admission avoidance and reduced admissions of patients over 75;

- Additional Flu testing kits to improve PET.

In addition to the immediate measures being undertaken in the Winter Plan the Government through the Sláintecare Strategy is addressing the issues of access to healthcare. The Sláintecare Action Plan for 2019 has a specific workstream on access and waiting lists. The Government is also increasing investment in health infrastructure and capacity in the system in line with Project Ireland 2040.

I am confident that together with the more immediate measures being undertaken under the Winter Plan and the strategic approach undertaken by the Government under Sláintecare that progress will be made in addressing the difficulties in the emergency departments.

**Cancer Screening Programmes**

351. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which the women involved in the cervical smear test issues have had their cases dealt with to their satisfaction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49149/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I understand that the Deputy is referring to the Independent Clinical Expert Panel Review of cervical screening, which is being carried out by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG).

The purpose of the review is to provide women, or their next of kin, with independent clinical assurance about the timing of their diagnosis and treatment. In addition, an aggregate report by the Royal College will make recommendations, where appropriate, with the aim of improving care for women.

I am happy to report that the RCOG review is nearing completion. The overriding focus throughout this process has been to ensure that review results are communicated to women and families in the most appropriate and sensitive way possible.

On 9 September, the HSE sent a letter to all 1,038 participants in the review to provide them with options about how they may choose to receive their report. The process of communicating
individual reports to women or next of kin has been ongoing since the 23 September. This has been a large-scale process and, although it has taken longer than originally planned, is expected to complete in the coming days.

A core principle underpinning this process has been to ensure that individual participants would have had an opportunity to receive their results in advance of publication of the Expert Panel’s Aggregate Report. In keeping with this principle, the Minister for Health will bring the aggregate report to Government, and publish it, once he has received assurance that all women or next of kin have had the opportunity to receive their individual report.

While the aggregate report has not yet been received, the Royal College in a letter to the Minister for Health in September advised 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 experience in the UK.

It has always been expected that a significant proportion of women in this review will receive results which disagree with their original review result. This is in line with international experience. For example, in one review of the English Cervical Screening Programme, 45% of slide reviews disagreed with the original review result.

This reflects the reality that no matter how closely a review panel tries to reproduce the original screening conditions, the conditions of a review are different – the fact that a review includes records of a patient known to have a serious condition, such as cancer, will heighten vigilance and increase reports of abnormality. Finding discrepancies on review does not imply that the same findings should have been made under routine conditions.

**Primary Care Centres**

352. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which he expects the provision of primary care centres nationwide to alleviate the congestion at general hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49150/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

**Medical Card Data**

353. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the number of full medical card holders nationwide; the extent to which this number has fluctuated in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49151/19]

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

**Hospital Procedures**

354. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the number of children or other patients who have undergone scoliosis procedures on a monthly basis in the past two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49152/19]
Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting times for patients to access scoliosis services is a key priority of Government. Increased investment in paediatric orthopaedics and scoliosis services has improved access to surgery and outpatient appointments in recent years. Furthermore, Children’s Health Ireland (CHI) is working to ensure that children in Ireland who require scoliosis surgery and ongoing treatment can be seen and treated within a clinically appropriate time.

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

Hospital Beds Data

355. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Health the extent to which the need for extra beds is being addressed at hospitals nationwide; if progress is being achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49153/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Capacity Review published last year indicated that there was a need for a major investment in additional capacity in both hospital and community beds, combined with reform of the manner and the location of where health services are provided.

As set out in Sláintecare, moving care options for patients closer to their homes and into their local communities is a key part of the solution. In addition, there is a need to further develop community services to meet the increasing demand, which is placing additional pressure on hospital services.

Steady progress is being made in increasing bed capacity with the number of available inpatient beds expected to increase to above 11,000 following the investment planned in the National Service Plan 2019.

The Capacity Programme for 2019 provides for the following increases in capacity, as set out in the National Service Plan 2019:

- The provision of 75 acute beds and 70 community beds under the Winter Plan 2018/19;

- 47 additional beds, including the 40-bed modular build in South Tipperary General Hospital (STGH), 3 HDU beds in the Mater Hospital and 4 HDU beds in Cork University Hospital. The 40-bed modular in STGH is due to be completed in November 2019 and operational in Quarter 1 2020.

- Preparation of 202 beds, of which 16 are critical care, during 2019, with a view to bringing this extra capacity into operation in Q1 of 2020;

- Commencement of works on a 60-bed modular ward in University Hospital Limerick. The enabling works are completed, the main contractor is currently on site, and construction is anticipated to be completed in mid-2020. Commissioning and equipping are scheduled to be completed in Quarter 3 2020.

The National Service Plan for 2020 is currently under consideration by the Department.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data
Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Health the number of patients awaiting cardiovascular procedures; the length of time they have been on waiting lists for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49154/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government. In this regard, the Government is committed to improving waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures.

The latest published National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) figures for October show that there are 3,969 patients on the Cardiology Inpatient and Daycase (IPDC) waiting list. Of these, 75% (2,964) are waiting 6 months or less and 86% (3,429) are waiting 9 months or less. With regard to cardiology long waiters, there are 341 patients waiting over 12 months, which is a 13% decrease when compared to the same period last year.

The latest NTPF figures show that there 651 patients on the Cardio-Thoracic Surgery IPDC waiting list. Of these, 67% (437) are waiting 6 months or less and 82% (533) are waiting 9 months or less.

In recent years, my Department has worked with the HSE and NTPF to make considerable improvements to access for patients waiting for high volume procedures and life limiting procedures including angiograms. Waiting list figures for the end of October 2019 show that the number of people waiting nationally for an angiogram procedure has decreased, from 3,149 in July 2017 to 2,037. In this same period, there has also been a reduction of 83% in the number of patients waiting over 9 months for an angiogram procedure.

Budget 2020 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the NTPF increasing from €75 million in 2019 to €100 million in 2020.

My Department is working with the HSE and NTPF to develop the Scheduled Care Access Plan 2020. The National Service Plan 2020 will set out HSE planned activity level for the year ahead, while the NTPF will work with the hospital system to provide additionality to improve access to inpatient/daycase treatment and with a particular focus on hospital outpatient services.

In this regard, I would encourage all hospital groups and individual hospitals to engage with the NTPF to identify waiting list proposals for the remainder of this year and for 2020.

The data requested by the deputy is outlined in the documents at the link.


Hospital Waiting Lists Data

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Health the average length of time patients can expect to wait for orthopaedic procedures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49155/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government. In this regard, the Government is committed to improving waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures.

The latest published National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) figures for October show
that there are 10,033 patients on the orthopaedics Inpatient and Daycase (IPDC) waiting list. Of these, 67% (6,743) are waiting 6 months or less, 80% (7,993) are waiting 9 months or less and 86% (8,616) are waiting 12 months or less. In regard to orthopaedics long waiters, there are 1,417 patients waiting over 12 months, which shows a 14% decrease when compared to the same period last year. Overall, the orthopaedics IPDC waiting list has decreased by 6% (-672) when compared to the same period last year.

Under the Inpatient Day Case Access Plans for 2018 and 2019, Hip/Knee replacements were among the procedures targeted by the NTPF, and by the end of October 2019, the number of people waiting nationally for a Hip/Knee replacement procedure had decreased, from 3,476 in July 2017 to 2,586. In this same period, there has also been a reduction of 73% in the number of patients waiting over 9 months for a Hip/Knee replacement procedure. In this context, the NTPF has advised my Department that they have approved a number of IPDC proposals for orthopaedics in 2019, providing up to 2,038 procedures for patients.

Budget 2020 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the NTPF increasing from €75 million in 2019 to €100 million in 2020.

My Department is working with the HSE and National Treatment Purchase Fund to develop the Scheduled Care Access Plan 2020. The National Service Plan 2020 will set out HSE planned activity level for the year ahead, while the NTPF will work with the hospital system to provide additionality to improve access to inpatient/daycase treatment and with a particular focus on hospital outpatient services.

In this regard, I would encourage all hospital groups and individual hospitals to engage with the NTPF to identify waiting list proposals for the remainder of this year and for 2020.

The waiting times for Orthopaedic procedures is outlined in the document at the link.


**Departmental Budgets**

358. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of the 2020 health budget notwithstanding the experience in previous years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49156/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Budget 2020 sets out a budget of over €18.3 billion for health and social care services, the highest budget ever allocated. The Health budget increased by €1.2 billion on 2019, a substantial additional level of funding, particularly bearing in mind that Budget 2020 was framed in a no deal Brexit scenario. The amount allocated follows an extensive process of engagement between my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, which considered both the funding requirements and the fiscal position. These types of engagements are a normal part of the Budgetary process and happen with Departments across Government. All Departments put forward spending proposals but are required to operate within the amounts proposed by Government and determined by the Dáil.

The issue of health funding is a major policy challenge for both the Irish and international Governments. Despite welcome increases annually, the need for effective financial management remains crucial as the health service deals with a larger and older population, with more acute health and social care requirements, increased demand for new and existing drugs and the
rising costs of health technology. The costs associated with these service pressures will increasingly need to be managed not solely through annual increased Exchequer allocations but also through improved efficiencies, productivity and value from within the funding base.

Under legislation the Health Service Executive is required to set out in the National Service Plan, the type and volume of health and social care services to be provided having regard to the funding available. The Health Service Executive were directed that the 2020 Plan was to be developed and implemented within the statutory limit determined and that expenditure controls and savings measures were fully achievable next year. As part of this process to secure the most effective delivery of services possible within the resources available the Health Service Executive were required to ensure that the greatest value possible was achieved from the entirety of the resources that were allocated.

**Hospital Waiting Lists**

359. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical procedure will be scheduled for a person (details supplied). [49159/19]

**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.

**GLAS Payments**

360. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in a GLAS payment being issued to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48590/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into the GLAS 1 scheme with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and received payments for scheme years 2015 - 2017 and the 2018 Advance payment.

In this case, the application has not yet passed the pre-payment validation checks for the 2018 balance due to issues with the associated BPS application. Once this issue is resolved and the application clears all validations, the 2018 balance payment will be processed and the case will move forward for processing of the 2019 claim.

GLAS payments continue to issue on a weekly basis.
361. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an application by a person (details supplied) to plant trees, which was submitted in April 2019, will be assessed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48664/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An application for the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme was received for the person named in April this year. The assessment of the site takes in seven different SACs, two of which must be considered in-depth, due to the nature of the SAC and its proximity. The assessment of the application is on-going and is being carried out in accordance with recently revised Appropriate Assessment Procedures (AAP).

I acknowledge that changes made to internal Appropriate Assessment Procedures (AAP) has resulted in delays to many files. These are beyond my Department’s control as officials are obliged to implement changes to AAP that were required following important Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) decisions and their subsequent interpretation by the Forestry Appeals Committee (FAC) and others. All forestry licences issued by the Department undergo a legal consent process. Since 2017, all forestry licence applications received have been subject to a statutory public notification system and are subject to a statutory appeal system operated by the FAC.

Most appeals have been in connection with our Appropriate Assessment (AA) procedure. The Habitat Directive (Article 6.3) requires that where a plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a Natura site, either individually or in-combination with other plans or projects, it must undergo an appropriate assessment of its implications for that Natura site.

Currently, we are amending the AA procedure in order to introduce a robust and workable system which will address the issues now faced. Introducing this system involves the recruitment of additional ecological expertise and changes in procedures for the forestry inspectorate. Last week, the Department advertised for ecologists and we also have access to external ecological support, which will be supplemented in due course. Inspectors have already undergone training and will receive appropriate support in delivering these new procedures; they are not on a work to rule. A categorisation of files affected by these requirements is also underway in order to best assess further action needed and by whom.

I am fully aware of the concerns of applicants, such as the person named, and other stakeholders in the sector, in relation to the AA process. My officials are in regular communication with stakeholders and they have been fully apprised of the issues involved and of my Department’s efforts to address them. They have also been advised of steps they can take to ensure that applications received are completed to an acceptable standard and to take account of any issues relating to sensitive habitats.

### Basic Payment Scheme Payments

362. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a farm payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48670/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named submitted a 2019 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application on 9 May 2019 in which he declared a share on the Dunloe Upper Commonage in County Kerry.
An over claim has occurred on this commonage and my Department is currently reviewing this over claim. This over claim is impacting on payment under the BPS, ANC and GLAS schemes. An official from my Department has been in touch with the person named regarding this over claim with a view to having this resolved at the earliest opportunity.

Basic Payment Scheme Eligibility

363. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if basic payment entitlements will be returned to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48720/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named has been an applicant under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) from 2015 to 2019.

Applicants under the BPS were allocated payment entitlements in 2015. These are paid annually on the basis that a BPS application is submitted and the applicant declares an eligible hectare of agricultural land per entitlement.

The Terms and Conditions booklet for the BPS is circulated annually to all farmers. In this booklet, the requirements in relation to usage of BPS entitlements are outlined. Under these requirements, all BPS entitlements allocated are subject to a two-year usage rule. In effect, should a farmer have unused entitlements for two consecutive years, the entitlements will be reverted to the National Reserve in the second year of non-usage.

A farmer’s usage position is available for them to view at any time on the online system where it clearly states the number of available entitlements and the number which have been used in each year.

For scheme year 2018, the person named held 23 entitlements and submitted a BPS application on 6 April 2018 declaring 12.39 hectares of eligible land. In scheme year 2019, the person named submitted a BPS application on 19 April 2019 again only declaring 12.39 hectares of eligible land. As he did not declare sufficient lands, over a two-year period to support all 23 entitlements held, the unused entitlements have been reverted to the National Reserve.

It is noted that under the 2018 BPS application, the person named deleted a parcel of land from his application amounting to 10.48 hectares of land and did not declare this land on his 2019 BPS application either.

The Deputy has mentioned that the entitlements were unused in error as the person named was recently suffering from ill health. Officials from my Department will contact the person named in this regard.

Farm Inspections

364. **Deputy Patrick O’Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a farm inspection on land in an area (details supplied) will be carried out rather than a desk study; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48757/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Under the current Rural Development Regulation (and subsequent amendments under the Omnibus Regulation), Member States were required to change the approach to the designation of land under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme. Previously, my Department had been identifying eligible
areas using a range of socio-economic indicators such as family farm income, population density, percentage of working population engaged in agriculture, and stocking density.

From 2019, eligible areas must instead be designated using the following list of bio-physical criteria:

- Low temperature
- Dryness
- Excess soil moisture
- Limited soil drainage
- Unfavourable texture and stoniness
- Shallow rooting depth
- Poor chemical properties
- Steep slope

In tandem with the process to designate relevant lands under these biophysical criteria, Member States were also required to undertake a fine tuning process. This process was required to identify areas where significant natural constraints were identified with reference to the above-listed biophysical criteria, but where objective criteria, such as arable land use or stocking density levels, would indicated that these constraints have been overcome.

Finally, Member States could also identify areas for inclusion as Areas of Specific Constraint where it is necessary for land management to be continued in order to conserve or improve the environment, to maintain the countryside, to preserve the tourist potential of the area, or to protect the coastline.

This three-phased process was a lengthy project, involving protracted technical engagements with the EU DG for Agriculture and Rural Development and the Joint Research Centre in the EU Commission. The technical process was completed in late 2018 and, at that time, further to a series of consultation meetings with key stakeholders, I published full details in relation to the outcome of the review project, which can be summarised as follows.

The vast majority of land that was eligible under the existing Scheme remains eligible under the new approach. Some 700 townlands that would have previously been eligible are not eligible under the new designation. Farmers impacted financially by this change will receive a degressive phasing out payment in 2019 and 2020. Over 2,000 townlands will now be eligible under the new approach and will be eligible to receive a payment for the first time in 2019.

An independently chaired Appeals Committee was appointed to examine any requests received by my Department for a full review on the status of a townland under the 2019 ANC Scheme. This process is currently under way and it is anticipated that the process will be completed in the coming weeks. An appeal has been submitted to the Committee for the townland in question. Given the independent nature of the appeals process, it is a matter for the Committee to decide on the most appropriate approach to resolving the appeals received.
when the newly developed public park on the site of a plant (details supplied) at Haulbowline, County Cork, will open to the general public; when the land in question will be formally transferred to Cork County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48900/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I assume that the Deputy is referring to the former waste disposal site known as the East Tip on Haulbowline Island. I am sincerely impressed at the transformation that has taken place there since contracts were signed in July 2017 to deliver remediation works. All of the works have now been completed and it really is incredible to see that where there was once a bleak post-industrial vista there is now a beautifully landscaped park. It was heartening to hear last weekend that Engineers Ireland conferred the project with their highest award and I offer my congratulations to all involved in the Council, in my own Department and the contractors who delivered this project.

As of October, charge of the site has been returned to Cork County Council which acts as my Agent for operational matters at Haulbowline. The Council has requested permission to operate the site as a public recreational amenity. It is important to note that the main occupancy of the island is the headquarters for the Irish Naval Service and the Government has accordingly decided that ownership of the island will ultimately transfer to the Minister for Defence. My Department, as the current owner of Haulbowline Island, is actively engaged with representatives of the Department of Defence and Cork County Council to put in place the appropriate mechanisms, including a lease for the Council, to facilitate the operation of the recreational amenity.

The ultimate opening date of the facility will be a matter for Cork County Council in due course.

Environmental Policy

366. Deputy Brian Stanley asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he plans to launch a code of good practice which will set out measures to reduce ammonia emissions over the coming years. [48901/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following a consultative process earlier this year, the Code of Good Agricultural Practice for Reducing Ammonia Emissions from Agriculture was launched on Wednesday 20th November 2019 and can be found on my Department’s website. www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/ruralenvironment/climatechange/bioenergy/codeofgoodagpracticeammoniaemissions/1CodeofGoodAgriculturalPracticeforreducingAmmoniaEmissions081119.pdf.

The Code acts as a guidance document that outlines best practice actions to help reduce ammonia emissions from our farms. Ammonia emissions arise principally from fertiliser and manure applications, animal feeding strategies, animal housing and manure storage and can have negative impacts on health and biodiversity. Ireland has clear targets to deliver in terms of reduced ammonia emissions and the adoption and implementation of the voluntary measures outlined in this Code will reduce the risk of Ireland exceeding its ammonia emissions ceilings into the future.

My Department is already supporting delivery of actions within this guidance document through the provision of support for investments in technology such as Low Emission slurry application technology such as the trailing shoe and trailing hose. To date, my Department has approved over 2,000 applications under the TAMS II Scheme and has already paid approximately €19 million to farmers for this technology.
As agriculture is responsible for approximately 99% of ammonia emissions, it is vital that the agri-food sector continues to build on the good work achieved to date. The Code will support them in achieving this objective.

**Agriculture Scheme Applications**

367. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there will be a second round of applications under the BEAM scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48957/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM) has provided 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. Under the terms of that regulation, and the scheme as notified to the European Commission, it is not possible to open a second round of applications for the measure.

**GLAS Payments**

368. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment for 2018 will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48979/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named is fully up to date with his GLAS payments.

**Organic Farming Scheme Eligibility**

369. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) was not accepted onto the organic farming scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48981/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Organic Farming Scheme is one of the most successful schemes under our current Rural Development Programme. A budget of €56m was allocated to fund the Scheme opened during the period 2014 to 2020 which was the largest allocation ever to an Organics support scheme.

The Scheme has more than achieved its targets in terms of new land converted and the maintenance of organic land. The area of land under organic production has expanded dramatically as a direct result of my Department’s investment. Latest figures indicate that there are now some 72,000 hectares under organic production, an increase of nearly 50% on the position at the start of the Programme in 2014.

As a further vote of confidence in the organics sector by this Government, my colleague Minister Doyle established an Organics Strategy Group last year comprising relevant stakeholders and state bodies. Part of the remit of the Strategy Group was to consider the case for a possible re-opening of the Organic Farming Scheme. They recommended that it should be re-opened but on a targeted basis. The sectors targeted were areas for which there is a clear market demand, and which are critical to the further development of the Organic Sector, namely horticulture, cereals and dairy. This recommendation acknowledged that the budget was very
limited given the success of the current scheme and the overall spending within the RDP.

The terms and conditions of the Scheme state that an applicant must reach a minimum ranking of 25 marks to be deemed eligible for consideration for inclusion in the Scheme. They further state that the number of applications to be accepted into the Scheme will be determined by funding and that the submission of a valid application does not guarantee entry to the Scheme.

No changes were made to the minimum ranking of 25 marks - it is the same as in previous OFS under the current RDP. Once applicants reached the minimum ranking of 25 and met the other eligibility criteria, they were then assessed under the Ranking and Selection system in accordance with the criteria agreed by the Organic Sector Strategy Group.

The person named, although eligible for consideration, did not score high enough to be selected in this tranche. Their score was below the minimum score that was ultimately accepted into the Scheme. It should also be noted that their major enterprise was not one of the targeted enterprises identified by the Organic Strategy Group.

It is important to note that this is a targeted re-opening and that I fully expect that there will be a new Organics scheme under the next CAP. I would encourage all stakeholders to make their views known on the shape of this future scheme as part of the wider CAP consultation process.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

370. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48991/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named submitted an application under the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme of TAMS II. The application was approved and a payment claim was subsequently submitted. By virtue of the penalty section in the terms and conditions of the scheme, a penalty/reduction was applied in this case. Payment was made to the person named on 14 March 2019 less a penalty/reduction as a result.

The penalty applied in this case is currently being reviewed. The outcome of this review will be notified, in writing, directly to the person named as soon as it has been completed.

Greyhound Industry

371. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to end grants to the greyhound industry in view of an opinion poll (details supplied); if he will review the allocation to the industry in view of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49004/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Under Section 12 of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001 (No.20 of 2001), the horse
and greyhound racing industries receive financial support from the State through the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund (the Fund). Monies are paid out of the fund in the ratio of 80% to Horse Racing Ireland and 20% to Bord na gCon as specified in Section 12 (6) of the Act. State funding provided through the Fund is pivotal to the survival of the horse and greyhound racing industries.

According to the 2017 Power Report, the greyhound industry provides and supports considerable employment both directly and indirectly across the Irish economy. It is estimated that, in 2016, the industry supported 5,058 full-time and part-time jobs in the economy. In addition, there are 7,313 active greyhound owners. The total number of people deriving economic benefit from the sector is estimated at 12,371. It is an industry that is ingrained in the social and cultural networks of rural Ireland.

It is worth noting that the Greyhound Sector has undergone a series of reforms in recent times. The Greyhound Racing Act 2019 which was signed by the President on 28 May 2019 strengthens the legal basis for the industry, with a view to fortifying the integrity of the greyhound racing sector and improving provision for greyhound traceability. Bord na gCon will continue to invest significant resources into regulation and greyhound welfare and it intends to devote more resources to welfare, re-homing and traceability.

Any suspension of funds would have immediate consequences for employment in the sector and could have unintended consequences for the welfare of dogs used for racing and coursing. Future financial support of the greyhound industry will entail a refocusing of funding towards welfare initiatives in the first instance - making welfare standards the centrepiece of the industry.

**Bord na gCon**

372. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Irish Greyhound Board is attempting to hide incidents involving dogs falling and suffering injuries by withholding race footage from its website (details supplied); if he will direct it to publish the footage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49005/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Bord na gCon have informed the Department that, although it broadcasts all races at Bord na gCon licensed stadia, there is no regulatory or legislative requirement on Bord na gCon to make all racing footage available on its website.

Bord na gCon collates figures relating to the injuries of greyhounds at all 16 licensed stadia, as well as statistics relating to greyhounds put to sleep. Any greyhound injured or put to sleep at a track is included in these figures. These are published on a regular basis.

Bord na gCon have reiterated that greyhound injuries at stadia are rare. Bord na gCon control stewards carry out a track inspection prior to all race meetings and trial sessions. The track vet attends all race meetings and sales trials to ensure that appropriate care is provided to injured greyhounds and to advise the stewards on welfare.
In August 2019, Bord na gCon launched a greyhound injury support scheme to provide financial assistance to owners to aid injured greyhounds to continue with a healthy life. The introduction of the “Injuries at Tracks Recovery Scheme” is open to all owners and trainers who have incurred veterinary costs in the treatment of greyhounds to repair a career-ending orthopaedic (bone) injury sustained at an IGB licenced stadium. Applications are assessed on the basis that the greyhound will immediately retire from competitive action (trials and races) following its treatment.

A number of improvements to various stadia, including track improvements, the installation of new hare rails and the purchase of new equipment, have been made in recent times. Bord na gCon emphasises that the very best veterinary care and advice is provided to greyhounds injured at stadia at all times.

Animal Welfare

373. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that an Irish greyhound that is believed to have suffered whippings has been rescued from Spain; if he will recommend an end to exports to Spain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49006/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Bord na gCon have informed me that they unreservedly condemn cruelty to any greyhound. They are aware of this case, and have confirmed that the greyhound’s Irish owner had complied with the Welfare of Greyhounds Act 2011 in the sale of the greyhound.

The movement of all breeds of dogs, including greyhounds, between EU member states is currently set at a European level rather than as a national measure in isolation. Bord na gCon continues to advise owners to only export to destinations that provide the expected levels of greyhound welfare through its Code of Practice which is monitored and updated regularly.

Bord na gCon have stated they will continue to do everything possible within their remit to prevent exports of greyhounds to countries that do not have acceptable animal welfare regimes.

Beef Industry

374. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he plans to assist beef producers attain at least the average EU price for their livestock; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49069/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Irish Government has provided significant financial support to the beef sector over the past number of years through national funding and the rural development programme.

The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) provides Irish beef farmers with up to €300 million in funding over the current Rural Development Programme (RDP) and provides a high degree of important performance data to beef farmers to drive efficiency through facilitating better decision making.
My Department has rolled out a range of other schemes from which beef farmers benefit, as part of the €4 billion RDP including GLAS, ANCs and Knowledge Transfer Groups. Suckler farmers also benefit, of course, from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Greening payments under CAP Pillar I.

In 2019, a further €20 million of exchequer funding was made available through the Beef Environmental Efficiency Programme, to encourage farmers to measure the weaning efficiency of their suckler cows.

The Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM) has provided 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. Over 34,500 farmers had applied for BEAM at its closing date of 20 September, representing potential commitments of up to €78 million.

In recognition of the important income support role played by the ANC scheme, the total allocation for the scheme has been increased by €48m over the last two budgets (€25m in Budget 2018 and €23m in Budget 2019). In both 2018 and 2019, payment rates in the scheme were increased, with a targeting of increases corresponding to the different level of constraint in the different categories of land in the scheme.

In Budget 2020, I have provided almost €85 million in targeted schemes to support sustainable beef farming. This includes almost €45 million for the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP), and a further €40 million for targeted supports. I intend to consult with stakeholders as to the use of these funds.

In addition, in the event of a No-Deal Brexit, my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform confirmed in Budget 2020 that a Brexit contingency fund of €650 million will be available to support our most vulnerable sectors, to be activated in tranches as the full impacts emerge. €110 million will be made available through my Department in the first tranche, of which €85 million will be provided in immediate supports for beef farmers. This will, of course, be supplemented by any exceptional aid provided from the EU under the CMO regulation.

There have been a series of formal negotiations with beef sector stakeholders, facilitated by my Department, since early August, culminating in an agreement being reached between stakeholders on Sunday 15 September.

The full text of the Agreement and updates on work progressed to date is available on my Department’s website: https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmingsectors/beef/beeftaskforce/

The Agreement involves a number of interventions which will provide immediate benefit for beef producers, as well as a range of strategic measures which seek to address structural imbalances in the sector.

Beef producers will benefit from an immediate increase in a range of bonuses. This will increase the level of bonus being paid on certain animals, as well as significantly increasing the number of animals which are eligible for a bonus. The cumulative effect is that over 70% of all steer and heifers slaughtered will now be eligible for a bonus on top of the base price paid.

A number of actions in the area of market transparency, beef promotion and strengthening the position of the farmer in the supply chain are included in the Agreement. These measures set
a course towards greater clarity for all stakeholders involved in the beef supply chain, primarily farmers.

My Department is also proactively engaging with several potential beef Producer Organisations, which have to potential to strengthen the bargaining power of beef farmers in the supply chain. Two beef producer organisations have been formally recognised by my Department in recent weeks.

I have established a Beef Market Taskforce to provide the leadership to develop a sustainable pathway for the future of the beef sector in terms of economic, environmental and social sustainability. It was deeply regrettable that the first meeting scheduled for 14 October was unable to proceed. However the independent chair and Department officials continue to engage proactively with Taskforce members with a view to enabling its important work to progress.

Trade Missions play an important role in promoting the Irish agri-food sector and in market development, and I have been very active on this front in recent years as we strive to gain and develop a presence in as many global markets as possible. A significant achievement was gaining access to the Chinese market for beef in 2018 and expanding this access to 14 further beef plants in 2019. Access was also achieved for beef to Qatar, Kuwait and Ukraine in 2018 and improved conditions for export agreed with Japan in 2019.

I am very aware of the significant difficulties facing beef farmers as a result of a sustained period of low prices. However, I believe that the range of financial and developmental supports available, coupled with the prioritisation of optimising access to third country markets is the correct path to continue on and I plan to support the sector by building on this work.

Alternative Farm Enterprises

375. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he can take to explore the possibility of farmers being able to grow hemp as a crop; the impediments that exist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49116/19]

376. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the analysis carried out to examine potential markets for hemp grown here as a crop; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49117/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 375 and 376 together.

As the Deputy may be aware, current legislation does not allow for the growing of hemp unless a specific licence has been granted by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) which operates under the auspices of the Department of Health. In addition the cultivation of hemp (Cannabis genus) is restricted to varieties having less than 0.2% content of the narcotic compound Delta-9 Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Cannabis (which includes hemp) is listed in schedule 1 of the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2017, as amended which means it is subject to the strictest level of control.

Earlier this year, my Department concluded a broad consultation which included relevant bodies/agencies in an examination of growing hemp commercially. The consultation included the Departments of Health, Justice and Law Reform, the Health Products Regulatory Authority, Teagasc and the two representative bodies for Hemp.

A clear view arising from respondents in the consultation involved in regulation is that the
domestic hemp industry should continue to be controlled and regulated by the Department of Health and that the current stringent controls in relation to growing hemp should continue. This strict regulation is in line with the situation in many other countries.

An oversupply of industrial hemp in the European market has resulted in current low value for the majority of products from hemp. A number of large scale hemp processing facilities in Europe have failed and the lack of processing facilities in Ireland, which are required to be in close proximity to hemp growers, is also an issue.

Officials of my Department have met with industry representatives on a number of occasions and it is clear from all of those consultations that further in-depth research and financial analysis is required to be undertaken by the industry in order to determine if the establishment of processing facilities in Ireland is commercially viable. While my Department remains available to assist, it must be borne in mind that any development in this area must be industry-led.

National Broadband Plan Expenditure

377. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the funding his Department is providing in respect of the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48596/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every home, school and business in Ireland has access to a high speed broadband service. The signing of the contract with National Broadband Ireland on the 19th of this month will enable that aim to become reality in the coming years. The procurement process for the National Broadband Plan has determined that the maximum cost to the State over the 25 year term of the contract will be €2.143bn, excluding VAT of €355m and excluding contingency of €480m.

My Department has a capital allocation in 2020 for the National Broadband Plan of €119 million. The multi-annual expenditure ceilings for Capital Expenditure for my Department are published in the Budget 2020 Expenditure Report. The total capital expenditure ceiling for my Department for 2021 is €517m and for 2022 is €611m. The detailed allocations required for the NBP for 2021 and for subsequent years of the NBP will be settled in the context of the annual Estimates process.

National Broadband Plan

378. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will report on the launch he attended of the national broadband plan. [48836/19]

393. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the role played by his Department in the organisation or funding of an event to sign the national broadband plan which took place in County Wicklow on 19 November 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48926/19]

394. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the criteria by which the attendees of an event to sign the national broadband plan which took place in County Wicklow on 19 November 2019 were chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48927/19]
395. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department was asked to invite candidates in the upcoming general election to an event to sign the national broadband plan which took place in County Wicklow on 19 November 2019; the declared candidates who do not hold office who attended; the mechanism by which they were invited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48928/19]

402. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the costs associated with the launch of the national broadband plan in Laragh, County Wicklow, on 21 November 2019. [49143/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 378, 393 to 395, inclusive, and 402 together.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is the Government’s plan to rollout high speed broadband to the 1.1 million people living and working in the nearly 540,000 premises including almost 100,000 businesses and farms, and 695 schools, where commercial operators will not commit to deliver the service.

On the 19 November, the Government signed the contract for delivering the NBP State intervention network with National Broadband Ireland.

The contract signing and related Government press conference took place at St. Kevin’s National School in Laragh Co. Wicklow.

The event also comprised of a visit to the nearby Brockagh Resource Centre in Laragh by myself and cabinet colleagues to meet with local stakeholders who will be beneficiaries of the State intervention roll out.

Both of these locations were chosen as they are Broadband Connection Points, community based locations which will benefit from the rollout of high speed broadband in the first year of deployment.

Those invited reflected the nature of the event and included, members of the local community, Government Ministers, representatives of Wicklow County Council, ComReg Commissioners and Officials from a number of Government Departments.

Costs to be met by my Department relate to the provision of transport for staff to the venue, light refreshments for the attendees, together with logistics for the staging of the event which was facilitated by the OPW, including PA system and audio visual facilities. The relevant invoices have yet to be received, verified and paid.

**Broadband Service Provision**

379. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to extend high-speed fibre broadband to a household (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48547/19]

380. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to extend high-speed fibre broadband to a household (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48548/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 379 and 380 together.
The National Broadband Plan is the Government’s plan to rollout high speed broadband to the 1.1 million people living and working in the nearly 540,000 premises including almost 100,000 businesses and farms, and over 695 schools, where commercial operators will not commit to deliver the service.

The Deputy’s Questions relate to two premises which are both located in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department’s website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the areas to be served by the network to be deployed under the NBP State led Intervention, the contract for which was signed on 19 November with National Broadband Ireland (NBI).

Approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) will be deployed across all counties during 2020. The BCPs will be located in community centres, schools, library hubs and local GAA halls and will enable communities to get free public access to high speed broadband. The BCP locations are available to view on the High Speed Broadband Map on the Department’s website www.dccae.gov.ie.

NBI will pass approximately 10,000 premises by the end of 2020. By the end of 2021, NBI plans to pass approximately 115,000 premises, with 70,000 - 100,000 passed each year thereafter until rollout is completed. NBI has indicated that the network rollout will take an estimated 7 years from the beginning of deployment.

A deployment plan will be made available by NBI shortly. Over 90% of premises in the State will have access to high speed broadband within the next four years.

**Climate Action Plan**

381. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on environmental concerns and Government action (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48564/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Climate Action Plan sets out, for the first time, how Ireland can reach its 2030 targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and also puts Ireland on the right trajectory towards net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The Plan has been informed by the work of the Citizens’ Assembly and the All Party Committee on Climate Action.

The Plan sets out over 180 actions, together with over 600 sub-actions, and embraces every relevant sector: electricity, enterprise, housing, heating, transport, agriculture, waste and the public sector.

The plan has a strong focus on implementation, with clear timelines and steps needed to achieve each action, assigning clear lines of responsibility for delivery. A Climate Action Delivery Board has been established and will hold each department and public body accountable for the delivery of actions set out in the plan.

Amongst the ambitious actions which are being pursued under this plan are:

- Move to 70% renewable electricity by 2030;

- Deliver a new Retrofit Plan to retrofit 500,000 homes, with large groups of houses being retrofitted by the same contractor to reduce costs, underpinned by smart finance options, and easy pay back methods;
- Deliver an intensive programme of retrofitting to install 400,000 heat pumps in homes and businesses;

- Bring 950,000 electric vehicles onto our roads and deliver a nationwide charging network;

- Eliminate non-recyclable plastic and impose higher fees on the production of materials which are difficult to recycle, and implement measures to ban single-use plastic plates, cutlery, straws, balloon sticks and cotton buds;

- Establish a new micro-generation scheme, allowing homeowners to generate their own electricity and sell what they don’t use back to the national grid; and

- Every public body to be given a climate action mandate.

The publication of the first progress report on 31 October 2019 demonstrates robust delivery of the actions set out in the Plan. A completion rate of 85% has been achieved, incorporating 149 measures across sectors. The Climate Action Delivery Board will continue to monitor progress and identify challenges to delivering the remaining actions not yet achieved.

I am confident that the Climate Action Plan will ensure Ireland meets the multi-faceted challenges that climate change presents both at home and abroad, and will contribute to the global effort to lower emissions and meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.

**Climate Action Plan**

382. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of compressed natural gas public fuelling stations open and operational; the location in which they are based; the number that was originally planned and scheduled to open in 2019; the location in which the scheduled stations are based; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48601/19]

383. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which the State will ensure EU targets for the deployment of alternative fuel refuelling infrastructure and recharging points will be met within the set deadlines to support the commercial fleet here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48602/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 382 and 383 together.

The delivery of 14 public Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) refuelling stations, as part of the Causeway Project co-funded by the EU Connecting Europe Facility, is an operational matter for Gas Networks Ireland. However, I have been provided with an update on the current status of these refuelling stations by Gas Networks Ireland. There is one operational public CNG refuelling station which is located in Dublin port. The next public refuelling station will be located at Cashel, Co. Tipperary. Construction of this station has been completed and commissioning is planned for January 2020. A further eight stations have been contracted in 2019 and it is forecast that six of these will be delivered in 2020. There are also three private CNG refuelling stations which are located in Dublin, Cork and Shannon Co. Clare.

The Green Connect project, which is also being developed by Gas Networks Ireland, has been approved for funding from the Connecting Europe Facility Transport Fund. The project spans a five year period from 2019 to 2024. It is a follow on project from the Causeway Programme to complete a national network of CNG refuelling stations along the core road network.
in Ireland. The project includes the delivery of 21 additional CNG refuelling stations. Two further CNG refuelling stations are to be provided by Gas Networks Ireland’s GRAZE project supported by the Climate Action Fund.

The development of electric vehicle recharging points is being supported through a grant of up to €600 for the installation of a home charge point, a grant of up to €5,000 for Local Authorities to install on-street charge points and accelerated capital allowances to support businesses installing charge points.

Budget 2020 provided €6 million in funding to my Department to support the development of this charging infrastructure with €4 million allocated to the home charge point grant and €2 million to the on-street charge point grant. The Climate Action Plan, which was published in June, also sets out a range of actions to support the delivery of charging infrastructure for electric vehicles. These actions include expanding the home charger grant to include locations with shared parking such as apartments.

Funding of €10 million from the Climate Action Fund is supporting the ESB to develop a nationwide, state-of-the-art electric vehicle fast charging network, with the ESB also investing €10 million. This project includes the installation of 140 fast chargers consisting of 90 150kW chargers (each of which will be capable of charging two vehicles simultaneously) and upgrading 50 existing standard chargers to 50kW chargers. The project will also involve replacing over 500 existing standard charge points with next generation high reliability models. This is a multi-annual project and is expected to be fully completed by 2022.

In addition, new regulations being developed by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government will require provision to be made for charge points in new domestic and non-domestic buildings with over 10 car parking spaces and those undergoing major refurbishments. The regulations will also require non-domestic buildings with over 20 car parking spaces to install charging facilities.

**Exploration Licences**

384. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason prospecting licences are being granted in areas of Natura 2000 sites, national heritage areas, special areas of conservation and special protection areas in view of the fact that no mining licences are to be offered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48630/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney):** Prospecting licences may be granted following environmental screening by my Department including screening for Appropriate Assessment. This screening takes into account designated sites including Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Natural Heritage Areas, Nature Reserves and National Parks.

An application for a mining licence is a separate and independent process from prospecting licensing. Mining licences are only issued after planning permission and an IPC licence has been granted by the Local Authority and the EPA respectively. If an applicant can demonstrate that the proposed mine will not have significant adverse effects on a Designated Site, or alternatively, should imperative reasons of overriding public interest exist in accordance with the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (SI 477 of 2011), permission could be granted.
385. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a solution will be provided for a school (details supplied) that is experiencing significant connectivity issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48636/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is the government’s plan to rollout high speed broadband to the 1.1 million people living and working in the nearly 540,000 premises including almost 100,000 businesses and farms and 695 schools, where commercial operators will not commit to deliver the service.

The Deputy’s question relates to a school which is located in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department’s website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the areas to be served by the network to be deployed under the NBP State led Intervention, the contract for which was signed on 19 November with National Broadband Ireland (NBI).

A deployment plan will be made available by NBI shortly. Over 90% of premises in the State will have access to high speed broadband within the next four years.

Approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) will be deployed across all counties during 2020. The BCPs will be located in community centres, schools, library hubs and local sports halls and will enable communities to get free public access to high speed broadband. The BCP locations are available to view on the High Speed Broadband Map on the Department’s website www.dccae.gov.ie. Broadband Officers in each Local Authority were tasked with consulting with local communities and business to find the appropriate mix of locations to reap the maximum benefits.

By the end of 2021, NBI plans to pass approximately 115,000 premises. Approximately 70,000-100,000 premises will be passed each year thereafter, with the final premises to be completed in 2026.

**National Broadband Plan Implementation**

386. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if discussions have taken place between his Department and companies (details supplied) regarding the minimum amount of premises for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48719/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Broadband Plan is the Government’s plan to rollout high speed broadband to the 1.1 million people living and working in the nearly 540,000 premises, including almost 100,000 businesses and farms and 695 schools, where commercial operators will not commit to deliver the service.

The contract to deliver this service was signed with National Broadband Ireland (NBI) on 19 November 2019. Work will begin immediately and a deployment plan will be made available by NBI shortly. All counties will see premises passed in the first 2 years and over 90% of premises in the State will have access to high speed broadband within the next 4 years.

Approximately 300 community centres, schools, library hubs and local sports halls in every county in Ireland will be connected to high speed broadband during 2020, to enable communi-
ties to quickly get free public access to high speed broadband. A list of these community centres is available to view on the High Speed Broadband Map on my Department’s website www.dccae.gov.ie which also outlines the scope of the NBP intervention area.

NBI will pass approximately 10,000 premises by the end of 2020. By the end of 2021, NBI plans to pass approximately 115,000 premises. Each year thereafter, approximately 70,000 to 100,000 premises will be passed with the final completion in 2026.

The country will be divided into 110 areas of around 5,000 premises. The subsidy will be paid to NBI in arrears as premises in each of the 110 areas are completed. There is a comprehensive set of protections and legally binding obligations set out in the contract with NBI, which includes a suite of key performance indicators and significant penalties for under performance to ensure the service is maintained appropriately.

**National Broadband Plan Data**

387. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of providers that have been accepted for the national broadband plan; the number of providers that have been rejected without engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48721/19]

388. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the material change to the national broadband plan intervention area since the mapping exercise; the number of premises added to the intervention area; the number of premises removed from same; the breakdown of premises removed from the intervention area by operator type that is fixed line, cable, mobile, fixed wireless; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48724/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 387 and 388 together.

As a State intervention, the NBP must comply with the requirements of the European Commission’s Guidelines on the application of State aid rules for broadband networks. The Guidelines require, amongst other things, that Member States carry out a detailed mapping exercise to identify as far as reasonably possible those areas where intervention is required.

Having consulted with industry on an ongoing basis, my Department recently conducted a final public consultation to close the mapping exercise in advance of the award of the NBP contract. Over 180 submissions were received from a variety of stakeholders, including 30 from large and small commercial telecommunications operators, with the remainder from local authority broadband officers and members of the public.

Following evaluation of the submissions and receipt of a positive State aid decision on 15 November, responses have been issued to the submissions from the commercial operators.

Having evaluated the submissions received, approximately 38,000 premises were removed from the intervention area as commercial operators provided evidence that these premises can now access a high speed broadband service from an existing network. These premises relate to network deployment detailed in submissions received from eir (34,000 premises) regarding its fibre rural network and SIRO (4,000 premises) as part of its wider fibre network rollout, which were evaluated as meeting the assessment criteria published by the Department.

In addition, approximately 37,000 premises originally identified as being served by com-
commercial operators have now been included in the intervention area for the NBP, as commercial operators’ plans to serve these premises have not materialised.

The map has also been updated for approximately an additional 2,000 premises identified in the latest Ordinance Survey Ireland data. The final Intervention Area now covers 537,596 premises.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

389. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the cost to bring high-speed broadband to the home under the national broadband plan for members of the public; the process involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48729/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The contract awarded to National Broadband Ireland (NBI) is for the sale of wholesale broadband services only in the designated areas.

As the network is built consumers will be notified that they can order from their broadband service provider of choice, such as eir, Sky, Vodafone, or a local broadband provider. The price that NBI can charge for connecting each home or business and the monthly rentals, are fully regulated by the contract with the Minister. Prices charged must also be benchmarked to the regulated prices allowed by ComReg each year to ensure prices remain in line with urban areas over the 25 years of the contract. The initial maximum connection charge to a home that NBI is allowed to charge is €100. This charge is paid by the broadband service provider (e.g. eir, Sky, Vodafone, or a local broadband provider) to NBI. Thereafter the maximum monthly wholesale charge for a home buying a 150Mbps service is capped at €30. This is similar to the charge levied by eir’s wholesale division in urban areas.

It was a requirement under the State Aid rules that subsidy could only be awarded to a wholesale only network provider of broadband services. This will ensure that consumers have the choice of many retail broadband providers similar to consumers in urban areas. Similar to offers available in urban areas, consumers in rural areas will also be able to buy multiple services through bundled packages including broadband, fixed and mobile voice, TV and other services from retail operators, in what will be a competitive market. This will ensure choice and competition in the market for broadband, to the benefit of all residential and business consumers.

Renewable Energy Incentives

390. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the grants and incentives given in budget 2020 to help in the production of biogas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48793/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Support Scheme for Renewable Heat has been developed to financially support the adoption of renewable heating systems by commercial, industrial, agricultural, district heating and other non-domestic heat users not covered by the EU Emissions Trading System.

The first phase of the scheme, an installation grant for heat pumps, opened for applications in September 2018. Following EU State aid approval, the second phase of the scheme,
an operational support for biomass boilers and anaerobic digestion heating systems, opened for applications in June of this year. Under this phase of the scheme, eligible renewable energy technologies will be supported through a multi-annual payment, for a period of up to 15 years, on the basis of prescribed tariffs. Under Project Ireland 2040, the National Development Plan sets out an allocation of €300 million for the roll-out of the scheme for the period up to 2027. As part of Budget 2020, I announced an allocation of €5 million for the scheme.

As set out in the Climate Action Plan, it is intended to set a 2030 target for the level of energy to be supplied by indigenous biomethane injected into the gas grid. My Department is in the process of developing an appropriate target for inclusion in the National Energy and Climate Plan that is due to be submitted to the European Commission by the end of this year. As part of this work, my Department is examining potential options to support biomethane grid injection.

**National Broadband Plan**

391. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a marked signed copy of the contract and associated documents he signed with the preferred bidder of the national broadband plan will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48806/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The full National Broadband contract, redacted for commercial sensitivity, will be published in due course on my Department’s website.

**Environmental Policy**

392. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding a nationwide ban on smoky fuels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48899/19]

397. **Deputy Brid Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the work under way by his Department and the Attorney General to finalise a legally robust plan to implement a nationwide smoky coal ban; his plans to do so by regulation, amending legislation or primary legislation; if he will publish the advice on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48955/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 392 and 397 together.

I refer the Deputies to the replies to Questions No.58 of 16 October. The position is unchanged. The government does not publish advice which has been received from the Attorney General.

*Questions Nos. 393 to 395, inclusive, answered with Question No. 378.*

**National Broadband Plan**

396. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department will embark on an advertising campaign for the national broadband plan in advance of the beginning of the roll-out of fibre; if so, the nature of the campaign;
the budget for the campaign; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48929/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Broadband Plan (NBP) contract, which was signed on 19 November, sets out the communication and demand stimulation requirements that must be undertaken as part of the contract. These include the development and implementation of communications campaigns and initiatives to maximise awareness and demand on the network. NBI is obliged to execute these communications plans before, during and post the deployment of the NBP network in each geographical area.

My Department will also continue to raise awareness among the general public on the objectives of the NBP, the rollout of the service and the benefits of high speed broadband.

It is important to note that the purpose of a communications campaign and initiatives to maximise awareness will be to increase the take-up of high speed broadband. It will be important to highlight the opportunities that are presented by the digital economy, from health care to farming, and from education to agriculture, rural development, jobs and tourism. From a financial point of view, a higher uptake of high speed broadband can also reduce the cost to the State of the National Broadband Plan, through the utilisation of clawback provisions contained within the contract.

*Question No. 397 answered with Question No. 392.*

**Electric Vehicles**

398. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if grants or accelerated capital allowances are available for businesses which purchase and use newly manufactured fully electric mini diggers; if this matter will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49047/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** There is a generous range of supports available to incentivise the purchase of electric vehicles. In order to qualify for the electric vehicle purchase grant, the electric vehicle must be classified as M1 (passenger vehicle) or N1 (light commercial vehicle). Electric mini diggers are not eligible for this grant and my Department has no plans to extend the grant to include them.

The accelerated capital allowance is a tax incentive scheme that promotes investment in energy efficient products and equipment. The equipment models eligible for the scheme are listed on a product register maintained by SEAI. Currently, electric mini diggers are not eligible for the scheme. This scheme is a taxation policy and therefore is within the remit of the Minister of Finance.

**Energy Policy**

399. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the State agencies that have a statutory or regulatory function in respect of energy security; the agencies and bodies that have an advisory role on energy security; the way in which he will ensure that the regulatory aspects of energy security are not captured by stakeholder bodies, such as the ESB and a company (details supplied) that may have strategic commercial interests at stake; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49101/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):**
I have overall responsibility for national policy in the energy sector. This includes policy in relation to energy security, which is fully aligned with EU law and EU policy objectives. The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) has statutory functions relating to energy security, for both gas and electricity, and is independent in the exercise of its functions. These include functions in the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999, as amended, to promote the continuity, security and quality of supplies of electricity. CRU also is required by S.I. 60/2005 to monitor, and take such measures as it considers necessary to protect, the security of supply of electricity.

In relation to gas, the CRU has the function, under the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended, to secure the continuity, security and quality of supplies of natural gas. The CRU is also the designated competent authority for Ireland, for EU Regulation 2017/1938 concerning measures to safeguard the security of supply of gas.

The National Oil Reserves Agency has statutory responsibility in relation to the storage of oil stocks for use in an emergency, at a level sufficient to comply with the State’s stockholding obligations.

The transmission system operators for gas and electricity, Gas Networks Ireland and EirGrid, have legal responsibilities in relation to gas and electricity security.

Article 40 of EU Directive 2019/944 on common rules for the internal market for electricity sets out tasks of electricity transmission system operators including that they shall be responsible for: ensuring the long-term ability of the system to meet reasonable demands for the transmission of electricity, and contributing to security of supply through adequate transmission capacity and system reliability.

Article 13 of EU Directive 2009/73/EC, as amended, concerning common rules for the internal market in natural gas, sets out tasks of gas transmission system operators, including that they shall operate, maintain and develop under economic conditions secure, reliable and efficient transmission facilities to secure an open market, with due regard to the environment.

My Department regularly engages with State Agencies and other stakeholders, including Gas Networks Ireland and the ESB, as part of the normal process of feeding into policy development and formulation.

In relation to energy sustainability and security, I am initiating a major review into Ireland’s energy sustainability and security which will:

- Consider the optimal actions that need to be taken, in reaching 70% renewable electricity, to ensure Ireland’s electricity system is backed up in a secure, safe and sustainable way.

- Assess the role of gas during the transition, as the lowest CO2 emitting fossil fuel, and consider how and from where it is sourced.

- Review the role that other technologies can play in the transition, including battery storage, pumped storage, the role of interconnection (both gas and electricity) and the possibilities for hydrogen and Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS).

- Consider what the roadmap for renewable electricity looks like in the period from 2030 to achieving carbon neutrality in 2050

I have written to the Chairperson of EirGrid, ESB, Bord na Móna, Ervia and CRU to seek their input into the review.
Inland Fisheries

400. Deputy Dara Calleary asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the proposed national salmon life centre in Ballina, County Mayo; the projected timeframe for the commencement of the development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49137/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney): Proposals, including prospective funding and project timelines for a Salmon Life Centre in Ballina are a matter for Mayo County Council. Enquiries as regards to its prioritisation and the anticipated timeframe for any delivery should be addressed directly to the Council.

Mobile Telephony Services

401. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the safety of 5G; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49138/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): 5G is the next generation of mobile communications and has the potential to deliver hugely enhanced connectivity.

The potential health impacts of exposure to non-ionising radiation are addressed in a substantial volume of internationally recognised scientific research and evidence. This includes the guidelines set down by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). These guidelines have been endorsed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the European Commission and provide scientifically-based exposure limits that are applicable to both public and occupational exposure from electromagnetic fields (EMF).

The ICNIRP Guidelines apply up to a frequency of 300 gigahertz (GHz), well above the maximum frequencies being considered for 5G. ComReg, the independent telecoms regulatory authority, ensures that licensed mobile operators comply with their licence conditions and do not exceed these guidelines.

An Irish Government commissioned report published in 2016 reaffirmed the conclusions of an earlier 2007 report, that there is insufficient evidence to establish a causal relationship between exposure to low-frequency electromagnetic fields and adverse health effects.

Nevertheless, public exposure to non-ionising radiation is an issue that is kept under review. As Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I assigned a new statutory function to the Environmental Protection Agency earlier this year to provide general information to the public in this regard, to monitor international scientific developments and provide independent advice to my Department in this area. Information is published on the EPA’s website at www.epa.ie/radiation/emf.

Question No. 402 answered with Question No. 378.

Road Network

403. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has
received a request from the local authority for funding to upgrade Castlefinn Bridge in County Donegal; if so, the details of the project plans; if his attention has been drawn to the need to deliver this project in view of the state of the structure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48611/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads (RLR) in Donegal is the statutory responsibility of Donegal County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council’s own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

Applications for funding under the Department’s Bridge Rehabilitation Scheme are invited on an annual basis for consideration for funding in the subsequent year. Councils are made aware of the conditions and are asked to submit applications in order of priority. Donegal County Council recently submitted its bridge rehabilitation funding application and Castlefinn Bridge was not included in this application. The Department will examine applications from all local authorities and Councils will be notified of their allocations early in the new year.

Larger scale bridge upgrade works fall under the Specific Grant category and applications need to comply with project appraisal requirements. A Specific Grant application has not been received in relation to Castlefinn Bridge.

It is important to reiterate that the role of Exchequer grants for regional and local roads is to supplement local authorities in their spending in this area and it is open to Donegal County Council to fund work on this bridge from its own resources.

Cycling Facilities Provision

404. Deputy Eamon Ryan asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the National Transport Authority checks the compliance of cycling infrastructure schemes which it funds with the national cycle manual and the design manual for urban roads and streets. [48534/19]

405. Deputy Eamon Ryan asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the National Transport Authority has overseen the design of the proposed Broadmeadow greenway and checked it for compliance with the national cycle manual. [48535/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 404 and 405 together.

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

Noting the NTA’s responsibility in this matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Stadium Projects
406. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the development of a stadium (details supplied); if his Department is involved in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48582/19]

407. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has met with the development committee established for the development of a stadium (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48583/19]

408. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if capital funding has been allocated to Dublin City Council for the design or redevelopment of a stadium (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48584/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 406 to 408, inclusive, together.

The Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund opened for applications on 19th November 2018 and the closing date for receipt of applications was 17th April 2019.

An application has been made for funding towards the design of the redevelopment of the stadium referred to by the Deputy. That application is one of 72 applications received. Details of all applications have been published on the Department’s website. The detailed evaluation procedures have also been published on the Department’s website.

As set out in this evaluation process, applicants were given an opportunity to provide corrected and amended documentation, where necessary, in support of applications. This part of the process is now complete and detailed assessment work of the applications has commenced. In view of the detailed information contained in each application I expect that it will be towards the end of this year before assessments are completed.

Neither I nor Minister Ross has met with the development committee to discuss the proposed redevelopment.

**Road Projects Status**

409. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the north ring road in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48587/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

**Road Network**

410. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for link roads from the proposed TEN-T priority route to the towns of Ballybofey and Stranorlar, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48598/19]
Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Services

411. Deputy Aindrias Moynihan asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to improve services on a bus service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48606/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport in Ireland. I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Bus Éireann, and I have forwarded the Deputy’s question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Traffic Accidents Data

412. Deputy Colm Brophy asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of pedestrians with physical or intellectual disabilities killed or seriously injured over the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48619/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This data is not held in this Department. The Road Safety Authority may have some relevant information on the matter. However, I am not aware that such information is routinely recorded in respect of either deaths or serious injuries and may be problematic in terms of consistent and robust definition.

I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Sports Facilities Provision

413. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the provision of funding towards the establishment of a sports centre (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [48623/19]

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 2019.

An application has been made for funding towards the design of a Regional Sport Centre in Mullingar. That application is one of 72 applications that were received. Details of all applications received have been published on the Department’s website. The detailed evaluation
process has also been published on the Department’s website.

As set out in this evaluation process, applicants were given an opportunity to provide corrected and amended documentation, where necessary, in support of applications. This part of the process is now complete and detailed assessment work of the applications has commenced. In view of the detailed information contained in each application I expect that it will be towards the end of this year before assessments are completed.

**Railway Stations**

414. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures he is taking to address the lack of parking at Sallins and Naas railway stations (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48647/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport in Ireland. I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

The issue raised is an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy’s question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

**Military Aircraft Landings**

415. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if permission was given for munitions or explosives to be taken through Shannon Airport on an aircraft (details supplied) which landed at the airport on 15 November 2019 from Tulsa and travelled on to Tel Aviv on 16 November 2019; the cargo the aircraft was carrying; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48652/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** An exemption for the carriage of munitions of war, pursuant to Article 5 of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Orders, was not sought by the civil air operator in question for this flight.

The operator provided a prior notification to my Department of a planned technical stop at Shannon Airport, and detailed that their cargo consisted of wing sections for business jets and other associated parts, so the need for an exemption under the Order did not arise.

**Public Transport**

416. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48714/19]

**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.
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.

Road Network

417. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the completion and re-opening of the bridge at Ardfinnan, County Tipperary; the timeframe for the work to commence; the timeframe for full completion of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48722/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council’s own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is a matter for the Council.

An allocation of €400,000 was given to Tipperary this year for repair works on Ardfinnan Bridge and these works have been completed recently.

Any projects proposed by local authorities for consideration under the Specific Grant Programme are assessed by the Department on a case-by-case basis. All projects put forward by local authorities for consideration must comply with the requirements of the Public Spending Code and the Department’s Capital Appraisal Framework (CAF). Given the limited funding available for RLR improvement works it is important for local authorities to prioritise projects within their overall area of responsibility with these requirements in mind.

As required under the project appraisal guidelines, a Preliminary Appraisal has been received from Tipperary County Council concerning pedestrian and cycling options at Ardfinnan Bridge. All applications received from local authorities for specific grant allocations have to be assessed taking into account competing projects and the available budget with a view to maximising value for money and meeting Government strategic objectives, where possible.

Road Network

418. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the provision of a new bridge at Ballina, County Tipperary; the stage at which the project is at; when the project will be completed; if there is sufficient funding available for the project to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48723/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities’ own resources supplemented by State road grants.

I am assuming that the Deputy is referring to the Shannon Bridge Crossing at Killaloe/Ballina. This bridge is one element of the proposed Shannon Crossing/Killaloe Bypass/R494 upgrade scheme. Clare County Council is responsible for implementation of the scheme which is at land acquisition, site investigation and design stage. An updated Business Case for the scheme is in the process of being finalised as required in the Public Spending Code and my Department’s Capital Appraisal Framework and in this context a construction programme for
the Shannon bridge has not been finalised as yet.

Funding for the scheme is being provided from the Project Ireland 2040 capital envelope for regional and local road improvement projects. Schemes are being managed on a programme basis with phased implementation taking account of the profile of annual capital allocations.

Road Improvement Schemes

419. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application by Meath County Council for a grant to improve the safety of a dangerous stretch of the R156 road at Mullagh Cross, County Meath. [48725/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities’ own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

Before the recession, local authorities could apply on a regular basis for grants for Specific (schemes costing less than €5m) and Strategic Improvement Grants (schemes costing more than €5m) for the strengthening, widening or realignment of regional and local roads. However, the extent of the cutbacks in grant funding during the crisis meant this grant scheme had to be curtailed from 2013 because expenditure on maintenance/renewal was falling well short of what was required to adequately maintain the regional and local road network.

The current Capital Plan does provide for the gradual build-up in funding for the road network but it will take some time yet to reach the level required even for the basic maintenance and renewal of the network. For this reason, there continues to be limited scope for funding new or additional projects under the Specific and Strategic Grant Programmes.

Any projects proposed by local authorities for consideration under these Grant Programmes are assessed by the Department on a case-by-case basis. All projects put forward by local authorities for consideration must comply with the requirements of the Public Spending Code and the Department’s Capital Appraisal Framework (CAF). Given the limited funding available for RLR improvement works it is important for local authorities to prioritise projects within their overall area of responsibility with these requirements in mind.

As required under the project appraisal process Meath County Council submitted a Preliminary Appraisal in relation to improvement works on the R156 in October this year. In view of budgetary constraints all applications received from local authorities have to be assessed taking into account competing projects and the available budget.

Light Rail Projects Status

420. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the proposed Luas extension from Broombridge to Finglas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48801/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, includ-
Noting the NTA’s responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy’s question to the NTA for a direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Public Service Vehicles

421. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of SPSV licences issued by county in each of the years 2010 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48809/19]

423. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which the turnaround time can be improved for applicants for public service vehicle licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48811/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 421 and 423 together.

The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

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.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

422. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons to date on waiting lists for driver tests in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the length of time they have been waiting; the stage they are at in the application process in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48810/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As this is a matter for the Road Safety Authority I have referred the Deputy’s question to the Authority for direct response. Please contact my office if a reply is not received within ten working days.

Question No. 423 answered with Question No. 421.

Coast Guard Services

424. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding safety issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48967/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Coast Guard withdrew the services of its in-shore rescue boats stationed at 23 locations around the coast on Friday last, 15 November 2019. This action was taken following a reported malfunction of a number of lifejackets which are a key piece of personal protective equipment. An investigation is underway into the malfunctioning lifejackets which involves the Coast Guard, the supplier and the manufacturer. It is hoped to identify the cause and provide for a speedy, effective and safe solution.
This action is being taken in compliance with Coast Guards SAR assurance obligations as set out in the National SAR Plan to ensure safety of Coast Guard boat crews. The National SAR Committee met on Monday 18 November and was briefed on the matter. In the meantime, from a SAR coverage point of view, the Coast Guard is deploying various contingencies based on an assessment of risk. All shoreline and cliff rescue services remain in place, along with the four Search and Rescue Coast Guard helicopters. The RNLI, Community Inshore Rescue Boats, and Naval Service will continue to assist particularly in those areas of greatest risk until the issue has been resolved.

As regards other concerns raised previously, the Irish Coast Guard addressed these at the time through a programme of both internal and external testing. Along with independent testing through a UK based Testing Laboratory regarding the EN ISO standards applicable and assurances received from the manufacturer of the lifejacket in question.

As regards broader issues of safety in our national search and rescue service, I would draw the Deputy’s attention to the recent review of our National Search and Rescue Framework which was published in July last and the publication of a new National Search and Rescue Plan. The review was chaired independently by Sir Alan Massey, ex CEO of the UK’s Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

The Report welcomed the establishment by the IRCG of a new Safety, Quality and Compliance (SQC) section, and appointing therein a dedicated Health and Safety Officer to provide oversight of the SMS, working with the Department’s Safety Officer(s) to embed and improve Health and Safety policy, procedures, goals and objectives. Further, the IRCG has committed to implementing an effective SMS, applicable to the specific needs of the IRCG and in line with the mandatory requirements of ISO 45001:2018 - Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems (SMS Revision & Accreditation – SRA - Project). This work is already helping inform other entities within the SAR system who are seeking to improve their Safety Management Systems. The recent issue with lifejackets and the response to that is evidence of safety management in action.

At a national level, the new National SAR Plan delivers a new mechanism of assurance in relation to standards and practices and oversight of the overall Search and Rescue system. This includes a support network to assist those involved in search and rescue to develop minimum standards and practices and to embed principles of continuous improvement and safety within their organisations. It also creates a new Search and Rescue Regulators’ Forum, a unique initiative which brings transport regulators in the Search and Rescue domain together to exchange good practice and seek to improve the overall system assurance mechanisms.

**Tourism Policy**

425. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter regarding the advertisement of greyhound races (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48970/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I was gravely concerned following the coverage and debate regarding alleged cruel practices within Ireland’s greyhound industry. One of the issues that arose as a result was the promotion of greyhound racing by our tourism agencies.

Consequently, while the process of investigating and addressing issues was underway in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, I asked the tourism agencies to review
their promotion of greyhound racing. I subsequently welcomed their decision to pause active promotion of greyhound racing and to keep the situation under review, pending implementation of several reforms.

Since then, my colleague Brendan Griffin T.D., Minister of State for Tourism and Sport at my Department, has received an update on Bord na gCon’s additional and enhanced care and welfare measures, which he forwarded to both Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Minister Griffin has made it clear that he has strong personal views on the industry, which do not coincide with my own. I have no problem with him letting those personal views be known to third parties.

Sports Capital Programme

426. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if feedback will be provided to a club (details supplied) in County Cork that was unsuccessful in the recent allocation of sports capital grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48978/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): 2,337 applications were submitted under the 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme seeking a total of €162m in funding.

The club referred to by the Deputy submitted a valid application. Given the level of demand from applicants and the amount of funding available however, unfortunately it was not possible to allocate grants to every eligible applicant.

My Department will be writing to all applicants in the coming days with details of the outcome of the assessment of their application. Unsuccessful applicants will also be invited to appeal the Department’s decision if they believe that the Department has made any error in the assessment process.

Sports Capital Programme

427. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if feedback will be provided to a club (details supplied) in County Cork that was unsuccessful in the recent allocation of sports capital grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48980/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): 2,337 applications were submitted under the 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme seeking a total of €162m in funding.

The club referred to by the Deputy submitted a valid application. Given the level of demand from applicants and the amount of funding available however, unfortunately it was not possible to allocate grants to every eligible applicant.

My Department will be writing to all applicants in the coming days with details of the outcome of the assessment of their application. Unsuccessful applicants will also be invited to appeal the Department’s decision if they believe that the Department has made any error in the assessment process.
Regional Road Network

428. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided to local authorities to assist with the maintenance of roadside hedges in view of health and safety concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49062/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is a statutory function of each road authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993.

Works on regional and local roads are funded by local authorities’ own resources supplemented by State grants. Within the overall resources available to it, the selection and prioritisation of works including the maintenance of road verges is a matter for each local authority.

Section 70 of the Roads Act 1993 sets out the responsibility of landowners to take all reasonable steps to ensure that trees, hedges and other vegetation growing on their land are not, or could not become, a danger to people using a public road or interfere with the safe use of a public road or the maintenance of a public road.

A local authority can serve notice requiring a landowner to take action to address a hazard. This section also allows the relevant road authority to step in where a landowner fails or is unable to take action to remedy a hazard and to seek recovery of reasonable costs from the landowner. This is, therefore, a matter for management between the landowner and the relevant local authority.

As Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) and the relevant local authority are responsible for maintenance of national roads, I have referred the Deputy’s Question to TII for direct reply. If the Deputy does not receive a reply within 10 working days please advise my Office.

Tourism Promotion

429. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when funds will be allocated under the destination tourism towns initiative. [49086/19]

430. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Mullingar and Athlone, County Westmeath, will be included in the destination tourism towns initiative. [49087/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 429 and 430 together.

Fáilte Ireland’s Tourism Destination Towns initiative is a capital investment scheme under which Local Authorities were invited to apply for funding to enhance public spaces in developed and emerging tourism destinations in a way that will engage tourists and enhance their experience.

I understand that Fáilte Ireland will confirm allocations under the scheme in the coming weeks. I have asked Fáilte Ireland to reply directly to the Deputy regarding any further detail it might be in a position to share. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Cycling Facilities Provision
431. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the various cycle network plans being implemented in major cities; the funding being allocated to the implementation of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49095/19]

**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, including cycling infrastructure. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the allocation of funding at project level and for the implementation of cycle network plans across our major cities.

I can advise the Deputy that, since announcement of Budget 2020, the overall funding for my Department’s two principal active travel related programmes is now likely to increase to just over €100 million in total.

This improved funding allocation does not include the Bus Connects programme which will deliver 200km of largely segregated cycle lanes across Dublin City. It also excludes various other funding sources, such as €23 million for 2020 under the Greenways Strategy and funding that is provided outside my Department, like the Urban & Rural Regeneration and Development funds.

Noting the NTA’s responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy’s questions to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

### Road Projects Status

432. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a bypass for Thurles, County Tipperary; if the bypass is included in the Project Ireland 2040 plan; if TII expects that it will be constructed within the lifetime of the plan; if it is itemised within the plan; if the bypass for Thurles project has been included in material published by his Department or TII either in material published as part of the Project Ireland 2040 plan or since; if so, if he will provide the extract that includes the information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49134/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

I understand from TII that the proposed N62 Thurles Bypass scheme was suspended back in 2011, after potential routes were assessed.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply and to provide you with information about its suspension. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### School Expulsions

433. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the rates of expulsion in a school (details supplied); and the way in which they compare to rates nationally. [48710/19]
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As this is an operational matter I have asked Tusla, the Child and Family Agency to reply directly to the Deputy.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

434. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason a system (details supplied) is in place; if Pobal will be instructed to address the anomaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48586/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Officials from my Department have been in contact with colleagues in Pobal who have confirmed that there is no anomaly with the Higher Capitation application system on PIP.

This year, due to data protection limitations, service providers were required to submit all qualifications as part of their Higher Capitation applications, regardless of whether they had been approved in previous years. This requirement had the effect of adding time to the appraisal process as additional checks needed to be performed to ensure that all submitted qualifications were DCYA-approved courses. Previously, DCYA had administered the Higher Capitation appraisal process, but this change was necessary when the process transitioned to Pobal.

In some cases, as part of the process, applications have to be referred back to Early Learning and Care (ELC) providers for a number of reasons including confirmation of qualifications from a third party accredited body or institution. Until these applications are resubmitted with correct details and rechecked, they cannot be approved and paid. Once these applications are resubmitted to Pobal, with correct details, they are dealt with as a priority.

As response to this change and considering the significant pressure on services, the decision was made that ELC providers whose applications had not yet been processed and who were also in receipt of the first preliminary payment on 23rd August 2019, would receive an additional preliminary payment on 1st November 2019. This payment was for a four-week period that took ELC providers to 20th November 2019. The payment was based on a child’s Full Time Equivalent (FTE) numbers for the week ending 18th November 2019 using the max FTE cap for services which were approved for higher capitation last year.

A further preliminary payment was made on 8th November 2019 for any ELC service providers whose application had still not been processed at that stage. This payment was for a four week period that took ELC service providers to the 22nd November 2019. ELC service providers who had not previously been approved for the Higher Capitation rate but had submitted an application for the 2019/2020 programme year that had not been processed, received a preliminary payment on 29th October 2019. This payment was for an eight week period. An additional preliminary payment was also made to these services on 8th November and this payment was for a four week period.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

435. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the case of unpaid higher capitation for a company (details supplied) will be examined. [48592/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Thank you for your correspondence concerning the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Higher Cap-
Questions - Written Answers

Pobal administer both programmes on behalf of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA).

In relation to Higher Capitation payments, Pobal issued an announcement to services through the PIP system on 19th August 2019 informing them of the Higher Capitation timelines for the 2019/2020 programme year. Regrettably these timelines were later than had been indicated the previous year, due to a combination of resourcing issues and a delay in closing off the 2018/2019 programme year. I understand the frustration the timelines and delays have caused.

Pobal officials began processing applications for the programme year 2019/2020 in October 2019, in line with the announced schedule. Pobal is currently processing a large volume of applications, and is working to approve applications and release funding as soon as possible.

Considering the significant pressure on services, my Department made the decision that early learning and care providers whose applications had not yet been processed and who were also in receipt of the first preliminary payment on 23rd August 2019, would receive an additional preliminary payment on 1st November 2019. This payment was for a four-week period that took early learning and care providers to 20th November 2019. The payment was based on a child’s Full Time Equivalent (FTE) numbers for the week ending 18th November 2019 using the max FTE cap for services which were approved for Higher Capitation last year.

A further preliminary payment was made on 8th November 2019 for any early learning and care service providers whose application had still not been processed at that stage. This payment was for a four week period that took service providers to the 22nd November 2019. Service providers who had not previously been approved for the Higher Capitation rate but had submitted an application for the 2019/2020 programme year that had not been processed, received a preliminary payment on 29th October 2019. This payment was for an eight week period. An additional preliminary payment was also made to these services on 8th November and this payment was for a four week period.

As part of the School-Age Childcare strand of the 2019 Capital Grants Programme, it was a condition for services to register with Tusla in order to receive the full grant amount, as registration with Tusla is now a legal requirement for school-age childcare services. As the registration process for many services had not yet been completed at an earlier stage in the year, services who were approved for school-age childcare capital funding and had engaged with the registration process had part of their grant released prior to completion of registration, with the remainder being withheld until the registration process was complete.

Officials in my Department have been in contact with colleagues in Pobal for clarification on the details you have raised on behalf of the service in question. In response, Pobal confirmed that there are outstanding issues on the service’s Higher Capitation and School Age Childcare Capital applications. I would therefore urge the service to engage with Pobal with the intention of resolving these issues. As Pobal are the administrators of both the Capital and Higher Capitation payments, they are the most appropriate point of contact for queries concerning such applications.

Early Childhood Care and Education Data

436. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of applications for AIM payments received in each year since the scheme was introduced; the number of applications in each year that were received before the programme year commenced;
the average waiting time for processing payments; the number of payments that were made for the full programme year for applications that did not require a setting visit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48656/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a model of support that is designed to ensure that children with a disability can access the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) (free pre-school) programme. The key objective of AIM is to support early learning and care (ELC) providers to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience, ensuring that children with a disability can meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme, thereby reaping the benefits of quality pre-school education. This year I have secured an additional €10 million for AIM in Budget 2020 of which a significant proportion will go to provide increased supports under AIM Level 7.

The following table provides information on the number of applications for AIM payments received for the full programme year and before the programme year commenced (on or before the last date prior the commencement of the programme year).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme Call</th>
<th>Total applications received</th>
<th>No. of applications made before programme year commenced</th>
<th>Programme start date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIM Level 7 2016</td>
<td>1,552</td>
<td>380*</td>
<td>29/08/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIM Level 7 2017</td>
<td>3,574</td>
<td>1,480*</td>
<td>28/08/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIM Level 7 2018</td>
<td>4,851</td>
<td>2,791*</td>
<td>27/08/2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIM Level 7 2019</td>
<td>4,986</td>
<td>3,601*</td>
<td>26/08/2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please note that this figure relates to applications received between May and 31 August.

The average waiting time for processing payments

AIM Level 7 payments are made in line with the payments schedule published in August with the first payment run processed three weeks after the commencement of the 2019/2020 ECCE Programme year. Weekly catch up payments are also facilitated to minimise the time lag for services from approval to payment. In order to make an AIM Level 7 payment there must be an approved registration for the AIM child which reflects the level of AIM support awarded. Services are informed of this requirement as part of the decision notification process and regular communications (including timelines) are published on the Programme Implementation Platform (PIP). The average timeframe from approval to payment is 3 weeks inclusive of the registration check process.

The number of payments that were made for the full programme year for applications that did not require a setting visit

As per the AIM programme rules an observation visit is required for all applications made under the AIM Level 7 application process. However, in exceptional cases where the needs of a child are identified as highly or medically complex and to ensure the child’s participation in pre-school, AIM level 7 support may be awarded in advance of an observation visit being undertaken, provided this has been previously approved by Better Start. Within the current programme year (2019/2020) there have been 32 of these cases. Payment has been issued as per the AIM Level 7 payment schedule, when all pre-payment requirements have been met.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

437. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her atten-
tion has been drawn to the unacceptable delays in processing requests for AIM assessments and subsequent payment approval processes; if her attention has been further drawn to the negative impact that the delays are having on children in view of the fact that services are unable to retain AIM workers or subsidise payment delays; the reason for the refusal to backdate approved payments to the date the AIM worker commenced in the setting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48657/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a model of supports designed to ensure that children with a disability can access the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) (free pre-school) programme. The key objective of AIM is to support early learning and care providers to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience, ensuring that children with a disability can meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme, thereby reaping the benefits of quality pre-school education.

AIM provides a range of supports, both universal and targeted. In many cases, the universal supports provided through AIM, which include staff training, are sufficient to enable the full participation of a child with a disability. Having reviewed the needs of a child in the context of the early learning and care setting, an Early Years Specialist may provide advice on strategies to support the child’s inclusion. In some cases, the Early Years Specialist may recommend funding for additional assistance, either to allow for an additional staff member or to enable a reduction in the adult to child ratio.

In order to minimise any delays in the provision of supports, early learning and care providers are encouraged to submit applications for support (Access and Inclusion Profile) as early as possible. For the programme year that began in September 2019, the window for applications opened on 1st May.

Since the September 2019 programme call opened on May 1st, the average response time from submission of an Access and Inclusion Profile to conducting an observation visit for a child or children in the ECCE programme - which is necessary to determine the level of need - has been 26 days. This is within the expected timeline as per the Access and Inclusion Profile guidance, which states that, following a review of the information provided, a member of the Better Start Access and Inclusion team will contact the pre-school within 4-6 weeks of submission.

Once an observation visit has taken place, an Early Years Specialist within Better Start completes a report, which goes through a review and appraisal process. On average the time from observation to final decision is 23 days. Therefore, in total, from application to decision it takes on average 49 days to process an AIM application.

AIM payments for additional assistance (AIM Level 7) are made in line with the payments schedule published in August 2019 (see table). The first payment run was completed on 13 September 2019, three weeks after the commencement of the 2019/2020 ECCE programme year. Weekly catch-up payments are also facilitated to minimise the timeframe for services from approval to payment. In order to make an AIM Level 7 payment there must be an approved registration for the AIM child which reflects the level of AIM support awarded. Early learning and care services are informed of this requirement as part of the decision notification process and regular communications (including timelines) are published on the PIP provider portal.

With regard to the back-dating of AIM funding for an additional staff member, it should be noted that this type of support is only one of a range of supports provided under AIM. Where an application for AIM support is submitted, an Early Years Specialist determines the most appropriate type of support, depending on the needs of the child in the context of the early learning
and care setting. The most appropriate support may not be an additional staff member. It would therefore not be appropriate for an additional staff member to be recruited until funding for this purpose is approved.

In cases where a child has additionally complex needs or complex medical needs such that he or she could not reasonably be expected to attend the preschool service for an observation visit without AIM targeted supports already being in place, the observation visit may be delayed until after the supports are in place at the discretion of the Better Start Early Years Specialist Service. In such situations, targeted supports can be approved prior to an observation visit, but approval by the Better Start Early Years Specialist Service is required, and payment in relation to targeted supports cannot be backdated to a date before the date on which approval is given.

In cases where a child has been allocated AIM Level 7 support in the first year of the ECCE Programme, and the child continues the ECCE Programme in the same early learning and care setting, provided there are no changes e.g. to the adult-child ratio in the room, approval for the second year of funding may be granted without a second visit to the setting. (An observation visit will have taken place in the first year of the child’s participation.)

### AIM Level 7 Payment Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Payment Date</th>
<th>% paid</th>
<th>Cumulative paid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13th September 2019</td>
<td>25% of contract value</td>
<td>25% of contract value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th October 2019</td>
<td>12.5% of contract value</td>
<td>37.5% of contract value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29th November 2019</td>
<td>12.5% of contract value</td>
<td>50% of contract value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th January 2020</td>
<td>12.5% of contract value</td>
<td>62.5% of contract value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st February 2020</td>
<td>12.5% of contract value</td>
<td>75% of contract value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27th March 2020</td>
<td>12.5% of contract value</td>
<td>87.5% of contract value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22nd May 2020</td>
<td>12.5% of contract value</td>
<td>100% of contract value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please Note:

- Payments may vary throughout the year, if there are any changes to approved funding.
- Catch up payments will be made to services on a weekly basis.
- This schedule is for information purposes only. DCYA reserves the right to amend it at any stage.
- Service Providers are advised to check PIP on a regular basis to ensure they are in possession of the most up to date information.

### Childcare Services Expenditure

438. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the expenditure on childcare in each year since 2014, by scheme; the allocation and estimated out-turn for 2019 and the allocation for 2020, in tabular form. [48697/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Expenditure in the Early Years section of my Department has increased significantly over the last number of years, as outlined in the following table.

Table 1: Early Years Beneficiary Outturn (€m) 2014-2018
€574.4m was allocated to these purposes in 2019. Current projections indicate that expenditure over this year will be within 1% of this allocation.

Table 2: Early Years Beneficiary allocation and estimated outturn 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2019 Allocation</th>
<th>2019 Est. outturn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECCE</td>
<td>€298.1</td>
<td>€295.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCS/NCS Programme funding</td>
<td>€148.0</td>
<td>€147.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEC</td>
<td>€9.2</td>
<td>€7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIM Programme funding*</td>
<td>€21.4</td>
<td>€23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme Support Payment (PSP)</td>
<td>€19.4</td>
<td>€18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>€9.6</td>
<td>€9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration and supports</td>
<td>€68.8</td>
<td>€67.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>€574.4</td>
<td>€569.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The AIM programme launched in 2016. There are a range of further supports under the model which, from 2019, are now accounted for under the administration and supports heading.

My Department is currently finalising funding allocations for next year as part of the annual Revised Estimates process. On Budget Day 2020 I announced that an additional €54.5m had been secured for Early Learning and Care and School Aged Childcare

Early Childhood Care and Education

439. Deputy Willie O’Dea asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will address a matter relating to early years services (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48726/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Officials in my Department, along with our colleagues in Tusla, are currently compiling the information as requested by the Deputy. This information will be supplied to the Deputy in no later than 10 working days. I have asked my officials to follow up on this to ensure delivery as a matter of urgency.

Family Support Services

440. Deputy Tom Neville asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding process for family support services through Tusla; the funding provided to Tusla in each of the...
years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; the funding provided to family support services by Tusla in the same period in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48805/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency allocates funding to a wide range of programmes in the area of family support. Family Support is defined as a style of work that strengthens positive informal social networks through community-based programmes and services. The main focus of these services is on early intervention, which aims to promote the health, wellbeing and rights of all children, young people and their families.

Tusla receives annual funding from the Exchequer under my Department’s Vote (Vote 40). The following table outlines the gross core budgetary allocation to Tusla from my Department for the years 2014 to 2019.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Funding Provided (€m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>609.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>658.401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>676.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>712.895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>753.526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>784.619</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each year after the budget announcement, I issue Tusla with its annual Performance Statement in line with the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013. The Performance Statement outlines Tusla’s overall gross and net current and capital expenditure budget for the following year under the broad headings of pay, non-pay and capital expenditure. In response to the Performance Statement, Tusla prepares a Business Plan, which is submitted to me for consideration.

The precise level of funding to be allocated to specific services including family support services is considered by Tusla, in preparing its Business Plan, having regard to its statutory remit and taking account of the totality of funding available each year.

I have asked Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to respond to you with further details regarding its family support services funding and process.

Childcare Services

441. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention or that of a body under the aegis of her Department has been drawn to the reason a childcare facility (details supplied) in County Cork is closing; the steps she is taking to resolve the situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48952/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Na Páistí Beaga – Magnet Community Group CLG is a community not-for-profit childcare service in County Cork. My Department has been informed that the service intends to close on 31st December 2019. I am acutely aware of the difficulties this future closure may impose on the families and children who attend the facility, as well as the staff who work there.

My Department does not own or operate childcare services; instead it provides funding to subsidise the cost of childcare to parents through a number of schemes. As such, Magnet Community Group is a private organisation and this decision to close the service remains within the
remit of its Board.

Both Pobal and Cork City Childcare Committee (CCC) are working on my Department’s behalf with Magnet Community Group CLG; and with parents, the local community, and service providers to find a viable solution which will enable families to access quality childcare following this closure.

If an alternative service provider intends to provide services in this community served by Na Páistí Beaga, they will be eligible to apply for the Early Learning and Care and School Aged Care programmes, once they have met requirements including registering with the Early Years Inspectorate of Tusla.

Parents who are concerned that they may be affected by this closure should contact Cork City Childcare Committee. Cork CCC may be able to assist them in locating alternative childcare places.

Departmental Funding

442. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if funding is available for groups (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48975/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The service that the Deputy refers to appears to be an in-school health promotion initiative around drugs and alcohol. Accordingly I would advise the Deputy that he might refer the question to the Minister of State at the Department of Health with responsibility for Health Promotion and the National Drugs Strategy for her consideration.

By way of background to work that my Department undertakes in this area, the Deputy may be aware of the significant work being done to reform the funding and provision of youth services. Part of this reform involves the restructuring of four existing funding schemes into one funding scheme – the Targeted Youth Funding Scheme. One of the previous four funding schemes was for projects under the Local Drug Task Force.

21 youth related Local Drugs Task Force projects target young people under the various pillars of the National Drugs Strategy “Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery”. The funding is given to youth projects to provide a range of supports for young people by way of targeted drug prevention and awareness programmes as well as referrals.

The Targeted Youth Funding Scheme has been allocated €35.18 million for 2019 to provide out-of-school supports to young people aged 10 to 24 years of age who are described in the National Youth Strategy as marginalised, disadvantaged or vulnerable will be the primary target group for services available through the new scheme.

Child and Family Agency Data

443. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases reported to Tusla in respect of a series of matters (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48987/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Deputy is enquiring about an operational matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have therefore
referred the matter to Tusla, and asked that a direct response be provided to the Deputy.

Childcare Services Regulation

444. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the process open to a parent who wishes to make a complaint against a preschool, playschool or childminder; and if a parent does not in the first instance have to make a complaint directly to the facility involved (details supplied). [49017/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** In the first instance, if a parent/guardian is experiencing an issue with a service provider, my Department encourages both the parent/guardian and the service provider to seek to resolve the issue between themselves using the service provider’s complaint policy. The local City/County Childcare Committee may also provide assistance to both the parent/guardian and the service provider in order to resolve the issue.

All early learning and care and school-age childcare services (including those childminders who are subject to regulation) must be registered with the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate, and the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 require services to submit to Tusla - as part of the registration process - a copy of their complaints policy. The registered provider must specify the procedure to be followed in making a complaint to the provider, the manner in which the complaint will be dealt with, and the procedures for keeping the complainant informed of the manner in which the complaint is being dealt with.

If the complaint is in relation to a breach of the DCYA childcare funding rules, the parent/guardian should contact their local City/County Childcare Committee or Pobal, who will escalate the issue to my Department if the issue cannot be resolved.

If there is a concern that a child may have been, or is currently at risk of harm or neglect, Tusla should be contacted immediately.

If anyone has cause for concern that a child is at immediate risk they should contact An Garda Síochána immediately.

With the exception of cases of risk of harm or neglect to a child, the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate does not investigate individual complaints about the operations of an early learning and care or school-age childcare setting. However, Tusla welcomes information about services, and reviews and assesses all such information that it receives. Tusla may then use unsolicited information that it receives in this way to inform its decisions about the timing and focus of inspections of services that it carries out. Further information on the Tusla unsolicited information procedure can be found on the Tusla website (https://www.tusla.ie/services/preschool-services/where-to-get-advice-if-i-have-a-difficulty-or-a-complaint-about-a-service/ ).

Youth Services Funding

445. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to improve funding for youth services in County Wicklow. [49111/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Government investment in youth services has increased since 2016 by €8.5m. In 2019 we have invested €63.6M in current and capital funding in clubs, services and young people. In Budget 2020, I secured an additional €1.396 million in funding. My officials and I are considering the final
distribution of this funding and final approval will issue in due course following the publication of the revised estimates volume (REV).

My Department and I are committed to ensuring that every young person in Ireland has access to the transformational power that participating in youth services can bring. This is achieved through the provision of out-of-school supports to young people in their local communities to enable them to overcome adverse circumstances and achieve their full potential by strengthening their personal and social competencies.

The following tables detail the Department of Children and Youth Affairs funding for youth services in County Wicklow in 2019.

**Targeted Youth Funding Scheme (TYFS) (Wicklow)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Amount in €</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connect Bray Neighbourhood Youth Project</td>
<td>€94,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect Bray Neighbourhood Project 1</td>
<td>€118,997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect Bray Neighbourhood Project 2</td>
<td>€101,503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballywaltrim Youth Project</td>
<td>€48,277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Bray Special Project</td>
<td>€48,277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longstanding (Bray Youth Service)</td>
<td>€48,277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Risk Youth Project</td>
<td>€14,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bray Adventure Sports Project</td>
<td>€24,351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure Sports</td>
<td>€25,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bray Youth Service</td>
<td>€107,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAI Football in the Community Officer</td>
<td>€24,477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bray Travellers Project Ltd</td>
<td>€2,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wicklow Traveller Development Group Ltd</td>
<td>€824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>€657,918</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Targeted Youth Funding Scheme (Wicklow and Kildare*)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Amount in €</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Football in the Community (4 new towns)</td>
<td>€8,262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Access Program 2011</td>
<td>€1,813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Promotion Unit</td>
<td>€120,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>€130,155</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Revised Youth Funding Scheme (Wicklow)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Amount in €</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Wicklow Y.S. Arklow (Crosscare)</td>
<td>€206,844.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Wicklow Y. P. Inst 4</td>
<td>€144,538.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>€351,382.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**One-off (2019) Capital Funding (Wicklow and Kildare*)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Amount in €</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff-led Capital Funding</td>
<td>€40,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Youth Club Equipment Scheme</td>
<td>€56,386.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>€96,386.97</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the Deputy may be aware my Department is currently managing the most significant reform of youth services ever undertaken. Part of this reform involves the restructuring of four funding schemes into one funding scheme – the Targeted Youth Funding Scheme.

The Targeted Youth Funding Scheme has been allocated €35.18 million for 2019 to provide out of school Young people aged 10 to 24 years of age who are described in the National Youth Strategy as marginalised, disadvantaged or vulnerable will be the primary target group for services available through the new scheme.

Key to the reform is the new approach to identify need and to focus funding on young people most in need of intervention. Future development and investment in youth services will be informed by the mapping exercise completed in 2017, which mapped youth service provision across the State, as well as an Area Profiling, Needs Assessment and Service Requirement tool which was designed in collaboration with the Education and Training Board (ETB) sector and was officially launched in January 2019. This mapping and tool will assist the Department and the relevant ETBs in developing a detailed social demographic profile in terms of both population numbers and deprivation levels.

My Department is committed to working with ETBs to identify requirements in their area and facilitate decisions on service requirement by reference to evidenced need.

Childcare Services Provision

446. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to assist in planning for provision of further childcare places in County Wicklow. [49112/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am committed to improving the provision of childcare throughout the State. I have successfully secured a 138% increase in the level of public investment in Early Learning and Care and School Aged Childcare services over the past 5 budgets. This extra investment has supported a doubling of capacity in the sector, including both Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and the provision of childcare to the 0-3 age group.

One of the key priorities for my Department’s capital programme is to support childcare providers to extend their existing services, or to establish new services, where need or demand exists.

My Department allocates capital funding on an annual basis. Providers are invited to submit applications setting out their grant request. All applications are appraised in a fair and impartial manner and on the basis of the quality of their application. Four providers in Co. Wicklow were allocated capital grants in 2019 to enable them to extend their services.

Finally, if the Deputy is aware of any specific cases of parents having difficulty accessing childcare places, the Wicklow County Childcare Committee will be pleased to assist them.

Childcare Services Regulation

447. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to ensure quality and safety in childcare providers in County Wicklow; and if she will make a state-
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department has made significant strides over the last number of years in progressing the quality agenda both nationally and locally, to enhance quality and safety in early learning and care and school-age childcare. Measures already undertaken and which will continue over the years ahead include:

- Introducing a minimum qualification requirement in law which ensures that all staff must have at least a Level 5 qualification in early childhood care and education
- Incentivising the recruitment of graduates. 25% of those working in the sector now have degrees in early childhood education and care
- Establishing the Better Start Quality Development Service that provides mentoring and training to services all across the country.
- Providing Learner Fund Bursaries and payments for participation in Continuing Professional Development, to support the upskilling of those working in the sector.
- Funding the provision of training in areas such as the curriculum and inclusion.
- Expanding and strengthening the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate, which is the statutory regulator of the sector. The number of inspections carried out by Tusla each year is nearly double what it was 5 years ago.
- Creating a register of providers, and giving Tusla the power to deregister providers and to attach conditions to their registration.
- Introducing “education-focused inspections” for the ECCE programme that are carried out by the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate on behalf of my Department.
- Supporting the 30 City and County Childcare Committees - including Wicklow County Childcare Committee - to assist my Department in ensuring that schemes and other initiatives we operate nationally meet local needs.
- Introducing (in 2019) the regulation of school age childcare for the first time.
- Consulting on a Draft Childminding Action Plan (published in August 2019 for the purpose of public consultation), which sets out how we propose to introduce the regulation of childminding over the years ahead and to open up a full range of supports for childminders, including supports for quality and safety.

In addition, First 5, our Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, which I published last year, sets out a wide range of further measures that I - working in collaboration with my colleagues in Government - intend to take. These include, for example, the Workforce Development Plan, work on which began earlier this year and which will set out a detailed plan of actions to achieve a graduate-led workforce in early learning and care settings by 2028. In relation to school-age childcare, following the initial Regulations introduced earlier this year, a public consultation took place in summer 2019 which will inform the development over the period ahead of comprehensive Regulations and a quality improvement framework for school-age childcare settings.

Following the recent broadcast of the RTÉ investigation, Behind Closed Doors, I wrote to the Chair of Tusla to ask what additional powers the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate might need. Following Tusla’s reply, my Department is now examining legislative options, which may include mechanisms to inform parents of inspection findings at an earlier stage, to require
services to display prominently their inspection status, and to alert parents in relation to the operation of unregistered services.

Additional powers for Tusla must form part of a multi-faceted approach that also includes: additional training for those working in the sector, with a renewed focus on the child protection training that is already under way; strengthened advisory supports before and after inspections; supporting the Garda Vetting process for the sector; and additional information for parents. In short, we need to keep strengthening the quality agenda we have been successfully pursuing over recent years.

Archival Material

448. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he has considered making data storage available to local historians and folklorists who require a large amount of data storage to preserve their material; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48662/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Department recognises the valuable local resource that archives represent and the importance of their proper management. Under Section 80 of the Local Government Act, 2001, it is a matter for each local authority Chief Executive, in the first instance, to ensure that the proper arrangements are in place for the proper management, custody, care and conservation of local records and archives and for their inspection by the public.

In that context, my Department is considering providing funding towards the Decade of Centenaries commemoration programme next year which will encompass the digitisation of relevant archives across the country.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

449. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the request (details supplied) for consideration to request an amendment to a grant allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48597/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The project referred to by the Deputy was approved for funding under the 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme. This project contained a number of complementary elements that were to be delivered through the grant funding provided.

My Department subsequently received a request to amend and/or remove a number of these elements. The requested changes were not approved by my Department as they represented a significant modification to the proposed project as assessed and approved.

In recent days I have directly received a request from the community group concerned to reconsider their proposal to alter the scope of this project. Following on from this request I have asked my officials to consider the matter further.

CLÁR Programme

450. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the
way in which an area can seek to be included as a CLÁR designated area. [48622/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population.

The areas originally selected for inclusion in the programme in 2001 were those which suffered the greatest population decline from 1926 to 1996. The Cooley Peninsula was also included on the basis of the serious difficulties caused in that area by Foot and Mouth disease. The average population loss in the original CLÁR areas over the period 1926 to 1996 was 50%.

In 2006, an analysis of the 2002 Census data was carried out by the NIRSA Institute at Maynooth University and the programme was extended to include areas with an average population loss of 35% between 1926 and 2002. The analysis of the Census data was carried out at a District Electoral Division (DED) level and all areas designated as being ‘CLÁR’ areas are at that level.

As the Deputy will be aware, the CLÁR programme was closed for new applications in 2010. However, I re-launched the programme in the second half of 2016, using as a base-line the areas identified in the work carried out by NIRSA in 2006.

I have initiated a review of the CLÁR programme which will examine CLÁR areas by reference to the 2016 Census of Population data. It will also consider whether there are any other factors that should be taken into account in designating areas for eligibility under CLÁR in the future.

My officials have been in contact with NIRSA in relation to review. I envisage that a wider stakeholder consultation will also take place as part of the process. Once completed, the review will help to inform the design of future CLÁR programmes and the areas covered.

Community Services Programme

451. Deputy Tony McLoughlin asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of an application for a manager by a company (details supplied) under the community services programme; when the applications will be decided upon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48727/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department’s Community Services Programme, or CSP, supports community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. CSP funding is provided as a fixed annual contribution towards the cost of an agreed number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions including a manager where appropriate. Some €46m is available to support community organisations under the programme in 2019.

CSP funding and other relevant supports, for new organisations are considered in light of qualification criteria and available budgets.

In that context, I can confirm that the organisation in question submitted an Expression of Interest (EOI) seeking support under the CSP on 11 March 2019. The EOI was reviewed for suitability and fit with the CSP and the organisation was approved for further Pobal engagement and support. The organisation has recently submitted a business plan for appraisal to Pobal, who manage the programme on behalf of my Department, and I expect that my Department will be in a position to make a decision on the application in the coming weeks.
CLÁR Programme

452. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if correspondence (details supplied) will be reviewed; the steps the school can take in its CLÁR application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48808/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population.

As I have pointed out previously, the areas included in the programme are based on an analysis of population loss in the Census of Population data at District Electoral Division (DED) level. The current designated CLÁR areas are based on work carried out by the NIRSA Institute at Maynooth University in 2006.

As the Deputy will be aware, I re-launched the CLÁR programme in 2016, after a period of some years when the programme was closed for new applications. The areas identified in the work carried out by NIRSA in 2006 were used as a base-line for the re-launched programme.

I have now initiated a review of the CLÁR programme which will examine CLÁR areas by reference to the 2016 Census of Population data. It will also consider whether there are any other factors that should be taken into account in designating areas for eligibility under CLÁR in the future. My officials have been in contact with NIRSA with a view to progressing the review.

I envisage that a wider stakeholder consultation will also take place as part of the process. Once completed, the review will help to inform the design of future CLÁR programmes and the areas covered.

I can confirm from the details supplied by the Deputy that the village referred to in her correspondence is not currently located in a CLÁR area and is therefore not eligible under the CLÁR programme at present. If the prospective applicant has not already done so, enquiries could be made to the Department of Education about the possibility of funding for the proposed project.

Rural Social Scheme

453. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he or his officials have had or are having discussions on the future of the RSS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49043/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** A series of bilateral meetings have taken place between my Department and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in the context of the work of the Interdepartmental Group (IDG) on Social Inclusion Work schemes, which included consideration of the RSS.

The report of the IDG is currently being finalised and I expect my colleague Minister Doherty will present it to cabinet in due course.

Social Welfare Benefits

454. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-
tion her plans to ensure that workers (details supplied) are able to access their social insurance benefits; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48860/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised that the matter raised by the Deputy is being investigated by my Department. Any workers affected should attend their local Intreo Centre where they can discuss their entitlements.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Budget 2020

455. Deputy Eamon Scanlon asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the date on which she declared an increase of €5 to welfare recipients across the board during her budget 2020 speech; if it includes all contributory and non-contributory pensions; her views on whether many pension recipients are receiving only a percentage of that increase; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49085/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As part of Budget 2020, I announced, on 8th October this year, that I was directing the resources available to me towards a series of targeted measures to ensure that the social welfare system supports the most vulnerable people in our society.

These measures include:

- A €5 increase to the living alone allowance for over 160,000 pensioners, widows and widowers and over 40,000 people with disabilities;

- Increases in the qualified child payment by €3 per week for children aged 12 and over and by €2 per week for under 12s, in recognition of the need for greater income support for welfare-dependent households with children;

- A further increase in the earnings disregard for the one parent family payment and jobseeker transition payment by €15 per week, increasing the incomes of working lone parents;

- Enhancement of the school meals programme to deliver hot meals instead of cold lunches to up to 35,000 children;

- Restoration of the full-rate of jobseeker’s allowance for 25-year-olds; and, for 18-24 year olds, payment of the full rate for young people living independently and in receipt of state housing supports;

- An increase of €10 per week in the income thresholds for the working family payment for families with up to 3 children;

- An increase in the fuel allowance payment by €2 per week, bringing its value to €686 over the course of the fuel season for 370,000 households.

I also introduced a disregard for Blind Welfare Allowance in social assistance schemes means tests and provided for an increase in the hours that carers can work or study outside the home from 15 hours to 18 and a half hours per week.

These increases and improvements to social welfare payments will take effect from week beginning 6th January 2020.
456. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an illness benefit appeal by a person (details submitted); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48528/19]

**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 referred on 27 September 2019 to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing. I have also been advised that, following initial consideration of the appeal, the Appeals Officer requested additional medical evidence from the person concerned on 7 November 2019.

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.

### Invalidity Pension Applications

457. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an invalidity pension application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48529/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for the lady concerned on 23 July 2019. Her application was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on 19 November 2019 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Fuel Allowance Applications

458. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a fuel allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48540/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Fuel allowance is a means-tested payment to assist householders on long-term social welfare payments towards the cost of their heating needs.

The main eligibility conditions that apply to the fuel allowance scheme are that a person must be in receipt of a qualifying payment, must satisfy a means test and must either be living alone or with other qualifying persons. The fuel allowance means test is linked to the maximum rate of the state pension (contributory). The applicant and their spouse can have a combined weekly household income of €100.00 above the maximum rates for state pension (contributory)
and Increase for qualified adult and still be eligible for a fuel allowance.

The person concerned applied for this allowance on 7 August 2019. Since it is a means-tested payment, additional information regarding means held by the couple was requested on 26 August 2019. A further request issued on 21 October 2019. There is still information outstanding, regarding a bank account and rate of UK pension, which is required for the means test to be completed.

The application for fuel allowance was disallowed based on non-disclosure of means and the person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 20 November 2019. However, if the requested information is provided, a Deciding Officer will review the application and notify the person of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

459. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an invalidity pension application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48541/19]

**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 referred on 4 November 2019 to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Data

460. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if information (details supplied) will be provided in tabular form. [48545/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** As the Deputy will be aware, JobPath is a case management service that provides employment counselling and advice to long-term unemployed jobseekers with a view to improving their prospects of securing sustained full-time employment.

The service is provided to help and support clients to identify and pursue suitable job opportunities themselves with the help of a Personal Adviser. Support can range from CV preparation, to assisting with job applications, to, in some cases, financial assistance for clothing or transport costs at interview stage or in the first days of employment.

The data requested in questions (a) - (d) is too voluminous to be answered in this Parliamentary Question. Therefore my officials will provide the data requested directly to the Deputy. I am advised that data is not compiled on referrals or employments by contractor office, however we can supply this data by county to the Deputy.
The total amount of fees paid by my Department to the JobPath Providers from January 2016 to the end of June 2019 is as per Table 1 below.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount paid to Seetec</th>
<th>Amount Paid to Turas Nua</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>€10.7m</td>
<td>€14.5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>€27.6m</td>
<td>€29.8m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>€38.1m</td>
<td>€33.6m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019 (Jan-June)</td>
<td>€18.2m</td>
<td>€13.8m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Welfare Benefits Waiting Times

461. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason for the delay in processing medical evidence with the medical review and assessments department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48546/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Medical Review and Assessment Section (MRAS), in conjunction with individual scheme business sections, co-ordinates and manages all referrals for assessment to the Medical Assessors.

The Department offers a number of schemes on illness, disability; carers and occupational injury and applications vary in volume and frequency both yearly and seasonally.

High volume and resource intensive schemes like Domiciliary Care Allowance and Disability Allowance would have a higher proportion of Medical Assessors delegated to assessing these schemes. Medical Assessors are assigned to specific schemes on a daily basis.

The length of time taken for each scheme for desk assessments varies depending on the complexities of the case and the volume of documents submitted, Domiciliary Care Allowance is one such example. Therefore it is not feasible to allocate a fixed time for each case as they are unique in their own way even with clients of similar diagnosis. The Medical Assessor will take the time as required to read, analyse and evaluate each case in the assessment and arrives at the clinical opinion for capacity for work or the need for full time care. Furthermore, the Medical Assessor will take the time to prepare the narrative for the reasoning in the event of a not eligible opinion.

My department has efficiently reduced waiting times for medical assessments of claim applications in all schemes to between one to four weeks.

I hope this satisfactorily clarifies the concerns raised by the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

462. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48553/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I confirm that an application from this gentleman for disability
allowance (DA) was received by the Department on 22 July 2019.

On 26 September 2019 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on his eligibility.

The application has been referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for a report on the person’s means and circumstances. Once the SWI has submitted his/her report to DA section, a decision will be made on the application and this gentleman will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

463. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of efforts to address the pension issues for community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors based on the 2008 Labour Court recommendation and in view of the Fianna Fáil motion on the issue, which was passed by Dáil Éireann in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48591/19]

 **Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Community Employment (CE) programme is designed to enhance employability by providing work experience and training opportunities for people within their communities.

The programme is operated by CE Sponsors, who are typically voluntary and community organisations wishing to benefit the local community. These CE Sponsoring organisations contract, as independent employers, with my Department on an annual basis, to provide job seekers and other vulnerable groups with good quality work experience and training qualifications within their communities to support their progression into employment.

Under the annual agreement my Department funds the employment of CE participants, and provides funding towards training, material and supervisory costs. Grant aid is provided by my Department to cover these costs on a per capita basis. The agreement clearly establishes the role of the CE Sponsor as an independent contractor, responsible for all persons recruited by them.

I am very aware of the valuable and dedicated service that Community Employment (CE) sponsor organisations provide in running CE Schemes across the country. CE supervisors, as employees of these organisations, are an integral part of that good work. However, CE supervisors are not employed by my Department, nor are they public servants.

My Department is currently engaging with representatives of CE supervisors to discuss issues arising following that 2008 Labour Court Recommendation and all parties have agreed that the detail of all discussions undertaken by the group should remain confidential until the process has completed. I expect an outcome shortly.

Carer’s Benefit Applications

464. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision has been made on an application for carer’s benefit by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48607/19]
Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer’s benefit (CARB) is a payment made to insured people who leave the workforce to care for a child or an adult in need of full-time care and attention. An increased payment can be made where full-time care is being provided to two people.

To qualify the carer must satisfy PRSI conditions, employment conditions, show that they are providing full-time care and attention and must show that the care recipient requires full-time care and attention.

An application for CARB was received from the person concerned on the 1st October 2019. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

In the meantime if the person concerned is experiencing financial difficulties, she can contact her local Intreo Centre to apply for a means-tested payment under the Department’s Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) scheme.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer’s Support Grant

465. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a carer’s support grant payment will be made available to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48614/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Carer’s Support Grant is an annual payment paid by my Department to full-time carers.

The person concerned was awarded the 2018 and 2019 Grants on 4 October 2019. Written notification of this award was sent to her that day. An amount of €3,400 (€1,700 for 2018 and €1,700 for 2019) was sent to her nominated bank account on 10 October 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Free Travel Scheme Eligibility

466. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application by a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48624/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned applied for a Companion Free Travel Pass on 26 August 2019. The application was assessed by the Department’s Medical Adviser on 07 September 2019. Based on the medical evidence provided, the application was disallowed on 14 September 2019.

It is open to the person concerned to provide additional (or specialist) medical evidence in support of their claim for a Companion Free Travel Pass. If further evidence is provided, the matter will be re-examined.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Eligibility
467. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a full invalidity pension will be awarded to a person (details supplied). [48669/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for the lady concerned on 11 September 2019. This claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on the 20 November 2019 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

468. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48682/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned was notified of the Appeals Officer’s decision on 20 November 2019.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Data

469. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons referred to JobPath; the number of persons referred twice, three and four times, respectively, having already spent at least one year on the scheme previously, in tabular form. [48686/19]

470. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of registration fees paid in respect of JobPath referrals since 2015; the number of registration fees paid in respect of the same person twice, three and four times, respectively, in circumstances in which the person had spent at least one year on the scheme previously, in tabular form. [48687/19]

471. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons referred to JobPath in the first year; and the number of those referred in the first year who sourced employment that was sustained for 52 weeks, in tabular form. [48688/19]

472. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection...
the number of persons referred to JobPath in the second year; and the number of those referred in the second year who sourced employment that was sustained for 52 weeks, in tabular form. [48689/19]

473. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons referred to JobPath in the third year; and the number of those referred in the third year who sourced employment that was sustained for 52 weeks, in tabular form. [48690/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 469 to 473, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the primary purpose of JobPath is to provide a case management based employment advice and counselling service to long term unemployed jobseekers. Between July 2015 and October 2019, some 247,296 jobseekers had commenced their engagement period with the JobPath service. Of this number, 52% were unemployed for over three years. This group, in particular, faces significant barriers when seeking to enter or return to employment in the labour market.

The numbers of clients to engage with the JobPath service for the first three years and their employment outcomes are set out in Table 1 below. It should be noted that many clients who are currently engaged with JobPath are still in the first phase of the service. They have not had sufficient time with the service to have gained employment nor sustain that employment for up to 52 weeks. Furthermore, as many clients who have commenced employment will have done so less than 52 weeks ago the numbers sustaining employment for 52 weeks is expected to increase over time. This is particularly relevant for those clients who commenced an engagement with the service in 2018.

The number of Jobseekers engaged with JobPath and the number of current subsequent engagements is set out in Table 2 below.

The number of registration fees paid in respect of JobPath referrals since 2015 as well as the number of registration fees paid in respect of the same person twice, three and four times are set out in Table 3 below. Registration fees are incurred when a client engages with the JobPath service and agrees a personal progression plan. However, due to the validation process there is a time difference between the date of the client engagement and the payment of the registration fee.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**Table 1: Jobseekers engaged with JobPath & Outcomes Years 1 - 3**

For the purposes of the JobPath Contracts 2015 and 2016 are considered to be Contract Year 1, however, for convenience the table below is presented by calendar year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contract Year</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Jobseekers engaged with the JobPath service</th>
<th>Number of Job Starts (One per referral*)</th>
<th>Numbers who sustained 52 weeks Employment (to date)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>6,591</td>
<td>1,659</td>
<td>644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>65,461</td>
<td>14,413</td>
<td>5,432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>74,869</td>
<td>21,618</td>
<td>8,762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>60,848</td>
<td>14,505</td>
<td>3,021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Jobseekers may have multiple job starts during an engagement period, however, for the purposes of the above statistics only one job start per referral has been counted.*
Table 2: Jobseekers engaged with JobPath & the current number of re-engagements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Jobseekers engagements with JobPath July 2015 - End-October 2019</td>
<td>247,296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Jobseekers to complete at least one full engagement period with JobPath.</td>
<td>138,446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Jobseekers currently engaged with service for the 2nd time having previously completed one full engagement period.</td>
<td>27,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Jobseekers currently engaged with service for the 3rd time having previously completed two full engagement periods.</td>
<td>1,555</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Registration Fees Processed for payment July 2015 - End October 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registration Fees Processed for payment July 2015 - November 2019</th>
<th>Total Number of Unique Clients</th>
<th>Total Registration Fees paid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 registration fee paid only</td>
<td>156759</td>
<td>156759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 registration fees paid only</td>
<td>42060</td>
<td>84120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 registration fees paid only</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>5916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 registration fees paid only</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>200805</td>
<td>246851</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Carer’s Allowance Payments

474. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when arrears will issue to a person (details supplied) in respect of a carer’s allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48704/19]

**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.

I can confirm that arrears of carers allowance due from 6 December 2018 to 5 June 2019, for the amount of €4,075.50, will be issued to the nominated bank account of the person concerned on 28 November 2019.

The person concerned was notified of this on 21 November 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

475. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a social welfare appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48708/19]

**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. 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 10 October 2019 and the case has been assigned 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 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.

**Carer’s Allowance Applications**

476. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made regarding a carer’s allowance application by a person (details supplied) that is ongoing since January 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48716/19]

**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.

My department received an application for carer’s allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 9 August 2019.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 20 November 2019 and the first payment will issue to her nominated Post Office on 28 November 2019.

Arrears of allowance due from 15 August 2019 to 20 November 2019 will issue shortly.

The person concerned also applied for her payment to be backdated to the date from which domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was awarded in respect of her son. DCA was awarded on 5 November 2018, backdated to 1 November 2017. I am advised that this request was disallowed as she had not applied for CA within the 6 month allowable timeframe from the date which DCA was awarded from.

The person concerned was notified on 20 November 2019 of these decisions, the reason for them and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**Working Family Payment Applications**

477. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48745/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):**
Working Family Payment (formerly Family Income Supplement) is a weekly tax free payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

WFP for the person concerned was due for renewal from 30 October 2019 and an application was received on 29 August 2019.

In order to process the claim, as the person concerned had a 2nd employment further information was requested on 21 October 2019 and this information was provided to us on 18 November 2019.

The person concerned has now been awarded WFP with effect from 31 October 2019 to 28 October 2020.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Payments

478. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if disability allowance arrears will issue to a person (details supplied); the details of the amount and arrears due to the person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48747/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 15 May 2019. The first payment was made by her chosen payment method on 17 October 2019.

Arrears of payment due were calculated to take account of any overlapping payments and have issued to the person concerned on 24 October 2019. A breakdown of this figure has also issued to this lady.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

479. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position of workers who will retire in 2020 at 65 years of age but will not be entitled to a contributory pension until 67 years of age; if they will have an entitlement to jobseeker’s payment between their retirements and pension entitlement age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48750/19]

489. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to ensure that persons who must retire at 65 years of age due to their contracts of employment but will not qualify for the State pension until 67 years of age from 2021 are in a position to avail of social welfare support for the intervening period; her plans to make changes in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48956/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 479 and 489 together.

Increasing pension age, to moderate the increase in pension duration, is a means by which pensions can be made sustainable in the context of increasing longevity. In order to provide for sustainable pensions and to facilitate a longer working life, legislation passed in 2011 provides
for an increase in the State pension age in three separate stages. In 2014, the State pension age was standardised at 66. This will be increased to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028. The Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023 has stated that future changes in State pension age after 2035 will be based on research into life expectancy.

This sustainability is vital, if the current workers, who fund State pension payments through their PRSI, are to receive a pension themselves when they reach retirement age. It is the only feasible solution which does not involve reducing pension rates to pensioners (which would result in an increase in the rate of poverty among older people), or reducing other significant areas of Government expenditure (such as other payments made by my Department).

In most cases, it is hoped that workers will continue to work up to State pension age, and so the question of claiming a social protection payment would not arise. Where this is not possible and a person ceases their employment before reaching State pension age, they may apply for either the jobseeker’s benefit or jobseeker’s allowance schemes. Jobseeker’s payments are currently paid to eligible jobseekers aged 18 to 66 years subject to the person satisfying the general scheme conditions. Social Welfare legislation states that jobseeker payments may be made until the person reaches pensionable age provided they satisfy the necessary contribution conditions.

It is important to note that there is no legally mandated retirement age in the State, and the age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers. While such a contract may have been entered into with a retirement age of 65, in the context of the previous State pension arrangements, there is no legal impediment to the employer and employee agreeing to increase the duration of employment for one or more years, if both parties wish to do so. In this regard, the Workplace Relations Commission has produced a Code of Practice on Longer Working and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) has published guidance material for employers on the use of fixed-term contracts beyond normal retirement age.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

**State Pension (Non-Contributory) Applications**

480. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a State pension by a person (details supplied) in County Kildare. [48755/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for state pension non-contributory was received from the person concerned on 7 November 2019. A request for further information in relation to this pension claim was issued to the person concerned on 19 November 2019.

On receipt of the requested information, the person’s eligibility for pension will be examined and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome in writing.

I hope that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**Social Welfare Benefits**

481. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the social welfare payment a person (details supplied) is receiving; the value of same; if the person’s carer’s allowance payment has ceased; if there is an application with her Depart-
ment for disability or invalidity for the person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48756/19]

**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.

The person concerned was in receipt of carer’s allowance until 31 October 2019, at which time it was stopped as the care recipient went into full-time residential care in a nursing home.

The person concerned has been awarded a basic supplementary welfare allowance of €40.20 effective as of 7 November 2019. The three weeks of these payments due were issued as one payment of €120.60 on 21 November 2019. She has also received an Exceptional Needs Payment of €150 on 21 November 2019.

The person concerned submitted an application for Disability Allowance (DA) on 12 July 2019. I am advised that their application, based upon all the evidence submitted, was disallowed on medical grounds as it was not found that this lady was substantially restricted in taking up employment. The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 30 September 2019.

The person requested a review of the decision by a deciding officer (DO) and submitted additional medical evidence for consideration on 9 October 2019 and on 8 November 2019.

The person in question has also submitted an appeal, on the DA decision, to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). All the relevant papers requested by that Office are being prepared and will be submitted by the Department shortly. The SWAO will be in touch with the person in due course in relation to the appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**Local Employment Service**

482. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the provision of the local employment service will be put out to public tender; the steps being taken to prepare for same; if she will ensure that there is a social benefit clause included in future tender documents in order that the service remains focused on the community; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48794/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):**

The Local Employment Services are contracted by my Department on an annual basis to provide activation services to those on the Live Register, as well as “drop-ins” to these services. These contracts are reviewed annually to ensure they are fit-for-purpose in the context of the Irish labour market, as well as providing value for money for taxpayers.

Indecon, in its reviews of the LES and Job Clubs published last January, recommended that the Department consider the introduction of multiannual contracts and a competitive procurement process for future provision of these services. The Department has also received legal advice to the effect that renewing the LES and Job Clubs contracts annually, without any movement towards competitive procurement, is no longer sustainable.

This, combined with the closure of the JobPath contracts to new referrals at the end of 2020,
provides my Department with the opportunity to review all contracted public employment services. The aim is to design and introduce a comprehensive model that will incorporate various models of response and be fit for purpose for the Irish labour market from 2021 onwards.

In September, my Department published a Request for Tender for consultancy services, to provide advice, support and assist with the procurement of contracted public employment services in Ireland, covering the period 2021-2025. It is anticipated that the successful tenderer will provide the Department with a final report in the second quarter of 2020. In the interim, no changes will be made to the current contracting process for Local Employment Services for 2020.

As part of the review of Local Employment Services officials from my Department are currently holding a series of engagements with Local Employment Servicers and Job Clubs across the State in order to hear the views of those currently providing activation services on the ground on behalf of the Department. Their views will feed into the Department’s considerations in developing an appropriate contracted public employment service for the future.

I am on the record in recognising the valuable work performed by Local Employment Services. It is my view that, within the parameters of current procurement rules, any future procurement process give due recognition to the ability to deliver high quality, locally-based services.

Indeed, it is in everyone’s interests - jobseekers, service providers and the State - to ensure, insofar as it is possible, that experienced employment service providers with a strong community ethos continue to form a core part of our employment services infrastructure.

**Pensions Data**

483. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of reinstating the transition State pension in each of the years 2020 to 2026. [48850/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The purpose of changes to the State pension age is to make the pension system more sustainable in the context of increasing life expectancy. If there is no change in State pension age, the proportion of a person’s life spent in retirement will increase to levels where current workers will no longer be able to support current pensioners.

This sustainability is vital, if the current workers, who fund State pension payments through their PRSI, are to receive a pension themselves when they reach retirement age. Therefore, the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This began in January 2014 with the abolition of the State pension (transition) which was available to people aged 65 who had retired and who satisfied the PRSI qualifying conditions. This measure standardised the State pension age for all at 66 years. This is in keeping with similar measures being employed by most EU and OECD countries.

My Department’s current estimate is that the net annual cost of restoring the State pension (Transition) would be €150.5m including PRSI foregone and secondary benefits. Thus the high level estimated cost for the period 2020 - 2026 would be well over €1 Billion.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.
484. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of not implementing the pension age increase to 67 years of age in each of the years 2020 to 2026. [48851/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Increasing pension age, to moderate the increase in pension duration, is a means by which pensions can be made sustainable in the context of increasing longevity. In order to provide for sustainable pensions and to facilitate a longer working life, legislation passed in 2011 provides for an increase in the State pension age in three separate stages. In 2014, the State pension age was standardised at 66. This will be increased to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028. The Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023 has stated that future changes in State pension age after 2035 will be based on research into life expectancy. This is in keeping with similar measures introduced by most EU and OECD countries.

This sustainability is vital, if the current workers, who fund State pension payments through their PRSI, are to receive a pension themselves when they reach retirement age. It is the only feasible solution which does not involve reducing pension rates to pensioners (which would result in an increase in the rate of poverty among older people), or reducing other significant areas of Government expenditure (such as other payments made by my Department).

It is estimated that the gross cost to the State Pension (Contributory) of postponing the increase in State Pension Age would be approximately €430m per annum, but the net cost is closer to €217.5 million per annum. The estimates factor in secondary costs such as foregone PRSI receipts and additional Household Benefit payments.

Therefore the estimated net cost for the period 2020 - 2026 would be over €1.5 Billion.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**Unfair Dismissals**

485. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person cannot be dismissed from a job on the grounds that he or she is claiming the carer’s allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48907/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977 to 2015 provide protection for employees from being unfairly dismissed from their jobs by laying down criteria on which the fairness or otherwise of dismissals can be judged. The Acts provide that every dismissal of an employee will be presumed to have been unfair unless the employer can show substantial grounds justifying the dismissal. There are currently no provisions contained in the Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977 to 2015 to provide that a person cannot be dismissed from their job on the grounds that they are claiming the carer’s allowance.

The Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 provides that a carer can work or study outside the home to a limited extent while still receiving the allowance. From 6th January 2020, the number of hours allowed will increase from 15 hours to 18.5 hours.

Where an individual believes they are being deprived of employment rights, they may refer a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) where the matter can be dealt with by way of mediation or adjudication, leading to a decision that is enforceable through the District Court.
Complaints can be made on an online complaint form available at the WRC’s website www.workplacerelations.ie. The WRC’s Customer Service Section, which provides information to both employers and employees in relation to employment, equality and industrial relations rights and obligations, can be contacted at Lo-call: 1890 80 80 90 or 059-9178990.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Guardian’s Payment

486. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if arrears of payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [48920/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned was awarded guardians non contributory payment with effect from 23rd August 2019. Payment commenced at their nominated Post Office from the 15th November 2019.

My Department is in the process of calculating the arrears due from 23rd August 2019. Any arrears due will issue shortly.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Living Alone Allowance

487. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a living alone application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48921/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The living alone allowance is an additional payment of €9.00 per week made to people aged 66 years of age or over who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments and who live entirely alone. It is only available to people who are under 66 years of age, if they are in receipt of disability allowance, invalidity pension, incapacity supplement or blind pension.

As the person concerned is under age 66 years and is not in receipt of a qualifying payment it was decided on the 22nd November 2019 they are not eligible for the living alone allowance increase. The person concerned has been notified of outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

488. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied) regarding the right of pensioners to representation regarding the future of their pensions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48939/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Deputy will appreciate that I am unable to comment on issues relating to a particular pension scheme.

My Department has no role in setting the level of pension increases received by members of
occupational pension schemes. Pension increases are entirely a matter for the scheme trustees and the sponsoring employer. Matters directly related to the sponsoring employer referred to in the details supplied come under the remit of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

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 are a matter for the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 489 answered with Question No. 479.*

**Carer’s Allowance Appeals**

490. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a carer’s allowance review will be finalised for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48966/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):**

Firstly I would like to offer my condolences to Ms Miskells family at this difficult time.

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.
My department received an application for carer’s allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 26 July 2018. The application was awarded to the person concerned on 16 January 2019. She was notified of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

A review was initiated on 29 August 2019. A deciding officer has requested further information in relation to the legal representative of the person concerned. Once the legal representative has been established, the deciding officer can progress the review. As soon as this information is received the matter will be dealt with promptly.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker’s Allowance Applications

491. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will have a decision on a social welfare claim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48976/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I can advise that Jobseeker’s Allowance has been approved for the person concerned with effect from the 31-May-2019 at the weekly rate of €274.50.

The first payment will be in the Post Office on Wednesday 27th November, and arrears will be calculated and included in the following weeks payment.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

492. Deputy Tom Neville asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a fuel allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48982/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A Fuel Allowance is a payment under the National Fuel Scheme which may be payable to certain households in receipt of long term Social Welfare payments who are unable to provide for their heating needs. Fuel allowance is a means tested payment and all income, including private/occupational pensions and capital such as savings and investments are taken into account.

A single person, under age 80, can have €348.30 per week income (the equivalent of the maximum State Pension Contributory plus €100) and still qualify for fuel allowance.

It was decided on the 19th November 2019 that the person concerned was not entitled to a fuel allowance as their income from employment was in excess of the fuel weekly income threshold. The person concerned was notified of outcome.

If the financial circumstances of the person concerned changes in the future, it is open to them to re-apply for the allowance.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications
493. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision has been reached regarding the date on which the entitlement of a person commenced (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48993/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned has been examined and payment has now been awarded from 25 February 2019, which is the first date she was medically certified as unfit for work.

Payment due from 25 February 2019 to 13 June 2019 has issued and accordingly the person has now been paid the full amount due from 25 February 2019 to date.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**Paternity Benefit Applications**

494. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if he will address a matter regarding a delay in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49000/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Paternity benefit claims are processed promptly and are ready for payment in advance of the person taking the leave, where the required advance notice is provided. Claimants are advised, via the Department’s website www.welfare.ie, that they should apply for the payment 4 weeks before they intend to go on paternity leave and that this should be increased to 12 weeks if they are self-employed. This is to allow adequate time to process the claim.

A claim for paternity benefit was received from the person concerned on 1st November 2019, in relation to a leave period which he had already taken. As he is self-employed the enquiries are underway to confirm eligibility, as advised on the Department’s website.

This claim will be processed as soon as possible and a decision will issue direct to the person concerned.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**Household Benefits Scheme**

495. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49012/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** An application for the Household Benefits Package was received from the person concerned on 4 November 2019. The application was disallowed, as the person concerned is under age 66 and is not in receipt of a qualifying payment. I am further advised that the person concerned does not qualify for a widow(er)’s concession arrangement as their late spouse/partner was not in receipt of the Household Benefits Package prior to their date of death.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.
Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

496. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will review correspondence regarding community employment, CE, scheme supervisors (details supplied); if the laws will be expedited and put into action; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49027/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Community Employment Scheme (CE) is an active labour market programme designed to provide eligible long-term unemployed people and other disadvantaged persons with an opportunity to engage in useful work within their communities on a temporary, fixed term basis.

The programme is delivered through independent Community Employment Sponsoring Bodies. The contract agreement between my Department and the Community Employment Sponsoring Body establishes their role as an independent contractor, responsible for all purposes and all persons recruited by them.

CE Supervisors are not employed by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and are not public servants. CE Supervisors have always been employees of Community Employment Sponsoring Bodies which operate in the community and voluntary sector.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Department is currently engaging with representatives of CE supervisors to discuss issues arising following that 2008 Labour Court Recommendation. All parties agreed that the detail of all discussions undertaken by the group should remain confidential until the process had completed. That process is still ongoing and therefore I would ask Deputies to continue to respect the confidentiality of the discussions and to allow them to continue free from speculation.

In relation to the Workplace Relations Commission judgement, my Department received the Adjudication Officer’s decision on Monday 4th November, 2019. The Department has reviewed that decision and has sought legal advice on it.

I am very aware of the valuable and dedicated service that Community Employment (CE) sponsor organisations provide in running CE Schemes across the country. CE supervisors, as employees of these organisations, are an integral part of that good work.

**Disability Allowance Eligibility**

497. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider introducing a rent or mortgage disregard for the disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49038/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The system of social assistance supports provides payments based on an income need. The means test plays a critical role in determining whether or not an income need arises as a consequence of a particular contingency – such as disability, unemployment or caring. This ensures that the recipient has a verifiable income need and that resources are targeted to those who need them most.

By its nature, the means test takes account of the income a person or couple has in terms of cash, property - other than the family home - and capital. It does not take account of a person’s expenditure. In line with most social assistance payments, deductions permitted for disability allowance include PRSI, union dues and superannuation (pension contributions).
Introducing a rent or mortgage disregard for disability allowance would have significant budgetary implications, and would give rise to inconsistencies in how means tests are applied across schemes. It would also significantly increase the complexity of the means assessment.

In relation to means testing, disability allowance has the highest capital disregard of any scheme operated by the Department. A recipient can have up to €50,000 in savings and still receive the full rate of payment. This is compared to €20,000 for most social welfare payments. In addition to this, disability allowance recipients may work and earn up to €120 per week without their payment being affected.

It should also be noted that people receiving disability allowance may also be eligible for secondary benefits such as free travel, fuel allowance, the household benefits package, living alone allowance and the telephone support allowance. Depending on their circumstance, recipients may also be entitled to rent supplement or housing assistance payment, to help meet housing expenses.

Any changes to the means assessment for disability allowance would have to be considered in the overall policy and budgetary context.

**Rural Social Scheme Administration**

498. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to move the responsibility for the rural social scheme, RSS, to another Department; if she or her officials have had or are having discussions on the issue; if so, the status of the discussions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49042/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** In early 2019, the Government agreed to establish an Interdepartmental Group (IDG) to explore the most appropriate organisation arrangements to include social inclusion schemes including the Rural Social Scheme (RSS).

A series of meetings of the IDG have taken place and a number of bilateral meetings were undertaken with the relevant Departments with included discussions on the rural social scheme. In addition to this, written submissions were received from key stakeholders and community groups. All submissions received were considered as part of the deliberation process. The final report of the IDG is expected to be available shortly.

The priority for my Department is to ensure that all employment programmes and incentives including RSS will be focused, targeted and suitable for the needs of low income farmers and fishermen into the future.

**Guardian’s Payment Applications**

499. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps she will take to expedite an application for a guardianship payment by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49077/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Guardians’ payments are made to a person caring for a child, where that child is defined as an “orphan” under social welfare legislation.

In deciding whether a child can be considered an “orphan” for the purpose of this payment,
the Deciding Officer must, in cases where the child has one or both parents still living, be satisfied that the child has been abandoned and that their parent or parents have “failed to provide” for them.

The claim to a guardians payment of the person concerned is currently under consideration. When all enquiries are made and all the necessary information is available to the Deciding Officer, a decision will be made. The person concerned will be notified of outcome without delay.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

500. Deputy Marc MacSharry asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will receive a decision on an invalidity pension application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49083/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The gentleman referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 11 July 2019. Payment will issue to his nominated bank account on 28 November 2019. Any arrears due from 11 July 2019 to 27 November 2019 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue as soon as possible. The gentleman in question was notified of this decision on 21 November 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

501. Deputy Marc MacSharry asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will receive a decision on an invalidity pension application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49090/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for this lady on the 02 April 2019. Her claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on 08 August 2019 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The lady concerned subsequently requested a review of the decision and submitted further medical evidence in support of her request.

Following a review of all the information available the lady referred to has been awarded IP with effect from 04 April 2019. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 05 December 2019. Any arrears due from 04 April 2019 to 04 December 2019 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue as soon as possible. The lady in question was notified of this decision on the 22 November 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.
502. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a living alone allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49114/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The living alone allowance is an additional payment of €9 per week made to people aged 66 years or over who live alone and are in receipt of certain social welfare payments. It is only available to people who are under 66 years of age, if they are in receipt of disability allowance, invalidity pension, incapacity supplement or blind pension.

As the person concerned is under age 66 years of age and is not in receipt of a qualifying payment it was decided on the 19th November 2019 that they are not eligible for a living alone allowance increase. The person concerned was notified of the decision on the same date.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**Invalidity Pension Applications**

503. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an invalidity pension will be made available to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49157/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** An application for invalidity pension (IP) was received from the lady concerned on 17 September 2019. This lady has been awarded IP with effect from 31 January 2019 to 06 February 2019. Payment of arrears due from 31 January 2019 to 06 February 2019 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue to her nominated bank account as soon as possible. The lady in question was notified of this decision on 21 November 2019. This lady may have an entitlement to state pension contributory from 07 February 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**Building Regulations**

504. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there are targets in place to increase the use of timber in the construction of houses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49092/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The aim of the Building Regulations is to provide for the safety and welfare of people in and about buildings. The Building Regulations apply to the design and construction of a building or to an extension or material alteration of a building. These regulations set out the minimum performance requirements that a building must achieve. Building Regulations and procurement processes are performance based. As such there cannot be a target set for specific construction materials. The requirements of the Building Regulations are set out in 12 parts classified as Parts A to M. In support of these the department has issued Technical Guidance Documents (TGD A - M) which provide technical guidance on how to comply with the building regulations in practical terms.
TGD D (Materials and Workmanship) requires “proper materials”. This means materials that are fit for the use for which they are intended and for the conditions in which they are to be used, and includes materials which comply with an appropriate Irish Standard.

The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) have issued the Timber Frame Dwellings Standard, IS 440, which sets the requirements for construction of timber frame dwellings. TGD A (Structure) recognises and takes account of the IS 440 timber frame standard for dwellings. NSAI facilitates industry standards committees in the area of timber construction materials.

The Office of Public Works is leading an action of the Climate Action Plan to develop a roadmap to promote greater use of lower-carbon building material alternatives in construction. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is leading a range of additional actions to work with industry stakeholders to increase the use of low carbon materials, taking into account international best practice.

**Property Tax Review**

505. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress the baseline review group has made regarding the local property tax to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48566/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): In May 2018, a Local Government Funding (Baseline) Review Group was established to consider the methodology to determine local authority funding baselines, to inform the distribution of any additional funding that could become available for general, operational purposes.

Recommendations were received from the Review Group in August 2018 and these fall to be considered in the context of the review of Local Property Tax (LPT) undertaken by the Department of Finance. When the ongoing process in relation to the consideration of that Review of LPT is concluded by the Department of Finance, the work of the Baseline Review Group will be considered further.

**Planning Data**

506. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Part 8 housing planning applications that have been refused planning permission in each local authority in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48551/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authority “own” developments prescribed in Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, are exempted development under section 4 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and therefore no planning application is required for local authority development of this nature.

Section 179 of the 2000 Act provides that, with certain exceptions, Part 8 type development proposals require a public consultation process and the consent by resolution of the elected members of the local authority in order to proceed. Further to the public consultation on such proposed development and the Chief Executive’s report on the public consultation, the pro-
posed development may be carried out as recommended in the Chief Executive’s report unless
the elected members of the local authority, by resolution, decide to vary or modify the develop-
ment otherwise than as recommended in the Chief Executive’s report, or decide not to proceed
with the development.

As Part 8 type developments are exempt from planning permission, my Department does
not compile statistics in this regard and individual local authorities should be contacted for the
information sought.

Fire Safety Regulations

507. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-
ment if he is satisfied that fire safety regulations are up to date, especially in terms of multi-
occupancy buildings such as student accommodation; and if guidelines have been issued as
regards cladding. [48585/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):
The design and construction of buildings is regulated under the Building Control Acts 1990
to 2014. The building regulations set the minimum performance requirements that a building
must achieve, to provide for the health, safety and welfare of people in and about buildings.
The building regulations apply to the design and construction of a building, material alterations
or extensions of a building, provision of certain services, fittings and equipment and the mate-
rial change of use of a building. The requirements of the building regulations are set out in 12
parts classified as Parts A to M. Technical Guidance Documents (TGDs) provide guidance on
how to comply with the building regulations in practical terms. Where works are carried out in
accordance with the guidance, this will, prima facie, indicate compliance with the requirements
of the building regulations.

Part B/TGD B of the building regulations deals with Fire Safety. Part B approaches fire
safety in buildings from 5 perspectives;

- the provision of a satisfactory means of escape for people in the event of a fire, and
- the limiting of fire spread over internal linings, and
- the stability of buildings in the event of a fire, and
- the limiting of fire spread over external surfaces and to another building, and
- the provision of access and facilities for firefighters.

A full and comprehensive review of Part B & TGD B, 2006 has been ongoing for a number
of years now.

Following a consultation process on the Part B/TGD B 2006, and in the interests of clarity
a decision was made, in 2014, to develop TGD B into two volumes: Volume 1: Buildings other
than dwelling houses and Volume 2: Dwelling Houses.

In 2017, a new Part B/ TGD B Volume 2 was published and came into force on 1 July 2017.
This applies to dwelling houses.

Work is progressing on Volume 1 - Buildings other than dwelling houses at present, this
volume will include student accommodation, apartments, offices, etc. The issues and ongo-
ing reports on the Grenfell fire are important sources of information for this work. The review
also considers common and emerging building trends, international developments and events, matters relating to external fire spread, external fire resistance, internal fire resistance, cladding systems, sprinklers, etc. It is intended to publish a draft for public consultation in 2020.

In parallel with the full review, my Department is preparing additional guidance to TGD B 2006 on open plan apartments, which will be published shortly. Currently there is no guidance in the TGD on this increasingly popular form of apartment design. This will provide both local authorities and industry with greater clarity on how to demonstrate compliance with Part B for open plan apartments, promote greater consistency across the country and streamline the process for demonstrating compliance.

Separately, following the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy, in June 2017, I established a Fire Safety Task Force to examine fire safety in Ireland. As part of the work of the Task Force, my Department requested fire services to identify medium-to-high rise (greater than eighteen metres, or greater than six storeys in height) buildings fitted with cladding systems. Fire services were also asked to consider whether use of their power under section 18(6) of the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003 – to require the person having control over the building to carry out a fire safety assessment of the building, including the cladding system – was warranted.

Countrywide, fire safety assessments were required in respect of 210 buildings – including 103 residential buildings. To support these assessments, as part of the work of the Task Force, guidance was developed and issued in December 2017. The guidance provides information on methods and standards to be used in assessment of cladding systems, as well as interim fire safety measures for application, pending completion of remedial works to cladding systems, where necessary. The guidance will be of assistance to those carrying out assessments, as well as to fire services who appraise assessments provided to them in respect of identified buildings.

The most recent information provided to my Department by fire services indicates that, so far, eight buildings have been identified where some remedial works to cladding systems will be necessary.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Status

508. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the sewage treatment works at the unfinished housing estates (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48612/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** On 23 July this year my Department launched the multi-annual Developer Provided Water Services Infrastructure Resolution Programme. In parallel to this, local authorities were invited to submit their bids under the programme for the funding of projects in their functional area. The development of such a multi-annual funding programme was a key recommendation of the report on the National Taking-in-Charge Initiative that was published by my Department in December 2018.

The programme will enable the progressive resolution, on a priority basis, of substandard Developer-Provided Water Services Infrastructure, commonly called DPI, much of which was installed in housing estates during the building boom of the late 1990’s and early 2000’s. These privately owned and temporary facilities provide mostly wastewater treatment with a small number providing drinking water.

The closing date for bids under the programme was 18 September 2019. A total of 19 local authorities with Developer Provided Infrastructure in estates in their areas made applications.
under the programme for support. Donegal County Council included the estates listed in the
details supplied in its application.

My Department is currently completing a preliminary evaluation and clarification process
on the bids received with the local authorities. The intention is to shortly set up an Expert Panel
to independently evaluate the bids and recommend suitable projects for funding. This evalua-
tion will take place over the coming months. Membership of the Panel will include department-
tal, stakeholder and independent representation in the Chair.

The Expert Panel will make recommendations to me on the suitability of projects for fund-
ing under the programme based on the criteria set out in the Framework document issued to
local authorities when requesting proposals. The Panel will report to my Department when its
examination of the bids is concluded. I expect to be in a position to make announcements in
early 2020 on approvals and allocations once that process is concluded and has been considered
by my Department.

Local Authority Housing Data

509. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-
ment further to circular 15/2019 of 17 April 2019, the updated cost guidelines for South Dublin
County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48660/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):**
Through the supports made available under Rebuilding Ireland, funding is available to all lo-
cal authorities to deliver additional social housing stock through new construction projects and
through the acquisition of new and previously owned houses/apartments for social housing use.

Given the emphasis on achieving best value for exchequer investment, a set of cost guide-
lines for the acquisition of social housing homes was introduced by my Department. In response
to the continuing fluctuation in house prices the guidelines are reviewed and updated regularly
to reflect movement in the market.

The current cost guidelines were issued in April 2019, including to South Dublin County
Council, on foot of Circular 15/2019 and apply to acquisitions where contracts are signed and
closed on or after 1 April 2019. Lower and upper ranges are stated, along with an average/
benchmark cost which is representative of the average range of current stock value across the
local authority area. All cost guidelines are representative of stock having a minimum C1 BER
rating, being in good condition and ready for occupancy.

Arrangements are being made for relevant details in relation to South Dublin County Coun-
cil to be forwarded directly to the Deputy.

Housing Provision

510. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-
ment further to Parliamentary Question No. 586 of 12 November 2019, if correspondence (de-
tails supplied) will be provided in respect of two local authorities regarding all matters relating
to each social, affordable and mixed use housing development being considered or proposed in-
cluding funding requests by the two local authorities since September 2018 to date. [48681/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I
refer to the reply to Question No. 586 of 12 November 2019 on this matter, in which I indicated
that to search for and provide the full breadth of correspondence sought would involve a disproportionate level of work.

As the Deputy will be aware, there is a vast number of housing projects in Cork City and County, including build, acquisition and leasing projects. This is in addition to a huge level of activity under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), as well as the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) and the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF). In relation to social housing alone, the Social Housing Construction Status Report for Quarter 2 2019, for example, which was referred to in my previous reply, lists some 200 build projects and phases of projects for the 2 local authority areas, with over 3,000 associated homes. Each of these schemes has frequent contact points between my Department and the relevant local authority.

Many different Business Units in my Department would engage multiple times per week with officials in both local authorities. This correspondence could be broadly categorised as follows:

- Emails and letters in relation to applications for funding approval, including multiple exchanges of correspondence on files, documents, maps and drawings;
- Correspondence related to various stages after initial approval;
- Emails and letters in relation to affordable housing, including both general and specific proposals, guidance, circulars and funding;
- Queries, responses and updates on status of overall social and affordable housing programmes, and specific schemes including projects at proposal stage;
- Funding drawdown at various stages, including submission of, validation of and queries on invoices and payments;
- Arrangements for quarterly technical meetings to discuss existing and planned housing delivery programmes, including follow up correspondence and clarifications;
- Routine exchanges on queries on implementation of programmes between officials and local authority housing teams and the development of pipeline future activity; and
- Arrangements for meetings, including National and Regional Housing Summits, the Cork Social Housing Task Force meetings, including preparation of briefing, statistics, reports which include information on proposed and ongoing activity.

I trust that this information is helpful and that the Deputy can appreciate that the related correspondence could extend to thousands of records. Should the Deputy, however, have a particular interest in any of the categories outlined above, or a specific scheme or project, I will be happy to arrange for my Department to meet the Deputy on the matter.

Local Authority Housing Provision

511. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a decision on an application for a long-term leasing scheme (details supplied) will issue. [48712/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Over the course of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, the Government is committed to meet-
ing the housing needs of over 138,000 households. This will be achieved through blended delivery, involving increasing the social housing stock by 50,000 homes, through build, acquisition and leasing programmes, and supporting some 88,000 further households through the Housing Assistance Payment and the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

Of the 50,000 social housing homes to be delivered under Rebuilding Ireland, over 10,000 homes will be leased by local authorities and approved housing bodies under leasing arrangements and availability agreements from a range of different sources, including direct leasing by local authorities and approved housing bodies, the Repair and Leasing Scheme, the Mortgage to Rent Scheme and Enhanced Leasing. In that regard, I can confirm that my Department issued approval to Westmeath County Council to enter into an availability agreement for 17 homes on a phased basis, in respect of the Moate Retirement Village, Moate, Co. Westmeath on 25 November 2019. This scheme will be used to accommodate households from Westmeath County Council’s waiting list in accordance with the local authority’s allocation scheme.

**European Court of Justice Rulings**

512. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which he plans to respond to the imposition of a €5 million fine on Ireland by the European Court of Justice in respect of a wind farm in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48795/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** In the judgment delivered on 12 November 2019, the Court of Justice of the European Union in case C-261/18 (the Derrybrien Wind farm case) ruled against Ireland and imposed the lump sum fine of €5m referred to in the question.

While detailed payment instructions are awaited from the EU Commission, the lump sum fine of €5m will likely be payable before end 2019. It is understood the Commission will be in contact with Ireland over the coming weeks regarding the payment procedures involved for the lump sum fine and the separate daily fines.

**Local Authority Staff Data**

513. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of staff employed in South Tipperary County Council and North Tipperary County Council in each of the years 2013 to 2018 and to date in Tipperary County Council in 2019; if they were full or part-time positions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48821/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authority for which he or she is responsible.

My Department oversees workforce planning for the local government sector, including the monitoring of local government sector employment levels. To this end, my Department gathers aggregate quarterly data on staff numbers in each local authority on a whole time equivalent basis. However, granular data, in terms of the detailed breakdown of all full time and part time positions, is not collected and consequently is not available in my Department.
Staffing numbers for the local authority sector are available on the Public Service Numbers databank which is hosted and maintained by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is available at the following link:


The information sought is available broken down on a quarterly basis. In 2013, individual staffing returns were provided for Tipperary North County Council and Tipperary South County Council and from 2014 onwards a single return for Tipperary County Council.

The staffing numbers for the end of Quarter 3, 2019 are currently being collated and will then be published on the DPER databank.

Home Loan Scheme

514. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider amending the criteria of the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme to allow for those who have declared bankruptcy previously to be allowed to be considered for the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48859/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Applicants for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan must be of good credit standing and have a satisfactory credit record. The Housing Agency provides a central credit assessment service to local authorities and credit checks are undertaken as part of the credit assessment process. The final decision on loan approval is a matter for the relevant local authority and its credit committee on a case-by-case basis. Decisions on all housing loan applications must be made in accordance with the statutory credit policy that underpins the scheme, in order to ensure prudence and consistency in approaches in the best interests of both borrowers and the lending local authorities.

A person who has been discharged from bankruptcy and is eligible in all other respects, including being a first-time buyer, for a Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan may apply for a loan and will be subject to the same credit assessment process that applies to all applicants.

Irish Water Funding

515. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the Irish Water budget figure for 2019; the balance as of 1 September 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48911/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** A voted provision of €1.2 billion is included in the 2019 Estimates in respect of Irish Water’s domestic water services operational and capital expenditure in 2019. At the end of September 2019 €806m of this provision had been provided to Irish Water.

I expect to be providing the full €1.2 billion to Irish Water in 2019 in respect of Irish Water’s domestic water services operational and capital expenditure as provided for in the 2019 Estimates.

Vacant Sites Levy
516. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the circumstances in which a derelict sites levy can be waived; his plans to review the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48940/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department oversees a number of legislative provisions aimed at addressing dereliction and vacancy in our cities and towns, including the derelict sites levy.

The only circumstances under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 where the derelict sites levy may be waived is on hardship grounds. In this connection, section 26 of the Act provides as follows:

26.-‘Where, in the opinion of a local authority, payment of the derelict sites levy or of interest payable under this Act at a particular time by a particular person would cause undue hardship to the person, the local authority may, by notice in writing sent by post or given to the person, suspend action or further action under this Part to secure payment of the whole or part of the amount of the levy due for such period as may be specified in the notice...’.

Section 23(6) of the Act also provides that a local authority may allow for payment of the levy due by instalments.

I have no plans to amend the legislation in this regard at this point in time.

**Mica Redress Scheme**

517. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the implementation of the mica redress scheme in County Donegal; the way in which he plans to address the confusion and uncertainty in relation to the implementation of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48999/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** Last year, the Government agreed in principle to introduce a scheme to support affected homeowners in the counties of Donegal and Mayo to carry out the necessary remediation works to dwellings that have been significantly damaged due to defective concrete blocks.

Budget 2020 provides funding of €40 million to fund the operation of the pyrite remediation scheme and this new scheme to address the issues identified in Donegal and Mayo.

Funding for future years will be agreed on an annual basis as part of the normal Estimates process and additional funding can be provided should it be required.

The full terms and conditions of the scheme are currently being finalised in consultation with the Attorney General’s Office and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, including the development of the necessary regulations.

This process takes account of the engagement that my Department is currently having with both Donegal and Mayo County Councils, who will operate and administer the scheme.

In this regard, my Department continues to meet with both local authority teams to conclude implementation arrangements for the scheme, including the communication of the scheme. Further engagement will take place over the coming weeks.

The aim will be to complete the outstanding work without delay in order to ensure that the scheme can get underway as early as possible.
518. **Deputy Frank O’Rourke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will include an application for a new fire station (details supplied) in the fire services capital expenditure programme for 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49015/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of fire station premises, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the Fire Service Act, 1981. My Department supports fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding support for equipment and priority infrastructural projects.

In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on an annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres. The five-year programme proposed the construction or refurbishment of twenty six fire stations. This included sixteen new builds and ten upgrade or refurbishment projects.

The Fire Services Capital Programme forms an important part of my Department’s strategy to support fire authorities in the development and maintenance of a quality fire-fighting and rescue service. The prioritisation and effective management of these resources is, in the first instance, a matter for each of the fire authorities based on their assessment of local needs and requirements. My Department works closely with fire services around the country to progress priority projects.

In order to maximise the Capital Programme funding available, my Department re-assesses the status of projects in the capital programme on an annual basis and priority can be adjusted to bring forward more advanced projects offering best value-for-money taking account of the state of readiness of projects in the programme more generally.

While a fire station project for Maynooth is not included in the five year programme referred to above, Kildare County Council wrote to my Department in 2017 requesting that a station in Maynooth be considered in any future capital programmes. I understand that the Council was in the process of identifying a suitable site at that time.

All requests for funding from my Department’s Fire Services Capital Programme are considered in the context of the available resources, local authorities’ priorities, the value for money offered by proposals and the totality of requests from fire authorities. My Department will liaise further with Kildare County Council regarding this project.

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**Traveller Accommodation**

519. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures he will take to ensure that local authorities spend funds allocated to them for Traveller housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49084/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government**
(Deputy Damien English): In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department’s role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

In line with the commitment in Rebuilding Ireland, and reflecting the disappointing level of overall funding drawdown in recent years, the Housing Agency, in 2017, commissioned a review of funding for Traveller-specific accommodation. This review had regard to targets contained in local authority Traveller Accommodation Plans (TAPs) and actual delivery, the current status of accommodation funded and funding provided for accommodation maintenance and other supports.

Following its consideration of the review, the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee recommended the establishment of an independent expert group to review the effectiveness, implementation and operation of relevant legislation and to put forward proposals to improve delivery of Traveller accommodation nationally. The Expert Group submitted its report in July 2019.

The 32 recommendations made by the Expert Group to accelerate the delivery of Traveller accommodation are comprehensive and wide ranging, and include proposals aimed at:

- addressing research deficiencies, including how information is gathered and used;
- removing any potential delays and obstacles in the planning system in terms of delivery;
- increasing resources and delivery capacity; and

- strengthening governance arrangements.

I am currently considering the report and recommendations of the Expert Group, with a view to implementing appropriate actions and policies that will improve the delivery of Traveller accommodation nationally. The priority is to ensure that full use is made of the increasing level of funding available for investment in Traveller accommodation. The report has been published and is available on my Department’s website at the following link:


In the context of the 32 recommendations, my Department is also liaising with key stakeholders on issues arising. The Expert Group’s report has also been shared with the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee and members of the Committee are considering the report and will provide submissions to my Department, as appropriate.

I am working to complete this process as soon as possible and set out a road map for implementation of agreed recommendations, with a view to accelerating and increasing the delivery of much needed Traveller accommodation, drawing on the increasing funding available.

Social and Affordable Housing

520. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider enabling housing bodies to transfer some of their social units to affordable units to ensure a greater mix; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49088/19]
Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness recognises the key contribution that Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) make to the delivery of social housing. Approximately 34,000 homes are managed by AHBs, meeting the housing needs of families on low income, older persons, persons with disabilities and households experiencing homelessness.

AHBs are committed to delivering a third of the 50,000 new social housing units that are to be provided over the period of the Plan through a blended delivery of build, acquisition and leasing.

My Department has in place three schemes available to AHBs to support the provision of social housing.

These are:
- CAS - Capital Assistance Scheme
- CALF - Capital Advance Leasing Facility
- SHCEP - Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme.

These schemes enable AHBs to source units for the provision of social housing through construction or acquisition of units and leasing units from the private sector. In 2018 AHBs delivered a total of 3,219 homes (38% of the delivery of social homes) and have delivered 1,009 homes up to Q2 2019.

The AHB Sector is playing a central role in contributing to the delivery of social housing under Rebuilding Ireland, as well as meeting the need of existing tenants, and I am committed to using these schemes to ensure that momentum towards meeting the ambitious 50,000 social housing target under the Action Plan is maintained. Accordingly, there are currently no proposals to enable AHBs to transfer units in the manner suggested.

Local Authority Housing Provision

521. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has received an application from Westmeath County Council to provide affordable housing as part of the housing development on the Orchard, Ballymahon Road. [49089/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authority land utilisation and activation is, in the first instance, a matter for the local authority and its elected members including the development of its land for the delivery of affordable housing.

In line with the commitments in Rebuilding Ireland to support the delivery of discounted homes to buy or rent, this Government has allocated €310 million under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF), from 2019 to 2021, to provide infrastructure to support the delivery of some 6,200 more affordable homes on local authority lands. This funding is being made available in areas where local authorities have demonstrated a requirement for affordable housing and the viability to deliver such housing from their sites.

The first call for proposals under the SSF in June 2018 was specifically aimed at providing funding opportunities to 11 local authorities, where it was identified that the greatest affordability pressures existed. Approval in principle was issued in December 2018 for funding for 10 infrastructure projects in Dublin and Cork with €43 million funding, which will support
the delivery of 1,400 affordable homes. Details of these projects can be found on the Rebuilding Ireland website at https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-approves-10-local-authority-sites-affordable-housing-serviced-sites-fund/.

Following the first call under the SSF, and in order to target affordable interventions, local authorities were asked to complete financial/economic assessments of each of their sites to assess whether the provision of affordable homes was economically viable. Local authorities were also asked to assess the broader housing affordability within their area.

A second call for proposals under the SSF issued to 19 local authorities (including Westmeath County Council) in April 2019 and was based on the aforementioned economic assessments. 31 submissions were received from 15 local authorities. Westmeath County Council elected not to make a submission under this SSF call. Approval in Principle was issued in August 2019 for the funding of 25 infrastructure projects in 13 local authorities across 9 counties with €84 million funding. This will support the delivery of 1,770 affordable homes. Details of these projects can be found on the Rebuilding Ireland website at https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-approves-funding-of-e84m-to-support-delivery-of-1770-affordable-homes-under-the-ssf/.

The primary focus of the SSF scheme is to support the provision of affordable homes on lands in local authority ownership. It is my intention to issue a further SSF all for Proposals in 2020 and Westmeath County Council will have the opportunity at that stage to submit an application, which would be assessed against the relevant criteria along with any other applications received.

My Department is currently not in receipt of any funding application in respect of a social or affordable housing development project on the Orchard, Ballymahon Road. It is my understanding, however, that my Department has recently funded the purchase of two homes by Westmeath County Council for social housing in the Orchard area.

Those wishing to purchase new homes off the open market may also qualify for other Government supports such as the ‘Help to Buy Scheme’ or the ‘Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan’.

**Local Authority Housing Data**

522. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of housing units purchased by each local authority, excluding Part V, to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49098/19]

523. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authority housing units completed by each local authority to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49099/19]

524. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of housing units acquired by each local authority under Part V to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49100/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 522 to 524, inclusive, together.

Details of the number of homes constructed and acquired in each local authority area, are available on my Department’s website at the following link www.housing.gov.ie/node/6338.
I also publish details on the outputs under Part V arrangements and these are also available on the website at the following link:


The most recent published information sets out the position to the end of Quarter 2 of 2019. Details relating to delivery in Quarter 3 of 2019, will be published shortly.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Status

525. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of a public water supply scheme (details supplied) in County Mayo; if his Department is in receipt of an application for funding from the local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49110/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** On 8 February this year, I announced details of the measures being funded through my Department under the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021. In parallel to the announcement local authorities were invited to submit their bids for the funding schemes or projects in their functional areas, with the deadline for receipt of proposals set as 14 March 2019.

The new multi-annual programme includes Measure 6 – Community Connection (Water and Wastewater) Networks. This new measure facilitates the continued expansion of the coverage of piped water supplies and central wastewater collection systems by extension off the public (Irish Water) network where it is technically and economically viable to do so.

Mayo County Council made a number of bids under Measure 6, including a proposal for the Downpatrick Head Group Water Scheme.

An Expert Panel was put in place to support the evaluation process. In addition to providing an expert perspective, the Panel brought independence, openness and transparency to the bids evaluation process which was done on a national prioritised basis. The Expert Panel’s membership included Departmental, stakeholder and independent representations.

The Expert Panel made recommendations to the Department on the suitability of schemes and projects for funding based on objective criteria, which are set out in the Framework document issued to local authorities when requesting proposals. Nationally local authorities made bids for funding for 41 Community Water Connection projects under measure 6 (a). The Expert Panel concluded that 24 of these bids fulfilled the objective criteria set out in the Framework document and recommended them for funding under the programme.

The Panel, in considering the Downpatrick Head Group Water Scheme bid, concluded that:

‘... based on collectively considering the bid for this scheme, against the criteria for the measure in the Framework including the number of houses benefiting (with a low density of houses involved), estimated cost and unit cost per house, this proposed scheme is unviable. The Panel recommends that the local authority engages with the promoters to consider alternative lower cost solutions (e.g. private wells for which, subject to terms and conditions, a separate grant is available).’

In considering the recommendations of the Expert Panel the Minister accepted these in full when announcing the approvals and allocations under the multi-annual rural water programme.
on 15 October 2019.

I understand at present, that officials from Mayo County Council are considering alternative options that may assist the Downpatrick Head Group Water Scheme with a substitute solution.

National Raised Bog Management Plan

526. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her further plans regarding the repatriation of bogs in view of the €5 million promised in budget 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48576/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** A key element of the National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022, approved by the Government and published by my Department in December 2017, is to maintain active raised bog habitat and restore degraded raised bog habitat to active raised bog habitat.

The national restoration programme for Ireland’s raised bog special areas of conservation and natural heritage areas is contained within this Plan. It was intended to restore all designated raised bogs within 3 cycles, with the first cycle operating for the duration of the Management Plan.

This programme can now be accelerated due to the announcement in Budget 2020 of €5m for peatlands restoration. This funding will allow for restoration measures to be undertaken on a number of raised bog designated sites across 7 counties and the installation of an Eddy Covariance Flux tower on a bog to measure surface to atmospheric fluxes (CO2, Methane, turbulent energy, moisture etc.).

23 other raised bog designated sites have been identified for restoration works over the next 5 years or so under the programme.

Special Protection Areas Designation

527. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will consider a geographical extension to a special protection area (details supplied) to include additional lands in view of the fact the lands could be considered a buffer zone for the Dublin Bay biosphere and having regard to the EU Bird and Habitats Directives; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48557/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** My Department is responsible for implementing the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2018, the primary legislation underpinning the protection of biodiversity and nature in Ireland. The Wildlife Acts afford protection to a range of habitats and species and provide for regulation and control of activities that impinge on biodiversity, such as hunting and trade.

The legislative framework in place to protect our natural heritage is further strengthened by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 SI No 477/2011, which also fall under the remit of my Department. These Regulations transpose the EU Birds Directive and the EU Habitats Directive into national law, and provide for protection of certain habitats and species across the European Union, giving a framework for specific measures to be taken to target areas of concern in each Member State.

The main instruments provided for are the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPA), aimed at the protection of threatened species of birds, and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC),
aimed at protecting other animal species and habitats. Ireland is required under the terms of the EU Birds Directive to designate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for the protection of endangered species of wild birds.

A programme to identify and designate SPA sites in Ireland commenced in 1985 and a review of the Irish network of SPA sites identified at that time a number of sites that required re-notification. The necessary SPA survey work was undertaken and all of Ireland’s list of over 150 SPAs have been notified to landowners and published in a fashion that is consistent with the requirements of the Birds Directive.

The SPA referred to in the question was selected for designation as it met a number of conditions relating to protection of listed species. Sites can only be designated on solid scientific grounds, where there is evidence-based justification for doing so.

There are no plans in my Department, at this time, to undertake further scientific surveys in the SPA concerned.