

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 7, inclusive, answered orally.*

### National Broadband Plan Expenditure

8. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount spent to date on the national broadband plan; and the cost of external consultants, legal advice, services and internal departmental staff costs. [46267/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The contract that I signed with National Broadband Ireland on 19 November 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, along with 695 schools, where commercial operators will not commit to deliver the service.

It will ensure that one quarter of the country mostly living in rural Ireland are not left behind. Without high speed broadband it will be much more difficult to sustain existing jobs or create new ones. It will make it possible for rural Ireland to take advantage of the opportunities created by the digital economy, from health care to farming from education to agricultural development to tourism

Officials working in the NBP Division of my Department, supported by a team of external expert advisers, have been working on this initiative since 2013. The total amount spent to date on the National Broadband Plan is €28.833 million. This amount is largely comprised of the cost of these external advisers, as well as other costs associated with the procurement process. These external advisers have provided advice across many areas of expertise including, technical advice, financial and procurement advice, legal advice, economic and strategic advice, environmental advice and insurance and tax advice. The cost of external advisers to date is €28.16 million.

My Department's NBP team has also been supported by other officers across the Department. While the Department does not operate on a basis of allocating costs for each staff member across its range of functions, salary and other administration related costs for the Department are published in the annual Estimates and in the Appropriation Account.

*Questions Nos. 9 to 11, inclusive, answered orally.*

### Air Quality

12. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the implementation of the smoky fuel ban here particularly

in County Wexford; when he plans to implement a nationwide ban; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49052/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Transitioning away from fossil fuels to more renewable, sustainable energy sources is at the heart of the Climate Action Plan.

Currently 40% of our homes use coal and peat for heating, many in combination with other fossil fuel heating systems. By 2030, we will upgrade a third of all homes to at least a B2 energy standard, installing approximately 400,000 heat pumps. Currently over 99% of our vehicle fleet is powered by fossil fuels. By 2030, nearly a million electric vehicles will be on our roads. These measures will significantly improve air quality by reducing emissions of harmful pollutants.

Extending the ban on the use of smoky coal would also have a positive impact on air quality, particularly in built up areas.

The ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous coal, or ‘the smoky coal ban’ as it is commonly known, was first introduced in Dublin in 1990, and subsequently extended to 26 major urban areas.

My two predecessors proposed national extension of the smoky coal ban, but a number of coal firms have indicated that they would challenge the proposal of two former Ministers to extend the smoky coal ban.

This is very disappointing.

The basis of their challenge is that a nationwide smoky coal ban cannot be introduced without a nationwide ban on the burning of peat, turf and wet wood because these products produce similar levels of pollution. The legal threat is not only to take down any new nationwide ban, but to remove the existing ban which is currently in place in cities and many towns around the country.

In that context, it is particularly important to ensure that the measures put forward are not vulnerable to legal challenge, and I am continuing to work to finalise a legally robust way forward which will improve air quality by reducing air pollution, without jeopardising the existing ban.

I also intend to publish a Clean Air Strategy, which will set out a number of policies to improve air quality nationwide, in the coming months.

My Department is also funding the Environmental Protection Agency’s roll-out of the Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme (AAMP), which will greatly improve the data available on air pollution in Ireland, facilitating the design and targeting of appropriate policy measures to tackle it.

*Question No. 13 answered orally.*

## **Bord na Móna**

14. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has been briefed on the recommendations in the cross-party report on climate change specifically relating to the future of Bord na Móna; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43657/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I welcome the focus given by the Joint Committee on Climate Action in its report to the future of Bord na Mona and the Midlands region.

The Committee correctly identified that, while all sectors face challenges transitioning to a low carbon economy, immediate interventions must be put in place in those locations and for those sectors imminently under threat, such as those whose livelihoods are dependent on Bord na Móna peat extraction activities. The Committee also highlighted the importance of exploring opportunities to green existing jobs, and create new jobs in areas such as energy retrofitting for buildings, sustainable forestry and peatland restoration.

The Government has responded to this challenge in its Climate Action Plan, and subsequently with funding allocated through Budget 2020 and the appointment of Just Transition Commissioner for the Midlands.

The Climate Action Plan identifies the need to plan appropriately to ensure that those most affected by our transition to a low-carbon, climate resilient society are supported and equipped to contribute to this transition.

The Plan sets out a number of actions to support this objective, including:

- a programme of analysis to assess the economic and employment implications of the transition to a low-carbon economy
- the establishment of a Just Transition Review Group under NESC working group structures to advise the Climate Action Delivery Board
- supporting the work of the Midlands Regional Transition Team, the Midlands Regional Enterprise Strategy and the Midlands Regional Skills Forum
- identifying sources of funding that could be used to support the transition to a low-carbon economy and society, including inclusion of peat in the EU Coal Platform on transition.

Building on the actions in the Climate Action Plan, Budget 2020 allocated funding to support a Just Transition in the Midlands region, comprising:

- €20 million for a new energy efficiency retrofitting scheme with the social housing stock in the region at its core, but enabling private homeowners to opt-in
- €5 million for peatland rehabilitation
- €6 million for a dedicated new Just Transition Fund, with ESB agreeing to contribute an additional €5 million to this fund bringing its total value to €11m.

My Department is in discussions with the European Commission with a view to making a state aid application for PSO support for an enhanced peat land restoration and rehabilitation scheme in the midlands. This is currently being processed through the State Aid pre-notification procedure.

The Government has appointed Mr Kieran Mulvey as the Just Transition Commissioner to facilitate discussions and work with stakeholders to develop, mobilise, and deliver opportunities for the Midlands. The Commissioner will collaborate with, and build on the work undertaken by, the existing local taskforces to ensure that locally generated ideas and projects are brought forward for consideration for funding from the Just Transition Fund. I published the terms of reference for the work of the Just Transition Commissioner on 19 November 2019.

*Question No. 15 answered orally.*

### **Bord na Móna**

16. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the actions he is taking to secure employment for Bord na Móna employees who are the first staff to lose their jobs as a result of the decision by the ESB to cease the operation of west Offaly and Lough Ree power plants. [49068/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The managed transition out of peat envisaged by Bord na Móna has been significantly impacted by the An Bord Pleanála decision to refuse planning permission for ESB's West Offaly Power station beyond the end of 2020 and the subsequent ESB decision to withdraw a planning permission application for the Lough Ree Power station.

Government has already taken significant steps to ensure that a just transition for the Midlands is adequately supported. This includes:

- €6 million for a Just Transition Fund, targeted at the Midlands, to support the retraining and reskilling of workers and to assist local communities and businesses in the Region to adjust to the low carbon transition.

- Following the announcement that ESB intends to cease operations at the two plants at the end of 2020, ESB has committed to contributing an additional €5 million to the just transition fund, bring the fund to €11m.

- €5 million for a National Parks and Wildlife Service bog restoration and rehabilitation programme to restore 1,800 hectares of bog to their natural habitat, ensuring the return of these bogs to carbon sinks once again and creating 70 to 100 jobs; and

- €20 million targeted at the Midlands, to deliver a new model to group housing upgrades, as set out in the Climate Action Plan, which will support an estimated 400 direct and indirect jobs, as well as significantly upgrading the social housing stock in the region.

Mr Kieran Mulvey has been appointed as the Just Transition Commissioner to co-ordinate Government's response to an accelerated exit from peat for electricity generation.

Following proactive engagement by my Department and Bord na Móna, including a request from myself to Commissioner Cañete earlier this year, the Midlands Region was accepted into the Coal Regions in Transition Platform in July. Membership enables the Midlands Region to avail of the support of a dedicated Country Team to assist with the development of strategies and projects for the region, focusing in particular on the employment challenges faced by workers.

My Department is also in discussions with the European Commission with regards to the use of a Public Service Obligation to fund an extensive bog rehabilitation programme. This would provide Bord na Móna with the funds necessary to rehabilitate their industrial bogs above and beyond the legal requirements under their EPA licences.

An interdepartmental group led by Department of An Taoiseach has been established to develop a just transition plan for the Midlands. Clearly this work cuts across a number of Government Departments, including my own Department, Public Expenditure and Reform, Business, Employment and Innovation, Rural and Community Development, and Agriculture, Food and

the Marine.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

17. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the 300 broadband connection points are expected to be live; the way in which the points were chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49413/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Government recognises the need to roll out high speed broadband as quickly as possible and is conscious that the full rollout of the National Broadband Plan (NBP) State intervention area will take a number of years.

Broadband Connection Points are key NBP locations in communities across Ireland. Broadband Connection Points are locations of community importance such as community centres, parish halls and schools.

Approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) will receive an early connection in the roll out of the NBP.

The BCPs have been specifically selected by the local authorities so that they can provide public Wi-Fi and other facilities to support mini digital/enterprise hubs to the local community in advance of the main NBP deployment.

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.

All BCPs will have a free public Wi-Fi connection, others will have hot-desks, and some will be digital hub business centres where digital training, business information events, and other SME supports are organised.

It is anticipated that there will be between 7 and 23 BCP locations identified in each county and they will include 138 community centres, 14 tourism locations, 51 schools and three business parks.

Work will commence on the deployment of the Broadband Connection Points immediately. It is expected that 298 Broadband Connection Points will be established and providing a high speed broadband service by the end of 2020.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

18. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the areas which will be targeted first under the national broadband plan; when County Kildare can expect to see premises passed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49412/19]

**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, along with 695 schools, where commercial operators will not commit to deliver the service.

Following the contract signing on 19 November, work has already begun 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 four years.

Approximately 300 Broadband Connections Points (BCPs), including schools, library hubs and local sports halls in every county in Ireland, will be connected to high speed broadband during 2020, to enable communities to quickly get free public access to high speed broadband. Nine BCPs are planned for deployment in County Kildare. The BCP locations are available to view on the High Speed Broadband Map on the Department's website [www.dccae.gov.ie](http://www.dccae.gov.ie).

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.

The planned rollout will provide access to high speed broadband to 13,329 premises located in the Intervention Area in County Kildare through the investment of approximately €53m over 25 years.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

19. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the type of services that will be available at broadband connection points; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49343/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Government recognises the need to roll out high speed broadband as quickly as possible and is conscious that the full rollout of the National Broadband Plan (NBP) State intervention area will take a number of years.

Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are locations of community importance across Ireland such as community centres, parish halls and schools. The BCPs have been specifically selected by the local authorities so that they can provide public Wi-Fi and other facilities to support mini digital/enterprise hubs to the local community in advance of the main NBP deployment. Approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) will receive an early connection in the roll out of the NBP.

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.

All BCPs will have a free public Wi-Fi connection, others will have hot-desks, and some will be digital hub business centres where digital training, business information events, and other SME supports are organised.

It is anticipated that there will be between 7 and 23 BCP locations identified in each county and they will include 138 community centres, 14 tourism locations, 51 schools and three business parks.

Work will commence on the deployment of the Broadband Connection Points immediately. It is expected that 298 Broadband Connection Points will be established and providing a high speed broadband service by the end of 2020.

## Climate Action Plan

20. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the breakdown of the estimated €50 billion cost of retrofitting all homes as announced by An Taoiseach on 21 November 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49221/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Government's Climate Action Plan commits to upgrading 500,000 homes to B2 or cost optimal energy efficiency standard by 2030.

To deliver this target, a new retrofitting delivery model is being developed. Learning from experience both in Ireland as well as other jurisdictions, it will:

- Group homes in the same area together to drive down cost;
- Start with social homes owned by the local authorities, but will include privately owned homes in the wider community;
- Introduce easy pay back models; and
- Develop smart finance.

The cost of bringing a home to a B2 or cost optimal standard is determined by a number of factors including the size and type of home as well as the starting condition of the home. A cost-optimal analysis commissioned by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government estimated the cost to achieve a B2 rating from a starting point of a D or E rating to be in the range of €21,000-€39,000. 90% of our dwellings are estimated to have Building Energy Ratings below a B2. Through the development of a new retrofitting model, we want to bring this cost down.

There are approximately 1.7 million occupied houses and apartments in the country. €50 billion is based on a high level estimate of the cost of bringing those premises up to a B2 standard. A key task of the recently established Retrofit Taskforce will be to develop the new model and determine the overall cost associated with the retrofit programme to 203 and the most cost effective ways of achieving the level of retrofit upgrades required.

### Better Energy Homes Scheme

21. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the review into the Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland better energy warmer homes scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49440/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme is funded by my Department and administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. The scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty.

The 2019 budget allocation for the Warmer Homes Scheme is €39.8 million. The budget for 2020 will be €52.8 million - a record level of funding for the scheme. €13 million of this funding will come from the increase in the carbon price.

In 2018, the measures available under the scheme were expanded. Previously, those homes which were not suitable for cavity wall insulation could not get their walls insulated under

the scheme. Since the expansion of measures, the scheme can now, in certain circumstances, provide internal or external wall insulation. This is permitting the upgrade of a wider range of property types, such as homes with solid walls, and also increases the energy savings and emissions reductions that the scheme can achieve. In addition, it will enable future fuel switching.

Demand for the scheme is extremely high, reflecting the shift to deeper measures, and is impacted by longer delivery times associated with these types of works and the available budget.

Action 173 of the Climate Action Plan commits to reviewing ways to improve how current energy poverty schemes target those most in need. This review is underway and is scheduled for completion by the end of the year.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

22. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the commitment to provide high speed broadband to every house and business in County Donegal; the timeline for when the roll-out will commence in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49346/19]

27. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the national broadband plan; when all homes and businesses in County Donegal will have access to high speed broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49345/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 22 and 27 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, along with 695 schools, where commercial operators will not commit to deliver the service.

Following the contract signing on 19 November, work has already begun 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 four years.

Approximately 300 Broadband Connections Points (BCPs), including schools, library hubs and local sports halls in every county in Ireland, including Co. Donegal, will be connected to high speed broadband during 2020, to enable communities to quickly get free public access to high speed broadband. 12 BCPs are planned for deployment in Donegal. The BCP locations are available to view on the High Speed Broadband Map on the Department's website [www.dccae.gov.ie](http://www.dccae.gov.ie).

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.

The planned rollout will provide access to high speed broadband to 32,130 premises located in the Intervention Area in Donegal through investment of approximately €128m over 25 years.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

23. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the impact the roll-out of high speed broadband will have with respect to smart farming methods. [49338/19]

31. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the potential benefits of high speed broadband with respect to healthcare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49344/19]

33. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the anticipated expansion of the digital economy; the role broadband will play in allowing Ireland, particularly in rural areas, to take full advantage of the opportunities of the digital economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49342/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 23, 31 and 33 together.

The availability of high speed broadband services in rural communities will have a transformative effect on these parts of the country. High speed broadband will allow citizens and businesses in rural communities to enjoy broadband speeds comparable to and in many cases better than speeds available to those living in towns and cities. This will enable rural communities to avail of the opportunities presented by the digital economy including healthcare, education, farming, rural development and tourism.

High speed broadband services will allow farmers and farming communities to avail of new and emerging technologies that rely on a fast and reliable broadband service. Farmers can benefit through smart farming which allows increased production quality, remote monitoring of livestock, lower operational costs, reduced impact on the environment, better security technology and easier interaction with State bodies online.

The benefits of high speed broadband to people's healthcare include enabling remote monitoring of older and vulnerable people in their homes, improving home-based care as an alternative to hospitalisation and the increased use of video medical appointments.

In addition, the provision of high speed broadband in rural Ireland is of critical importance in areas such as flexible and remote working. Remote or home-working is becoming an increasingly prevalent employment model, including amongst overseas firms that continue to invest in Ireland. This area of the economy is projected to double over the next 5 years. It will also afford national and international employers better access to a wider catchment of skilled workers, even where offices and businesses are located within more rural areas.

An initial enabler to rural communities will be the early roll out of community based Broadband Connection Points. It is expected that 298 Broadband Connection Points will be established and providing a high speed broadband service by the end of 2020.

## Electricity Grid

24. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the proposal to change the electricity market rules in order to enable micro-generated electricity to be sold to the grid will proceed in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49439/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Action 30 of the Climate Action Plan commits to the delivery of a framework for

micro-generation with a view to commencement of an enduring support scheme by 2021, at the latest, to ensure that people can sell excess electricity they produce back to the grid. There are ten sub-actions listed under this heading for delivery, mainly by the Department and the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities (CRU), in order to ensure that a policy and support scheme is in place.

A micro-generation working group, chaired by my Department has been established and is progressing the key steps to deliver this action. This process involves a review of requirements for resolving market settlement issues for renewable self-consumers exporting to the grid which commenced in Q3 2019.

An assessment of the possible support mechanisms for micro-generation/renewable self-consumption is scheduled for Q1 2020, with an associated public consultation in Q3 2020 and the launch of a finalised policy and pricing support regime for micro-generation due in Q2 2021.

### **Broadcasting Sector**

25. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on whether potential cost savings at RTÉ will have a negative effect on independent screen producers here in view of the fact that spending by the national broadcaster on independent productions has fallen dramatically; and the way in which he can address same in the context of changes to the television licence system to ensure the viability of independent screen production and jobs in that sector. [49175/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In recent years, the broadcasting sector has faced severe financial, market and structural challenges, including the impact on advertising revenue arising from Brexit and the migration of advertising to online services. This has impacted on the capacity of all broadcasters, including RTE, to produce high quality Irish content and to commission such content from independent producers.

In July 2019, the Government accepted the recommendations of the Working Group on the Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting that TV Licence Collection should be put out to public tender for a five year period to reduce the evasion rate. This process will be initiated as soon as the enabling legislation, the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill, which passed Second Stage in October 2019, has been enacted. At the end of the contract period, the licence fee will be replaced by a device independent broadcasting charge to take account of changes in how Irish people consume content. These reforms will generate additional funding for public service broadcasting.

In addition to the reform of the public funding model, and in line with the commitment in my Department’s Statement of Strategy, there will also be a review of two provisions of the Broadcasting Act, 2009.

First, there will be a review of the proportion of TV licence funding allocated to the Sound and Vision Scheme under the Broadcasting Fund with a view to assessing whether it should be increased. At present, the Broadcasting Fund amounts to 7% of net TV licence receipts, currently €14.5 million. This scheme, which is administered by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, supports the production of high quality TV and radio programmes on Irish culture, heritage and experience and is accessible by independent producers and commercial broadcasters.

There will also be a review of the minimum amount of funding that RTE is obliged to make available under Section 116 of the Act, for external commissioning of radio and television

programming. Notwithstanding its financial difficulties, RTE continues to meet the statutory minimum amount of such funding which in 2018 amounted to €39.7m. The review will examine if this statutory minimum level can be further increased which would provide an important additional stimulus for the independent sector.

### **International Summits**

26. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his priorities for the upcoming COP25 discussions in Madrid. [49414/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will hold its 25th Conference of the Parties (COP25) in Madrid, Spain, from 2 to 13 December 2019. Ireland engages in negotiations under this Convention through its membership of the European Union (EU).

At COP 24 in Katowice, Poland, the main elements of the Paris Agreement rulebook were achieved. A key priority and remaining open aspect of the rulebook to be finalised at COP25 in order to operationalise the Paris Agreement is the Markets Chapter (Article 6). Ireland and its EU partners look forward to positive engagement by all Parties to the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC to ensure a successful conclusion to these negotiations at COP25.

Ireland, together with its EU partners, will also be emphasising the importance of working to enhance global climate ambition in response the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C and the outcomes of the UN Climate Action Summit, including on the updating of Nationally Determined Contributions and the submission of Parties' long-term greenhouse gas emissions strategies by 2020.

Ireland also looks forward to promoting continuous engagement by non-state actors in delivering the Paris Agreement objectives, with a particular focus on youth engagement.

*Question No. 27 answered with Question No. 22.*

### **Waste Management**

28. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to increase awareness of recycling, general waste and compost for home owners disposing of their waste; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49326/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Increasing public awareness to improve recycle and organic waste quality through better recycling practices and reduced contamination of waste continues to be a priority for my Department. In this regard my Department is committed to the continued promotion of [www.mywaste.ie](http://www.mywaste.ie). This web portal which was launched in November 2018 has been developed by the Regional Waste Management Offices with support from the Department, to provide consumers with a single information resource on all aspects of domestic waste management in Ireland and in particular it focuses on the provision of advice on managing waste more responsibly and efficiently. The website contains an interactive map showing details of waste facilities across the country, such as civic amenity sites and bring banks.

The Regional Waste Management Offices, in conjunction with the National Waste Collection Permit Office, are launching Phase 3 of the My Waste platform today. Phase 3 adds 'the

who' to the website, adding a search function so that citizens can get information about who collects waste in their area and contact details for each of the collectors.

To ensure a consistent national message on improving waste management, the Department established a Waste Communications Strategy Group in 2018 consisting of the Department, the Environmental Protection Agency, Repak, the Price Monitoring Group on Household Waste Collection and the Regional Waste Management Planning Offices. This Group continues to meet to help ensure the various bodies involved in waste awareness campaigns co-ordinate to the fullest extent possible.

A full public consultation on the development of Ireland's Waste Action Plan will be launched before the end of this year which will seek views on all matters waste related, including seeking views on the need for and delivery of future awareness and education campaigns.

### **Consultancy Contracts Expenditure**

29. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated costs of the external consultant reviews of major infrastructural projects such as the national broadband plan in 2019 and 2020. [45801/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I understand that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is developing proposals to provide for the independent review of large public capital infrastructure projects before they proceed to tender, as part of the proposed updating of the Public Spending Code.

The contract for the National Broadband Plan which was signed on Ireland on 19th November 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, along with 695 schools, where commercial operators will not commit to deliver this service. The focus is now on delivery and ensuring strong and effective governance of the contract.

### **Cybersecurity Protocols**

30. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on whether telecommunications infrastructure here has adequate protections in place to limit the damage of cyber attacks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49384/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The security of the Irish State and its citizens is a matter of the highest priority for the Government. Telecommunications security is an increasingly critical component of national security, and there are a range of measures already in place around the resilience of services, and responding to incidents.

All telecommunications operators already have statutory obligations to take measures to manage risks to the security of their networks and services. ComReg, the Commission for Communications Regulation, which is statutorily independent in the exercise of its functions, is responsible for ensuring compliance with the provisions of the European Communities (Electronic Communications Networks and Services) (Framework) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 333 of 2011), and in particular Regulations 23 and 24 relating respectively to Security and Integrity. Moreover, the integrity and security of the telecommunications sector is under on-going review

by the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment as a matter of policy.

More specifically, developments relating to concerns regarding the technology used in 5G networks are being monitored on an on-going basis. The focus of the State is on the security of telecommunications infrastructure, and a series of measures will be brought forward in the coming months to develop a flexible and robust system to ensure the security of telecommunications infrastructure into the future.

*Question No. 31 answered with Question No. 23.*

### **National Broadband Plan**

32. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which the national broadband plan addresses the requirements nationwide; the extent to which other options have been examined; the main benefits of the plan now in process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49408/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Broadband Plan will bridge the digital divide that is emerging between urban and rural areas. High speed connectivity has multiple potential positive impacts on the lives and livelihoods of citizens throughout the country. The National Broadband Plan will ensure that those benefits can be enjoyed by the 1.1 million people living and working in the Intervention Area, in nearly 540,000 premises, including almost 100,000 businesses and farms and 695 schools where commercial operators will not commit to deliver this service.

It will encourage and facilitate new models of service in Health, Education and in Enterprise and help communities to benefit from new economic activities. More people will be able to work remotely, receive services in their own homes, and have access to technologies that will make for smarter living, learning, farming and business.

The Government decision to appoint NBI as preferred bidder in May of this year was informed by detailed analysis of alternative options to deliver the NBP. That analysis, which was published on my Department's website in May, considered additional short term and longer term options, for example, the establishment of a State Agency for broadband delivery, designation of a new mandate to an existing State body such as the ESB, or the use of 4G and 5G technologies.

The analysis shows that all of the alternative options identified would take longer to reach 100% of the Intervention Area premises compared to the current plan, may be more costly, in most cases would require a consultation on a new strategy as well as a new procurement process and State Aid application, and may not provide the level of future proofing required under the Commission's strategy, "Connectivity for a European Gigabit Society".

The deployment of the network will quickly bring tangible benefits to those living in rural areas. Next year communities will be able to avail of high speed broadband services at approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points in rural locations around the country.

The Bidder is aiming to pass 115,000 premises by the end of 2021, with 70-100,000 passed each year thereafter until roll out is completed.

No matter where a person lives in Ireland, the National Broadband Plan will ensure equality of opportunity to fully participate in the digital society.

*Question No. 33 answered with Question No. 23.*

### **Air Quality**

34. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps being taken to ensure safe air quality levels and to introduce a nationwide ban on smoky coal in response to stated legal advice from the Attorney General; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49381/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Transitioning away from fossil fuels to more renewable, sustainable energy sources is at the heart of the Climate Action Plan.

Currently 40% of homes use coal and peat for heating (many in combination with other fossil fuel heating systems). By 2030, we will upgrade a third of all homes to at least a B2 energy standard, installing approximately 400,000 heat pumps. Currently over 99% of our vehicle fleet is powered by fossil fuels. By 2030, nearly a million electric vehicles (35%-40%) will be on our roads. These measures will significantly improve air quality by reducing emissions of harmful pollutants.

Extending the ban on the use of smoky coal would also have a positive impact on air quality, particularly in built up areas.

The ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous coal, or ‘the smoky coal ban’ as it is commonly known, was first introduced in Dublin in 1990, and subsequently extended to our major cities.

Following a public consultation process, it was further extended in 2012, and now applies in 26 urban areas nationwide. The ban has proved very effective in reducing particulate matter and sulphur dioxide levels in the air and has had the effect of significantly improving public health. Research indicates, for example, that the ban has resulted in over 350 fewer annual deaths in Dublin alone.

Regarding the proposed national extension of the smoky coal ban, a number of coal firms have indicated that they would challenge the proposal of two former Ministers to expand the smoky coal ban.

This is particularly disappointing, given the impact poor air quality can have on human health and the environment and the emphasis the Government is putting on transitioning to a low carbon society.

The basis of their challenge is that a nationwide smoky coal ban cannot be introduced without a nationwide ban on the burning of peat, turf and wet wood because these products produce similar levels of pollution. The legal threat is not only to take down any new nationwide ban, but to remove the existing ban which is currently in place in cities and many towns around the country.

In that context, it is particularly important to ensure that the measures put forward are not vulnerable to legal challenge, and I am continuing to work to finalise a legally robust way forward which will improve air quality by reducing air pollution, without jeopardising the existing ban.

I also intend to publish a Clean Air Strategy, which will set out a number of policies to im-

prove air quality nationwide in the coming months.

My Department is also funding the Environmental Protection Agency's roll-out of the Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme (AAMP), which will greatly improve the data available on air pollution in Ireland, facilitating the design and targeting of appropriate policy measures to tackle it.

### **North-South Interconnector**

35. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the North-South interconnector project. [49417/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The North South Interconnector has been designated a Project of Common Interest (PCI). PCIs are cross border energy projects deemed by the European Commission to be of the highest priority within the EU. The fourth PCI list was published in October 2019 pending ratification in early 2020.

The North South Interconnector is critical to improving the efficient operation of the Single Electricity Market and increasing security of electricity supply across the island of Ireland. A resilient and well connected energy infrastructure is vital for Ireland's economic wellbeing and the ability to respond to the future needs of energy consumers.

In December 2016, An Bord Pleanála granted planning permission for the project in Ireland, while in January 2018 full planning permission was granted for the section of the line that lies in Northern Ireland. Both of the planning decisions have been subject to legal proceedings in each jurisdiction. In Ireland, a Supreme Court appeal of the planning permission was dismissed on 19 February 2019.

In Northern Ireland, on 8 February 2019, the Department for Infrastructure asked the High Court to quash the planning permission given so the planning application can be re-determined under new legislation introduced by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in November 2018. On 24 July, SONI/EirGrid submitted an addendum to the Environmental Statement to the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland. That Department subsequently carried out a consultation process in Northern Ireland to provide members of the public with the opportunity to review and comment on the addendum and is now reviewing the submissions received. The Department for Infrastructure will determine in the coming months as to whether there is a need to re-open the public inquiry or if a final planning decision can be taken by the Permanent Secretary under the NI Planning and Functions Exercise Act.

In June 2019, ESB Networks awarded a framework contract for the design, test and supply of steelwork in relation to the project. I am advised that the detailed design is currently in progress. However under the framework there will be no supply of materials until the planning process in Northern Ireland is complete. The earliest possible date for construction to commence is 2020.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

36. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the roll-out of the 300 broadband connection points will commence; the role these wi-fi hot spots will play in providing high speed broadband to communities in interven-

tion areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49339/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Government recognises the need to roll out high speed broadband as quickly as possible and is conscious that the full rollout of the National Broadband Plan State intervention area will take a number of years.

Broadband Connection Points are key National Broadband Plan (NBP) locations in communities across Ireland. Broadband Connection Points are locations of community importance such as community centres, parish halls and schools.

Approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points will receive an early connection in the roll out of the NBP.

The BCPs have been specifically selected by the local authorities so that they can provide public Wi-Fi and other facilities to support mini digital/enterprise hubs to the local community in advance of the main NBP deployment. 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.

All BCPs will have a free public Wi-Fi connection, some will also have hot-desks, and some will be digital hub business centres where digital training, business information events and other SME supports are organised.

It is anticipated that there will be between 7 and 23 BCP locations identified in each county and they will include 138 community centres, 14 tourism locations, 51 schools and 3 business parks.

Work will commence on the deployment of the Broadband Connection Points now that the NBP contract has been signed. It is expected that 298 Broadband Connection Points will be established and providing a high speed broadband service by the end of 2020.

## **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

37. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will implement the recommendation made by the Youth Assembly to implement a tiered tax system on large corporations for their emissions. [49323/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I welcome the initiative of the Oireachtas to hold the Youth Assembly on 15 November. It is heartening to see the active engagement and mobilisation to the climate crisis which is, without doubt, the defining challenge of our generation. I thank the members of the Youth Assembly for their recommendations for action to stop climate breakdown which I am currently considering.

In relation to the recommendation to implement a tiered tax system on large companies, 104 installations are currently included the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) in Ireland. The EU ETS is a cornerstone of the European Union's policy to combat climate change and its key tool for reducing industrial greenhouse gas emissions cost-effectively. It is the biggest international system for trading greenhouse gas emission allowances and covers more than 11,000 power stations and industrial plants in 31 countries, as well as airlines. In addition, to the 104 stationary installations, 13 aircraft operators are also included under the scheme in Ireland.

The Government supports a strong EU ETS that promotes investment in decarbonisation in the power generation and industrial sectors in support of EU and Member States' long-term decarbonisation objectives. Reforms to the ETS were introduced in 2018 in order to achieve a 43% reduction in ETS emissions by 2030 relative to 2005 levels. These reforms, including changes to the market stability reserve to address the prevailing surplus of allowances within the ETS, and improvements in the resilience of the ETS to major price shocks by provisions for periodic adjustments to the supply of allowances to be auctioned, are beginning to take effect. The reforms are already having an impact on the price of ETS allowances, with market prices currently in the region of €25 per tonne, up from just under €8 per tonne in January 2018.

In parallel with the strengthened EU ETS regime at EU level, the Climate Action Plan sets out a number of supplementary measures to reduce emissions from the sectors covered by the EU ETS in Ireland, including:

- delivering an early and complete phase-out of coal and peat fired electricity generation;
- increasing electricity generated from renewable source to 70%;
- working with the enterprise sector to support delivery of identified potential for cost-effective mitigation over the next decade.

### **Bord na Móna**

38. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the meetings or discussions he has had with both Bord na Móna management and a person (details supplied) on the planned job losses at the company and the ending of peat harvesting; if the issue of negotiations with workers' representatives was discussed; if the issue of retraining workers affected was discussed or raised by him or his officials; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49390/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I have met with the Bord na Móna management and representatives of the Bord na Móna workers on a number of occasions in the last number of months. The most recent meeting was on Monday, 11 November, when myself and a number of my Cabinet colleagues visited the Lough Boora Discovery Park and Lough Ree Power station.

I met with Mr Kieran Mulvey, in his role as the Just Transition Commissioner, last Thursday and will continue to engage with Mr Mulvey as the details of his role as Just Transition Commissioner are finalised in the coming weeks.

In relation to industrial relations matters referred to in the Question, these issues are operational in nature and a matter for the Board and management of the company. As I have no statutory function, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on such matters.

### **Just Transition Fund**

39. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the breakdown of the funds available for just transition; the source of each form of funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49222/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Government recognises that early and complete phase-out of peat for electricity

generation will have a significant impact on the workers, their families and the Midlands as a whole. In this context, the Government has committed to delivering a whole-of-Government approach to addressing this challenge, and to working with local stakeholders to ensure that people impacted can be best supported.

Budget 2020 prioritised a number of just transition initiatives including:

- €6m Just Transition Fund targeted at the Midlands, to support the retraining and reskilling of workers and to assist local communities and businesses in the Region to adjust to the low carbon transition. In recognition of their longstanding relationship with communities in the Midlands, the ESB has agreed to contribute an additional €5 million to this fund bringing its total value to €11m. While details around the allocation of this fund are still being finalised, it is expected that it will support retraining and reskilling workers and assist local communities and businesses in the Midlands to adjust to the low carbon transition. There will be further consultation with the structures in place in the Midlands, including the Midlands Transition Team, on the application of the funding. In addition, I have invited the Just Transition Commissioner, Mr Keiran Mulvey, to make recommendations to me on the operation of the Just Transition Fund

- €5m for bog restoration and rehabilitation which will restore bogs to their natural habitat and become sinks that absorb carbon. This programme will support the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to restore 1,800 hectares of bog in 7 counties, resulting in 28m tonnes of carbon stored over the next 5 years. It will create 70 jobs in year one, rising to 100 as the programme develops.

- €20m to deliver new model, to group housing upgrades together, as set out in the Climate Action Plan. Targeted at the Midlands, this will support an estimated 400 jobs directly and indirectly, as well as significantly upgrading the social housing stock in the region during 2020.

In addition to the above, Budget 2020 included specific provisions for protecting the most vulnerable:

- A total of €52.8 million is being made available to retrofit the homes of people living in, or at risk of, energy poverty through the Warmer Homes Scheme. This represents the biggest ever allocation for the Warmer Homes Scheme – more than double the initial allocation for 2019. €13 million of this funding is ring-fenced revenue arising from the increase in the Carbon Tax.

- The changes to the Fuel Allowance Scheme led by the Department of Social Protection, will increase the income of households who get the fuel allowance by €2 per week which means an annual increase of €56.

## **Energy Efficiency**

40. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the funding from the SEAI to local authorities in 2020 to help retrofit social housing stock; the projected allocation and number of homes expected to be improved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49435/19]

55. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the SEAI allocation to local authorities for energy efficiency measures and retrofitting in social housing stock since 2010; and the planned spending by the SEAI on future energy efficiency measures in social housing units. [49388/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard**

**Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 40 and 55 together.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is funded by my Department to administer energy efficiency grant schemes to support homeowners to improve the energy performance of their properties. Since 2000, over 400,000 homeowners have received direct support under these schemes.

Social housing upgrades are primarily a matter for the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. A budget of €25 million has been allocated to that Department for the social housing energy efficiency retrofit programme in both 2019 and 2020.

Budget 2020 has also provided an additional €20 million from revenues arising from the increase in the carbon tax for the retrofitting of social housing in the Midlands. This scheme will operate in a different way to the traditional local authority retrofit scheme by focusing on upgrading much larger batches of homes in distinct, compact geographical areas and providing the opportunity for private homeowners to retrofit their homes. This will determine the savings that can be achieved through a larger scale and more structured approach to the renovation of our housing stock. It will also provide an economic stimulus for the region. The specific design of the project will be driven by the Retrofit Taskforce which is chaired by my Department.

Although Local Authorities have in recent years received some limited funding through the Better Energy Communities and Warmth and Wellbeing Pilot Schemes, the SEAI does not have a ring-fenced allocation for local authority homes. Since 2016, the total expenditure on the Warmth and Wellbeing Pilot Scheme is €26.3 million and the SEAI estimate approximately 15% of this amount has been spent on local authority homes. It is not intended to have an SEAI ring-fenced allocation for local authorities in 2020.

### **Online Safety**

41. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will appoint a digital safety commissioner. [49432/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** On 4 March 2019 I launched a public consultation seeking views on the content of the proposed Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill. The public consultation closed on 15 April 2019. A wide range of responses were received to the consultation from members of the public, NGOs, industry and government agencies. These responses, which were published on 27 June 2019, are currently being considered to inform the development of the Bill. Furthermore, a thematic analysis of the submissions identifying key themes and issues was published on 25 July 2019.

This legislation will set a clear expectation for online platforms to take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of the users of their service. A regulator, an Online Safety Commissioner, as part of a wider Media Commission, would oversee the new system.

This new regulatory system will address the proliferation of harmful online content, including cyberbullying material, material promoting suicide and self-harm and material promoting eating disorders, alongside the design and processes adopted by online services which lead to the proliferation of such material.

The regulator will have a number of significant compliance and enforcement powers, including the power to audit the compliance of services, publication of the fact of non-compliance, the power to issue administrative fines and the power to block offending services in certain cases.

My officials are currently pursuing an extensive programme of policy analysis to inform decision making around preparatory heads of the Bill. I intend to bring the draft heads to Government by end-2019.

While it would be impossible to protect people from every danger online, this Bill will ensure, for the first time, that robust regulation is in place and end the era of self-regulation by online platforms.

### **Renewable Energy Generation Targets**

42. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost to rapidly transition Ireland to 100% wind, solar, wave and hydro energy by 2030; and his views on whether Ireland could reach this goal. [49325/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Climate Action Plan launched in June 2019 sets out the comprehensive suite of actions to ensure Ireland can meet the 2030 climate commitments putting us on a trajectory to be net zero by 2050. Ireland has abundant, diverse and indigenous renewable energy, which will be critical to decarbonising our energy system and enhancing our security of supply.

The Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) under development is critical to delivering on the ambitious target of 70% of electricity demand by 2030. To achieve 70% renewable electricity will require the grid to be able to receive almost 100% electricity from renewables when the wind is blowing and the sun is shining. The 70% is an average figure, reflecting that there will be times when wind and solar final are not available.

The Scheme is being designed to achieve its targets within a competitive framework which will put downward pressure on the costs to end consumers. The RESS auctions will ultimately determine the precise mix and cost of renewable projects and technology diversity, including onshore and offshore wind, solar, hydro and ocean technologies, will occur naturally as the scheme matures.

Private sector funding through corporate contracting will also be essential for meeting higher levels of ambition to increase renewable energy supply. The Climate Action Plan commits to a 15% target for the renewable industry to develop projects through subsidy free corporate power purchase agreements by 2030.

Long term decarbonisation of the electricity sector will require significant investment in Ireland's potential in offshore renewables including harnessing the potential to export power generated offshore to other EU Member States. Further reinforcement of the grid (including greater interconnection to allow electricity to flow between Ireland and other countries), and putting systems in place to manage intermittent sources of power through developing a range of storage technologies will be essential.

While significant investment will be required to meet long term targets in decarbonisation of electricity, rapidly falling costs of renewable energy technologies will help reduce the costs to energy consumers. The Department will ensure that the costs of electricity from renewable energy sources will be kept under review and that RESS auctions will be informed by up-to-date Levelised Cost of Energy (LCOE) analysis.

### **Natural Gas Imports**

43. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to intervene on a project in Cork Harbour pursuing an LNG facility. [49430/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I understand that in July 2017 US company NextDecade announced it had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Port of Cork to develop a Liquid Natural Gas import terminal in Cork harbour, using a floating storage and regasification unit. NextDecade’s “Inis-free” project is a private sector project.

Final investment decisions for this project and compliance with all legal and regulatory requirements in relation to consents or permits will be the responsibility of the project promoter. Any undertaking would be required to comply with EU law in this area.

As I have previously advised the House, the Climate Action Plan, which I launched in June, sets out an ambitious course of action to address the challenge of climate disruption and the impacts on our environment. This includes a commitment to deliver 70% renewable electricity by 2030. In the context of this transition to a carbon neutral economy, I have initiated the process of commissioning a comprehensive independent energy sustainability and security review. This review, which will be completed during 2020, will examine the fuel mix necessary, including the role of gas in electricity generation and how and from where it is sourced, and the role of other technologies such as interconnection and battery storage as back-up for renewables, to ensure security of supply.

### National Broadband Plan Expenditure

44. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the expenditure to date on the broadband tendering process; the costs associated with the competitive tendering process and subsequent legal and consultancy advice; and the breakdown of fees paid to external agencies. [49387/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The contract that I signed with National Broadband Ireland on 19 November 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, along with 695 schools, where commercial operators will not commit to deliver the service.

The total amount spent to date on the National Broadband Plan is €28.833 million. This amount comprises the cost of external advisers and the costs associated with the procurement process and subsequent tender evaluation process. As part of their role to support my Department’s team during the procurement process, these external advisers have provided essential expertise including, technical advice, financial and procurement advice, legal advice, economic and strategic advice, environmental advice and insurance and tax advice. The total amount paid to external advisers since the start of the National Broadband plan is €28.161 million.

A breakdown of the fees paid to external advisers is set out in the following table.

Table 1: Total Payments for advisory services by firm

Company	Service/Advice	Costs
Achilles Procurement Services	Procurement	€5,166.00
Analysys Mason	Technical	€4,680,035.42

Company	Service/Advice	Costs
Deloitte Ireland LLP	Tax and VAT	€95,478.75
Doyle Kent Planning Partnership Ltd	Environmental	€7,995.00
Here and Now Business Intelligence	Communications	€29,520.00
KPMG	Financial/Procurement	€8,866,428.59
KPMG	Specialist personnel	€3,977,680.90
Marsh Ireland	Insurance	€68,203.50
Mason Hayes & Curran	Legal	€6,720,184.03
MON Legal Consulting	Legal	€4,095.90
Park Town Consulting	Technical	€6,089.25
Pricewaterhouse Coopers	Economic/Strategy	€2,411,020.69
PRISA Technologies Ltd	Technical	€1,131,563.12
RPS Consulting Engineers	Environmental	€130,887.99
Vilicom Engineering Ltd	Technical	€26,502.01
TOTAL		€28,160,851.15

### Climate Change Adaptation Plans

45. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the decision making role that local communities and trade unions will have in the just transition plan; the differences between the decision making role from a consultative role they may have; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49219/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Government has appointed Mr Kieran Mulvey as the Just Transition Commissioner on a non-statutory basis to facilitate discussions and work with stakeholders to develop, mobilise, and deliver opportunities for the Midlands.

A key objective of the new Commissioner will be to collaborate with, and build on the work undertaken by, the existing local taskforces to ensure that locally generated ideas and projects are brought forward for consideration for funding from the Just Transition Fund.

In this respect, I have invited the Commissioner to engage with all relevant stakeholders, including local community organisations, Bord na Móna, ESB, the Midlands Transition Team, local authorities and public representatives, and relevant trade unions and workers representatives.

The Commissioner will report to Government through me and I have asked him to consider specifically the following matters in relation to recommendations to be made:

- Delivery of the Just Transition measures provided for in Budget 2020, in particular an operating model for the new Just Transition Fund

- Optimal structures or processes to support co-ordinated and effective delivery of a Just Transition in the Midlands, including developing liaison channels between institutions in the region and central government

- Implementation of other actions underway, or planned, by Government Departments, Agencies, and Companies, including the four competitive funds under Project Ireland 2040

- Any additional actions or measures that he considers appropriate for Government consideration

The Commissioner has also been invited to take account of relevant existing plans and programmes, such as Bord na Mona's Brown to Green Strategy, the Regional Enterprise Development Plan for the Midlands, as well as provisions made in Budget 2020 to support a Just Transition in the region, comprising:

- €20 million for a new energy efficiency retrofitting scheme with retrofitting the social housing stock in the region at its core, while enabling private homeowners to opt-in to the scheme

- €5 million for peatland rehabilitation

- €11 million Just Transition Fund, with the Government contributing €6 million and the ESB contributing an additional €5 million

The Commissioner will not have a direct role in relation to industrial relations matters in Bord na Móna who will continue to work with the Joint Industrial Relations Council established under the Workplace Relations Commission, and with the Workplace Relations Commission as necessary.

### **Climate Change Policy**

46. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he expects to meet the challenges of climate change and reduction of greenhouse gases over the next 12 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49409/19]

**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.

### **Energy Efficiency**

47. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the funding that will be made available from the SEAI for energy efficiency measures in social housing units in mid-western areas of Dublin in the coming years; if the warmth and well-being scheme will be extended to other areas; the number of homes retrofitted under the scheme in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49438/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Social housing upgrades are primarily a matter for the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. A budget of €25 million has been allocated to that Department for the social housing energy efficiency retrofit programme in both 2019 and 2020. Although Local Authorities have in recent years received some limited funding through the Better Energy Communities and Warmth and Wellbeing Pilot Schemes, the SEAI does not have a ring-fenced allocation for local authorities.

The Warmth & Wellbeing Pilot Scheme is a joint policy initiative between my Department and the Department of Health under the Government's Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty and the Healthy Ireland Framework. The main aim of the Scheme is to validate, in an Irish context, the strong international evidence that making homes warmer, drier and more energy efficient can have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of people living with chronic respiratory conditions.

Since 2016, approximately €26.3 million has been invested under the Scheme in upgrading over 1,200 homes in the pilot areas of Dublin 8, 10, 12, 22 and 24. The SEAI estimate approximately 15% of this amount has been spent on local authority homes.

It is expected that an interim report on the health impacts of the scheme, which is being undertaken by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, will be completed in the coming months with the final evaluation scheduled for completion in 2021. A process for determining the next steps for the Scheme is nearing completion.

### **National Broadband Plan Administration**

48. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if it will be ensured that planned fibre optic broadband proposals agreed to under the national broadband plan will be placed under the ownership of the State. [49054/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Five alternative Ownership options were considered in the July 2015 public consultation on the Intervention Strategy for the National Broadband Plan.

In December 2015 two possible ownership options were recommended to government, one of which was the gap funded model (where public funds are made available to make private investment commercially viable). An inter-departmental group was then established to recommend the best way to proceed to assess the most appropriate ownership model.

The deliberations of the Sub-Group were informed by the Department's financial advisors' (KPMG) expert report, which provided detailed scenarios of the likely cost to the State of the various ownership options in real and nominal terms. Based on the ownership report from the Sub-Group, the Department recommended the gap funded model, and that was then adopted by Government in July 2016.

Our telecoms infrastructure is almost entirely privately owned and the Intervention has been designed to ensure that as much as possible of the network infrastructure will comprise the re-use of existing poles and ducts, which NBI will lease from existing infrastructure owners.

Infrastructure re-use in this manner ensures the State complies with State Aid guidelines and environmental sustainability best practice. It minimises costs and ensures that the network development is integrated into that evolving system. The model of subsidising the rollout of fibre rather than owning it was chosen deliberately to ensure the operator would continually invest to deliver to the highest standard.

Ownership of any other network assets procured by NBI will reside with NBI. NBI will be required to manage these assets over the lifetime of the project, and will be liable for the associated costs where network assets are required to be maintained or replaced.

### **National Broadband Plan Data**

49. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of the national broadband plan in excess of the amount allocated in the national development plan in each of the years 2020 to 2025; the potential cost if the national broadband plan were to be found to be in breach of state aid rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46969/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** 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, to deliver high speed broadband to more than 1.1 million people in the intervention area, will be settled in the context of the annual Estimates process.

With regard to compliance by the NBP with State aid rules, on 15 November last, Ireland received a positive decision from the European Commission in this regard.

### **National Broadband Plan**

50. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is satisfied that the national broadband plan is fit for purpose. [49433/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The availability of high speed broadband services can have a transformative effect on communities. High speed broadband will allow citizens and businesses in rural communities to enjoy broadband speeds comparable to communities in urban areas. This will enable rural communities to avail of the opportunities presented by the digital economy including in healthcare, education, farming, rural development and tourism.

Since July 2013, the Department has engaged in an extensive process of mapping broadband availability in Ireland in order to identify premises requiring State intervention. The mapping exercise has been supported by a number of public consultations which have elicited significant response from industry and the public.

The NBP contract, which was signed on 19 November, provides that the future proofed high speed broadband network to be deployed by National Broadband Ireland will also pass and connect new premises built in the intervention area over the next 25 years. The network will keep pace with developments outside the intervention area and minimum services offered will be reviewed every three to five years to ensure the network is keeping pace with demand.

The tender submitted by National Broadband Ireland committed to a network that will initially provide services of 150Mbps to the majority of homes and up to 1Gbps to heavy data users and Small and Medium size Enterprises. Services on the network will be upgraded for consumers to 300Mbps by year 6 and 500Mbps by year 10 while businesses and heavy users will also get an upgrade to 2Gbps by year 11 and incrementally beyond that.

### **Carbon Credits**

51. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated amount of carbon credits Ireland will need to purchase in 2020 in order to comply with its international obligations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49386/19]

56. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if spending needed to purchase carbon credits to comply with international obligations will affect other projects under his Department; the projected amount of funding needed in the coming years to purchase carbon credits; the areas from which the carbon credits for 2019 came; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49436/19]

206. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the net cost of carbon credits up to the end of 2019; the projected cost of those credits in 2020 including revenues received by Ireland under the Kyoto protocol effort sharing programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49614/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 51, 56 and 206 together.

Under the 2009 Effort Sharing Decision 406/2009/EC (ESD), which put in place binding annual emissions targets for each year between 2013 and 2020 for sectors outside the EU Emissions Trading System, Ireland must achieve a reduction of 20% relative to 2005 levels of emissions. These targets cover emissions from sectors such as transport, agriculture, buildings and waste. The latest projections of greenhouse gas emissions, published earlier this year by the EPA, indicate that emissions from those sectors of the economy covered by the ESD could remain between 0% and 1% below 2005 levels by 2020.

The ESD allows Member States to meet their targets by means of unused emissions allowances from earlier years, or through purchasing allowances from other Member States or on international markets.

The latest projections indicate that Ireland will cumulatively exceed its obligations by 14.8Mt over the 2013-2020 period. Ireland has, over the period since 2007, already acquired 5.3 million allowances that will be required for compliance. However, Ireland will need to purchase additional allowances to meet projected shortfalls in 2019 and 2020. My Department currently estimates the cost of this requirement to be in the region of €6m to €13m, depending on the price and final quantity of allowances required. Provision will be made in my Department's Vote for this purpose.

This cost estimate is in addition to the costs already incurred from previous purchases and agreements entered into by the State, amounting to some €121m in total since 2007, a proportion of which was used to meet Ireland's obligations under the Kyoto Protocol in the period 2008-2012.

### **Waste Disposal Charges**

52. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason for the considerable delay in introducing an annual support of €75 for the disposal of medical incontinence wear for vulnerable persons to help meet the average annual cost of disposing of domestic waste; when the support will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49076/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department has been examining this issue in detail and has engaged with relevant stakeholders, including representative organisations and the HSE, in an effort to see how best to provide a financial support to persons with long-term incontinence with respect to the disposal of medical incontinence wear. However, there are complex issues at play in this area, which are understandable given the sensitive nature of the medical data in question.

Since mid-2017, a range of charging options have operated, which encourage householders to reduce and separate their waste. This provides flexibility to waste collectors to develop various service-price offerings that suit different household circumstances. Mandatory per kilogramme 'pay by weight' charging was not introduced. A Price Monitoring Group (PMG) was established in mid-2017 to monitor the on-going cost of residential waste collection to homeowners across Ireland as the 'flat-rate structure' was being phased out. While fluctuations in prices and service offerings have been observed, the overall trend has been relative price stability. Results from the PMG are available on my Department's website.

### **Television Licence Fee**

53. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the need for the immediate introduction of the household charge in order to create the conditions required for the sustainability of public service media and the sustainability of the independent production sector here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49174/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Government has accepted the recommendations of the Working Group on the Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting, that TV Licence collection be put out to public tender for a period of 5 years and then replaced with a device independent broadcasting charge.

I will be bringing an amendment at Committee Stage of the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill to provide for the tendering for licence fee collection. This will help to reduce the evasion rate and increase the level of funding available for public service broadcasting and the Sound and Vision Scheme which is open to the independent production sector.

### **Offshore Islands**

54. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of his policies on the islands as requested by the interdepartmental committee on the islands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49410/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Interdepartmental Committee on Island Development is the first cross-Government policy developed for the islands in 23 years and will set a roadmap for the long-term sustainability and development of our offshore communities.

Our coastal islands are an integral part of our cultural heritage. Island communities need to continue to be sustainable and to realise their potential. The voices and views of islanders will be central to the process.

At a special event on Saturday 23 November 2019, on Sherkin Island, An Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Simon Coveney T.D., in conjunction with the Government Chief Whip and Minister of State for the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Islands, Seán Kyne T.D. launched a consultation process aimed at formulating a new national policy for the future development of the islands.

My Department has supported this initiative by outlining the breadth of policies relevant particularly to the Islands including those in the communications, energy, climate action and fisheries areas.

The National Broadband Plan aims to deliver access to high speed broadband to every premises in Ireland, regardless of location, including offshore islands. Provision of advanced communications services and innovation in smart agriculture, e-health, education, tourism and improved supports for emergency services, all offer potential island applications.

The NBP deployment plan will be finalised 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 four years.

Approximately 300 Broadband Connections Points (BCPs) in community centres such as schools, library hubs and local sports halls in every county in Ireland, including on some islands, will be connected to high speed broadband during 2020, to enable communities to quickly get

free public access to high speed broadband.

These include for example;

- Tory Co-Op, West Town, Tory Island, Co. Donegal, F92FD66
- Inishbofin Community Centre, Middlequarter, Inishbofin, Co. Galway, H91TC6C
- Scoil Caomháin, An Tra, Inis Oirr, Co. Galway, H91C967
- Valentia Island Community Centre, Chapeltown, Valentia, Co. Kerry, V23H240
- Keel Community Centre, Keel, Achill, Co. Mayo, F28XA33

There are many opportunities for the islands to become pioneers in initiatives designed to deliver our Climate Action Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals. My department has active programs for community participation.

- Sustainable Energy Communities operated by SEAI
- Waste reduction and recycling
- Sound and Vision Ireland operated by BAI

*Question No. 55 answered with Question No. 40.*

*Question No. 56 answered with Question No. 51.*

### **Broadband Service Provision**

57. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the role a company (details supplied) will have in connecting premises and encouraging take up of high speed broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49340/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** On 19 November, the Government signed the contract with National Broadband Ireland (NBI) to provide access to high speed broadband to the 1.1 million people living and working in 537,537 premises, including 44,000 businesses and over 54,500 farms and 695 schools, where commercial operators will not commit to deliver the service.

National Broadband Ireland will set up a wholesale open access company dedicated to the rollout of a predominantly fibre to the premises (FTTP) network in the Intervention Area, which will be capable of delivering a future-proofed high speed broadband network, initially providing services of 150Mbps to the majority of homes and up to 1Gbps to heavy data users and Small and Medium size Enterprises.

Work by NBI will begin immediately and over 90% of premises in the State will have access to high speed broadband within the next four years.

Approximately 300 community centres, schools, library hubs and local sports halls across every county in Ireland will be connected to high speed broadband during 2020, to enable communities to quickly get free public access to high speed broadband.

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.

The take up of recently built fibre to the home networks in rural areas indicates strong and accelerating demand for services. NBI will ensure equal access to the network for all wholesale and retail operators. Under the National Broadband Plan contract there are also obligations on NBI to engage with stakeholders and to raise awareness of the rollout of the service.

The initial connection charge and the monthly charges from service providers to those living in rural Ireland will be similar to those paid by residents in urban areas with the ability to avail of services such as voice, broadband, TV from the same service provider.

### **National Broadband Plan**

58. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to a legal challenge to the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49385/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I am not aware of any legal challenge that has been made to the National Broadband Plan.

As a State intervention, the NBP must comply with the requirements of the European Commission's Guidelines on the application of the State aid rules on 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.

My Department recently conducted a public consultation to close the ongoing mapping exercise and the findings of that consultation informed the NBP State aid notification. Following receipt of a positive State aid decision on 15 November, the NBP contract was awarded on 19 November.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

59. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has met with representatives from social media companies in the past two months; and if so, the companies he met with. [49431/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I have not met with any social media companies in the period referred to by the Deputy.

On 4 March 2019 I launched a consultation in relation to the proposed Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill. This legislation will set a clear expectation for online platforms to take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of the users of their service. A regulator, an Online Safety Commissioner, as part of a wider Media Commission, would oversee the new system.

I intend to bring the draft heads of Bill to Government by end-2019. My Department will consult further with stakeholders, including social media companies, in early 2020 in relation to the detail of these proposals.

### **RTÉ Expenditure**

60. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to address the ongoing funding crisis at RTÉ; if he has met a person (details supplied) to discuss the plans of RTÉ since publication of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49383/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department is in ongoing contact with senior management in RTÉ regarding their financial position and their proposals for reform, a number of which will require my consent as Minister and will be submitted to me in due course for consideration. The detail of these matters is being considered by my officials, in conjunction with NEWERA officials and officials from DPER. I have met with the chair and the director general in recent months and expect to do so again in the coming period.

An additional €10m in public funding has been allocated to RTÉ over the past two budgets. This includes an additional €8.6m made available in Budget 2019 through a combination of an increase in exchequer funding for Public Service Broadcasting, which replaced TG4's TV Licence funding, and an increase in the amount paid by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection for free TV Licences. This builds on the increase in funding for Public Service Broadcasting in 2018, funded through a €1.64m increase in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection contribution for free TV licences.

### **Defence Forces Representative Organisations**

61. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding the affiliation of a union (details supplied) to another union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49524/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Section 2(3) of the Defence (Amendment) Act 1990, prohibits the Defence Forces representative associations from being associated with or affiliated to any trade union or any other body, without the consent of the Minister. Members of the Permanent Defence Force also cannot become members of a trade union.

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

In 2017, the European Committee of Social Rights, in a non-binding ruling, upheld the prohibition of the right of military personnel to strike but did conclude that Ireland was in violation of Article 5 of the European Social Charter on the grounds of the prohibition against military representative associations from joining national employees organisations and in respect of Article 6.2 of the Charter regarding the right to bargain collectively.

It should be noted that the basis for the complaint pre-dates a number of significant Government initiatives. In relation to collective bargaining, the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations were afforded equal standing to other public sector trade unions and representative associations during the negotiations which led to the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020.

The findings of the European Committee of Social Rights were considered as part of an independent review of the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force. One of the recommendations from that review was that the official side should, with the consent of the Minister, engage in discussions with ICTU to explore the practicalities

of a PDF representative association forming association/affiliation with ICTU, while giving due consideration to any likely conflict that might arise between such an arrangement and the obligations of military service.

Association with ICTU poses complex questions for the Defence Forces from a legal, operational and management perspective. I asked my officials to examine this matter further and, in this regard, Defence management (civil and military) have engaged in discussions with ICTU. Defence management have met with the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations, RACO and PDFORRA, to discuss this matter. I have also discussed the matter of ICTU affiliation/association with both RACO and PDFORRA.

I am aware of PDFORRA's longstanding ambition to affiliate with ICTU. I am also aware that RACO, the representative body for Commissioned Officers, have a conflicting position on this matter.

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

### **Departmental Expenditure**

62. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount spent by his Department and each agency under the aegis of his Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49537/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** It has not been possible in the time available to compile all the information requested by the Deputy. The information will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Air Corps**

63. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the upgrade of accommodation facilities at Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnel, is fully completed; if not, when the works will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49557/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The contract for the refurbishment of the Apprentice Hostel Accommodation Block at Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnel is well advanced. This will provide class rooms, auditorium, recreational and improved living in accommodation for 75 personnel. Works are progressing well and the project is due to be completed in early 2020 at a cost of €3.3m.

### **Defence Forces Representative Organisations**

64. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49566/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Section 2(3) of the Defence (Amendment) Act 1990, prohibits the Defence Forces representative associations from being associated with or affiliated to any trade union or any other body, without the con-

sent of the Minister. Members of the Permanent Defence Force also cannot become members of a trade union.

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

In 2017, the European Committee of Social Rights, in a non-binding ruling, upheld the prohibition of the right of military personnel to strike but did conclude that Ireland was in violation of Article 5 of the European Social Charter on the grounds of the prohibition against military representative associations from joining national employees organisations and in respect of Article 6.2 of the Charter regarding the right to bargain collectively.

It should be noted that the basis for the complaint pre-dates a number of significant Government initiatives. In relation to collective bargaining, the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations were afforded equal standing to other public sector trade unions and representative associations during the negotiations which led to the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020.

The findings of the European Committee of Social Rights were considered as part of an independent review of the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force, which was completed last year.

One of the recommendations from that review was that the official side should, with the consent of the Minister, engage in discussions with ICTU to explore the practicalities of a PDF representative association forming association/affiliation with ICTU, while giving due consideration to any likely conflict that might arise between such an arrangement and the obligations of military service.

Association with ICTU poses complex questions for the Defence Forces from a legal, operational and management perspective. I asked my officials to examine this matter further and, in this regard, Defence management (civil and military) have engaged in discussions with ICTU. Defence management have met with the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations, RACO and PDFORRA, to discuss this matter. I have also discussed the matter of ICTU affiliation/association with both RACO and PDFORRA.

I am aware of PDFORRA's longstanding ambition to affiliate with ICTU. I am also aware that RACO, the representative body for Commissioned Officers, have a conflicting position on this matter. The implications of possible association or affiliation are being carefully considered.

In 2016, the Government established the Public Service Pay Commission to provide objective advice to Government in relation to Public Service Pay Policy. Following the publication of the Public Service Pay Commission report in May 2017, the Government initiated negotiations on an extension to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, which culminated in the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020. This Agreement was accepted by the PDF representative associations, that is RACO and PDFORRA and their members are receiving the benefits.

Following the first report of the Pay Commission and in accordance with the provisions of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the Government tasked the Commission with prioritising a comprehensive examination of recruitment and retention difficulties in the Defence Forces.

The report of the independent Public Service Pay Commission was published and accepted by Government in July this year. The Report contains a broad range of recommendations aimed at improving recruitment and retention in the Permanent Defence Force. In accepting the report

of the Public Service Pay Commission, the Government also approved a plan Strengthening Our Defence Forces – Phase 1 to implement the recommendations in the report. The plan provides for a number of specific projects which are being progressed by civil and military personnel.

The Defence Forces have received the benefits of collective agreements in the past and it is intended that future remuneration of Defence Forces personnel will continue to be dealt with within this process. There are currently no plans to establish a pay commission specific to Defence.

### **Defence Forces Reserve**

65. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 60 of 20 November 2019, the number of the Reserve Defence Forces members who were discharged up to 31 October 2019 that are compulsory discharge numbers identified up to December 2019; the specific key performance indicators in place to monitor the processing of the 2,603 persons who applied to join; the specific appointment holder, civilian or military, in charge of the overall process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49568/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The information sought by the Deputy is in the process of being collated and verified by the military authorities. I will pass on the details to the Deputy when they become available.

### **Defence Forces Remuneration**

66. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will reintroduce a Gleeson style commission on the Defence Forces to examine terms and conditions to include a comprehensive review of contracts, duty allowances and technical payments for the members of the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49594/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Overarching Public Sector Pay Policy is a matter for the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform.

In 2016, the Government established the Public Service Pay Commission to provide objective advice to Government in relation to Public Service Pay Policy. Following the publication of the Public Service Pay Commission report in May 2017, the Government initiated negotiations on an extension to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, which culminated in the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 was accepted by the representative associations, RACO and PDFORRA and their members are receiving the benefits.

Following the first report of the Pay Commission and in accordance with the provisions of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the Government tasked the Commission with prioritising a comprehensive examination of recruitment and retention difficulties in the Defence Forces.

The report of the independent Public Service Pay Commission was published and accepted by Government in July this year. The Report contains a broad range of recommendations aimed at improving recruitment and retention in the Permanent Defence Force. In accepting the report of the Public Service Pay Commission, the Government also approved a plan Strengthening Our

Defence Forces – Phase 1 to implement the recommendations in the report. The plan provides for a number of specific projects which are being progressed by civil and military personnel.

The Defence Forces have received the benefits of collective agreements in the past and it is intended that future remuneration of Defence Forces personnel will continue to be dealt with within this process. There are currently no plans to establish a pay commission, specific to Defence.

### **Trade Missions Participation**

67. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Minister of State with responsibility for trade, employment, business, EU digital Single Market and data protection took part in a recent Enterprise Ireland trade mission to Bahrain; and if he or his officials briefed the Minister of State on the human rights abuses of the regime in Bahrain and encouraged him to raise such concerns about human rights in Bahrain during his meetings with government representatives there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49468/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Minister of State for Trade, Employment, Business, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection, Pat Breen T.D., visited Bahrain on 21 November, leading a trade delegation. He was accompanied by an official from the Embassy of Ireland in Riyadh, which is accredited to Bahrain.

The Embassy of Ireland in Riyadh and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade worked with Enterprise Ireland and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation in relation to the Minister of State's programme. The Bahraini authorities were contacted with a view to securing Ministerial meetings at which the Minister of State could discuss Ireland's bilateral relationship with Bahrain, including our concerns about human rights. However, in the event, it was not possible on this occasion to secure such meetings as the relevant Ministers were out of the country.

While consideration was given to postponing the visit it was decided to go ahead with the trade mission, given that a substantive programme was in place. Bilateral trade with Bahrain is worth over €100 million annually. In addition, the Minister of State attended the Bahrain GAA games and met the Irish community in Bahrain, signalling the Government's support for the Irish diaspora.

While it was not possible for the Minister of State to raise our concerns about the human rights situation directly with Bahraini Government representatives on this occasion, I can assure the Deputy that the Bahraini Government is aware of our concerns. I raised the human rights situation with the Bahraini Foreign Minister in New York in September 2019 and officials from my Department met earlier this month with a delegation from Bahrain on human rights. Topics covered at that meeting included prison conditions, freedom of expression and opinion, protection of Human Rights Defenders, and capital punishment.

My Department will continue to monitor developments in Bahrain, and to call on the Bahraini Government to deliver on its stated commitment to make progress in relation to human rights. We will continue to seek every opportunity to do so directly with Bahraini officials, as well as at EU and international level.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

68. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount spent by his Department and each agency under the aegis of his Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49541/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department participated in the National Ploughing Championships in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 in order to increase public understanding of the public services provided by the Department and how the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Ireland's diplomatic missions abroad engage with Ireland's international partners and wider audiences to advance the interests of Ireland and Irish citizens.

In the past four years, my Department's presence at the National Ploughing Championships has highlighted policy areas, public services and supports offered by the Department including innovation in the delivery of Passport services; Consular Assistance and Consular Services; Ireland's membership of the European Union and ongoing Brexit-preparedness work; Ireland's development assistance programme, Irish Aid; support for the diaspora; a number of Ireland's bilateral relationships; Ireland's membership of the United Nations; implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals; and "Global Ireland – Ireland's Global Footprint to 2025", the Government's initiative to double the scope and impact of Ireland's global footprint in the period to 2025.

Details of the expenditure of the Department's presence at the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2019 are outlined as follows.

My Department has not engaged in paid online advertising in relation to the National Ploughing Championships.

In 2016, 2017, and 2018 an advertisement was placed in National Ploughing Championships Official Catalogue. The cost of these advertisements were: €2,460 in 2016, €1,230 in 2017, and €1,476 in 2018. No advertisements were placed in 2019.

No additional wage costs were incurred due to my Department's participation at the National Ploughing Championships.

Promotional materials were not purchased specifically for this event.

Photography costs were €738 in 2018 and the same in 2019. There were no photography costs in 2016 or 2017.

The stand costs include plot and marquee rental, marquee construction, exterior and interior signage and audience activation design and provision, power supply, and health and safety facilities. The stand costs totalled to: €47,416.09 in 2019, €49,284.28 in 2018, €46,538.91 in 2017, and €35,555.91 in 2016.

## **Human Rights**

69. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on reports that over 1 million persons are being detained in camps in Xinjiang province in China; his plans to raise the matter with Chinese officials here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49581/19]

72. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on a recent report (details supplied) into appalling conditions in a huge network of concentration camps in which over 1 million Uighur people are imprisoned in Xinjiang by the Chinese Government; the steps he will take including with his EU colleagues to sanction the leadership of China and demand the immediate closure of the camps and freedom for those imprisoned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49613/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 69 and 72 together.

The Government, as a matter of practice, does not comment on leaked documents.

However, we remain deeply concerned over the credible reports of the treatment of ethnic Uighurs and other minorities in the Xinjiang region. We, along with our EU partners, take these reports very seriously and have raised our concerns at official and political level with our Chinese counterparts on a consistent basis.

Most recently, Ireland was one of 23 States to sign up to a Joint Statement at the UN Third Committee on 29 October 2019. This statement called for the Chinese Government to urgently implement eight recommendations made by the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination related to Xinjiang, including by refraining from the arbitrary detention of Uighurs and members of other Muslim communities.

Ireland was also one of 22 States to sign up to a Joint Letter at the Human Rights Council in Geneva in July this year. This letter expressed concerns about credible reports of arbitrary detention in large-scale places of detention, as well as widespread surveillance and restrictions, particularly targeting Uighurs and other minorities in Xinjiang. It called on China to uphold its national laws and international obligations and to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms in Xinjiang.

At EU level, this issue was raised at both the EU-China Summit and EU-China Human Rights Dialogue in April this year. During the dialogue the EU noted that while actions to counter terrorism are essential, these actions must respect the principle of proportionality, fundamental freedoms, and international laws. The EU has also raised this issue at multilateral level, calling on China to allow meaningful, unrestricted, and unsupervised access to Xinjiang for independent observers, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Ireland, along with our EU partners, will continue to raise our concerns during contacts with Chinese authorities at both official and political level.

## **Human Rights**

70. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps that have been taken at EU level to prevent the persecution of Christians worldwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49582/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland strongly condemns all forms of persecution on the basis of religion or belief, irrespective of where they occur or who the victims are. We are committed to promoting freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as the rights of persons belonging to religious minorities. This commitment to promoting freedom of religion or belief is reaffirmed in the Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World.

Within the EU, Ireland works with partners to address the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities. The EU's policy in this area is led by the Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief, which were adopted during our Presidency in 2013. The EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019 also includes an express reference to the promotion of freedom of religion or belief, and we will continue to work to ensure that these issues are addressed within the framework of the EU's external human rights policy.

The EU consistently raises concerns about violations of freedom of religion or belief in the course of political dialogues with partner countries, including human rights dialogues and consultations. The EU continues to be a strong advocate for Freedom of Religion or Belief in UN Multilateral fora, including at the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly as well as in other international organisations including the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe. Most recently, the EU successfully tabled resolutions on freedom of religion or belief at the 40th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2019 and the 74th session of the UN General Assembly Third Committee in November 2019. Ireland co-sponsored both initiatives.

In May 2016, the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker created the function of the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU, and appointed Ján Figel to the role. The Special Envoy has completed 16 official country visits since October 2016, during which he has met with government officials, civil society and human rights defenders.

Finally the EU is providing financial support of over €5m in the period 2018-2022 to three interfaith projects in the Middle East and Africa which aim to enhance cultural pluralism and intercultural understanding related to religion or belief. It has also increased its support to civil society projects on freedom of religion or belief under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights up to €5.18m.

### **International Agreements**

71. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans for Ireland to sign the Antarctic Treaty System; his further plans on becoming a signatory; and the timeline for such a process. [49592/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The question of Ireland's ratification of the Antarctic Treaty and related agreements comprising the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) has been examined in some detail by the Government and Offices concerned.

Accession by Ireland to the ATS would require enactment of complex legislation and impose a substantial administrative burden on the Government Departments concerned for relatively minor benefits. The subsequent servicing of meetings and obligations under the ATS by this Department would unfortunately divert resources from areas of priority national interest.

There are therefore no plans, at this time, for Ireland to accede to the Antarctic Treaty.

*Question No. 72 answered with Question No. 69.*

### **Data Protection**

73. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and

Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 54 of 21 November 2019, the reason each public authority listed accessed the passport office data sets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49630/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** It is not possible to provide the precise reason for these requests. This is due to the requirement that suitable and specific measures are taken to safeguard the fundamental rights and freedoms of data subjects, my Department is not privy as to why the information is being sought by the public authority. These requests are normally made under Section 41 (b) Data Protection Act 2018.

An Garda Síochána, Interpol and Europol request information in accordance with section 41(b) of the Data Protection Act 2018 whereby the data requested is for the purpose of preventing, detecting, investigating or prosecuting criminal offences.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection requests information in accordance with 41 (b) of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the provisions of Section 261 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, 2005 to assist in the prevention of, or the detection of fraud.

Revenue makes requests in accordance with 41 (b) of the Data Protection Act 2018 whereby the data requested is for the purpose of preventing, detecting, investigating or prosecuting criminal offences under the Finance Act 2001 or the Customs Act 2015.

The Department of Justice and Equality requests information in accordance with section 41(b) of the Data Protection Act 2018 for the prevention, detection and investigation of offences under the Immigration Acts 1999/2004 or prosecuting criminal offences.

The Road Safety Authority very occasionally requests information in accordance with 41 (b) of the Data Protection Act 2018 to be used for the purpose of the detection, prevention and investigation of an offence under the Road Traffic Act 1961 (as amended).

In addition, the Health Service Executive requests addresses, contact numbers and e-mail addresses to assist in the tracing of holders of Irish passports who were on flights where a person with an infectious disease was known to be on board. The information is provided under section 6 (1) (d) of the General Data Protection Regulation.

## **Data Protection**

74. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the procedures and-or protocols that were in place prior to the enactment of GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 for public authorities and An Garda Síochána to gain access to the information in the Passport Office data sets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49653/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Prior to the introduction of the Data Protection Act 2018, the Passport Service complied with the Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018.

Under the Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018, the Passport Service shared data as requested by An Garda Síochána and other authorities under Section 8 of the Data Protection Act 1988 as amended by the Data Protection Act 2003.

## **Tax Code**

75. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Finance the action he is taking to ensure the proposal to cease the flat rate expenses scheme for workers does not proceed as planned; if he has requested the Revenue Commissioners to defer its decision on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49505/19]

**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.

### Fiscal Data

76. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Finance the gross fixed capital formation in percentage terms in each of the years 2008, 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49509/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** In July 2019, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published the National Income and Expenditure (NIE) results for 2018. The NIE includes the most recent updated series for gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) in Ireland. The year-on-year percentage growth rates for GFCF in constant (i.e. inflation adjusted) and current prices from the NIE for the years in question are presented in the table.

-	2008	2017	2018
GFCF (constant prices)	-11.6	-6.8	-21.1
GFCF (current prices)	-17.8	-3.7	-18.6

The negative growth rate of GFCF in 2008 is primarily explained by the fall in construction investment related to the downturn in that sector at that time.

In recent years, GFCF has become distorted by the globalised investment activities of a small number of large multinational firms, and as a result has been very volatile on an annual basis. These distortions, which have very little impact on the underlying domestic economy, include the following:

- Investment in aircraft by the aircraft leasing sector for international leasing activities.
- The relocation of intellectual property-related assets or patents to Ireland.

The year-on-year declines in 2017 and 2018 are mainly a result of annual declines in the on-shoring in intellectual property assets by the multinational sector in those years, with investment by the aircraft leasing sector also a factor in 2017. However, when we look beyond these distortions it is clear that the underlying investment patterns in the economy in those years were positive.

Indeed, it should be noted that an alternative investment series - 'modified investment' - which is also published by the CSO and which removes the aircraft leasing and intellectual property related distortions from the GFCF figures, recorded positive growth rates in both 2017 and 2018.

### Economic Data

77. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Finance the gross domestic product in percentage terms in each of the years 2008, 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49510/19]

78. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Finance the rate of growth in percentage terms in each of the years 2008, 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49511/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 and 78 together.

In July 2019, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published the national income and expenditure (NIE) results for 2018. The NIE contains the most recent series for gross domestic product (GDP) and related economic statistics for Ireland. The year-on-year percentage growth rates for GDP in constant (i.e. inflation adjusted) and current prices are presented in the table.

	2008	2017	2018
GDP (constant prices)	-4.5	8.1	8.2
GDP (current prices)	-4.8	9.4	9.1

The contraction in GDP in 2008 represents the onset of both the domestic and global recession. In particular, the negative growth in GDP is attributed to the negative growth in gross fixed capital formation (i.e. investment) and exports along with moderating private consumer spending in 2008 relative to 2007.

More recently, GDP has become increasingly distorted by the globalised activities of a small number of large multinational firms which have limited impact on actual activity in the Irish economy.

The GDP numbers in 2017 and 2018 are affected by these activities which include:

- Activity in the aircraft leasing sector which involves substantial investment in portfolios of aircraft for international leasing and which generate substantial fee income (i.e. services exports) without significant employment effects.

- The relocation of intellectual property (IP) related assets or patents to Ireland.

- The effect of ‘contract manufacturing’ whereby multinationals located in Ireland contract a party located abroad to produce and supply goods on their behalf to another party. Throughout this process the Irish firm retains economic ownership of the goods, such that sales of these products are recorded as exports in Ireland’s national accounts.

While the high GDP growth rates recorded in 2017 and 2018 are impacted by a relatively small number of very large multinational firms who engage in these activities, the GDP figures are compiled in accordance with best international practice and statistical standards. However, as Ireland is a small, open and highly globalised economy, the relevance of GDP as a metric by which underlying economic trends and changes in living standards can be assessed is considerably less than elsewhere.

To address this, the CSO publishes additional series, including modified gross national income (GNI\*) and modified domestic demand, which are more closely related to the domestic economy. In particular, modified domestic demand - that is domestic demand excluding investment in foreign owned IP and leased aircraft - increased by 2.8 and 4.8 per cent in 2017 and 2018 respectively, pointing to robust growth in the domestic economy.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

79. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the amount spent by his Department and each agency under the aegis of his Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49540/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** With respect to the 2019, we estimate my Department incurred costs of €71.70 related to the printing of materials on behalf of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform which were to be distributed at the National Ploughing Championships. No costs were incurred in the years 2016 to 2018.

There are 17 bodies under the aegis of my Department, 12 of which have not incurred any costs at National Ploughing Championships in the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019. These are the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Credit Union Advisory Committee, the Credit Union Restructuring Board, the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman, Home Building Finance Ireland, the Investor Compensation Company DAC, the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, the Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal, the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, the National Asset Management Agency and the Tax Appeals Commission.

The remaining 5 bodies have provided the following details:

Body	Details of the amount spent by agencies under the aegis of the Department of Finance on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years in the 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019
Central Bank	2016 Online Advertising/Offline Advertising – Nil Promotional material - €5,004.40 Wages - €14,457.60 Photography - €776.13 Plot rental - €2,298 Marquee rental - €13,620 Exhibition creation/refresh - €24,593.85 Other costs - €2,276.10 Total: €63,016.08 2017 Online Advertising/Offline Advertising - Nil Promotional material - €369 Wages - €15,662.40 Photography - €1,137.75 Plot rental - €2,983.98 Marquee rental - €8,118 Exhibition creation/refresh - €28,607.34 Other costs - €6,772.50 Total: €63,650.97 2018 Online Advertising/Offline Advertising - Nil Promotional material - €4,501.20 Wages - €22,489.60 Photography - €2,725.40 Plot rental - €3,492.00 Marquee rental €7,441.50 Exhibition creation/refresh €29,919.45 Other costs €2,550.00 Total: €73,119.15 2019 Online Advertising/Offline Advertising - Nil Promotional material - €5,940.50 Wages - €16,867.20 Photography - €934.80 Plot rental - €3,673.97 Marquee rental - €8,508.30 Exhibition creation/refresh - €20,472.75 Other costs - €2,444.99 Total: €58,842.51
Credit Review Office (CRO)	2016 Online Advertising/Promotional Material/Photography – Nil Offline Advertising €219.92 Staff Costs/Reviewer Costs €945.00 Stand/Exhibition Costs €1,363.74 Courier €72.90 Total €2,601.56 (ex VAT) The CRO did not incur any other costs as they did not attend the National Ploughing Championships in 2017, 2018 or 2019.
National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA)	2017 Other costs - €101.23 Total €101.23 (incl. VAT) The NTMA did not incur any other costs as they did not attend the National Ploughing Championships in 2016, 2018 or 2019.
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	2016 Online Advertising/Offline Advertising/Wages/Photography – Nil Promotional material - €200 Stand rental - €4,116 Large Format Printing (Backdrops/Pull Up) costs - €428 Total: €4,744 2017 Online Advertising/Offline Advertising/Wages/Photography – Nil Promotional material - €200 Stand rental - €3,480 Large Format Printing (Backdrops/Pull Up) costs - €428 Total: €4,108 2018 Online Advertising/Offline Advertising/Wages/Photography – Nil Promotional material - €200 Stand rental - €5,500 Large Format Printing (Backdrops/Pull Up) costs - €528 Total: €6,228 2019 Online Advertising/Offline Advertising/Wages/Photography – Nil Promotional material - €1,145 Stand rental - €25,278 Large Format Printing (Backdrops/Pull Up) costs - €857 Total: €27,280
Strategic Banking Corporation Ireland (SBCI)	2016 Online Advertising/Offline Advertising/Promotional Material/Photography – Nil Staff costs - €363.92 Stand costs - €2,445.37 Total: €2,809.29 2017 Online Advertising/Offline Advertising/Promotional Material/Photography/Stand costs - Nil Staff costs - €30.36 Total: €30.36 2018 Online Advertising/Offline Advertising/Promotional Material/Photography/ Stand costs - Nil Staff costs - €227.40 Total: €227.40 The SBCI did not incur any other costs as they did not attend the National Ploughing Championships in 2019

### Banking Operations

80. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a bank (details supplied) has recently sold an €850 million non-performing loan portfolio for the discounted price of €700 million to a company; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the company is attempting to eliminate future retirement benefits for supermarket workers in the United States of America; his views on whether the State should use its influence in majority State-owned banks to ensure that investment firms that seek to do business with them are accountable for their treatment of workers in other jurisdictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49586/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Deputy is aware I have no role in the commercial activities of any bank operating in the Irish market.

The Deputy will be further aware, as Minister for Finance, I cannot stop or reverse loan sales even by the banks in which the State has a shareholding. Decisions in this regard, as well as the criteria used to decide the make-up of loans to be included and the selection process applied to bidders, are the sole responsibility of the board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The banks' independence is protected by Relationship Frameworks which are legally binding documents that I cannot change unilaterally. These frameworks, which are publicly available, were insisted upon by the European Commission to protect competition in the Irish market.

### **Tax Data**

81. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the projected size of tax expenditures at the end of 2020; if his Department is researching or considering further new tax expenditures in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49619/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Tax expenditures may take a number of forms such as exemptions, allowances, credits, preferential rates, deferral rules etc. They are general government policy instruments used to promote specific social or economic policies and are closely related to direct spending programmes.

The Department's Report on Tax Expenditures for 2019, published with the Budget 2020 documentation on 8 October, identifies a complete list of all tax expenditure measures in the Irish tax system. In total 176 tax expenditure measures are identified, in respect of which the total revenue forgone is estimated to be €5.3 billion, are classified under the following nine broad headings Capital taxes (CAT/CGT); Pensions; Stamp Duty/DIRT; Local Property Tax ; Benefits-in-Kind; Corporation Tax; Excise Duty; VAT and Personal Tax Credits. It should however be noted that data for over 40% of the tax expenditures listed is not available, so the total revenue foregone of €5.3 billion listed in the Report does not reflect the full amount of such expenditure.

The absence of revenue foregone data on a given tax expenditure can be due to any one or more of a number of reasons, including:

- It not being collected (normally where such collection/costing is not required in law);
- Revenue, due to taxpayer confidentiality considerations, being unable to provide the data necessary to cost a particular tax expenditure as doing so might allow the use of the expenditure concerned to be linked to a particular taxpayer or small number of taxpayers; or
- the revenue foregone figure is below €50,000.

As the report is prepared on the basis of the latest available date on revenue foregone in respect of each measure, it is not possible to accurately forecast the projected size of tax expenditures at the end of 2020.

It should be noted that Revenue provides an extensive suite of costings across nearly all tax heads, most of which are published in their Ready Reckoner: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/ready-reckoner/index.aspx>. In recent years, Revenue have greatly expanded both the range of the costings and statistics published, as well as making this information available in more open and accessible formats as part of commitment to support the Government's Open Data initiative.

Furthermore, my Department periodically reviews its approach to tax forecasting. The last

such report was published in 2008. At present, the Department is currently assessing its tax forecasting methodology with various institutions (domestic and international) represented. The analysis will focus on the composition of the Irish tax take and the accuracy of the Department's tax forecasts, with a plan to report before end-2019.

There is continued monitoring of tax expenditures by my Department. Over the course of each year, a number of reviews of tax expenditures and other tax related matters are carried out by, or on behalf of, the Department of Finance. These are intended to ensure that the tax expenditures and taxes they relate to remain fit-for-purpose, to ascertain whether existing tax expenditures and taxes should be amended, continued, extended or ended, or to otherwise review certain taxes (existing and proposed) or groups of taxes. These reviews are normally published on the Department's website.

In relation to further new tax expenditures in 2020, a range of options for possible new tax measures are examined as part of the Tax Strategy Group process each year. In addition to consideration of measures under individual tax heads, broader papers on the area of Tax Expenditures were prepared for the TSG in July this year, and previously in 2017. These papers are published, and are available on the Department's website.

## **Insurance Industry**

82. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the role his Department has in the proposed new limits to insurance pay out claims and revisions to the book of quantum from early 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49620/19]

**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 my Department has no role in the area of award levels or changes to the Book of Quantum.

The Cost of Insurance Working Group which was established by my predecessor as Minister for Finance, and which is currently chaired by Minister of State Michael D'Arcy TD has always recognised that the single most essential challenge, which must be addressed if we are to overcome the current insurance cost and availability problems, is to bring the levels of personal injury damages awarded in this country more in line with those awarded in other jurisdictions. A key recommendation arising from the CIWG's reports was the establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission (PIC) and the publication of its two reports. The PIC conducted a benchmarking of award levels exercise between Ireland and other jurisdictions for the first time and this has been very helpful in identifying the scale of the problem that is faced. This research showed that award levels for soft tissue injuries in Ireland are 4.4 times higher than in England and Wales. The PIC recommended that a Judicial Council be established and that it should compile guidelines for appropriate general damages for various types of personal injury. In carrying out this exercise, the PIC believes that the Judiciary will take account of the jurisprudence of the Court of Appeal, the results of its benchmarking exercise, etc.

The relevant legislation to establish the Judicial Council was a matter for the Minister for Justice and Equality, and as the Deputy will be 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. It is important to note that the Government cannot interfere in their deliberations.

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 the recent 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 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. In that context, I am happy for my Department to play its role. I also understand that PIAB has written to the Judiciary to offer its expertise and assistance for the purpose of this recalibration exercise.

I might also add that in addition to the work of the Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee, the Law Reform Commission (LRC) is carrying out a detailed analysis of the possibility of developing constitutionally sound legislation to delimit or cap the amounts of damages which a court may award in respect of some or all categories of personal injuries. This is another important recommendation of the CIWG, which I believe should not be overlooked. I believe that if there was a significant move in this area, it could also have an impact on insurance pricing and could also help attract new entrants into the insurance market.

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.

### **Tax Credits**

83. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the tax free allowance in the case of a person (details supplied). [49665/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Every person resident in Ireland is entitled to a personal tax credit. The amount of that credit depends on the person's circumstances, for example whether s/he is single, married or in a civil partnership, widowed or a surviving civil partner. Persons in employment are also entitled to receive the additional Employee Tax Credit.

Revenue has advised me that it has examined the tax record of the person in question but cannot confirm their correct entitlements from the information available. Revenue has written to the person setting out the necessary additional information that is required to determine their correct entitlements. Revenue has also provided a contact name and telephone number in case the person requires any further clarification regarding the details required.

### **Central Bank of Ireland Investigations**

84. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank has undertaken an industry wide review or investigation of potential overcharging on mortgage accounts with related insurance policies; if lenders have informed the Central Bank of cases of overcharging similar to that found in a bank (details supplied); the number of impacted customers in the bank and other lenders that have been reported to the Central Bank; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [49671/19]

85. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the attention of the Central Bank has been drawn to the number of customers of a bank (details supplied) who have been overcharged in mortgage accounts with related insurance policies; if the attention of the Central Bank has been further drawn to the amount by which the customers were overcharged; if the figures will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49672/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 84 and 85 together.

As the Deputy is aware I have no role in the commercial activities in any bank operating in the Irish market. Officials from my department contacted the Central Bank of Ireland with your queries and received the following response:

“The Central Bank of Ireland does not comment on individual firms regulated by the Central Bank. However, the Central Bank is examining the practice and is engaging with industry on this matter.

“Where errors are identified, under the Consumer Protection Code, 2012 (the Code) firms must address and rectify issues which affect customers, with the over-arching objective of protecting consumers’ interests, including ensuring that they are not left out of pocket. The Code requires that errors are resolved and customers notified and refunded promptly, systems failures are corrected and controls implemented to prevent a recurrence of the error. If customers have any queries about their mortgage or related insurance, they should contact their lender directly.”

### **Departmental Staff Data**

86. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of employees in his Department dedicated to international financial services, including the funds and asset management industries; the number of open vacancies in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49673/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Government’s Strategy for the development of Ireland’s international financial services sector to 2025, ‘Ireland for Finance’, was launched at the end of last April. The vision of the Strategy is for “Ireland to be a top-tier location of choice for specialist international financial services and to enhance and protect our future competitiveness”.

The Ireland for Finance Strategy was accompanied by an Action Plan containing over 50 action measures for implementation in 2019 across sub-sectors such as banking, investment funds, investment management, insurance, fintech, payments, and aviation leasing.

The Ireland for Finance strategy is led by the Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Michael D’Arcy TD. The Ireland for Finance strategy is supported by the public sector High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC), which consists of the senior officials of the Departments of the Taoiseach, of Finance, of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, of Education & Skills, of Foreign Affairs & Trade, and the CEOs of Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland. The strategy is also supported by an Industry Advisory Committee, which consists of representatives of Irish and international IFS companies. The HLIC and the IAC meet quarterly as the Joint Committee.

The Ireland for Finance (IFF) Strategy includes a commitment under Action 15 (Resourcing

of the Department of Finance) to ensure the optimal resources are in place to deliver the objectives of the Ireland for Finance strategy and this is monitored on a continuous basis.

A dedicated International Financial Services (IFS) Unit works on the Ireland for Finance strategy and operates as the Secretariat to the various IFF Committees. It also coordinates work on IFS with other parts of the Department and the Permanent Representation to the European Union in Brussels. In the promotion of the Ireland for Finance strategy abroad, the IFS Unit act as the key liaison point with the Embassies, Consulates, and the international offices of the Enterprise Agencies, (IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland). It also works closely domestically and internationally with individual businesses, their advisors, and industry representative organisations.

Apart from the dedicated IFS Unit, responsibility for IFS issues is spread across different areas of the Department with associated resourcing, namely: Financial Services Division; Banking Division; and International Finance Division. Financial Services Division covers funds and asset management, along with insurance. Banking Division covers banking and payments, while International Finance Division covers Sustainable Finance, FinTech and RegTech. In addition, there is input from Legal Services and the Department's Financial Advisory Services across the range of international financial services on particular issues.

Finally, the Department of Finance recently advertised a position for a Communications/Media Manager role who will be appointed in the near future. This role will be involved in the promotion of IFS with the two Enterprise Agencies and our Embassy network. An external PR company has also been recently appointed to assist with particular aspects of IFS promotional work.

### **Central Bank of Ireland Staff**

87. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of employees in the Central Bank dedicated to international financial services, including the funds and asset management industries; the number of open vacancies in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49674/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I have been advised by the Central Bank that the current number of employees within the Bank aligned to supervising international financial services, including the funds and asset management industries, is 216 as at the end of October with the number of open vacancies being 9 in these areas.

These teams are supported by Policy, Inspections and analytics teams which contribute to the regulation of both international and national financial services.

### **Legislative Programme**

88. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he is considering publishing an annual financial services Bill each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49675/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The introduction of an Annual Financial Services Bill was a suggestion from some of the industry representative bodies during the consultation process for the development of Ireland for Finance (IFF), the Government's Strategy for the development of Ireland's international financial services sector to 2025 which was

launched on 26th April last.

However, there already is a significant amount of legislative work undertaken by the different parts of the Banking/Financial Services Divisions in the Department and the Permanent Representation in Brussels every year.

The vast majority of legislation in financial services is based on European Directives or Regulations. In the first instance, these need to be agreed within Council and with Parliament. This process involves analysis and formulation of legislative proposals, compromise texts, negotiations with different Member States, and engagement with the Central Bank as well as with industry as the legislation is developed at European level.

After the European Directive/Regulation has been agreed, these have to be then transposed into Irish law via Statutory Instrument (SI) under the European Communities Act 1972 or primary legislation. While European Regulations have direct effect, some provisions of Regulations also have to be transposed by legislation.

The process for transposing European legislation involves decisions on discretions, preparations of consultation papers, engagement with the Central Bank, industry and the Attorney General's office (particularly the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel).

Given the significant amount of work currently being done in the financial services area on legislation on a continuous basis, coupled with the strong element of EU engagement on this legislation, there is no rationale for an Annual Financial Services Bill.

However, in light of the request for this initiative during the development of IFF, the Ireland for Finance Industry Advisory Committee have been tasked with identifying and making submissions on national legislative proposals that they consider important to further develop the operating environment under Action 14 (National legislative and regulatory proposals) of the Ireland for Finance Action Plan for 2019. An update on this measure will be provided as part of the Q4 Progress Report under Ireland for Finance.

## Financial Services Sector

89. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for the funds, asset management and international financial services industries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49676/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Deputy may be aware that the Government's Strategy for the development of Ireland's international financial services sector to 2025, 'Ireland for Finance', was launched last April. The vision of the Strategy is for "Ireland to be a top-tier location of choice for specialist international financial services and to enhance and protect our future competitiveness".

The Ireland for Finance strategy was accompanied by an Action Plan containing over 50 action measures for implementation in 2019 grouped across the four pillars of the Strategy: operating environment; technology and innovation; talent; and communications and promotion. The actions cover sub-sectors such as banking, investment funds, investment management, insurance, fintech, payments, and aviation leasing.

As part of the governance structures of the Ireland for Finance strategy, the public sector High-Level Implementation Committee, which is chaired by Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Michael D'Arcy TD, will report to Government every six months on

the progress of the annual Action Plans. The first Progress Report under Ireland for Finance covering progress on Q2 & Q3 2019 will go to Government soon and it will be published on relevant Government websites shortly afterwards.

One of the key measures for 2019 was the introduction of legislation to update the Investment Limited Partnership vehicle in the asset management sector to support the development of the growth finance and funds industry in Ireland. This legislation was published in recent months and proceeds through the Oireachtas. Other headline actions in 2019 included the consideration of a stakeholder engagement bodies; and the establishment of a Fintech Foresight Group (the latter is led by industry representative bodies).

The Department of Finance supports the Minister of State in the delivery of the strategy. The Department and the Minister are currently developing Action Plan 2020 under Ireland for Finance by engaging with relevant government departments, agencies, stakeholders and the industry representative bodies for proposals for inclusion in Action Plan 2020. This will cover developments across the overall IFS sector, including asset management and funds. In terms of asset management and funds, it should be noted that Ireland is the 3rd largest global investment funds domicile. In addition, the country has over €4 trillion in fund assets under administration with the largest European domicile for ETFs and a leading location worldwide for hedge fund administration.

Financial services legislation is constantly being updated and amended, including legislation specific to various sectors within the international financial services industry, as well as the transposition of EU Directives and Regulations.

A draft version of Action Plan 2020 will shortly be presented to Ministers D'Arcy and Donohoe and, once cleared by them, it will be submitted to the quarterly Joint Committee meeting (consisting of the public sector High-Level Implementation Committee and Industry Advisory Committee, made up of senior level representatives of Irish and international IFS companies) next month.

Following agreement at the Joint Committee meeting, and subject to any agreed amendments, the draft Action Plan 2020 will be brought to a Cabinet meeting in January 2020 for agreement by the Government. If the Government agrees to publish the draft Action Plan 2020, it will be launched at the 5th European Financial Forum (EFF) in Dublin Castle next February.

## **Financial Services Sector**

**90. Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who work in the funds, asset management and international financial services industries by region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49677/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** 'Ireland for Finance', the Government's Strategy for the development of Ireland's international financial services sector to 2025 was launched in April of this year. The development of the regions is one of the priorities of the Strategy.

There were approximately 44,000 people in direct employment in the IFS sector at the end of 2018 with one-third of these jobs located outside Dublin. The sector has a significant presence in a number of regional locations including Cavan, Clare, Cork, Drogheda, Dundalk, Galway, Kerry, Kilkenny, Letterkenny, Leitrim, Limerick, Sligo, Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford and Wicklow.

A number of international financial services companies have chosen to build centres of excellence in these regional locations, taking advantage of the opportunity afforded by the higher staff retention rates associated with operations outside of Dublin. Close connectivity to educational institutions and the development of like-minded business lines in a particular regional hub are also important factors why companies locate in these areas.

The two Enterprise Agencies (IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland) actively promote the advantage of regional locations to both existing and target clients. IDA Ireland has an active 'second site' strategy where companies in Dublin are encouraged and supported to establish a second office in a regional location.

Groups such as State Street in Kilkenny, Northern Trust in Limerick, MetLife in Galway and First Data in Nenagh have successfully established a regional presence through this channel.

Other public sector bodies that are identified in Ireland for Finance as supporting the Enterprise Agencies include my Department and the nine Regional Skills Fora. At an upcoming meeting, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland will provide an update on employment figures for Q4 of 2019 to the public sector High Level Implementation Committee, which is chaired by Minister of State Michael D'Arcy TD.

However, significant announcements during the year have included the opening of Fundrock's regional second site in Limerick, where it intends to employ 45 people; Rimes' decision to establish its first office in Cork; and Japanese company JRI America Inc.'s announcement to further expand its Technology Centre in Tralee, Co. Kerry, creating 100 new jobs over 5 years.

Carne Global, an Irish founded global provider of fund management company solutions to the asset management industry, announced a significant expansion in its Irish operations earlier this year, creating an additional 250 regional jobs over the next three years in the South East.

Opus Fund Services recently announced its decision to establish a regional second site in Wexford, creating 100 jobs while Liberty Insurance announced a 120-person expansion of its office in Cavan in addition to the announcement by DMS Governance that it is to create 50 further jobs in Cashel.

The employment target in Ireland for Finance is to reach 50,000 people in direct employment in the sector by 2025.

## Tax Yield

91. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the tax paid by the funds, asset management and international financial services industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49678/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that its primary method of classifying businesses is the European standard NACE code.

I am further advised that the majority of the businesses referred to by the Deputy are included in the 'financial and insurance activities' NACE sector. The tax paid by businesses in this sector is available at the following link: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/receipts/receipts-sector.aspx>.

This link provides the following information.

Tax Paid by Financial and Insurance Activities (€ million)

Year	VAT Internal	PAYE Income Tax and USC	Self Em- ployed Income Tax	Corporation Tax	Capital Gains Tax	Overall
2016	420.40	2,091.77	103.52	2,064.18	51.43	4,731
2017	445.52	2,219.15	97.18	2,302.55	51.87	5,116
2018	381.23	2,255.48	62.69	2,105.40	73.67	4,878

The Deputy may also wish to note the research paper published on the Revenue website in respect of Corporation Tax receipts in 2018, which is available at link: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/research/ct-analysis-2019.pdf>. This paper includes information on payments from Section 110 companies (Table 16) and withholding tax in respect of Irish Real Estate Funds (Table 18).

### Legislative Programme

92. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the progress of the legislation governing limited partnerships; if his Department is taking the lead on same; if not, if the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation is taking the lead; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49679/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Investment Limited Partnership Act 1994 defines Minister as the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation. However the Investment Limited Partnership (Amendment) Bill 2019 proposes to amend the Act so that I, as the Minister for Finance, will be the responsible Minister and it is my officials that have been working on the proposed amendments to the Act. My officials have been engaging with the relevant stakeholders on the Bill during the drafting process, which includes the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation.

The Investment Limited Partnership (Amendment) Bill is a priority piece of legislation for Government and the legislation forms part of the Ireland for Finance Strategy. The second stage debate in Dáil Eireann was completed on 18 September 2019.

As the Minister of State outlined during the Second Stage debate, there will be a number of technical changes to be brought forward at Committee Stage.

### Departmental Expenditure

93. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount spent by his Department and each agency under the aegis of his Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49545/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The information requested by the Deputy in relation to costs incurred by my Department and the bodies under its aegis on the National Ploughing Championships since 2016 are set out in the table.

The Office of Public Works is currently collating material for this PQ and will respond directly to the Deputy once finalised.

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform	Advertising (offline)	Promotional Material	Stand Rental	Other Costs	Total
2019	-	€6,214.37	-	€4,650.38	€10,864.75
2018	-	€1,195.00	-	€713.34	€1,908.34
2016*	€270.51	-	€1,643.90	€1,742.25	€3,656.66
Bodies under the aegis: Public Appointments Service					
2017	-	-	€1,400.00	€3,600.00	€5,000.00

\* 2016 costs applicable to the Office of Government Procurement, which is a Division of my Department with its own Vote

In terms of wages, the small number of staff involved in managing a presence at the National Ploughing Championships do so as part of their normal duties.

### Healthcare Policy

94. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department has evaluated the full costings over the ten-year timeframe provided in the Sláintecare report; his views on whether the costings (details supplied) are accurate for the purposes of implementing the recommendations in the report; the percentage of GDP and GNI modified gross national income public health expenditure would incur if the Sláintecare proposals were implemented in full; if the measures had been in place in 2017 at the time of the publication of the report, the proportion of GDP and GNI modified gross national income that would have been incurred by public health expenditure at that time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49570/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Sláintecare report estimated that the full year cost (by year 10 of a 10-year programme) of implementing all the measures recommended in the report is €2.836 billion. In addition, the all-party Oireachtas Committee recommended that transitional funding of €3 billion over a six-year period would also be required to deliver the Committee's proposals. The Committee acknowledged the report that these costings are indicative only. The Government decided, following the publication of the Report in 2017, that implementation of the Sláintecare proposals, and consequently any evaluation and updating of the indicative cost estimations contained in the original Sláintecare report, are a matter for the Minister for Health in the first instance.

As the Deputy may know, substantial elements of the Sláintecare Report are in progress and are aligned with initiatives currently underway across the Health sector. In this context, the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy was published in August 2018. The Implementation Strategy sets out the actions to be taken in the first three years of the Sláintecare implementation process. It will be further developed into annual action plans, as reform progresses, and the implementation structures are in place with the first Action Plan published. As these action plans are developed policy proposals will be put forward and, as usual, will be subject to review and examination in my Department with up-to-date cost estimates being developed and evaluated in that context.

### Residential Institutions Redress Scheme Data

95. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount to be paid by each religious institution into the residential institutional redress board scheme in tabular form; and the amount paid to date by each religious institution. [49529/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The 18 religious congregations involved in the management of most of the residential institutions in which child abuse took place have made contributions towards the costs incurred by the State in responding to that abuse under two rounds: the legally binding 2002 Indemnity Agreement and the voluntary offers made in 2009 in the aftermath of the publication of the report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (the “Ryan Report”).

While the total cost of the State’s response will be in the region of €1.5 billion, the amounts offered by congregations total €480.6 million. To date contributions amounting to some €236 million have been made, in the form of cash, counselling and property transfers.

Some €125 million of the €128 million provided for under the 2002 Indemnity Agreement has been contributed with the transfer of two properties remaining to be fully completed. The cash and counselling contributions received under the Agreement, amounting to some €65 million, were made on a collective basis and accordingly it is not possible to identify the amounts paid by individual congregations.

The offers made in the aftermath of the publication of the Ryan Report included cash and properties and were valued by the congregations at €352.6 million. However, when account is taken of offers not accepted and changes in the valuation of properties previously offered and the value of properties offered but not being reckoned as a contribution are taken into account, the total value of the voluntary offers achievable will be lower than the amount of €352.6 million offered. The Religious Sisters of Charity has advised that it was waiving its claim for legal costs from the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA) and offsetting this claim against the remaining cash contribution of €3m. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate has advised that it did not seek legal costs from CICA while the Presentation Brothers has refunded its CICA legal costs of €600,000.

Some €111 million of the €352.6 million offered has been received to date, including €108.4 million in cash together with added interest, and properties valued at €2.8 million. Valuations in respect of a number of properties that have fully transferred have yet to be received. The €108.4 million in cash has been contributed by 15 congregations. A final cash payment of €2 million is expected to be received from the Congregation of Christian Brothers in December 2019, while an additional contribution of €1 million is expected to be received from the Presentation Brothers in 2020/2021. The following table summarises the position in regard to cash contributions.

Finally, my Department provides regular updates to Dáil Éireann’s Committee of Public Accounts (PAC) in regard to contribution from religious congregation. The most recent update was provided in October 2019 and may be accessed on my Department’s website and on that of the PAC.

Cash amounts offered by religious congregations on a voluntary basis in the aftermath of the publication of the Ryan Report including additional contributions offered (adjusted to reflect certain offers not accepted, legal costs not claimed, etc.). Position at 27 November 2019.

Congregation	Cash Received to date	Cash Outstanding	Note
Brothers of Charity	€1.5m		
Christian Brothers	€28m	€2m	Balance due December 2019

Congregation	Cash Received to date	Cash Outstanding	Note
Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul	€9.95m		
Daughters of the Heart of Mary	€1.5m		
De La Salle Brothers	€1m		
Dominican Order	€6.5m		
Oblates of Mary Immaculate	€20m		
Hospitaller Order of St John of God	€1m		
Presentation Brothers	€3.6m	€1m	Balance due 2020 & 2021
Presentation Sisters	€4m		
Sisters of Charity	€2m		
Sisters of Our Lady of Charity	€1.5m		
Sisters of St Clare	€1m		
Sisters of St. Louis	€1m		
Sisters of Mercy	€25.88m		Additional cash contributions may be received following property disposals
Total	€108.43m	€3.0m	

### Teacher Training Provision

96. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the terms and conditions announced in budget 2020 for teachers to improve their standard of spoken and written Irish; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49459/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I understand that the Deputy is referring in particular to the restoration of the Gaeltacht placement grant for students on State-funded Initial Teacher Education Programmes.

The Gaeltacht placement is crucially important as an immersive Irish language experience for student teachers, to improve their communicative competence in Gaeilge, in the context of their future role as teachers of Irish and other subjects through Irish. It also enhances their understanding of life and culture in the Gaeltacht and the reality of life in bilingual communities.

I was very pleased therefore that Budget 2020 includes a commitment to restore the Gaeltacht grant for students in State-funded primary initial teacher education programmes. The measure will take effect from the academic year 2020/2021.

### School Accommodation Provision

97. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the immediate measures he is taking to resolve the shortage of secondary school places in Skerries, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49507/19]

**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 data 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). While the announcement did not include a new post-primary school for the Skerries school planning area, the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular will have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

My Department 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. The Patron of Skerries Community College is currently tendering for the interim accommodation approved. It is expected to have all interim accommodation in place for September 2020.

### **School Transport Provision**

98. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the north Louth Carlingford-Cooley bus route (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49523/19]

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

The purpose of the School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

All children who are eligible for school transport and who complete the application process on time have been accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation for the 2019/20 school year.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and will be facilitated where spare seats are available after eligible children have been accommodated. Where the number of ineligible children exceeds the number of spare seats available Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for the spare seats using an agreed selection process.

Earlier this year, I sanctioned an additional €1m on the school transport budget to allow for temporary alleviation measures to address a shortage of school transport capacity on the post primary scheme in 2019. The cost of these measures has been given to those areas where there was a significant concentration of post-primary children who have paid on time for the 2019/2020 school year and who are attending their second closest school. The area in question did not fall within this criteria.

### Summer Works Scheme Data

99. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the primary and secondary schools in County Donegal that made an application for the 2020 summer works scheme; the works requested by the respective schools which applied for funding; the reason schools failed in their application for works under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49525/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am pleased to advise the Deputy the 24 Schools in County Donegal were approved for funding in Summer 2020 under the summer works Scheme.

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.

I can confirm that my Department has received 65 applications from schools in Donegal under Summer Works Scheme 2020 onwards, 53 of which are Primary schools and 12 are Post-Primary schools. The remaining applications submitted, for other works, will be considered under future rounds of the Summer Works Scheme.

### Departmental Expenditure

100. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount spent by his Department and each agency under the aegis of his Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49538/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The information requested by

the Deputy is not readily available at the moment due to the number of agencies involved. A response will issue directly to the Deputy once the information has been collated.

### **Schools Building Projects**

101. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of funding for school buildings (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49567/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Under the National Development Plan, 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.

Under Project Ireland 2040, we will invest €8.4 billion in primary and post primary school buildings. The government is committed to a PE Hall build and modernisation programme, escalating in the second half of the Project Ireland 2040 period.

The provision of general purpose rooms and PE Halls form part of the accommodation brief for all newly established schools. These facilities may also form part of the overall accommodation brief for major capital extensions to existing schools.

These measures will ensure that students in all post-primary schools can have access to state of the art facilities to support PE provision, particularly also in the context of the roll-out of PE as a Leaving Certificate subject.

Details of large-scale projects being delivered under the school building programme may be viewed on my Department's website, [www.education.ie](http://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.

### **School Transport Eligibility**

102. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of school transport for a child (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49602/19]

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

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

All children who are eligible for school transport and who completed the application process on time have been accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation for the 2019/20 school year.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and will be facilitated where spare seats are available after eligible children have been accommodated. Where the number of ineligible children exceeds the number of spare seats available Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for the spare seats using an agreed selection process.

Bus Éireann have advised that the pupil referred to by the Deputy lives 8.4kms from his nearest school and 12kms from the school he is attending. The pupil was unsuccessful in obtaining a concessionary seat for the 2019/20 school year and a refund has been issued by Bus Éireann.

Earlier this year, I sanctioned an additional €1m on the school transport budget to allow for temporary alleviation measures to address a shortage of school transport capacity on the post primary scheme in 2019. The cost of these measures has been given to those areas where there was a significant concentration of post-primary children who have paid on time for the 2019/2020 school year and who are attending their second closest school. The area in question did not fall within this criteria.

### **School Transport Eligibility**

103. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49608/19]

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

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

Bus Éireann have advised that this pupil is attending his nearest post primary school and that following a restructure of services by Bus Éireann, the pupil that the Deputy refers to, can now be accommodated on a service. Bus Éireann will be in contact with the family in regard to transport arrangements.

### **Third Level Participation**

104. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the fact that recent HEA research indicates that students from better-off backgrounds domi-

nate university courses with high points entry requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49618/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The vision of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 (National Access Plan) is to ensure that the student body participating in, and completing, higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population. Goal 3 of the Plan is to "gather accurate data and evidence on access and participation and to base policy on what that data tells us". The HEA's recently published Spatial and Socio-Economic Profile of Higher Education Institutions in Ireland arises from the implementation of this goal and the publication of a data access plan in 2018. The report enhances understanding of how socio-economic background and levels of disadvantage have impacted on rates of participation in higher education.

The findings in the report show the extent of diversity of the student population in our higher education institutions as well as the diversity of the institutions. This is the first year this type of data is available so it is only possible to establish trends when more years of data become available.

This report is not the only source of data in relation to the socio-economic background of our higher education student population. The socio-economic data where we have an established trend shows that there are improvements being made in access to higher education from target socio-economic groups. Specifically, the Progress Review of the National Access Plan published in December 2018 showed an increase in participation by people disadvantaged by socio-economic backgrounds in the following groups:

Non-manual worker group: 23% in 2012/13, 27% in 2016/17

Semi/unskilled manual worker group: 26% in 2012/13, 36% in 2016/17

It is also important to recognise and acknowledge that higher education is not the only option for school leavers. Further education, apprenticeships and progression to the labour market are all equally important, valid and worthwhile alternative options.

A number of initiatives are in place to support increased participation in higher education by under-represented groups including those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and communities e.g. Student Assistance Fund, HEAR, and the more recent PATH Fund.

The report provides a key evidence base that will help policymakers in the HEA and Department of Education and Skills as well access services in higher education institutions to develop a better understanding of the levels of socio-economic disadvantage in our communities and regions. In particular, the data in the report will support institutions to develop more targeted approaches to widening access in their regions.

### **School Transport Eligibility**

105. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49621/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

In the 2018/2019 school year over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

The purpose of the Department's 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.

In general, children with special educational needs are eligible for school transport if they are attending the nearest school that is resourced to meet their special educational needs. Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENO).

The pupil in question was deemed ineligible for school transport under the terms of the above scheme as, per the information provided in the application, he is not attending the nearest school that is resourced to meet his special educational needs.

The decision was referred to the School Transport Appeal Board and the appeal was disallowed by the Board.

The terms of the school transport scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

### **Immigration Status**

106. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to re-open a scheme to regularise non-EEA nationals; if the scope of the previous scheme (details supplied) will be widened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49463/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Special Scheme for Students was launched on 15 October 2018 and closed on 20 January 2019. Approximately 3,100 applications were received under this Scheme comprising of former students and their family members.

I am informed that, to date, my Department has made a decision on 2,969 cases of which 2,153 have been granted. The remaining applications are currently being processed.

I have no plans at this time to widen the scope or criteria of that scheme or to provide for further applications under the scheme outside of the closing date.

### **Garda National Immigration Bureau**

107. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons are queueing for hours each week in order to secure an appointment with the Garda National Immigration Bureau, Cork; his plans to improve the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49473/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy may be aware, my Department register persons residing in the Dublin area only. The Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) are solely responsible for registering persons who reside in the Cork area.

However, the issues in Cork have been brought to my attention. I have had enquiries made and I am assured that the GNIB are aware of the issue and are seeking to address the situation.

Queries in relation to GNIB appointments outside Dublin should be made to the individual Garda Station dealing with such appointments. Further information is available on the Registration pages of the Immigration Service website.

An enquiry can also be made to GNIB at the following email address: gnib\_dv@garda.ie.

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

### **Garda National Immigration Bureau**

108. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff working in the Garda National Immigration Bureau offices in Cork and Dublin over the past year in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49474/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** It is important to be clear that under the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner has responsibility for management of An Garda Síochána and for the allocation and efficient use of Garda resources. This includes responsibility for personnel matters and the distribution of personnel across the various Garda Divisions. As Minister I have no direct role in these matters. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use.

As the Deputy will be aware, a record €1.76 billion was allocated to the Garda Vote for 2019 and this is increasing to an unprecedented €1.882 billion for 2020. With the benefit of this investment, An Garda Síochána is a growing organisation. We currently have approximately 14,200 Gardaí nationwide, supported by over 2,900 Garda staff. A further almost 200 probationer Gardaí are scheduled to attest as members tomorrow, 29 November. As part of the Government's plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021, there is also ongoing recruitment of Garda staff.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the following table sets out the number of Gardaí assigned to the Garda National Immigration Bureau on a national level as at 31 October 2018 and 31 October 2019.

G.N.I.B.	Garda	Sergeant	Inspector	Superintendent	Chief Superintendent	Total
31/10/2018	96	14	3	2	1	116
31/10/2019	94	13	4	2	1	114

I am further advised that there were 18 Garda staff members assigned to the Garda National Immigration Bureau at 31 October 2018 and this number remains unchanged at 31 October 2019.

## **Garda Vetting Applications**

109. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a Garda vetting application by a person (details supplied). [49479/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** First I would confirm that the processing of vetting applications by the National Vetting Bureau is an operational matter for the Garda authorities and is carried out in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016 and other relevant law, including the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016.

My Department has no role in the processing of individual vetting applications.

Second, it is important to note that vetting and security clearance form part of Garda recruitment processes. I would not be appropriate to comment on any individual case.

Recruitment to An Garda Síochána is governed by the Garda Síochána (Admissions and Appointments) Regulations 2013. The Public Appointments Service (PAS), on behalf of the Garda Commissioner, manages the initial recruitment stages for selection of Garda Trainees with the final stages of the recruitment process in which candidates are vetted, complete a physical competency test and a medical examination, managed by the Commissioner. As Minister, I have no direct involvement in the matter.

Subject to final approval by An Garda Síochána, successful applicants from these campaigns are considered first for intakes into the Garda College, in accordance with the candidate's place on the Order of Merit. There is no set time frame for offers to applicants as this is dependent on their files being fully completed and the intake dates into the Garda College. All applicants remain on the panel until such time as they are offered a place in the Garda College, with the exception of those who are deemed unsuitable, fail the Medical or Physical Competence Test (PCT) or withdraw from the competition.

I would advise any candidate for a position as a Garda trainee to contact the PAS or the Garda Appointments Office, depending on the relevant stage of the application process, if they have any queries in relation to their application.

## **Prisoner Transfers**

110. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application by a person (details supplied) to transfer to an Irish prison under the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Act 1995; the reason the application has been in the Office of the Chief State Solicitor for at least 12 months; when it will conclude its consideration of the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49495/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by my officials in the Irish Prison Service that they are aware of the application referred to.

I am informed by the Prison Service that the Chief State Solicitor's Office has confirmed that its consideration of the legal issues involved is being expedited.

The Deputy will appreciate that I am not in a position to address the individual case or give a date for completion of consideration of the matter at this time.

## **Departmental Expenditure**

111. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount spent by his Department and each agency under the aegis of his Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49544/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** In 2019, the public sector presence at the National Ploughing Championships (NPC) was co-ordinated by the Department of the Taoiseach as part of the Government's unified approach to the Championships. This approach focused on delivering supports and services that citizens need, in a format that was accessible and relevant for visitors. This aligns with the new ways of working central to Our Public Service 2020, the framework for development and innovation in Ireland's public service, and to the Civil Service Renewal Plan. These new ways of working seek to embed public service reform into operational and delivery systems through citizen-focused design.

This approach to the cross-Government presence brought an increased level of coordination, cohesion and alignment between Government Departments, agencies and State-supported bodies at the NPC. It also focused on maximising the value and quality of supports and services provided to NPC visitors. For the first time, over 150 exhibitors were located in the one area, "The Government of Ireland Village", and Government stands across Departments, agencies and bodies were grouped in marquees and tents on the basis of the supports, services and policy areas they are responsible for.

While there was no dedicated Departmental stand during the period in question, a number of agencies under the remit of my Department had their own stands or were present at other stands, reflecting the broad range of work carried out in the Justice sector. I have referred your request to the relevant agencies for their direct response to provide further detail.

All of the Department's online and offline advertising was developed internally and, as such, no additional external costs were incurred.

The NPC provides an important opportunity to provide advice and guidance to citizens about many issues under the remit of my Department including safety. This year, for example, at the NPC I formally launched the National Rural Safety Forum - a collaborative partnership between An Garda Síochána, my own Department and a wide range of partners including the IFA and Muintir an Tíre. Its objectives include information sharing and community engagement on crime prevention.

I attend the National Ploughing Championships every year including since I became Minister for Justice and Equality. The then Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald T.D. attended in 2016. Generally, the Minister is accompanied by their Private Secretary at the event. A member of staff from the Department's Press and Communications Office would also be present as part of their normal duties in connection with publicising the work of the Department and the agencies under its remit.

All staff in question are entitled to travel and subsistence payments in connection with their attendance in line with civil service guidelines.

## **Garda Deployment**

112. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 99 of 25 September 2019, the number of members in the roads policing unit by division as of 22 November 2019; the target number for each division by the end of December 2019; if there were divisions in which no competition was completed for members to join the unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49562/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** In accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including the allocation and efficient use of Garda resources.

I have requested the relevant information from the Commissioner and I will write to the Deputy directly when I receive it.

### **Residency Permits**

113. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will take steps to expedite an application for residency by persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49593/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The persons referred to by the Deputy applied for a right of residency, accompanied by a right to work, based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child on 27 September 2019. The Deputy will appreciate that, in the interest of fairness to all applicants, applications are dealt with in chronological order. I understand that the applications are under consideration at present and my Department will be in contact with the persons concerned in due course.

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

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.

### **Domestic Violence Policy**

114. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps he will take to further support women and their children experiencing domestic violence; if he will respond to a report (details supplied) by introducing, resourcing and legislating for a multi-agency process of domestic homicide reviews; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49616/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Important work is carried out by Women's Aid in the field of domestic violence. I am aware of the recently published report "Femicide Watch 2019" and my Department will of course study it carefully in that con-

text.

As Deputies will be aware, the Government has already considerably strengthened the law and structures targeting domestic violence, as part of the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021.

Central to this is the landmark Domestic Violence Act 2018, which came into force on 1 January of this year. Other developments in this area include the enactment of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, which introduced a statutory definition of consent, and the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017, which provides a wide range of measures and services to protect and inform victims during the progress of their case through the Criminal Justice system.

Implementation of the Second National Strategy is monitored on an ongoing basis and actions may be added to it by agreement of the monitoring committee which is made up of representatives from state agencies and the community and voluntary sector. A mid term review of the implementation of the strategy is underway and will be completed in full consultation with all stakeholders, including Women's Aid.

An Garda Síochána is also continuously improving its specialist services. Responding to the needs of victims has seen the rollout of Divisional Protective Services Units (DPSUs) with specially trained officers responsible for investigations, including engagement with victims. These Units will support the delivery of a consistent and professional approach to the investigation of sexual and domestic crime. 13 DPSUs have now been rolled out and I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that they will be in place nationwide by the end of Quarter 1, 2020.

The introduction of these measures supported Ireland's ratification this year of the Istanbul Convention (the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence), which I announced on International Women's Day last March.

In May the Government supported my proposal to commission a study into familicide and domestic homicide reviews. This independent, specialist research will look at two particular issues:

- the provision of supports to families who are victims of familicide; and
- international best practice in the conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews.

Norah Gibbons is leading the study with Grainne McMorrough SC and Forensic Criminologist Dr Jane Monckton Smith. This team brings vast experience and a wide specialist expertise and included a period for consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including State agencies, family members of victims and NGOs.

While familicide is relatively rare in Ireland, these events have a devastating impact on those left behind, both family members and the wider community. The study will examine how such supports can be provided in a more systemic and integrated way. The study will attempt to ensure that victims of familicide are supported in as compassionate and timely a way as possible; as well as how local communities who experience the horror of familicide cases in their local areas can be best supported.

In parallel to that study, in the context of the categorisation and recording of homicides An Garda Síochána is currently conducting a review of the investigation of certain homicides which includes a number of domestic homicides.

Separately to this, An Garda Síochána is developing policies and procedures to inform the

overall policing approach to domestic homicides. This includes a Domestic Homicide Review Team in the Garda National Protective Services Bureau examining a small number of domestic homicides of relevance for review. The purpose of such reviews is to examine what lessons, if any, should be learned and what potential changes to relevant policing policy and procedures should be introduced. It is intended that such a course of action will result in an improved response by An Garda Síochána in the handling of domestic violence and/or abuse into the future and ultimately reduce the number of domestic related homicides in our society.

### **Family Reunification Applications**

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if in the event of proof of available accommodation in the case of a person (details supplied) he will be prepared to review the refusal of IHAP family reunification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49631/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** My Department does not accept further documentation in support of IHAP proposals once a decision has issued. This is in order to provide certainty to the process, and to be fair to all proposers. The required documentation was fully set out in the IHAP proposal form.

In the event that further calls for proposals are made under the IHAP, or any other future admissions schemes, the proposer in this case may have the opportunity to apply.

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

### **Naturalisation Eligibility**

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to obtain a passport for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49632/19]

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reckonable residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49633/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 116 and 117 together.

I can inform the Deputy that it is open to the person concerned to lodge an application for a certificate of Naturalisation if they have 5 years (60 Months) reckonable residency on the date of the application.

For the purpose of naturalisation, reckonable residency (i.e. stamp 1, stamp 3 or stamp 4), is calculated by counting months of permission to remain in the state. Reckonable residency is reflected in the corresponding stamp 1, stamp 3 or stamp 4 endorsements in a person's passport. To meet the statutory residency criteria as laid out in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 (as amended), an individual needs to have 60 months (5 years) reckonable residency with

the year immediately before the date of application being of continuous residency.

The minor the Deputy has referred to would not be entitled to a passport as he or she was born in the state after 1 January 2005 and were not entitled to Irish Citizenship at the time of birth. However, if at the time of the birth one of his or her parents had been a resident in the state for a period of 4 years immediately preceding the birth, the child would have been entitled to Irish citizenship.

An application may be submitted for a minor if the minor's parents have already been naturalised or if the minor is of Irish descent or has Irish associations or, at the time of their birth, was not entitled to Irish Citizenship but has since accumulate 5 years' reckonable residency in the state.

Minors cannot apply for naturalisation by themselves. The application must be made by their parent, legal guardian or person acting on the child's behalf "in loco parentis".

Further information on applying for naturalisation can be found on my Departments website [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie).

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.

### **Residency Permits**

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when stamp 4 will be updated to facilitate an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49634/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can inform the Deputy that the person referred to submitted an application for a Residence Card under the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015 ("The Regulations") which was accepted for consideration by my Department on 03/10/2018. Processing of this application is ongoing at present.

Applications are dealt with in strict chronological order, and a decision will issue to the person concerned in due course. Although it is not possible at the present time to provide a definitive date by which a determination will be made in this case, there will be no avoidable delay in completing same.

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 Question process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the Department is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **Naturalisation Eligibility**

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of residency and eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49635/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy continues to be processed and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. If further documentation is required it will be requested from the applicant in due course.

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

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

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to 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.

### **Naturalisation Eligibility**

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress and determination to date in regard to an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49636/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can inform the Deputy that the person concerned submitted an application for naturalisation on 30 November 2018. This application is currently being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. If further documentation is required it will be requested from the applicant in due course.

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

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

Queries in relation to the status of any immigration cases may be made directly to my Department by email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Question process. The Deputy may

consider using the e-mail service except in the cases where the response is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **Residency Permits**

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a means can be found to update stamp 4 in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49637/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed that the persons referred to were given a one year temporary permission to remain in the State until the 14th of December 2019. These persons were informed of the documents required to renew their permission, this being a national passport, in order to attest their identity and Nationality.

I am further informed that the persons concerned have not yet made an application for renewal of their current permission. Only when the persons referred to have made their application through the normal channels can a decision be made on their case.

Persons making an application for renewal of a permission to remain in the State are required to provide satisfactory evidence of their identity and nationality. This is usually in the form of a currently valid passport and may include other original supporting documents, such as a previously held or out of date passport, birth certificate and marriage certificate. In rare circumstances where an applicant cannot produce their current passport, or a previous passport, birth certificate or other supporting documents the applicant will be required to provide a full explanation. Such explanation should, where possible, be supported by satisfactory evidence that they have attempted to obtain such documentation and correspondence from the relevant authorities or embassy responsible for the issuing of passports and birth certificates in their country, clearly stating the reasons the documentation cannot be provided. My Department will consider the explanation given and, if satisfied it is for reasons genuinely beyond the applicant's control, may suggest alternative means to the person to assist in establishing their identity and nationality.

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

### **Naturalisation Eligibility**

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49638/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy continues to be processed and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. If further documentation is required it will be requested from the applicant in due course.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a

privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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

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

### **Visa Applications**

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when visas to join will be issued in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49639/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed that Join Family visa applications were received on 3 May, 2018 in respect of the persons referred to by the Deputy. These applications were subsequently refused by my Department and the reasons were outlined to the persons concerned in letters which issued on 9 October, 2019. The applicants were also advised that the decision could be appealed within two months. There is no record of any appeals being received to date.

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

### **Refugee Status Applications**

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if asylum and refugee status has been determined in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49640/19]

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

The IPO may be contacted: by email to [info@ipo.gov.ie](mailto:info@ipo.gov.ie); by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2. The International Protection Appeals Tribunal

may be contacted either: by email to [info@protectionappeals.ie](mailto:info@protectionappeals.ie); by telephone at 01-4748400 (or Lo-Call 1890 201 458), or in writing to Corporate Services Division, The International Protection Appeals Tribunal, 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin D02 W320.

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

For your information, on 27 February 2017, the Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications under the International Protection Act 2015, which is available to view on the website of the International Protection Office ([www.ipo.gov.ie](http://www.ipo.gov.ie)).

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.

### **Leave to Remain**

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if further consideration will be given to leave to remain in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49641/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can inform the Deputy that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 29 September 2017. This Order requires the person to remove themselves from the State and remain outside the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order is a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

As previously advised, representations were received from the person concerned, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked including information regarding the person's marriage. Following detailed consideration of the information submitted in support of the request, the Deportation Order was affirmed and notified to the person concerned by letter dated 27 November 2018. There are no outstanding correspondence or applications on file for this applicant.

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.

## Naturalisation Applications

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the case for naturalisation will be concluded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49642/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can inform the Deputy that the person referred to does not have an application for naturalisation with my Department at this time.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended.

Full details of the eligibility criteria and extensive guidelines are available on the Immigration Service website at [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie)

The person concerned currently has permission to remain in the State on stamp 4 conditions until 16th June 2020.

As a holder of stamp 4 permission, the person concerned can take up employment without the need of an employment permit. They can work in a profession, subject to conditions of the relevant professional or other bodies, can establish and operate a business and may access state funds and services as determined by Government departments or agencies.

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.

## Prison Service Staff

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons recruited to the Prison Service, male and female, in the past two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49654/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that the number of persons recruited to the Prison Service in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019 is set out in the following table. A breakdown by gender is also included as requested by the Deputy.

Year	Male	Female
2017	61	24
2018	186	75
2019 (to 27 November)	176	82

## Immigration Status

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position

regarding eligibility for residency status, stamp 4 and eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49657/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can inform the Deputy that the person referred to is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 25 August 2017.

Representations were received on behalf of the person concerned pursuant to Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to revoke the Deportation Order. Following the consideration of those representations, a decision was taken in July 2018 that the Deportation Order should be affirmed and this decision was communicated to the person concerned by registered post-dated 8 May 2019.

The Deputy might wish to note that the effect of a Deportation Order is that the person named on the Order is legally obliged to leave the State and to remain outside of the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order in this case is now an operational matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

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.

### **Assisted Decision Making**

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the funding arrangements he will put in place to address the concerns of the Supreme Court as expressed in a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49666/19]

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he will fully commence all parts of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 following the comments by the Supreme Court in a case on 17 October 2019 regarding the wardship process and the lack of clarity relating to the legal test under the Lunacy Regulation (Ireland) Act 1871 for deciding if a person lacks decision making capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49667/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 129 and 130 together.

My Department is looking at the Supreme Court decision and will keep the matter under review.

As the Deputy will be aware, wardship proceedings fall within the scope of the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995. Legal aid is available to persons who satisfy the financial eligibility criteria laid down in that Act and in the Civil Legal Aid Regulations 1996 to 2017. Principally, the person must have disposable income of less than €18,000 per annum and disposable capital assets of less than €100,000 (excluding the home in which they live). The person's case must also satisfy the merits criteria laid down under that Act. These criteria include if the applicant is reasonably likely to be successful in the proceedings and if having regard to all the circumstances of the case, including the cost to the Board as against the benefit to the applicant, it is reasonable to grant legal aid.

The Legal Aid Board is bound to apply the financial eligibility and merits criteria to all cases. While I as Minister for Justice, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, can disapply the financial eligibility criteria by means of an amendment to the Civil Legal Aid Regulations 1996, I cannot disapply the merits criteria in such a manner under the Act.

The Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 provides particular provisions in relation to legal aid for what are termed “relevant persons” (RPs) under the Act. The provisions would effectively remove the means criteria for RPs and apply what is known as the “reduced merits” criteria (the same criteria applicable in cases involving the welfare of a child, i.e. that the prospects of success and reasonableness tests are removed). It also provides for a mechanism for recovering costs in cases where legal aid is granted to an RP who would have been financially ineligible for legal services. These provisions are contingent on the commencement of Part 5 of the 2015 Act and are not worded in such a way that they could be applied to the provisions of the Lunacy Regulation (Ireland) Act 1871.

When the court considers it appropriate it can appoint a Guardian ad Litem to represent the voice of the Ward in Court. If funds are not available to cover the Ward’s costs associated with this appointment, they are borne by the Courts Service, Health Service Executive or the Child and Family Agency. If the Health Service Executive or the Child and Family Agency seeks the appointment of a Guardian ad Litem, they bear the costs of the appointment.

In relation to fully commencing the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015, as the Deputy will be aware, the Act was signed into law on 30 December 2015. The Act 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).

A high-level Steering Group comprising senior officials from my Department, 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 Decision Support Service and this work is ongoing.

A number of provisions of the 2015 Act were commenced in October 2016 in order to progress the setting up of the DSS. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) Order 2016 (S.I. No. 515 of 2016) commenced provisions of the Act to enable the recruitment of the Director of the DSS. Ms Áine Flynn was appointed Director of the DSS on 2 October 2017.

The commencement of Part 8 of the Act, which provides a legislative framework for advance healthcare directives, is a matter for the Minister for Health. The Minister for Health, under the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) (No. 2) Order 2016 (S.I. No. 517 of 2016), brought some provisions of Part 8 of the Act into operation on 17 October 2016. The commenced provisions provide for the establishment by the Minister for Health of a multi-disciplinary group to make recommendations to the Director of the DSS in relation to codes of practice on advance healthcare directives. In anticipation of the completion of that process, the Minister for Health commenced the remainder of section 91 on 17 December 2018 (S.I. No. 527 of 2018).

The key preparations are being put in place under the oversight of the Steering Group to allow for further commencement orders for the provisions of the 2015 Act to be made when the DSS is ready to roll out the new decision-making support options.

Work has been ongoing in my Department on the drafting of necessary amendments to the

Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015, taking account of issues raised by the Mental Health Commission, the codes of practice working groups and submissions received from other bodies. The intention was to bring forward these amendments by way of the Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2016. However, when Dáil Committee Stage took place on the Bill on 30 January 2019, a number of amendments were agreed which had previously been ruled out of order by the Ceann Comhairle, thus giving rise to a procedural matter. Work is ongoing to resolve this issue.

### **Trade Missions**

131. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if a report will be provided on the recent Enterprise Ireland trade mission to Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain; her plans to deepen trade relations with these countries; and if the Minister of State with responsibility for trade, employment, business, EU digital Single Market and data protection raised human rights issues during meetings with government representatives. [49467/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Minister of State for Trade, Employment, Business, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection, Pat Breen T.D. led a five-day Trade Mission to Kuwait, Dubai and Bahrain. This was one of the largest trade missions to the Middle East and is part of Enterprise Ireland's market diversification strategy to expand the Irish export footprint and increase Irish company exports to €26 billion by 2020. Enterprise Ireland has specifically set a target to grow exports to the United Arab Emirates to €2 billion in 2020, from €1.4 billion in 2016.

The 33 Enterprise Ireland supported companies that took part in the Trade Mission span a wide range of sectors including Aviation, Digital Technologies, Fintech, Education, Engineering, Telecommunications and Life Sciences. Across each of these sectors they see the Middle East as a key element of their current and future export diversification strategy and recognize the substantial opportunity that the region represents.

Over 200 meetings were attended by the 33 Enterprise Ireland backed companies on the mission, covering the Aviation, Digital Technologies, Fintech, Education and Engineering sectors.

Minister of State Breen did not meet with government Ministers on this occasion.

### **Legislative Programme**

132. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of the companies (corporate enforcement authority) Bill; if the Bill is ready for publication; if so, when it will be published; and if she will consider publishing it in draft form. [49472/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government approved the priority drafting of a Bill on the basis of the General Scheme of the Companies (Corporate Enforcement Authority) Bill 2018 on 4 December 2018. The Bill is one of the main actions in the Government's package of "Measures to enhance Ireland's corporate, economic and regulatory framework", published in November 2017. It will establish the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (the ODCE) as an agency, rather than as an Office of the Department, with a commission structure.

My Department worked with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel and received a stamped copy of the Bill on 24 July 2019.

Following Government approval, the General Scheme of the Bill was submitted to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Business, Enterprise and Innovation for pre-legislative scrutiny. The Committee considered the General Scheme with Officials from my Department on 5 February 2019 and the Director of Corporate Enforcement on 19 February 2019. The Chair of the Company Law Review Group and the Law Reform Commission appeared before the Committee on 2 April 2019.

In April 2019, I understand the Joint Committee decided to seek a submission from the Director of Corporate Enforcement in relation to the case of the Director of Public Prosecutions V Seán FitzPatrick. This is being sought under the Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privileges and Procedures) Act 2013, in light of certain protections for the Director and his Office that the Act affords. I understand the Committee has proceeded to seek the necessary approvals and that these will necessitate motions in Dáil and Seanad Éireann.

I intend to publish the Bill once the Joint Committee's pre-legislative scrutiny process is complete.

### **Foreign Direct Investment**

133. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the rate of foreign direct investment in percentage terms in each of the years 2008, 2017 and 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49512/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Ireland continues to perform strongly in terms of attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). There are now over 229,000 people employed in IDA Ireland client companies. Last year alone IDA Ireland won 265 projects, compared with 237 in 2017. Within this figure, a record number of 134 were from new companies investing in Ireland for the first time, which represented an increase of 20% over 2017. In 2008, IDA won 130 new projects, up 14% on the 2007 figure.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

134. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount spent by her Department and each agency under the aegis of her Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49533/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department and its offices have attended the National Ploughing Championships, over the years 2016 to 2019, to engage with the public and promote various aspects of our work. These included the Finance for Growth Unit, SME Policy Unit, Enterprise Agencies Unit, Employment Permits Unit, the Workplace Relations Commission and the Patents Office.

The presence of these staff, on a rotational basis, at the National Ploughing Championships was to:

- Promote awareness of supports available to enterprise and particularly supports in relation to Brexit;

- Provide advice on Ireland's employment permits system;
- Provide advice to the public on their rights and responsibilities under employment legislation;
- Advise businesses on the protection of their intellectual property.

The costs incurred by my Department in attending the National Ploughing Championships for the years 2016 to 2019 are set out in the table.

The Deputy has also requested details of the wages paid to staff. Staff were paid their normal salaries, however given the timeframe for responding to this question, it is not possible to provide information on any overtime payments that may have occurred. I have asked my officials to compile this information for the Deputy and this will be forwarded as soon as possible.

Where travel and subsistence costs were incurred by staff attending the event, expenses are paid at the normal civil service rates. These costs are included in the table below. Please note that travel and subsistence costs are not available at this time for 2016 as the Department's Travel and Subsistence Claim system migrated to the Government's Payroll Shared Services circa June 2017 and records prior to that would appear to be held off site and retrieving specific claims for 2016 relating to the NPC would require more time.

Additionally, a number of the agencies of my Department, for whom the National Ploughing Championships are a significant opportunity to engage with the public, had a presence at the event. These included Enterprise Ireland, the Local Enterprise Offices, and the Health and Safety Authority. The costs incurred by agencies of my Department will be forwarded to the Deputy within the timeframe allowed.

#### **Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation Expenditure at The National Ploughing Championships 2016 – 2019**

Category of Expenditure	2016 €	2017 €	2018 €	2019 €
Online Expenditure	0	0	2,160	0
Offline Expenditure, e.g print and radio	558	7,627	8,640	454
Promotional Materials	0	0	4,643	2,929
Photography	0	0	0	0
Stand Rental	4,892	9,592	14,412	23,481
Other Costs, incl T&S	0	5,908	8,406	6,896
Total	5,450	23,127	38,261	33,760

#### **Research Funding**

135. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of payments issued to date for successful applications made under the disruptive technologies innovation fund by county; the value of payments that have issued to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49629/19]

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

first call was run in 2018 with successful projects announced in December 2018.

Applications for funding under DTIF Call 2 are currently being assessed by independent international experts. I expect to be able to announce the successful projects in the coming weeks.

Given the unique nature of the Fund, which in Call 1 alone is supporting 27 consortia comprised of 100 organisations, including SMEs, Research Performing Organisations and multinationals, intensive contract negotiations have been ongoing since the successful projects were announced in December 2018.

To facilitate payments to the constituent organisations, Enterprise Ireland have developed new consortia agreements and a new pre-finance framework was put in place. Letters of offer and consortia agreements have now issued to all of the successful project partners. Payments to those organisations, including those that are eligible for pre-financing, continue to be processed once the formal legal documentation is signed off and returned to Enterprise Ireland.

For the most part, enterprise partners in DTIF collaborations will receive grant payments retrospectively following submission of validated claims for vouched expenditure. As most projects did not commence until mid-2019 at earliest, the payments to enterprise partners will not begin in significant numbers until early in 2020. The payments that have been made to enterprise partners relate mainly to pre-finance payments to a number of small enterprises.

Research Performing Organisations (i.e. higher education institutions and other public research bodies) can receive a share of their funding upon project commencement. Most of the €20m available for DTIF Call 1 projects will be allocated to these RPOs with 34 such payments having been made to date.

The current position is that €12.2m of payments have been processed with another €5m of drawdown requests in train. The €12.2m includes €9.6m to RPOs and €2.6m to enterprise partners. A breakdown of the €9.6m payments to RPOs by county is set out in the attached DTIF Payments table.

€2.6m of pre-finance payments have been issued to some small companies. It is not proposed to publish details of the pre-finance for small companies by county at this point as there are relatively small numbers involved and this could reveal information that is commercially sensitive to the companies concerned

Detail on payments to all DTIF partner organisations (RPOS and enterprises) will be provided from 2020 once enterprise partners start making their claims for vouched expenditure. Appended also for information is a list of the successful projects in Call 1, which provides the locations for each enterprise partner.

#### **Payments to Research Performing Organisations under DTIF Call 1 as at November 2019**

County	Payments
Dublin	€4.2m
Cork	€2.7m
Limerick	€1.3m
Galway	€0.9m
Waterford	€0.3m
Louth	€0.2m
Total Payments to RPOs	€9.6m

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2019-11-28\_pq-135-28-11-19\_en.docx">Awards</a>]

### **Thalidomide Victims Compensation**

136. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding State support for those who suffered injuries resulting from the ingestion of thalidomide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49456/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Following an Irish Government decision in 1975, the Government granted an ex-gratia sum equivalent to 4 times the German lump-sum and an ex-gratia monthly allowance for life equal to the German monthly allowance to each of the Irish children found to have thalidomide related injuries. The German monthly payments are made by the Contergan Foundation, which is established under German legislation. From 1st August 2013, the Contergan Foundation substantially increased its monthly payments to thalidomide survivors, including Irish survivors. There are currently 29 Irish people in receipt of ex-gratia monthly payments from my Department.

Both the German payments and the Irish ex-gratia payments made to the survivors are exempt from tax, including DIRT and are not reckonable as means for the purpose of Social Welfare payments.

In addition to the initial lump sum and monthly payments for life, the supports provided to each Irish survivor include a medical card on an administrative basis regardless of means, provision of appliances, artificial limbs, equipment, housing adaptations and access to a full range of primary care, hospital and personal social services.

There is a designated senior manager in the Health Service Executive to act as a liaison with regard to the ongoing health and personal social service needs of Irish survivors.

It is important to note that it is open to any Irish person to apply to the Contergan Foundation for assessment of their disability as being attributable to thalidomide. Any Irish person who establishes that their injury is attributable to thalidomide will be offered appropriate supports by the Irish Government, commensurate with those currently provided to Irish thalidomide survivors, as outlined above.

### **Primary Care Centres**

137. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the opening date for the new primary care centre in Tubbercurry, County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49457/19]

**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.

### **Home Help Service Provision**

138. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Health when funds will be allocated to enable a person (details supplied) in the midwest region who has been approved for home help

and is on a waiting list to access same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49465/19]

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

### **Medical Card Applications**

139. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card will be approved for persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49466/19]

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

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Provision**

140. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a prosthetic limb in view of the length of time the person has been waiting to date. [49470/19]

**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 Data**

141. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients on the cardiology waiting list at University Hospital Kerry in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49478/19]

**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 National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) figures show that there are 945 patients on the cardiology Outpatient waiting list in University Hospital Kerry. Of these, 51% (486) are waiting 12 months or less. There are no patients waiting for an Inpatient/Daycase cardiology 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 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.

Please see the document at the link for the requested information.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2019-11-28\_pq141-28-11-2019\_en.xlsx">UHK Cardiology OPD</a>]

### **Health Services Staff Recruitment**

142. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the recruitment process used to advertise for nurses and care staff in community hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49480/19]

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

### **Thalidomide Victims Compensation**

143. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter regarding thalidomide (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49494/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** There are a number of cases concerning thalidomide before the High Court at present, which are being managed by the State Claims Agency on behalf of the Irish State.

The State Defendants in the proceedings are the Minister for Health and Children, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, the Attorney General and Ireland. An order for discovery was sought by the Plaintiff and was made by the High Court on 10 April, 2019. That order has neither been perfected nor served upon the State and accordingly the time for compliance with discovery obligations has not commenced to run.

An application is pending before the Court to vary the discovery ordered and this has not as yet been determined. Review of the data necessary to comply with the discovery order in the context of proceedings is ongoing and is necessarily the subject of legal advice and privilege. Accordingly, it is inappropriate for me to give further comment or detail in respect of the process until discovery has concluded and the proceedings resolved.

No State Defendant has been determined to be non-compliant with the discovery order in these proceedings.

### **Pharmacy Data**

144. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of claims by pharmacies in each of the years 2016 to 2018 for non-dispensing fees in cases in which the pharmacist exercised his or her professional judgment and did not dispense an item on a GMS prescription; the amount paid in non-dispensing fees in each of those years; and the value of the non-dispensed medicines in respect of these claims for non-dispensing in each year in tabular form. [49496/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and

direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Health Services Staff Recruitment**

145. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to review the recruitment process for community hospitals in view of the fact that the current process is not functioning; if so, the timeframe for the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49498/19]

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

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

146. **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. [49500/19]

**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**

147. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a knee replacement operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49501/19]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for sched-

uled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

148. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when an operation will be provided for a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in issuing a date for the procedure; if the person can undergo the procedure on the treatment purchase fund scheme or in another way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49502/19]

**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.

With regard to whether the patient can avail of treatment through the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF). The NTPF works with public hospitals, as opposed to with patients directly, to offer and provide the funding for treatment to clinically suitable long waiting patients who are on an inpatient/day case waiting list for surgery, having been referred on to such a list following clinical assessment by a consultant/specialist at an outpatient clinic.

The key criteria of the NTPF is the prioritisation of the longest waiting patients first. While the NTPF identifies patients eligible for NTPF treatment, it is solely on the basis of their time spent on the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List. The clinical suitability of the patient to avail of NTPF funded treatment is determined by the public hospital.

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 Aids and Appliances Provision**

149. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the reason an art assist machine is not available to a person (details supplied) in view of the exceptional circumstances; the reason the assistance of the machines is not provided to patients in view of the fact they are a preventative medicine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49504/19]

**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.

### **Food Labelling**

150. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the development of national food labelling legislation; his views on front-of-pack nutrition labelling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49514/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Food labelling in the EU is governed by Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers (FIC). This contains mandatory requirements in regard to the provision of nutrition labelling in pre-packaged foods.

The Regulation also provides that EU Member States can recommend use, within their own territory, of a voluntary scheme which provides additional forms of expression or presentation of nutritional information for specified nutrients on the front-of-pack (FOP) of a product, once the proposed scheme meets certain criteria. There is currently no harmonised legislation at EU level on front-of-pack labelling (FOP).

In 2016, the Department of Health published an ‘Obesity Policy and Action Plan for 2016-2025’ which included an action point to review EU consumer information labelling of food products and with a view to its application in the Irish market. This issue will be considered in due course by the national Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group (OPIOG).

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

151. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49520/19]

**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**

152. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if additional therapy will be arranged for a child (details supplied). [49521/19]

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

### **Treatment Abroad Scheme**

153. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by a person (details supplied). [49522/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE is responsible for the operation of the Cross-Border Directive and under the terms of the Directive there is a National Contact Point (NCP) in each Member State. The NCP for Ireland is located within the HSE's CBD office. A key function of the NCP here is to facilitate exchange of information for patients regarding their rights and entitlements to receive healthcare in another Member State, in particular the terms and conditions for reimbursement of cost and the procedures for accessing and determining those entitlements.

Under the terms of the Cross-Border Directive it is the responsibility of the patient to make the arrangements for any treatment they wish to receive in another Member State and it is therefore not possible to assist the patient directly in the sourcing of treatment in the UK. A patient may wish to contact the NCP in the UK if seeking additional information relating to treatment available and alternative locations for the particular treatment. Contact details for all NCP's are available from the HSE's NCP on its website - <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/cbd/> - and also by phone and email.

### Departmental Expenditure

154. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent by his Department and each agency under the aegis of his Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49542/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The table details the Department's spend at the National Ploughing Championships between the years 2016 and 2019.

	2016	2017	2018	2019 (To Date)
Offline advertising	€ -	€ -	€ -	€3,075.00
Promotional material	€ -	€ -	€5,559.60	€715.25
Wages (Travel & Subsistence)	€ -	€ -	€74.01	€4,562.24
Stand rental	€ -	€ -	€548.40	€69,189.03
Other costs	€ -	€ -	€ -	€6,678.40
Department of Health Costs	€ -	€ -	€6,182.01	€84,219.92
Safefood				€9,064.00
Total Costs	€ -	€ -	€6,182.01	€93,283.92

### Psychological Services

155. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment will be made for a vacant psychologist post based in Kells, County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49549/19]

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

possible.

### **Psychological Services**

156. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacant psychologist posts in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49550/19]

**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 Recruitment**

157. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the status of a post (details supplied); his plans to replace the post; the interim measures being put in place for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49551/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the Children's Health Ireland to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

### **Disability Services Provision**

158. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of cases tabled to be taken by the early intervention team at Coolock primary care centre in 2020; if this is a reduced number of cases than previously tabled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49552/19]

**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.

### **Audiology Services Data**

159. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of full-time paediatric audiologists working in CHO area 9 in 2017, 2018 and to-date in 2019; his plans to further increase the number; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49559/19]

**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 Consultant Data**

160. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of full-time endometriosis excision specialists at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9, in each of the past three years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49560/19]

**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.

### **Occupational Therapy Staff**

161. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when an occupational therapy role (details supplied) will be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49561/19]

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

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Administration**

162. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is acceptable that a person (details supplied) in County Cork who had an urgent referral to CAMHS in February 2019 has received an appointment for April 2020; if he will make inquiries on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49564/19]

**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.

### **Pharmacy Services**

163. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49565/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Minister for Health 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. Community pharmacy is recognised as the most accessible element of our health service with an unequalled reach in terms of patient contact and access, regardless of their geographic location or status as either an independent retailer or as part of a larger chain of providers.

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. The fees to be set are determined by the Minister for Health, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

In keeping with my obligations under Section 43 of the 2017 Act, Department of Health officials have begun 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 as referred to.

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. It is my intention to open contract discussions in 2020 which will assist to deliver on the commitment given.

### **National Drugs Strategy Implementation**

164. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his views on the recent joint statement from each previous Minister with responsibility for the drugs strategy calling on him to give greater priority to supporting drugs task forces in their work and ensuring that agencies and Departments play their part in the response to the escalating social problems associated with drug misuse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49571/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The national drugs strategy Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery is a health-led response to the problem of drug and alcohol use in Ireland. The strategy is underpinned by a partnership approach between the statutory, non-statutory and community and voluntary sectors.

Drug and alcohol task forces play a key role in assessing the extent and nature of the drug problem in local communities. They ensure that a coordinated approach is taken across all sectors to address substance misuse based on the identified needs and priorities in their areas.

The task forces oversee an annual budget of €28m from the Department of Health and the HSE. This funding supports over 280 community projects, in local areas and communities throughout the country, to support initiatives to tackle drug and alcohol use and misuse.

Additional funding of €1m has been provided for the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy in 2019. This included €480,000 to provide an additional €20,000 for each of the 24 Task Forces, €10,000 of which will be on a permanent recurring basis. It also funds 13 strategic initiatives to respond to emerging trends in substance misuse and to improve access to services for people with complex needs. The initiatives were developed by task forces in conjunction with community healthcare organisations.

The Department of Health provides annual funding of over €200,000 to support, develop and facilitate the involvement of communities in the local and national structures for implementing the National Drugs Strategy. In addition, there are 11 community and voluntary representatives on the oversight structures of the strategy.

I am committed to implementing an integrated public health response to substance misuse. Working in partnership with statutory, community and voluntary sectors is central to this response, and I am confident the new strategic initiatives will have a positive impact and make a difference to people's lives as they journey to recovery.

The decision earlier this year to introduce a health diversion programme for persons in possession of drugs for personal use is a hugely important step in developing a public health approach to drug use. It delivers on a person-centred approach to harm reduction, which will benefit individuals and communities affected drug use. I am very pleased that we are delivering on this key commitment in the National Drugs Strategy.

## **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Provision**

165. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the severe shortages of services for children with mental health problems in the north-western areas of Dublin in which there are now significant waiting lists for assessments in primary care and for therapy; and the specific steps he will take to address the matter. [49572/19]

**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.

## **Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration**

166. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a group (details supplied) and its campaign to eliminate deficits for section 39 organisations in the adoption of the recommendations of the independent review group in the sector and to fund the full restoration of pay for the organisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49574/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Section 39 Agencies which provide services for people with a disability, do so on a contract for services basis with the HSE. Service Level Agreements are set out between the HSE and the individual organisations. I understand that some Section 39 organisations, which provide specialist disability services, have raised concerns about their financial sustainability with the HSE. The HSE has assured my Department that it is committed to working intensively with such organisations to support them, as appropriate, to address such issues in the context of the service level agreement process.

In relation to the issue of pay restoration raised by the Deputy, an agreement was reached in 2019 at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) between my Department, the HSE and health sector Trade Unions in relation to a process aimed at resolving the pay restoration issue for staff employed by section 39 bodies in 50 pilot organisations.

Pay restoration for these bodies commenced in April of this year with further payments due in 2020 and 2021 as appropriate. It is recognised that some of the remaining Section 39 organisations are also likely to have pay restoration issues. I can confirm that this issue is being progressed by the parties at the Workplace Relations Commission.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Independent Review Group on the role of voluntary organisations in the health and social care sector contained a broad range of recommendations in its report, including in relation to deficits in some voluntary organisations. I am currently giving consideration to these recommendations.

More generally, the Independent Review Group recommended a strengthening of the relationship between voluntary organisations and the State. In this regard, I have established a dialogue forum as recommended by its report and the first meeting will take place next week.

## **Respite Care Services**

167. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if the value for money audit and policy review conducted in advance of the decision to close a facility (details supplied) will be provided. [49575/19]

**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

### **Hospital Consultant Data**

168. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant psychiatric posts in the health service in Country Tipperary; and the number filled by permanent consultant, temporarily filled and vacant, respectively. [49576/19]

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

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

169. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49578/19]

**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.

### **Respite Care Services Provision**

170. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the refusal of respite for a person (details supplied). [49583/19]

**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

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme Eligibility**

171. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will qualify for the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49584/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their income and assets while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

There are three main steps to the application process:

- Step 1 is an application for a Care Needs Assessment. The Care Needs Assessment identifies whether or not the person needs long-term nursing home care. This is a key criteria and the HSE cannot make a determination on an application for State support under the Scheme unless a determination has been made that the person needs the relevant care services.

- Step 2 is an application for State Support. This is used to complete the Financial Assessment by the HSE which assesses the person's contribution to care and his/her corresponding level of financial assistance. The Financial Assessment takes account of a person's income and assets in order to determine the person's contribution to their care.

- Step 3 is the decision to approve financial support for the applicant under the scheme.

Participants in the Scheme contribute up to 80% of their assessable income and a maximum of 7.5% per annum of the value of assets held. In the case of a couple, the applicant's means are assessed as 50% of the couple's combined income and assets. The first €36,000 of an individual's assets, or €72,000 in the case of a couple, is not counted at all in the financial assessment. The capital value of an individual's principal private residence is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care. This is known as the three year cap.

Applicants to the Scheme can choose any public, voluntary or approved private nursing home. However, in order for financial support to be provided, the nursing home must have an available bed and be able to cater for the applicant's particular need. The HSE's Nursing Homes Support Offices can advise an applicant on the options available to them.

## Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

172. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health his plans to update the long-term illness scheme to include illnesses such as fibromyalgia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49587/19]

**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.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme at this time. However, I wish to inform the Deputy that 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.

For people who are not eligible for the LTI Scheme, there are other arrangements which protect them from excessive medicine costs.

Under the Drug Payment Scheme, no individual or family pays more than €124 a month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals with ongoing expenditure on medicines.

People who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be entitled to a medical card. In the assessment process, the HSE can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family.

People who are not eligible for a medical card may still be able to avail of a GP visit card, which covers the cost of GP consultations.

## Disability Definitions

173. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the status of plans to recognise the condition fibromyalgia as a disability; if his attention has been drawn to the distress and suffering caused as a result of the condition; the reason it has not received this recognition to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49588/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Fibromyalgia is a syndrome associated with wide-spread pain and fatigue. It is labelled a syndrome as fibromyalgia is a collection of signs, symptoms and medical problems that tend to occur together but are not related to a specific, identifiable cause. Fibromyalgia is not classified as a disability and there are currently no plans for the reclassification of fibromyalgia. HSE Disability Services provide personal and social supports based on the needs of the individual, rather than the provision of services based on a specific diagnosis or condition.

It is important to note that to help the sufferers of this condition with the cost of the treatment, any patient is eligible to apply to the Drugs Payment Scheme or to apply for a Medical Card. Under the Drug Payment Scheme, no individual or family pays more than €124 a month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals with ongoing expenditure on medicines. People who can-

not, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be entitled to a medical card. In the assessment process, the HSE can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family.

People who are not eligible for a medical card may still be able to avail of a GP visit card, which covers the cost of GP consultations. General medical services are provided by GPs. If the patient's clinical condition warrants a referral to a Consultant then their GP will organise that course of action.

### **Disease Incidence**

174. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health his plans to establish a registry of persons suffering from fibromyalgia in order that it is possible to ascertain the number of persons suffering from the condition; his view on whether it would be prudent to establish the registry alongside that of arthritis in view of the fact that more persons retire early as a result of fibromyalgia than arthritis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49589/19]

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

### **Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists**

175. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of children and adolescents in Cork city and county on a waiting list for orthodontic assessment and treatment, respectively; the length of time they have been waiting; the number of consultants providing such services in the location; the vacancies in this regard; the steps being taken to reduce the waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49596/19]

**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 Data**

176. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if information regarding public hospital waiting lists for surgery (details supplied) will be provided. [49597/19]

177. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if information regarding public hospital waiting list (details supplied) will be provided. [49599/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 176 and 177 together.

Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government. In this regard, the Government is committed to improving waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures.

Budget 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 de-

velop 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 and is also published on the NTPF website on a monthly basis.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2019-11-28\_pq176-28-11-2019\_en.xlsx">Tables - Hospital Waiting Lists</a>]

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Provision**

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in providing equipment to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49623/19]

**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.

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

179. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the level of capital funding allocated towards the development of the new facilities and upgrading of existing facilities at a health facility (details supplied); the works undertaken to date in 2019; the expenditure in this regard; the works to be undertaken at the facility in 2020; the projected expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49655/19]

**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.

### **Health Services Provision**

180. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49656/19]

**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.

### **Home Help Service Provision**

181. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when extra home help hours will be offered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49662/19]

**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.

### **Respite Care Services Provision**

182. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the reason no respite or respite grant has been made available in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49663/19]

**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 an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Medical Card Applications**

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when an emergency medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49664/19]

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

### **Organic Farming Scheme Data**

184. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the budget allocated to the new organic farming scheme which opened on 19 November 2018; the amount of same to be allocated to successful applicants to the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49475/19]

185. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the terms of the organic farming scheme which opened on 19 November 2019 (details supplied); if he will consider compensating the unsuccessful applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49476/19]

186. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of suckler farmers who were successful in applying to the organic farming scheme which opened on 19 November 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49477/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to

take Questions Nos. 184 to 186, inclusive, together.

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 includes the successful applicants under the November 2018 opening.

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 Scheme was opened for applications up to the 19 December 2018 and a total of 225 applications were received. A total of 58 applications were either withdrawn or were deemed ineligible. Following the ranking and selection process, one applicant withdrew, 55 were successful and 111 farmers received letters informing them that they had been unsuccessful. All unsuccessful applicants were given a right of appeal to the Organic Unit of my Department. It should be noted that, in 95% of the unsuccessful applications, the predominant enterprises were not from the targeted sectors identified when the Scheme was launched.

The breakdown by sector of the successful applicants is set out in the table.

Sector	Number
Cereals	24
Dairy	12
Beef	17
Horticulture	1
Lamb	1
Total	55

Under current RDP rules, the latest date that the Organic Farming Scheme could commence under this RDP was 1 January 2019. The targeted Scheme re-opened on the 19 November 2018 and closed for applications on 19 December 2018. The terms and conditions of the Scheme state that the number of applications to be accepted into the Scheme will be determined by funding. Applicants would therefore have been aware that, as with many schemes, the submission of a valid application did not guarantee entry to the Scheme and any expense they undertook before entry to the Scheme was at their own risk.

As part of the eligibility process applicants were required to submit a BPS application, which had a closing date of 15 May 2019, and also had to submit their Organic training certificate by 1 September 2019. The determination of eligible applications and the ranking and selection process could only commence following the deadline for receipt of educational certification.

It is important to note that this was 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.

### **Agriculture Scheme Eligibility**

187. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a matter (details supplied) regarding the sale of cattle will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49493/19]

**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.

BEAM is funded by a combination of EU aid and Exchequer support, provided in light of the difficult circumstances that Irish beef farmers have been facing as a result of the market volatility and uncertainty. Over 34,500 farmers had applied for BEAM at its closing date of 20 September, representing potential commitments of almost €78 million.

Terms and conditions of the scheme are available on my Department's website:

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/farmingschemesandpayments/beefexceptionalaidmeasure/BEAMCommissionNotificationSubmitted120919.pdf>

The following is specified under the terms and conditions of the scheme in relation to the issue raised in respect to mart sales:

“9.2 - Where an animal ... has been presented for slaughter by an agent or by a dealer within 30 days of purchase, including those purchased in the mart, payment may issue to the immediate previous herdowner or in respect of the previous eligible herdnumber, where that herdowner is an applicant. “

Therefore, selling an eligible animal through a mart for slaughter within 30 days does not present any barrier for access to the scheme.

### **Genetically Modified Organisms**

188. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the use of genetically modified organisms, pesticides and palm oil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49517/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (supported by the Environmental Protection Agency) is responsible for the authorisation of GM crops for cultivation, while my Department regulates its use, once authorised.

In 2018, the Government approved the transposition of Directive 2015/412 which will enable, though not compel, Ireland to opt out of cultivation of GMO crops approved for cultivation elsewhere in the EU. There are no approved GM crops cultivated in Ireland currently.

My Department only authorises pesticides on the basis of robust scientific evidence indicating high levels of protection for human and animal health and the environment. In addition, plant protection products and their users are subject to further regulation under the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive which incorporate requirements on training, sprayer testing, disposals, integrated pest management and use reduction around vulnerable areas and vulnerable groups.

In relation to palm oil, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) is the competent authority for the implementation of legislation governing GM food and the Department of Health is

responsible for policy in this area. As the competent authority, the FSAI ensures that only EU-authorised GM foods are allowed on the market and that they are labelled appropriately.

I can assure the Deputy that the Government keeps Ireland's GMO cultivation policy under ongoing review, particularly in light of scientific developments in this rapidly evolving sector.

### Departmental Expenditure

189. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount spent by his Department and each agency under the aegis of his Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49532/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The National Ploughing Championships is a very significant event in the farming calendar and provide my Department with the opportunity to interact on a face-to-face basis with the farming community.

For the duration of the event, my Department operates a fully resourced office on site. Farmers are able to have direct access to specialist staff, with access to relevant IT systems, who can answer any queries or resolve issues they may have.

There are a number of costs associated with my Department having a fully functioning, professional presence at the Championships. The total costs for each of the years 2016 to 2019 are set out in the attached table. The main cost relates to the supply, build, fit-out and dismantling of a marquee. That marquee, in each of the years up to and including 2018, was supplied on the basis of a public tendering process carried out by the Department. For 2019, the Department was part of a centralised purchasing process overseen by the Government Information Service and the Office of Public Works. There are no additional costs for wages because DAFM staff are assigned from their usual work locations in order to provide service directly to the farmers on site. Overtime and travel and subsistence is paid at normal Civil Service rates.

As regards the twelve State Bodies under the aegis of my Department, the information requested is an operational matter for the State Bodies themselves. I have therefore referred the Deputy's question to the Agencies and have requested that a response should issue within 10 days.

#### DAFM National Ploughing Championships Costs 2016 to 2019

Costs	2016	2017	2018	2019
Marquee (design, build, fit-out out and dismantling)	€56,759	€103,084	€119,492	€159,495
Comms (WIFI / Broadband / Network) *	N/A	N/A	N/A	€6,642
Payment to NPA (Tickets/Site Fees) **	€24,686	€26,507	€26,658	€12,868
Promotion and Advertising	€1,460	€5,441	€5,285	€5,571
Totals	€82,905	€135,032	€151,435	€184,576

\*Comms costs were included as part of the marquee/fit-out contracts for 2016 - 2018

\*\*2019 Payment to National Ploughing Association was for tickets only as site fees were, as part of the GIS/OPW procurement process, included in the overall 'marquee' costs

*Questions - Written Answers*  
**Afforestation Programme**

190. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the state aid rules in place with respect to grant aid for an agency (details supplied) to afforest land; the EU regulations in place and state ceilings set; if the matter has been raised at EU level; and the process involved to have the matter reviewed. [49553/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** State aid is the term that refers to forms of public assistance, using taxpayer-funded resources, given to undertakings (public and private) on a discretionary basis, with the potential to distort competition and affect trade between member states of the European Union. The principles governing State aid are enshrined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, mainly in Articles 107-109. These provisions provide for a general prohibition on the use of State aid, subject to certain exceptions, the interpretation of which are largely the preserve of the European Commission, subject to the jurisprudence of the European Courts.

However, if an EU Member State has identified an area of market failure and feels that it is justified to provide an incentive effect in the form of State aid in a particular area, Member States must notify the Commission of proposed State aid in advance and seek the Commission's advance approval before the aid can be paid. There are a few exceptions to the notification requirement, namely:

- If the measure falls within the General De Minimis Regulation which allows overall aid of less than 200,000 euros over 3 fiscal years.
- Agricultural de minimis aid to farmers of less than 20,000 euros over 3 fiscal years.
- Measures which are covered under a pre-existing approved Irish Scheme.
- Measures falling within the General Block Exemption Regulation.

State Aid approval was requested and received from the European Commission for the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 in 2014. The Forestry Programme is 100% State aid funded and is therefore required to fully comply with all relevant State Aid Guidelines, notably European Union Guidelines for State aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas 2014 to 2020 (2014/C 204/01), issued by the European Commission and applicable to the 2014-2020 programming period.

My Department's Afforestation Scheme is part of the Forestry Programme. In accordance with the relevant State aid provisions, the scheme terms & conditions set out that a fixed afforestation grant towards the costs, subject to the maximum laid down in the scheme documents, will be available to private land-holders, companies or public entities. Aid for the afforestation of state owned lands may be granted but only if the body managing such land is a private body or a municipality. Land owned and managed by public entities will not be eligible for payment of premiums.

It is expected that the European Commission will issue new State aid Guidelines for the next programming period (2021-2027). The first step of the consultation on the new State aid rules with the Member States has been initiated by the European Commission earlier this year and my Department is participating in this process. In consideration of the new national afforestation targets, all aspects of how forestry is grant aided will be under review during the coming years in preparation for the next Forestry Programme.

## Afforestation Programme

191. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the carbon sequestration potential has been examined of all designated land including hen harrier designated land with respect to permitting some planting on such land. [49554/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Forests can make an important contribution to climate action through the sequestration and storage of carbon dioxide and by supplying sustainable and renewable materials that support the decarbonisation of our economy.

The Government's Climate Action Plan 2019 recognises this key role which afforestation has to play in climate change mitigation particularly through carbon sequestration. Under current rules, agreed as part of the EU Effort Sharing Regulation, forestry can contribute some 2 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per annum of carbon towards Ireland's emissions targets under the next climate mitigation period 2021-2030.

Planting achieved under successive afforestation programmes will be the basis for this emissions reductions figure. The Climate Action Plan now sets a target of an average of 8,000 hectares of new planting per year. While this will mostly yield benefits in the longer term post-2030, it will also contribute to our 2030 target through carbon sequestration.

Issues concerning the designation of Special Protection Areas (or SPAs) and the setting of conservation objectives are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. As previously outlined by Minister Madigan, the issue of afforestation within SPAs important to breeding hen harrier, is an ongoing issue and a previous protocol on the issue was discontinued as the European Commission considered it non-compliant with the EU Birds Directive.

The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has prepared a draft Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan in co-operation with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, and with my own Department. The draft Threat Response Plan must also undergo public consultation.

Regarding the issuing of afforestation licences, the Deputy will be aware that, under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, any Minister considering a plan or project in a SPA or a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) shall give consent for such a plan or project only after having determined that the plan or project shall not adversely affect the integrity of any SPA or SAC. In addition, under the European Union guidelines for State aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas, within SPAs and SACs, only afforestation consistent with the management objectives of the Natura sites concerned, and agreed with the Member State's authority in charge of implementing Natura 2000 (in Ireland's case, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht), shall be allowed.

## Fish Landings

192. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of the Celtic Sea herring landed in Irish ports by Irish boats in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019 that was processed for human consumption versus processed for fishmeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49563/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The data re-

quested by the Deputy is held by the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) and I have referred the query to them for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

193. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he plans to implement to reward farmers for farming carbon on blanket bogs or peaty soils under grassland in private ownership in the near future in order that Ireland can avail of land, land-use change, and forestry flexibilities from 2021 in view of the annual carbon losses from peatlands which in total amount to more emissions than from the entire transport sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49603/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department recognises wetlands and peat soils as an important carbon pool in the Irish landscape. Reducing emissions by water table manipulation has the potential to significantly reduce GHG emissions from these soils and is a means to positively contribute to our climate change mitigation ambitions. This is an important part of Agriculture's contribution to the emission reductions and is set out in the All of Government Climate Action Plan, released in June 2019, as highlighted in the targets set for the Agriculture, Forestry and Land-use sector.

In this respect, the Climate Action Plan sets out a target of at least 40,000 ha of reduced management intensity of grasslands on drained organic soils to 2030. This will contribute 4.4 Mt CO<sub>2</sub> eq cumulative abatement of the overall target of 26.8 Mt CO<sub>2</sub> eq abatement through Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry actions over the period 2021 to 2030. The removal of carbon from the atmosphere through measures such as afforestation and the reduced management of peatlands are extremely important contributions towards achieving our national climate targets.

Action 132 of the Climate Action Plan demonstrates the necessary steps we must take to reach these targets and includes the identification of carbon rich soils currently under agricultural management as well as the actions required to reduce carbon losses and improve sequestration from them. My Department has been assigned €3 million to carry out relevant research in respect of carbon removal, which will include at its forefront peatland management measures. My Department will engage with farmers as to how to implement and understand the best management practices for better management of peatlands and their carbon rich soils.

### **Nitrates Action Programme**

194. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the continuation of the agricultural catchments programme; and the funding for the programme in 2019 and 2020 and each year of the programme in the years ahead. [49680/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Agricultural Catchments Programme, which has been in place since 2008, is an intensive monitoring programme used to evaluate the impact of Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) and the Nitrates derogation which are implemented under the Nitrates Directive.

The Programme is funded by my Department and has been delivered by Teagasc since its inception. I recently announced the continuation and enhancement of the Agricultural Catchments Programme from 2020 to 2023. Funding allocated for Phase 4 of the Programme is €2.5

million annually, while funding for 2019 is €1.6 million.

Phase 4 is an expansion on the previous phases and will include the collection of data on greenhouse gases emissions, ammonia emissions and soil carbon sequestration as well as extending the current baseline monitoring of water quality. This will aid my Department achieve our targets under the Climate Action Plan while, at the same time, continue the monitoring of water quality required under the Nitrates regulations.

### **Live Exports**

195. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps being taken to increase lairage capacity at Cherbourg. [49681/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Live exports are a critical part of Ireland's livestock industry. They play a significant role in stimulating price competition and providing an alternative market outlet for farmers. My Department facilitates this trade, recognising its importance to the agri-food sector, while placing a strong emphasis at all times on the welfare of all animals being transported.

In 2018, total live exports of cattle, including calves, increased by over 30% compared to 2017, to 246,000 head. This growth trend has continued into 2019, with live exports already totalling 266,000 up until the week ending the 19th of October, 2019. This is up from 221,000 for the same period in 2018 – a 20% increase.

Officials from my Department are in on-going communication with Irish exporters with regard to the need for co-operative management between each other to ensure that the lairage capacity at Cherbourg is optimised. I have urged the live export sector to consider developing an additional lairage in Cherbourg or engaging with the owners of existing facilities to explore the potential for additional capacity. This has proved possible – as evidenced by the French authorities approving an increase of the holding capacity of the Qualivia lairage in Cherbourg earlier this year. My Department worked closely with the French authorities in this matter. The move provided for additional daily capacity for 400 calves.

I met with the exporters in September to discuss and review existing export procedures, including lairage facilities in Cherbourg. Officials from my Department have had continued regular engagement with them.

I am aware that industry stakeholders the IFA, ICOS and ICMSA recently visited Cherbourg with a view to addressing the issue of lairage capacity ahead of Spring 2020. My Department will continue to liaise with stakeholders on the matter.

### **Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations**

196. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position taken by Ireland regarding the Finnish Presidency proposal that countries spend at least 30% of CAP funds post 2020 on climate and environment measures; and if he is considering carrying out an impact analysis of the proposals to compare them to the EU Commission proposals in 2018 by which a country would have to spend 40% of CAP funding on climate measures and the environment. [49682/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The new legislative proposals for the Common Agricultural Policy 2021-2027 outline a greater environ-

mental ambition post-2020 and recognise the role the agriculture sector has to play in helping Member States achieve their environmental and climate change targets.

I firmly endorse the principle that there must be a high level of environmental ambition in the CAP post-2020.

The Finnish Presidency recently proposed a single common percentage to be applied by Member States for environmental actions across both Pillars. However, this proposal did not include any suggested percentage. I believe the details of the proposal will have to be developed further before we come to any definitive conclusions. I am, of course, ready to explore all possible options when examining these proposals and look forward to engaging with the Presidency and my European colleagues further on this matter.

### **Corrib Gas Field**

197. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address matters (details supplied) relating to the Corrib gas project and related infrastructure. [49471/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The consents granted in respect of the Corrib gas field and the terms and details of these consents are published on my Departments website. The Corrib gas field is also under permit from other bodies, including the Commission for Regulation of Utilities and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Third party access to upstream gas pipelines is covered in the Gas Act 1976, as amended, which transposes the requirements of EU Directive 2009/73/EC relating to common rules for the internal market in natural gas. As part of the Petroleum Lease granted to the Lessees of the Corrib gas field, it is the responsibility of the Lessees to decommission the facilities after cessation of production.

Any application received for working of petroleum must be submitted in accordance with the Petroleum and Other Minerals Development Act, 1960, as amended. The requirement in respect of Environmental Impact Assessment are set out in this Act. Other pertinent legislation includes the Gas Act 1976, as amended and the Continental Shelf Act 1968, as amended. Further legislation may be relevant depending on the characteristics of any particular application.

### **Energy Efficiency**

198. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a company (details supplied) has commenced the upgrade of its domestic meters to smart meters; if so, if it is by agreement with the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities; the alternative meters available to customers who have been informed that their meters are old and need replacing in cases in which the customer does not wish to have a smart meter installed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49497/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Smart meters are the next generation of electricity and gas meters and will replace older mechanical meters. The installation of smart meters is a key enabler for the energy transition to a decarbonised system.

The Commission for the Regulation of Utilities (CRU) is the competent authority for deliv-

ery of the Smart Meter Upgrade. ESB Networks are responsible for rolling out smart electricity meters and Gas Networks Ireland (GNI) will be responsible for rolling out smart gas meters.

The Smart Meter Upgrade is a meter replacement programme. When the programme completes in Ireland in 2024, it will result in the upgrade of over 2 million meters to modern, smart-ready technology. The electricity smart meter installation commenced in September 2019 and it is expected that some 20,000 meters will be installed by the end of 2019. Already over 9,000 smart electricity meters have been installed.

GNI has an on going domestic meter replacement programme and currently replaces older meters with smart ready ones.

Gas Networks Ireland apply due diligence with regards to gas meters over 20 years old and install a replacement meter. Like all equipment, meters for measuring gas or electricity use require replacement over time and as older brands and models cease to be available, newer technology enables improvements in services and greater efficiencies in meter reading. The maintenance of gas meters is an operational matter for GNI, a commercial state body under the aegis of the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, which operates the gas distribution network.

The smart ready meters have no radio communication features and emit no radio signal. However, a customer who does not want an upgraded meter will be able to decline to have this new meter installed.

## **Waste Management**

199. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of progress and the anticipated completion and publication of a cost-benefit analysis for a deposit return scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49516/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The government is determined to reduce the excessive use of plastics.

As a first step, the purchase of single use plastics has been banned throughout the public service. We are determined to increase recycling of plastics from 37% now to 55% in the coming years and, along with other EU member states, to phase out non-recyclable plastics entirely.

A Deposit and Return Scheme is one option proposed for EU member states to consider as a means of increasing the collection of plastic beverage containers and achieve the new 90% target for this waste stream identified in the Single Use Plastic Directive.

In January this year I commissioned a study to examine how Ireland can deliver a 90% collection target for single use beverage containers, including plastic bottles. This study will also examine the possibility of introducing a Deposit and Return Scheme and how this might operate in an Irish context. The introduction of an initiative such as a Deposit and Return Scheme needs to be fully understood and the costs and impacts identified to enable evidence-based decision making in this matter.

A first draft of the study has been received and is currently being reviewed.

## **Departmental Expenditure**

200. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount spent by his Department and each agency under the aegis of his Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49535/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department, along with a number of other government departments, has an annual presence at the National Ploughing Championships. The Department's attendance at the Ploughing Championships is an important means to engage with the public as it enables citizens to meet representatives from the Department and our various agencies on issues such as rural connectivity, soil and geological profiling of land, sustainability initiatives, energy efficiency grants and schemes, and initiatives to support small businesses and enhance digital literacy and use in communities.

The total cost of the Department's presence at the Ploughing Championships is as follows:

2016: €6,240 (The Department had one division represented at the Ploughing Championships viz Geological Survey Ireland)

2017: €144,483.21

2018: €138,305.25

2019: €124,563.81.

These figures include advertising and promotional material, design, build, event support and break-down/removal of the marquee itself as well as all built items within it, all stands, audio-visual equipment, backdrop design and printing, kitchen and toilet facilities, electrical set-up, AV and marquee staffing (including project management and construction) and maintenance in the lead-up to and throughout the event. The figures also include event passes, buses and transport as well as onsite services such as waste, cleaning and security.

Staff, where their presence was required in terms of management and support across all Departmental exhibits, were paid as they would be for their normal working day. Travel, subsistence and overtime, where necessary, was paid in line with the agreed rates.

The information requested in relation to the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each agency. The Department will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisations.

### **Public Service Obligation Levy**

201. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if an increased amount of PSO levy will be allocated to Bord na Móna to increase it in line with a greater use of biomass in the Edenderry power plant. [49577/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The support scheme for use of biomass in electricity generation, the Renewable Electricity Feed-In Tariff (REFIT 3), runs until 2030, with support payments made through the Public Service Obligation (PSO) levy. The Bord na Móna-owned plant at Edenderry was allocated support for fuelling the plants with up to 30% biomass.

As Bord na Móna currently co-fires the Edenderry plant with 30% biomass, it is at its maxi-

mum support under the REFIT 3 scheme. The REFIT3 Scheme has been closed since December 2015.

### **Energy Policy Review**

202. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the scope and terms of reference of the proposed energy security review; the way in which this will be carried out; the person or body which will carry out the review; the timeline for same; if the review will consider questions of intergenerational and global climate justice; the way in which he will ensure that no conflict of interest ensues between stakeholders, regulators and policy makers in determining the energy interests of Ireland in the context of the climate emergency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49604/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The major review into Ireland's energy security and sustainability, which I have initiated, 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 Chairpersons of EirGrid, ESB, Bord na Móna, Ervia and CRU to seek their input into the review.

My Department regularly engages with State Agencies and other stakeholders as part of the normal process of feeding into policy development and formulation.

The review, which will be completed during 2020, will be carried out by an independent body following a public procurement exercise.

The full terms of reference of the review have not yet been finalised. However, it is not intended that this particular review will cover questions of intergenerational and global climate justice. I expect to finalise the terms of reference early in the new year. It is intended that the primary focus will be on both the achievement of our decarbonisation goals and maintaining energy sustainability and security.

### **National Broadband Plan**

203. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a company (details supplied) has undergone a prequalification assessment; the way in which the company became involved in the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49610/19]

204. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the capital which will be provided by the owners of a company (details supplied) for the roll-out of the national broadband plan; the amount being provided by a company (details supplied); the amount being provided by companies (details supplied), respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49611/19]

205. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the person or body responsible for providing extra capital to a company (details supplied) if the roll-out of the national broadband plan is not successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49612/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 203 to 205, inclusive, together.

I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question 1 on today's order which dealt comprehensively with these matters.

In addition to the €220m in equity and working capital which NBI has committed to invest in the project, NBI bears the risk of having to provide additional equity injections over the life of the project, should this be required, as the State subsidy is capped.

*Question No. 206 answered with Question No. 51.*

### **Data Centres**

207. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has estimated the significant levels of electricity required by data centres by the end of 2019; his plans to power the expected further increase in power required by these facilities by 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49615/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Government policy in relation to the Role of Data Centres in Ireland's Enterprise Strategy is primarily a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation in the first instance. The Government Statement on the role of data centres in Ireland's Enterprise Strategy, 2018 recognises that a plan-led approach is needed to develop a range of measures to promote regional options for data centre investment, minimising the need for additional grid infrastructure.

While data centres have until recent time accounted for less than 2% of Ireland's total electricity demand, EirGrid, in their Generation Capacity Statement 2019-2028, project that demand from data centres could account for 29% of all demand by 2028. EirGrid, in its capacity as the transmission system operator, continually model and forecast the predicted future growth of electricity demand in their published analysis such as Tomorrow's Energy Scenarios, which is available on their website at [www.eirgrid.com](http://www.eirgrid.com)

While data centres consume very large amounts of energy they have a flat, predictable demand profile meaning that they use the same amount of electricity day and night and therefore require a range of generation technologies to meet their demand. Significant increases in volumes of generation capacity, including from renewable energy sources, will be required to meet Ireland's electrification objectives and demand from heat pumps, electric vehicles and data centres. The Climate Action Plan sets out a number of actions to ensure that data centres are accommodated in a sustainable manner.

Corporate power purchasing of renewable energy by large energy users will also be critical to supplying data centre demand as will ensuring that large demand connections are regionally balanced to minimise grid reinforcements and the costs to consumers.

### **Electric Vehicles**

208. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of electrically propelled vehicles in use throughout public transport or the State sector; the progress in recent years in this regard; his expectation for the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49643/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department does not record the number of electric vehicles in use by state bodies. The public transport sector falls within the policy remit of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

### **Climate Change Policy**

209. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which his climate change energy policies compare with applicable policies in other EU states with particular reference to greenhouse gas reduction and the phasing out of fossil fuels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49644/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The European Environment Agency produces an annual report which provides an assessment of the progress of the EU and individual Member States towards their climate and energy targets. The latest report “Trends and Projections in Europe 2019” is based on official statistics on energy and greenhouse gas emissions reported by Member States up to and including 2017. The report can be found here: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/trends-and-projections-in-europe-1>.

The 2009 Effort Sharing Decision 406/2009/EC (ESD) set binding annual emissions targets for Member States for the period 2013-2020 for sectors outside the EU Emissions Trading System. According to the latest EEA report, ten Member States (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and Poland) are projected to miss their 2020 ESD target.

The ESD allows Member States to meet their targets by means of unused emissions allowances from earlier years, or through purchasing allowances from other Member States, or on international markets. Ireland expects to make use of these flexibilities to comply with the ESD.

### **Climate Action Plan**

210. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he expects climate change policies to appeal to individual householders and businesses in the context of the reduction of greenhouse gases; if he can ensure sufficient uptake to achieve the result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49645/19]

218. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action

and Environment the extent to which the action plan for climate change is expected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and 2050; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49668/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 210 and 218 together.

The Climate Action Plan, which I launched in June, sets out the comprehensive suite of actions to ensure Ireland can meet the 2030 climate commitments putting us on a trajectory to be net zero by 2050. Broader Government policy, including carbon pricing, and grant supports offered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, will play an important role in driving the changes required to reduce greenhouse gases at individual and business levels.

I am also confident that informed citizens will play a crucial role in the choices that they make in regard to climate action. The Climate Action Plan, therefore, addresses the role of citizen engagement and community leadership. The related actions include enhancing the effectiveness of climate-related communications, network building, and developing deliberative capacity, including through the National Dialogue on Climate Change (NDCA).

Communications and engagement will be closely intertwined with policy changes to be delivered. It will rest on three key elements:

- persuasive, consistent and effective external-facing communications on climate change and the need for action, including specific details on what the state is doing and what individuals can do to contribute;
- engagement designed to empower communities, that builds on the Climate Action Regional Roadshows, and quickly leads to mobilisation, capacity building and local action, and
- efficient exchange of information within the civil and public service, including all relevant commercial semi-state companies, directly related to supporting the Government's climate action objectives.

The overall objective of this approach is create a long- term process to communicate with citizens on the national objective of transitioning to a low carbon, climate resilient society and economy by 2050 in which every citizen has a role to play.

Engagements, on a regional and local basis have already taken place, with stakeholders in Athlone, Tralee and Kildare. I have also held a series of regional town hall meetings since the publication of the Climate Action Plan to gather views in relation to its implementation. In consultation with the EPA, I am currently developing a model for implementation of the next phase of the NDCA which will focus on local activation.

Engaging youth is key to the driving and encouraging future behavioural changes and I am communicating with that generation through a number of strands, including supports for climate related activity for Green Schools, and ECO-UNESCO. Government is also establishing a dedicated National Youth Council for Climate Action and Climate Justice. The Council will be established by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, in close partnership with my own Department. Furthermore, the Government, through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, has allocated in Budget 2020 for a new special fund for youth action on climate justice to enhance channels for direct engagement between young people and decision makers across Government and beyond. The overall goal will be to assist young people to engage in enduring dialogue with decision-makers, and support initiatives which are both youth-led and respond to the issues raised by young people.

I also welcome the recent initiative of the Oireachtas to hold the Youth Assembly on 15 November. It is heartening to see the active engagement and mobilisation to the climate crisis which is, without doubt, the defining challenge of our generation. I thank the members of the Youth Assembly for their recommendations for action to stop climate breakdown which I am currently considering.

### **Climate Action Plan**

211. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which recognition is given to the fact that Ireland produces food to meet the need of more than 40 million persons under the most efficient production methods resulting in the lowest carbon level in Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49646/19]

212. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he remains satisfied that sufficient carbon reduction proposals are in place to meet national targets while at the same time protecting the agrifood sector here and the low carbon level in the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49647/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 211 and 212 together.

The Climate Action Plan identifies the long-term challenge for the agriculture sector to meet the national policy objective, set out in the 2014 National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development, of an approach to carbon neutrality which does not compromise our capacity for sustainable food production. Ireland's agriculture sector has strong green credentials and a positive international reputation in terms of carbon efficiency. However, given the contribution of agriculture to overall national greenhouse gas emissions, a shift in the sector is needed and achieving this objective will be a significant challenge facing Irish agriculture over the coming decades.

Significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions can be achieved through meeting the targets set out for the agriculture sector in the Climate Action Plan. To achieve these targets, the Plan sets out a range of actions to reduce emissions on farms, promote afforestation and diversification of land use, develop opportunities in the bio-economy and in the supply of substitutes for fossil fuels, promote better management of peatlands and soils, and develop clusters of best practice.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has recently launched a public consultation on a draft National Climate and Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector to 2030 and Beyond. This consultation aims to address the issue of emission reduction targets while meeting the high ambitions of the Irish agriculture sector. It recognises the important role of the next Common Agricultural Policy, which is to have a strong climate ambition and will be implemented in Ireland through the development of a strategic plan for the period 2021 to 2027.

### **National Broadband Plan**

213. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he expects the national broadband plan to be in a position to compete internationally in terms of capacity, quality standards and speed in all areas nation-

wide; the degree to which this contrasts with previous developments over the past 20 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49648/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Broadband Plan has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. In 2012, less than 700,000, or 30% of Irish premises had access to high speed broadband. Today, 76% of the 2.4 million premises in Ireland can access high speed broadband.

On 19 November, the Government signed the contract with National Broadband Ireland (NBI) to provide access to high speed broadband to the 1.1 million people living and working in 537,537 premises, including almost 100,000 businesses and farms and 695 schools, where commercial operators will not commit to deliver the service.

The solution provided by NBI will meet and in some cases exceed, the parameters of the Intervention Strategy and European targets. The NBP will contribute to the EU strategic objectives set out in the Digital Agenda for Europe and in the Communication “Towards a European Gigabit Society”.

National Broadband Ireland will set up a wholesale open access company dedicated to the rollout of a predominantly fibre to the premises (FTTP) network in the Intervention Area, which will be capable of delivering a future-proofed high speed broadband network, initially providing services of 150Mbps to the majority of homes and up to 1Gbps to heavy data users and Small and Medium size Enterprises.

Work by NBI will begin immediately and over 90% of premises in the State will have access to high speed broadband within the next four years.

Approximately 300 community centres, schools, library hubs and local sports halls across every county in Ireland will be connected to high speed broadband during 2020, to enable communities to quickly get free public access to high speed broadband.

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.

Previous government initiatives to deliver or improve broadband service in the State include the National Broadband Scheme (NBS), the Rural Broadband Scheme (RBS), the Galway-Mayo Telecoms Duct, the Metropolitan Area Networks and the Schools 100Mbps Project.

The National and Rural Broadband Schemes were designed to deliver basic, affordable broadband to target areas across the country where premises were unable to obtain a service from a commercial operator. These initiatives were concluded in 2014 and 2011, respectively.

The NBP State intervention network, when complete, will push Ireland to the forefront of connectivity, both on a European and an international level.

### **Mobile Telephony Services**

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which the quality of mobile telephone services can be improved nationwide in both urban and rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49649/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard**

**Bruton):** The provision of telecommunications services, including mobile phone services, is a matter for the relevant service providers operating in a fully liberalised market regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), as independent Regulator. I do not have statutory authority to require commercial companies to rollout services and make specific investments in particular locations.

In terms of ongoing efforts to improve mobile telephony coverage nationally, the Programme for Government specifically included a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. The Taskforce worked with key stakeholders to produce a report in December 2016 containing 40 actions to alleviate some of the coverage deficits across the country. An Implementation Group is overseeing the implementation of the actions and comprises all key stakeholders responsible for delivery. The Implementation Group meets on a quarterly basis and publishes quarterly progress reports on the implementation status of actions.

Now in its third year of operation, the Taskforce has addressed over 70 actions and continues to focus on issues that are negatively impacting upon the rollout of essential telecommunications infrastructure around the country.

Various measures are underway under the aegis of the Taskforce which will address mobile coverage deficits, particularly in rural areas:

- Work is ongoing in order to achieve a greater consensus around site selection for telecoms infrastructure and therefore improve mobile phone coverage.

- A focus group was established to provide guidance with respect to categories of location where high quality reliable mobile coverage should be made available as a priority. The report of the focus group was published on the Department's website on 31 August 2018. It is anticipated that the output of the focus group should influence the actions of the mobile network operators in their work to reduce mobile phone blackspots. It will also inform future policy in the Department with regard to priorities for mobile phone service.

- A working group has been investigating the feasibility of developing standardised policy for accessing and utilising State and publicly-owned assets for the deployment of telecommunications infrastructure.

- ComReg has published a composite national outdoor coverage map, which will, in tandem with its work on handset testing and activities to raise consumer awareness, allow people across Ireland to optimise the services available to them.

- ComReg has developed a licensing exemption scheme which will enable households and businesses to use mobile phone repeaters to boost signals into their premises and bring immediate improvements in mobile coverage.

All of these initiatives should help enhance the quality of mobile phone and data services, particularly in areas currently experiencing a low level of service.

## **Electricity Generation**

215. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of electricity being generated from onshore wind, offshore wind, hydro and solar sources; the extent to which this can form part of a reliable electricity grid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49650/19]

216. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action

and Environment the daily electricity requirements as provided for by the national grid; the degree to which electricity generation sources are from non-fossil fuels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49651/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 215 and 216 together.

EirGrid have estimated that, in the 12 months ending September 2019, 35.2% of generated electricity has been from renewable sources. That figure consists of approx. 32% from wind energy, 2.5% from hydropower and 0.7% from other renewable sources. This does not include small scale and micro generation which could contribute up to 1% more to the total. Currently, offshore wind and solar represent less than 1% of total renewable electricity.

EirGrid are the Transmission System Operator for the national grid and operate the system in a safe and secure manner. Information on Ireland's fuel mix for electricity generation is available on EirGrid's website and updated on a monthly basis: <http://www.eirgridgroup.com>. This website also lists the installed capacity of each hydro-electric station attached to the transmission grid.

### **Biofuel Obligation Scheme**

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the full annual extent of the production and use of bio-diesel and ethanol; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49652/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Biofuels Obligation Scheme is the primary method by which the use of biofuels is supported in Ireland. The Biofuels Obligations Scheme Annual Report for 2018, which is available at [www.nora.ie](http://www.nora.ie), sets out that 216 million litres of sustainable biofuels were placed on the Irish road transport fuel market in that year. This included 162 million litres of biodiesel and 54 million litres of bioethanol. The report also sets out that over 11% of the feedstock used to produce these biofuels originated in Ireland.

*Question No. 218 answered with Question No. 210.*

### **Alternative Energy Projects**

219. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which alternative energy generation sources contribute to the national grid; the progress in this regard year on year over the past ten years; the expectation for the next ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49669/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has estimated that, in 2018, approximately 33.2% of electricity demand was met from renewable sources.

The following table shows the progress on the contribution of renewable energy sources to electricity generation. Progress since 2008 to date has been that its contribution increased from 10.8% of gross electricity consumption to 33.2% in 2018.

**Renewable Energy Contribution to Gross Electricity Consumption (RES-E normalised):**

Year	Normalised Renewables % of Gross Electricity
2008	10.8%
2009	14.0%
2010	15.6%
2011	18.3%
2012	19.8%
2013	21.3%
2014	23.5%
2015	25.5%
2016	26.8%
2017	30.1%
2018	33.2%

EirGrid's long-term view of the electricity transmission system is detailed in its Tomorrow's Energy Scenarios 2019 report published recently. The specific trajectory of renewable electricity out to 2030 will be set out in Ireland's National Energy and Climate Plan which is due to be finalised by the end of 2019.

The Climate Action Plan will be stepping up ambition in the renewable electricity sector with 70% of our electricity to be generated from renewable sources by 2030. This will require significant changes to the operation and management of the electricity grid, to integrate wind and solar energy at scale.

### EU Directives

220. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of fishing organisations here about the proposed implementation of EU Council Directive 2017/159 of the social partners agreement on the ILO Work in Fishing Convention 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49569/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Council Directive (EU) 2017/159 on the implementation of the social partners' agreement on the Work in Fishing Convention aims to enhance the working and living conditions for fishers working on vessels registered in an EU member State. The Directive implements an Agreement between the General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives in the European Union (Cogeca), the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) and the Association of National Organization's of Fishing Enterprises in the European Union (Europêche). These organisations represent the employer and employee representative organisations in the fishing sector across the European Union. As the agreement is a social partnership agreement, the Directive merely implements the Agreement as agreed between the social partners in 2012, and the Agreement itself was not subject to any changes during the discussions on the Directive in the Social Questions Working Party. My Department is supportive of the objective of the Directive to enhance the working and living conditions for fishers working on vessels registered in an EU Member State.

An important aspect of the transposition of the Directive is the requirement for consultation with stakeholders. On 16 November 2018, my Department published Marine Notice 42 of 2018, which invited stakeholders to contribute their views on Council Directive (EU) 2017/159. The consultation process resulted in the Department receiving seven submissions, which were reviewed and published on the Department's website (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1ee9a2-responses-to-the-consultation-on-ilo-work-in-fishing-convention-2007/>). Subsequently, my of-

officials met with representatives of the various fisheries organisations to discuss the transposition of the Directive. The outcome from the Department's consultations with stakeholders made an important contribution to the drafting of the package of Regulations required to ensure the transposition of the Directive.

On 9 October, my Department issued Marine Notice 42 of 2019, to provide key stakeholders with a brief overview of some of the main changes that will come into effect subject to the finalisation of the draft legislation. Any queries or concerns raised in relation to transposition of Directive 2017/159, since the publication of Marine Notice 42 of 2019, have been responded to by my Department.

My Department has been working on a package of regulations in order to transpose Council Directive (EU) 2017/159. Work is at an advanced stage and it is hoped that these regulations will be signed into law in the coming weeks.

### Sports Capital Programme Data

221. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the breakdown of funding allocated to each category of sport under the sports capital programme 2019; and if a schedule of the total amount applied for in each sports category and the total funding requested for each sports organisation that was unsuccessful will be provided. [49469/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme is set out in the following table.

Sports	Applications	Grants
American Football	€51,345	€19,141
Angling/Fishing	€159,885	€64,331
Archery	€78,534	€49,822
Athletics	€4,633,604	€2,178,635
Badminton	€104,410	€55,863
Basketball	€671,841	€307,968
Billiards & Snooker	€140,457	€51,073
Bowls	€132,417	€98,659
Boxing	€1,857,099	€935,034
Camogie	€866,494	€225,416
Canoeing / Kayaking	€839,499	€611,398
Clay Pigeon Shooting	€97,255	€24,631
Community Games	€652,499	€359,120
Cricket	€968,259	€350,384
Cycling	€639,332	€232,539
Diving/Snorkelling	€1,017,582	€414,590
Equestrian Sports	€839,157	€288,753
Fencing	€60,856	€28,100
Gaelic Games	€57,559,817	€19,053,985
Golf	€12,522,253	€4,637,037
Gymnastics	€861,064	€372,824
Handball	€965,370	€271,579
Hillwalking	€279,879	€145,513

Sports	Applications	Grants
Hockey	€1,884,352	€818,454
Ice Hockey	€69,060	€69,060
Judo	€69,048	€20,096
Ladies Gaelic Football	€211,653	€24,970
Martial Arts	€176,296	€55,469
Motor Sport	€120,775	€12,440
Motorcycling	€94,116	€15,353
Mountaineering	€156,246	€53,829
Multi-sport	€29,095,561	€10,656,348
Olympic Handball	€24,830	0
Orienteering	€8,200	€8,200
Pitch and Putt	€521,386	€201,222
Raquetball	€150,000	€100,276
Rock Climbing	€10,430	€10,429
Rowing	€3,471,153	€1,343,655
Rugby	€8,128,700	€2,611,857
Sailing	€2,446,184	€584,817
Shooting Sports	€8,100	€2,768
Skateboarding	€192,316	€82,956
Soccer	€20,833,293	€6,408,037
Squash	€303,511	€115,977
Surfing	€48,000	€13,788
Swimming	€1,087,704	€461,869
Table Tennis	€12,830	€12,830
Taekwondo	€19,614	0
Tennis	€5,895,639	€1,984,881
Tenpin bowling	€15,500	€11,950
Triathlon	€146,461	€119,136
Tug of War	€20,000	€13,250
Volleyball	€97,125	€38,499
Waterskiing & Wakeboarding	€49,600	0
Weightlifting	€139,952	€62,150
Wheelchair Sport	€274,173	0
Grand Total	€161,780,716	€56,690,961

Furthermore, details of all applications submitted under the latest round (2018) of the Sports Capital Programme are listed on a county basis on my Department's website at <https://assets.gov.ie/20000/ececa538f64a48e3ab4540515da4cf95.pdf>.

Similarly, details of all allocations under the programme are also published on the Department's website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/471ed5-sports-capital-allocations/>

### **Rail Network Expansion**

222. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the most recent reports and costings available to his Department with regard to the potential expansion of the Sligo to Dublin rail line to Donegal town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49481/19]

223. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the most recent reports and costings available to his Department with regard to a potential Letterkenny to Derry rail line; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49482/19]

224. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the most recent reports and costings available to his Department with regard to a potential Derry to Lifford to Strabane rail line; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49483/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 222 to 224, inclusive, together.

I am unaware of any reports or costings in recent years regarding any of the potential rail lines referred to by the Deputy. I can inform the Deputy however that there is no funding provided within Project Ireland 2040 for the potential rail lines referred to.

### **Light Rail Projects**

225. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the most recent reports and costings available to his Department with regard to a potential light rail system for Cork city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49484/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy may be aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has worked with Cork City Council and Cork County Council in developing a draft Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (also known as CMATS).

In developing CMATS, the NTA examined the potential for all modes of sustainable mobility in the Cork metropolitan area and provided indicative costings against the options considered, including a potential light rail corridor in the city.

CMATS is obviously a long-term, twenty-year strategy and there are therefore a range of measures proposed in the short, medium and longer term, with the short term focus being on active travel and improved bus infrastructure and services.

A draft CMATS was published earlier this year for public consultation and is available to view on the NTA's website. Following the public consultation held earlier this year, I understand the local authorities will formally adopt CMATS as their relevant transport strategy in due course.

### **Rail Network**

226. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the strategic development plan for the cross-Border enterprise rail service between Belfast and Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49485/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The 'Strategic Development Plan' referred to by the Deputy was a joint initiative of both Iarnród Éireann and Translink and was not a plan developed by my Department. As such it represents the ambition of both companies in relation to their corporate development of the Enterprise service over the next 20 years.

Within Project Ireland 2040, there is a commitment to conduct an evaluation of the eco-

conomic benefits and value for money of high-speed rail on the main inter-urban rail network (including the Dublin to Belfast line) against improvements to existing and planned line speeds along the lines.

I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has commenced preparatory work in relation to the proposed evaluation and the study itself will be commenced in 2020.

### **Light Rail Projects**

227. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the most recent reports and costings available to his Department with regard to a potential light rail link between Shannon Airport and Limerick city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49486/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I am not aware of any recent reports on the matter of light rail between Shannon airport and Limerick city; however, the issue of light rail in Limerick was considered by the relevant local authorities in their development of the Mid-West Area Strategic Plan 2012 to 2030. I understand the Plan concluded light rail was not a viable option at that time.

The Deputy may be aware that the National Transport Authority (NTA) is currently working with the relevant local authorities to develop a draft Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (LSMATS).

The draft strategy will consider all transport modes and will set out a framework for investment in transport infrastructure and services for Limerick and Shannon for a 20-year period.

It is intended to publish a draft strategy in Quarter 1, 2020 for public consultation, after which a final strategy will be published.

### **Road Projects**

228. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of a bypass road for Julianstown, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49487/19]

**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 County or City 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.

Prior to the financial crisis, applications for funding for road improvement projects would have been considered as part of the Specific Improvement, and Strategic Regional and Local Road Grant Schemes. However, the extent of the cutbacks in grant funding during the recession meant these grant schemes had to be curtailed after 2013 because expenditure on maintenance/renewal was falling well short of what was required to adequately maintain the regional and local road network.

Project Ireland 2040 does provide for the gradual build up in funding for the road network but it will take some time to reach the level required for the adequate maintenance and renewal of the network. For this reason there is limited scope at present for funding projects under the Specific and Strategic Grant Programmes. The primary focus is on implementation of the 12

regional and local road projects identified for development, subject to necessary approvals, in Project Ireland 2040.

Any additional projects proposed by local authorities for consideration under the Specific and Strategic 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 my Department's Capital Appraisal Framework and it is important for local authorities to prioritise projects within their overall area of responsibility with these requirements in mind.

Under the capital project appraisal process a Preliminary Appraisal has to be submitted in relation to each proposed project. Once an appraisal is received it is assessed taking into account other competing projects, the overall regional and local road capital budget and the wider transport planning framework.

A draft Preliminary Appraisal has been received from Meath County Council regarding traffic management in the Julianstown area. This appraisal is currently being examined and the Department will be liaising with Meath County Council in relation to the further analysis required to underpin the assessment and costing of various options.

### **Road Projects**

229. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of a bypass road for Ardee, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49488/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and securing capital funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 the planning, design, procurement and construction of individual national roads is a matter for 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 Projects**

230. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of the northern cross route in Drogheda, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49489/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in Co. Louth is the statutory responsibility of Louth County Council, 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. My Department has no project appraisal on hand in relation to the proposed Drogheda Northern Cross Port Access road, and as such no cost estimates have been submitted.

Given the cutbacks in State funding for regional and local roads since the financial crisis, it has been necessary to curtail the grant programme for major new regional and local road schemes and for major realignment schemes in order to protect the funding available for the

maintenance of the existing network. The bulk of the funding allocated under Project Ireland 2040 is, therefore, earmarked for the maintenance and renewal of the road network with some limited investment in the new projects.

### **Road Toll Data**

231. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of removing the toll charges at the M1 slip road south of Drogheda town, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49490/19]

232. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of removing the toll charges at the M1 slip road north of Drogheda town, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49491/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 231 and 232 together.

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 operation and management of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Therefore, matters relating to the day to day operations regarding national roads, including toll roads and the establishment of a system of tolls, are within the remit of TII. More specifically, the statutory power to levy tolls, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into agreements with private investors are vested in TII under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended).

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Rail Network Expansion**

233. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of extending the rail line from the M3 parkway to Navan, County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49492/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy is aware, the issue of a potential extension of the existing Dunboyne/M3 Parkway line was considered by the National Transport Authority (NTA) during its development of the statutory Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016 to 2035.

The Strategy stated that based on current population and employment forecasts, the level of travel demand between Navan, Dunshaughlin and various stations to the city centre was insufficient to justify the development of a high-capacity rail link at that current time. Instead the Strategy proposed an enhanced bus service along the corridor and the development of a bus hub in Navan.

In this regard, Bus Éireann introduced a new service on the N2 Corridor in late 2017. Furthermore, Meath County Council, in collaboration with the NTA, continues to progress the development of a bus hub as provided for by the Transport Strategy.

Importantly, the Transport Strategy clearly states that the issue of a rail link to Navan would be kept under review and considered again as part of the statutory review of the current Strategy

which the NTA is required to undertake before the end of 2021.

The NTA will commence this review next year and, as part of that review, I understand that in the latter half of 2020 the NTA will re-evaluate the potential for a rail link to Navan. As committed in both Project Ireland 2040 and the Transport Strategy itself, this re-evaluation will take account of new and planned development along the proposed route. Obviously the issue of estimated cost will form part of that re-evaluation.

### **Road Traffic Legislation**

234. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the consolidation of road traffic legislation. [49499/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** My priorities in respect of road traffic legislation have been focused on legislation which is required to tackle specific issues which need to be addressed in terms of road safety and traffic. For example, I intend to shortly bring forward on a Road Traffic Bill to provide, in the main, for graduated penalties for speeding offences, as well as provisions to facilitate better traffic management on congested routes such as the M50.

The consolidation of the Road Traffic Acts has not therefore been a priority to date. Unfortunately, in discussion of this issue, the benefits of consolidation are too often misunderstood and overstated and the nature of the task itself mischaracterised. It is also worth noting that the absence of consolidation has not, in itself, been identified as an issue impacting on enforcement of any particular provision.

If the project is to be of value, it would be necessary to examine each aspect of the legislation and see where it might be require drafting improvement. It is not simply be a matter of re-enacting all current road traffic legislation into one instrument. Looking at previous projects of a similar nature, it is likely that such a project would take at least three years for a dedicated team of expert staff to complete.

### **Light Rail Projects**

235. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the MetroLink project has plans to take over an area (details supplied) for maintenance shaft and car park on a permanent basis; if consultation has taken place with local residents regarding potential changes to the amenity of the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49506/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport infrastructure projects in the Greater Dublin Area, including MetroLink.

Noting their responsibility in relation to this matter, I have forwarded your query to the NTA for their consideration and direct reply. Please notify my office if you have not received a reply within 10 working days.

### **Road Projects**

236. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of investment in upgrading the N73 Mallow to Mitchelstown, County Cork. [49526/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the maintenance, improvement and management 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 Projects Status

237. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected timeline for completion of the inner relief road Thurles, County Tipperary, linking the Slievenamon Road to the Mill Road; if funding is in place; if a route has been finalised; if all land is secured; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49527/19]

**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. Each local authority is the contracting authority for the purpose of implementation of regional and local road improvement projects.

The National Development Plan (NDP), which has been developed by Government to underpin the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF), provides the strategic and financial framework for investment in the road network for the period from 2018 to 2027. The bulk of the funding being provided is earmarked for maintenance and renewal of the regional and local road network with some limited investment in road improvement projects. The NDP does make provision for the implementation of 12 regional and local road improvement projects, subject to necessary approvals, in the period to 2023. Outside of that, some limited provision is being made in the regional and local road capital budget for the appraisal of a pipeline of upgrade projects. This is intended to cover the appraisal of projects for development, if possible, in the later years of the National Development Plan. The scope for carrying pipeline projects through to development stage is dependent on the future availability of funding.

The Thurles Inner Relief Road was mentioned in the NDP as an example of projects proposed by local authorities which were at various stages of planning and appraisal.

In accordance with the Public Spending Code and the Department's Common Appraisal Framework the project requires preliminary and detailed appraisal. The first essential step, therefore, is that a preliminary appraisal for this project is submitted to the Department by Tipperary County Council. Progression beyond that stage will depend on the quality of the appraisal, the overall availability of funding and the quality of the business cases relating to other proposed projects from around the country.

### Road Projects

238. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason for the delay in advancing plans for a bypass for Thurles, County Tipperary; if an estimate for the completion of the project will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49528/19]

**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 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.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

239. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount spent by his Department and each agency under the aegis of his Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49548/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The cost to my Department for the National Ploughing Championships for 2016 to 2018 follows. The cost to agencies is a matter for the agencies themselves. I will forward your query to the agencies under my remit for direct reply to you as soon as possible.

2016 - €1918.80

2017 - €4329.60

2018 - €4,829.60

2019 - €17,415.95

### **Public Transport Initiatives**

240. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider making the no alcoholic substances allowed programme compulsory for transport providers in an attempt to deal comprehensively with underage drinking; if his attention has been drawn to the fact the programme runs extremely well on a voluntary basis but needs to be made compulsory in order to deal with the growing issue of underage drinking on transport operator vehicles when travelling to and from social events and discos; if he will work on a cross-agency approach with a view to fully implementing the programme on a statutory basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49595/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

The consumption of alcohol on board transport providers vehicles is covered by bye laws

made by Corás Iompair Éireann (CIÉ) in respect of Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann and Irish Rail and bye laws made by the National Transport Authority (NTA) in respect of other public transport providers. I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to CIÉ and the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive responses within ten working days.

### **Road Traffic Offences**

241. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the fact that more than one quarter of motorists convicted of road traffic offences who are sent by the courts on road safety educational courses are failing to complete those programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49617/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** This is a matter for the Courts Service and my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality.

### **Road Projects Expenditure**

242. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding provided for a project (details supplied) in 2019; the projected drawdown of the funding by year end; the funding to be allocated in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49670/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The planning and implementation of the A5 upgrade project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities.

As is the case for the all such capital projects, the A5 upgrade scheme is subject to the planning assessment and approval process in Northern Ireland and since 2012 there have been a number of legal challenges to approvals related to the scheme. This has led to unavoidable delays to the implementation of the proposed scheme.

Most recently a challenge to a decision in November 2017 by the Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure to proceed with the A5 scheme, resulted in the decision to proceed being quashed by the High Court at the request of the Department for Infrastructure in November 2018.

Following the conclusion of that legal action the Department for Infrastructure updated project environmental assessments and undertook a public consultation on a number of environmental reports, including an Environmental Statement Addendum 2019. The Department announced in August this year that over 260 responses to the consultation had been received and that following on from consideration of the number and nature of the issues raised the Department had concluded that a further public inquiry is required.

Earlier this month the Department for Infrastructure also announced that the Planning Appeals Commission has been appointed to hold an inquiry into the A5 Environmental Statement Addendum 2019 and related environmental issues, along with the four updated draft reports to inform an Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Regulations prepared by the Department. It is understood that the inquiry will be held in February 2020.

The current funding arrangements in relation to the A5 are governed by the Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start. Under this Agreement the Government is committed to provide funding of £75 million (sterling) towards the cost of Phase 1a of the A5 upgrade scheme once the statutory planning process in Northern Ireland is concluded.

Allowing for the time required for the conclusion of the public inquiry and for a new decision to be taken on whether to proceed with the scheme together with the possibility of a further legal challenge, the timeframe for the start of construction of Phase 1a of the A5 project is uncertain.

In addition it is envisaged that, as was the case for previous contributions, payments from the South will be based on an agreed protocol linked to the achievement of construction stage milestones. This means that there would be a time lag between the construction start of the scheme and an initial payment by the South.

In view of the current state of play in relation to the A5 scheme and the timeframes involved, provision was not made in 2019 and is not being made in the calendar year 2020 for funding for the scheme. The Government remains committed to the £75 million sterling contribution and the Senior Officials Group established on foot of the Fresh Start Agreement will continue to liaise regarding the project with a view to delivering on that commitment.

In relation to the N2, 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 and in the context of delivering the Government's commitments arising out of Project Ireland 2040, the planning, design, construction and improvement of individual national roads, is a matter for TII, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **National Childcare Scheme**

243. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a public services card will be required to access the new childcare scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49461/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The National Childcare Scheme opened on 20 November. It is being opened on a phased basis, with the online application system now available and a postal application system available from early 2020. The Scheme provides the first ever statutory entitlement to financial support for childcare.

The Scheme has always been designed such that, when it is fully up and running, applications will be accepted both online and by post. A Public Services Card (PSC) and verified MyGovID account are required to apply online only.

The online system offers a user friendly application process for busy parents. It will deliver greater efficiency in the administration of a major, national Government scheme. It gives parents the possibility of (a) accessing subsidies via an online automated income assessment and (b) applying for subsidies using their mobile phone. It is parent friendly.

A secure identity verification system is required for any such IT system. The Public Services Card and MyGovID offers this security. It safeguards applicants' information and the administration of public funding. Our priority is to direct funding to hard-pressed parents and not into administration.

For those parents who wish to apply online but lack IT access or knowledge, help is available through their local Childcare Committee. DCYA has also been working with key stake-

holders to support vulnerable families and will continue this work. Parents can also contact the Parent Support Centre which is available from 8am to 6pm Monday to Saturday - 01 9068530.

There has been a very high volume of applications. Over 8,400 applications, benefiting over 12,100 children, have been successfully submitted, with many more in train.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

244. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount spent by her Department and each agency under the aegis of her Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49534/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The information sought by the Deputy is currently being collated and the response will issue as soon as possible.

### **Departmental Projects**

245. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49458/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** Pobal is a not for profit company that works on behalf of the Irish Government in managing and supporting programmes in the areas of Social Inclusion and Equality, Inclusive Employment and Enterprise, and Early Years and Young People.

Pobal established a temporary office in Mullingar during September 2019 and 10 staff are currently working from there. A new space to accommodate up to 50 seats is expected to open during quarter one of 2020. This will consist mainly of National Childcare Scheme staff and a hot-desk area. The staff who will be based there are expected to be a mix of existing staff who will transfer there and newly hired staff.

Any new jobs arising will be advertised on [www.pobal.ie](http://www.pobal.ie), their twitter account @Pobal and other sources.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

246. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount spent by his Department and each agency under the aegis of his Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49546/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The details requested by the Deputy are set out in the tables, which detail all costs inclusive of VAT. As my Department was established on 19th July 2017, the information provided commences in 2017 and includes costs for 2018 and 2019.

In both 2017 and 2018 my Department hosted a joint exhibit at the National Ploughing

Championships in conjunction with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, It should be noted that in 2017 the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht was the lead exhibitor and therefore incurred the higher percentage of costs relating to the shared exhibit. In 2018 my Department was the lead exhibitor and, in turn, incurred the higher percentage of costs.

At the 2019 Championships, Government Departments, Agencies and State-supported bodies were grouped in themed marquees, dictated by the nature of the supports, services and policy areas they have responsibility for. Costs relating to marquees were shared based on the extent of the space occupied.

**Department of Rural and Community Development - Ploughing Championship costs**

	2017	2018	2019
Online advertising	Nil	Nil	Nil
Offline advertising	Nil	Nil	Nil
Promotional material	€2,216	€9,596	€4,800
*Wages	-	-	-
Photography	€512	Nil	€1,540
Stand rental (marquee costs)	€41,398	€105,770	€82,186
Other costs	€5,835	€28,065	€15,868
Total	€49,961	€143,431	€104,394

\*Staff were paid their normal rates of pay as this work was carried out in the course of their regular duties.

**Agencies under the aegis of my Department**

There are four agencies under the aegis of my Department;

- Pobal
- The Western Development Commission
- Water Safety Ireland
- The Charities Regulator

**Pobal - Ploughing Championships costs**

	2017	2018	2019
Online advertising	Nil	€5,314	Nil
Offline advertising	€419	Nil	€545
Promotional material	€8,386	€4,434	€8,781
*Wages	-	-	-
Photography	Nil	Nil	Nil
Stand rental (marquee costs)	Nil (Hosted in shared exhibit, costs borne by Department)	Nil (Hosted in shared exhibit, costs borne by Department)	Nil (Hosted in Health and Wellness Marquee)
Other costs	Nil	Nil	€38
Total	€8,805	€9,748	€9,364

\*Staff were paid their normal rates of pay as this work was carried out in the course of their regular duties.

**Western Development Commission - Ploughing Championships costs**

	2017	2018	2019
Online advertising	Nil	Nil	Nil
Offline advertising	Nil	Nil	Nil
Promotional material	Nil	€1,759	€6,803
*Wages	-	-	-
Photography	Nil	Nil	Nil
Stand rental (marquee costs)	Nil (Hosted in shared exhibit, costs borne by Department)	Nil (Hosted in shared exhibit, costs borne by Department)	€1,471 (Hosted in Work & Business Marquee)
Other costs	€3,307	€1,949	€4,364
Total	€3,307	€3,708	€12,638

\*Staff were paid their normal rates of pay as this work was carried out in the course of their regular duties.

**Water Safety Ireland - Ploughing Championships costs**

	2017	2018	2019
Online advertising	Nil	Nil	Nil
Offline advertising	Nil	Nil	Nil
Promotional material	€250	€250	€300
*Wages	-	-	-
Photography	Nil	Nil	Nil
Stand rental (marquee costs)	Nil (Hosted in shared exhibit, costs borne by Department)	Nil (Hosted in shared exhibit, costs borne by Department)	Nil (Hosted in Community: Rural and Gaeltacht Supports Marquee, costs borne by Department)
Other costs	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total	€250	€250	€300

\*Staffed by Volunteers

The Charities Regulator has not had a presence at the Ploughing Championships since it came under the remit of my Department.

**Rural Transport Services**

247. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the meetings he has had with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and the NTA since he has taken up his ministerial position with respect to LocalLink transport services to date in tabular form; the policy input he has regarding improving LocalLink transport services under the action plan for rural development; and the issues raised in recent meetings. [49624/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** While I have not directly met with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in relation to Local Link services, my officials have met with the National Transport Authority (NTA) in relation to Local Link. The NTA gave a presentation on Local Link services to the Monitoring Committee for the Action Plan for Rural Development in May of this year.

The Action Plan for Rural Development contains several actions related to improving access to rural transport, including through Local Link services. Progress Reports on the Action Plan are published twice yearly on all measures contained in the Action Plan and these are available at [www.gov.ie/en/collection/b13c5f-progress-reports-action-plan-for-rural-development/](http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/b13c5f-progress-reports-action-plan-for-rural-development/).

My Department is currently developing the next phase of rural policy for Ireland, to succeed the Action Plan for Rural Development which reaches the end of its three-year lifecycle at the end of 2019.

The need for further integration of rural, regional and national public transport services to provide a comprehensive and reliable service to people who live, work and study in rural towns, villages and outlying areas was highlighted as part of the consultation process to inform the development of the new policy.

My Department will continue to engage across Government, including with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, to identify tangible policy measures for inclusion in the policy, including measures to further enhance access to transport services in rural areas.

### **Rural Regeneration and Development Fund Data**

248. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number and value of approved projects being funded under the rural regeneration and development fund; the funding allocated for the scheme in 2019; the value of payments made for approved projects to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49625/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund seeks to support ambitious and strategic projects which have the potential to transform rural economies and communities. The Government has committed €1 billion over 10 years to the Fund and €315 million is allocated to the Fund for the period 2019-2022. €52 million was allocated to the Fund for 2019.

The first call for applications to the Fund closed in September 2018. There was a large response to the first call, with 280 applications received under Categories 1 and 2.

Category 1 related to projects with all necessary planning and other consents in place and which were ready to proceed, while Category 2 projects were those which required further development to become ready for Category 1 status.

On foot of the first call, 38 successful Category 1 projects and 46 Category 2 projects were announced, with funding of €86m provided from the Fund to support projects worth €117m.

Following the announcement of the successful projects, my Department engaged with each lead party to complete due diligence requirements. Contractual arrangements were also drawn up with the release of funding based on the achievement of key milestones in the projects.

In this regard, significant progress is already being made on the implementation of successful projects. A number of the projects have already reached their first milestone and had funding released. To date, €21.9 million has been drawn down from the Fund by 55 separate projects. This is made up of €18.04 million drawn down for 33 Category 1 projects and €3.8 million for 22 Category 2 projects. I expect that payments from the Fund will continue to accelerate over the coming weeks and months as further milestones are achieved across the other projects.

The second call for Category 1 applications for the Rural Regeneration and Development

Fund closed on 6 August 2019. There was an excellent response from across the country and my Department received 69 applications for funding. I announced the successful projects from the second call on 6 November 2019. 26 projects were approved for funding of €62 million to support projects costing €95 million.

Following the announcement of the successful projects from the second call, my Department is engaging with each lead party to complete due diligence requirements and complete contractual arrangements.

### **LEADER Programmes Expenditure**

249. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount spent to date under the 2014-20 LEADER programme by project and administration costs; the amount expended to date on project costs by each LAG; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49626/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** LEADER is a multi-annual programme which has a total budget of €250 million over the period to 2020. It is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) who deliver the programme across the country.

Total expenditure on the LEADER programme since it commenced - effectively in 2016 when the majority of Funding Agreements were signed with the LAGs - amounts to over €73.4 million. This comprises:

- €1.5 million in initial costs incurred by the LAGs to develop their Local Development Strategies.
- €32.6 million in administration costs of the LAGs and the cost of their engagement with communities to generate projects.
- €39.3 million on project expenditure.

The level of project activity under the LEADER programme has increased significantly since the start of 2018. Currently, over 2,500 projects have been approved for funding of over €94.6 million. A total of 1,007 projects have been approved to date in 2019 alone.

A further 352 applications, requesting an additional €30.7 million, are at an earlier stage in the approvals process.

In addition, more than 100 Food and Co-operation projects have been approved at national level, outside of the core budget available to the LAGs.

Project payments have increased significantly in recent months as approved works have reached completion and claims have been submitted for payment. Over €39.2 million of project expenditure has been incurred to date, €26.1 million of that in 2019.

Over 1,000 or 40% of project promoters have now received a Final Payment in respect of their project application. The Programme is now delivering real and tangible results for communities right across rural Ireland and I am confident that the increased stream of project approvals by the LAGs and payment claims being submitted to my Department will continue at pace for the remainder of the programming period.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the project payments made to date by each Local Action Group. The figures do not include payments made under the thematic schemes funded outside

of the core budget allocated to each LAG.

**Total LEADER Project payments by LAG as at 25 November 2019**

Local Action Group	Project Payments
Name	Value
Carlow	€1,439,360
Cavan	€1,994,572
Clare	€1,413,934
Cork North	€942,688.44
Cork South	€504,996
Cork West	€540,069
Donegal	€3,458,456
Dublin Rural	€740,183
Galway East	€868,655
Galway West	€418,083
Kerry	€2,768,655
Kildare	€476,217
Kilkenny	€937,460
Laois	€989,437
Leitrim	€1,057,027
Limerick	€2,074,243
Longford	€850,063
Louth	€922,467
Mayo	€2,521,486
Meath	€508,852
Monaghan	€1,260,576
Offaly	€2,218,523
Roscommon	€1,181,447
Sligo	€1,311,592
Tipperary	€2,347,798
Waterford	€2,190,951
Westmeath	€622,187
Wexford	€2,023,527
Wicklow	€699,524
Total	€39,283,028

**Local Improvement Scheme Data**

250. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of rural roads that have received funding under the LIS in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by local authority in tabular form; and the projected number of road projects to be completed in 2019. [49627/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** Since I re-introduced the Local Improvement Scheme in 2017, I have allocated over €48 million to the scheme, which has resulted in the approval of over 2,000 roads projects.

The LIS is funded by my Department and administered through the Local Authorities. The number and location of roads to benefit from improvement works is a matter for the relevant

## Local Authority.

The table outlines the number of LIS projects approved, and the number that have been confirmed as completed to date since 2017. In a small number of cases, the number completed is greater than the number originally approved, due to necessary substitutions agreed with the Department.

A number of Local Authorities have yet to submit their final returns confirming the funding spent and the number of roads projects completed in respect of the 2019 scheme. My officials have been in contact with the Local Authorities to impress upon them the need to complete their LIS works and to submit payment claims.

**Table 1: LIS-Number of Roads Approved and Completed**

Local Authority	Number of Roads Approved in 2017	Number of Roads Confirmed Complete under the 2017 Scheme	Number of Roads Approved in 2018	Number of Roads Confirmed Complete under the 2018 Scheme	Number of Roads Approved in 2019	Number of Roads Confirmed Complete under the 2019 Scheme to Date
Carlow	20	20	28	28	14	14
Cavan	10	10	11	12	4	4
Clare	28	28	30	30	12	12
Cork	21	21	61	62	20	TBC
Donegal	164	164	106	107	34	TBC
Galway	57	57	66	69	37	36
Kerry	41	41	58	61	26	TBC
Kildare	0	0	12	12	8	8
Kilkenny	16	16	15	16	12	TBC
Laois	21	20	19	15	6	7
Leitrim	18	18	21	24	10	11
Limerick	18	17	21	22	13	TBC
Longford	18	17	25	25	15	TBC
Louth	8	8	5	6	7	6
Mayo	89	86	139	144	73	TBC
Meath	22	22	21	21	12	TBC
Monaghan	21	21	31	28	10	TBC
Offaly	20	20	31	31	11	9
Roscommon	41	41	92	91	21	21
Sligo	16	16	22	22	7	7
Tipperary	9	9	25	32	21	TBC
Waterford	17	17	19	20	4	3
Westmeath	23	23	22	22	12	12
Wexford	18	18	17	17	11	TBC
Wicklow	7	7	15	15	11	TBC
TOTAL	723	717	912	932	411	150

**CLÁR Programme**

251. Deputy Dara Calleary asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the

status of the review of the CLÁR programme. [49628/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The CLÁR programme provides funding for small infrastructural projects in rural areas which have suffered high levels of population decline.

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 regions over the period 1926 to 1996 was 50%.

In 2006, an analysis of the 2002 Census data was carried out by the NIRSA Institute (National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis) at Maynooth University and the programme was extended to include areas with an average population loss of 35% between 1926 and 2002.

As the Deputy is 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.

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 with regard to carrying out a detailed analysis of the most recent Census data to further inform the review process, and that engagement is ongoing. I envisage that a wider stakeholder consultation will also take place before the review is fully complete. Once completed, the review will help to inform the design of future CLÁR programmes and any additional measures which may be included.

### **Departmental Strategies**

252. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the new road map for social inclusion 2019 to 2025 will be further delayed in view of the fact that new SILC data is due for release on 28 November 2019 which may impact on the targets set in the road map and so on; if the road map for social inclusion will have to be revised in view of the new data; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49460/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The new Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 will include data from the 2018 EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), to be released by the CSO on 28 November, with any necessary adjustments made to the targets. It is not expected that the inclusion of this data will have any impact on the timeframe for publication of the new Roadmap.

### **Social Welfare Code**

253. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the documents required to be submitted to her Department by a person applying for a means tested payment to prove that the person is separated and not in receipt of maintenance payments in view of informal separation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49462/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Social welfare legislation provides that all income and assets belonging to the claimant and his or her spouse, partner or cohabitant are assessable for social welfare means testing purposes.

Where a person is informally separated, and living apart from their spouse or civil partner, social welfare inspectors have a key role in investigating and advising the Department's deciding officers on whether a couple are separated for means testing purposes. In this regard, no single criterion can necessarily support a decision that a couple are separated or not. The criteria for assessment include, but are not limited to:

- whether they share financially as a couple;
- whether the separation is temporary or long-term;
- whether there is an expectation of living together again shortly;
- whether the marriage or civil partnership remains unbroken.

If the deciding officer considers the couple to be separated, then the earnings of the spouse or civil partner would not be included in the means assessment. Any maintenance payments (including the payment of rent/mortgage) would then be assessable.

On several schemes there is a maintenance disregard in respect of housing costs. Jobseeker's Allowance, One-Parent Family Payment, Disability Allowance, State Pension (Non-Contributory), Blind Pension, Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's (Non-Contributory) Pension and, as of Budget 2019, Working Family Payment all have a maintenance disregard in place. For these schemes, housing costs of up to €95.23 per week are disregarded, and 50% of any maintenance above this is assessed as means.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy .

### **Rural Social Scheme**

254. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision has been made to move the rural social scheme from the responsibility of her Department to the Department of Rural and Community Development; if so, when the decision was made; when persons will be notified of the decision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49503/19]

**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 - which included 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 which included discussions on the RSS. 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.

**Departmental Expenditure**

255. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount spent by her Department and each agency under the aegis of her Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49539/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department has participated in the National Ploughing Championships over the past number of years and it provides an important opportunity for face-to-face engagement with our customers and the public.

In 2019, for the first time, my Department attended as part of the Government of Ireland village. The central Government of Ireland’s presence at the 2019 National Ploughing Championships (NPC) focused on delivering supports and services that citizens need, in a format that is accessible and most relevant for visitors.

My Department had an enhanced presence at the NPC in 2019 including representation from five key business areas of the Department deemed most relevant to attendees. These included the JobsIreland team who provided information on job opportunities and employer supports, representatives from State Pensions team, and also staff from the MyWelfare team. General scheme and support information was provide by staff from the Communications and Customer Services team.

As with previous years, staff also provided general information and supplied customers with information booklets, forms and guides to our services where relevant. My Department uses a reusable and reconfigurable stand for attendance the National Ploughing Championships and similar events. Stand installation is provided by a contractor and costs of this are included in the Department’s figures in the table.

My Department does not commission promotional material or literature specifically for the National Ploughing Championships.

This year my Department was the lead exhibitor and had a coordinating role for the Business, Employment Welfare and Tax marquee which included the Revenue Commissioners, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the National Childcare Scheme, CSO and the Workplace Relations Commission.

Information on the Citizens Information Board will take longer to collate and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

**DEASP National Ploughing Championships 2016 - 2019**

Year	DEASP costs	DEASP staffing
2019	€28,676.63	20 staff in attendance each day on average
2018	€9,571.50	8 each day on average
2017	€7,129.50	6 - 8 staff each day
2016	€5,530.50	6 - 8 staff each day

**Treatment Benefit Scheme Data**

256. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons who applied for hearing aids under the treatment benefit scheme in each of the years 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; the cost of same in each year in the same period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49558/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The details requested in relation to the number of people who applied for hearing aids under the treatment benefit scheme are set out in the following table.

Year	Number of Grants paid	Cost euro
2017	11,375	9.43m
2018	14,689	12.74m
2019 to end October	13,185	11.56m

### Illness Benefit Applications

257. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason persons with fibromyalgia can no longer access protocol 6 on the online list of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49590/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I can assure the Deputy that the quality of assessment carried out on the cohort of clients with Fibromyalgia is maintained to a high professional level and that there has been no diminishing of eligibility criteria for this illness.

The Department's protocols were developed with the primary intention of assisting Medical Assessors in carrying out their work. As protocols are in place solely for the use of medical assessors, I am advised that the Chief Medical Officer deemed it not necessary for them to be available online.

Should the Deputy have a particular case in mind, or have a specific query in relation to Protocol no 06 MSS (Musculoskeletal System) which covers fibromyalgia, I would be happy to have this clarified for him without delay.

I hope this answers the question for the Deputy.

### Social Welfare Code

258. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which fibromyalgia is assessed for the purpose of approving or refusing social welfare benefits; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49591/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The assessment of eligibility for medical related schemes such as Fibromyalgia includes detail medical history, the review of supporting medical evidence and in certain schemes an in-person assessment, where appropriate physical and relevant functional assessment is carried out by Medical Assessors of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, depending on the benefit scheme applied for.

After the assessment, the Medical Assessor will express his/her opinion on the case in the format of a medical report (MR1) or in the format of a reasoned narrative as per the scheme.

In all cases a deciding officer of my Department makes a decision in line with the provisions specified in the relevant social welfare legislation including supporting medical evidence supplied by the applicant and taking into account the opinion of the Department's Medical Assessor.

### **Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications**

259. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason an application by a person (details supplied) was refused; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49622/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** An application for Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) was received from the person concerned on the 16th August 2019. The application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 23rd October 2019 setting out the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

In the case of an application which is refused, the applicant may submit additional information and ask to have the decision reviewed, and/or they may appeal the decision directly to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. The options available have been advised in the decision letter.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Payments Administration**

260. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a further basic payment or exceptional needs payment will be made in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49658/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned received an Exceptional Needs Payment of €250 on 18/11/2019 in order to meet a need to provide home heating.

The Community Welfare Officer met with the person concerned in relation to her situation and the person concerned outlined that she has made efforts to formalise a maintenance payment and protection order.

According to the records of my Department no further application for an Exceptional Needs Payment (ENP) has been received from the person concerned. An application form issued to the person concerned on 26/11/2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Exceptional Needs Payment Eligibility**

261. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if exceptional need payments will be made in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49659/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Un-

der the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme my Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. An urgent needs payment (UNP) may be made to a person who may not normally qualify for SWA but who has an urgent need that cannot be met from their own resources .

The person concerned does not appear to have made an application for an ENP or UNP, but the local Intreo Centre has posted an application form today and requested the person to contact the office.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

### **Fuel Allowance Eligibility**

262. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when fuel and heating allowance will be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49660/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned was awarded fuel allowance with effect from 11 October 2019. As the Increase for living alone was in payment, they were automatically entitled to the telephone support allowance from 11 October 2019. These decisions issued in writing to the person concerned on 25 November 2019, together with details of arrears due.

Their fuel allowance is currently being paid on a weekly basis and will be paid in instalments from Friday, 10 January 2020. An application for the household benefits package issued to the person concerned. On receipt of the completed application their entitlement will be examined, and they will be notified in writing of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Household Benefits Scheme**

263. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the eligibility for free scheme and household package in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49661/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** An application for the Household Benefits Package was received from the person concerned on 19 November 2019. Under current eligibility conditions, the person concerned does not satisfy the household composition test.

Implementation of an incoming Budget 2020 measure, where another adult (except the spouse, civil partner or cohabitant of applicant) living in the household will no longer be a disqualifying condition for the purposes of the Household Benefits Package. The measure takes effect from the 6th January 2020. As a result of this change, the person concerned has been awarded the Household Benefits Package with effect from 6 January 2020.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social and Affordable Housing**

264. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there is an affordable housing scheme to provide affordable housing on lands owned by the local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49508/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** 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) over the period 2019 to 2021. This funding will provide for infrastructure to support the delivery of some 6,200 affordable homes on local authority lands. SSF is being made available in areas where local authorities have demonstrated a requirement for more affordable housing and a viability to deliver such housing on their sites.

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 more affordable private housing. Nevertheless, in order to target SSF funding interventions, in October 2018, local authorities were invited to undertake an economic assessment of their sites to assess whether the provision of affordable homes was necessary and economically viable. As part of that assessment local authorities were also asked to consider the broader housing affordability within their area. 19 local authorities returned economic assessments to my Department.

To date, I have allocated SSF funding of €127 million, in support of 35 projects in 14 local authority areas, for infrastructure works that will see the delivery of almost 3,200 affordable homes. I anticipate that a further Call for Proposals under the SSF will issue to local authorities in 2020. Full details of the projects approved under the 1st and 2nd SSF calls can be found at the following links:

<https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-approves-10-local-authority-sites-affordable-housing-serviced-sites-fund/>

<https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-approves-funding-of-e84m-to-support-delivery-of-1770-affordable-homes-under-the-ssf/>

Homes delivered under the SSF are subject to the provisions of Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 which was commenced in June 2018. This legislation now provides the statutory basis for the delivery of affordable housing for purchase in the State. Regulations in respect of the making of Schemes of Priority were signed on 12 March 2019, and these were issued to local authorities on 22 March 2019. The purpose of a Scheme of Priority is to set out the affordable purchase arrangements at local authority level. This includes the methodology that will be applied by local authorities to determine the order of priority to be accorded to eligible households where the demand for such affordable dwellings exceeds the number available.

In line with the legal requirements of the Affordable Dwelling Purchase Arrangements, further regulations will be put in place over the coming months regarding eligibility and other matters. When the operational procedures for the scheme are finalised, and before dwellings are made available for purchase under the scheme, a programme of communication will be undertaken by my Department and local authorities.

In addition to SSF, funding of €200m has also been made available under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), which is also designed to activate housing supply by putting in place the enabling public infrastructure necessary to ensure that large scale development could take place on key sites in urban areas of high housing demand. 30 projects received final approval, at a total cost of €195.71 million, of which €146.69 million will be funded by the Exchequer with local authorities funding the balance. These projects will

stimulate development of approximately 20,000 housing units across 14 local authorities and approximately 7,800 of these homes will be offered at a discount on open market prices.

These schemes will complement other key Government affordability initiatives, such as the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, and the Help to Buy Scheme, which have supported over 15,000 households nationally.

### Departmental Expenditure

265. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount spent by his Department and each agency under the aegis of his Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49543/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The information requested in respect of my Department is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy in accordance with Standing Orders.

The details requested in relation to bodies under the aegis of my Department are a matter for the individual bodies concerned. Arrangements have been put in place by each Agency to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The relevant contact email address for each agency, to which members may address queries, are set out in the following table.

Agency	Email address
An Bord Pleanála	Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie
Ervia, Gas Networks Ireland	oireachtas@ervia.ie
Housing Finance Agency	oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie
Housing Sustainable Communities Agency	publicreps@housingagency.ie
Irish Water	oireachtasmembers@water.ie
Local Government Management Agency	corporate@lgma.ie.
Ordinance Survey Ireland	Oireachtas@osi.ie
Property Registration Authority	reps@prai.ie
Pyrite Resolution Board	oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie
Residential Tenancies Board	OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie
Valuation Office	reps@valoff.ie
Land Development Agency	oireachtas@lda.ie
Office of the Planning Regulator	oireachtas@opr.ie

### Building Regulations

266. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to a newly formed group (details supplied) representing home owners in many developments with serious construction defects; if the report of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government, Safe as Houses, of January 2018 will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49573/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** I am aware of the group denoted by the Deputy and I acknowledge

the very stressful circumstances which owners and residents face when their homes are affected by construction defects.

The Safe as Houses report has been considered by my Department, and indeed many of its principles underpin the building control reform agenda already well underway. The building control reform agenda provides a comprehensive roadmap for embedding a culture of compliance and accountability within the construction industry and for strengthening the building control framework in this country.

The reform agenda includes:

- amendments made to the Building Control Regulations;
- the National Building Control Management Project; and
- the ongoing development of new legislation through the Building Control (Construction Industry Register Ireland) Bill.

Local authorities have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003, the Fire Services Acts, the Housing Acts and the Planning and Development Acts. Fire services may inspect buildings in cases of defects or complaints in respect of fire safety. They work with building owners to ensure that immediate risks are addressed and that a plan is put in place, where required, for works to bring buildings into compliance.

In general, building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved, that is the homeowner, the builder, the developer and/or their respective insurers, structural guarantee or warranty scheme. The State has no general statutory role in resolving defects in privately owned buildings, including dwellings, nor does it have a budget for such matters. It is not possible for the State to take on responsibility/liability for all legacy issues nor would it send the right message to the industry regarding their responsibility for compliance.

My focus will remain firmly on ensuring the full roll out of the Building Control reform agenda, to ensure that all those that engaged in the construction sector take their responsibilities seriously and are appropriately held to account.

### **Meteorological Services**

267. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason the Shannon rainfall radar is offline on a regular basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49607/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Met Éireann operates two weather radars in Ireland, one at Dublin Airport and one at Shannon Airport. This radar network provides real-time rainfall information for Ireland.

The radar at Shannon Airport has had high availability for 2018 and much of 2019, with only short outages, generally for routine maintenance and scheduled during dry weather. However, there have been two more significant outages recently due to technical faults, from 1 to 14 August 2019 and 25 October to 21 November 2019. The generally high levels of availability of the Shannon radar are reflected in the table, which sets out the percentage of time it was operational during each of the months from January 2018 to October 2019.

Met Éireann works closely with the manufacturers of the Shannon radar to schedule preventative maintenance and rectify technical issues when they arise. Most recently, in January

2019, at the request of Met Éireann, a review of the Shannon radar was carried out by the radar manufacturer. Following this review, a schedule of identified maintenance tasks was carried out to reduce the risk of technical faults.

Met Éireann has commenced a procurement process for a replacement weather radar system for Shannon Airport. Additionally Met Éireann has, since 2018, Met Eireann has been actively planning a broader project to upgrade, modernise and expand the Irish weather radar network. A scoping exercise is currently underway to identify the key requirements for a five radar network.

	Shannon Radar Availability 2018	Shannon Radar Availability 2019
January	98.9%	96.5%
February	97.3%	99.6%
March	99.6%	99.8%
April	99.9%	100%
May	98.8%	100%
June	99.9%	98.7%
July	99.8%	98.2%
August	93.7%	57.7%
September	100%	99.6%
October	99.3%	77%
November	100%	-
December	100%	-

### Local Authority Housing

268. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the €25million funding allocated for the upgrading of the energy efficiency of local authority homes in 2019 can be used for window and door upgrades taking into account windows lose approximately 25% of heat; if his plan is in line with proposals in the climate action plan 2019 and the obligations of Ireland under the EU energy efficiency directive; his views on whether a local authority reply (details supplied) is correct in its interpretation of the recent funding allocated by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49609/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department is currently supporting local authorities in undertaking an ambitious programme of insulation retrofitting for their housing stock, which commenced in 2013. The aim of the Energy Efficiency Retrofitting Programme is the improvement of energy efficiency and comfort levels in local authority homes, benefitting those at risk of fuel poverty and making a significant contribution to Ireland's carbon emissions reduction targets and energy efficiency targets for 2020.

The programme is being implemented in a number of phases: Phase 1 is focused on providing attic/roof insulation and the less intrusive cavity wall insulation in all relevant properties, while Phase 2, which was rolled out to all local authorities earlier this year, focuses on the external fabric upgrade of those social housing units with solid/hollow block wall construction and includes the provision of heating upgrades as well as the replacement of windows and doors to facilitate external wall insulation or where single glazed units exist.

Funding of over €139 million has been provided from 2013 to date to improve energy efficiency and comfort levels in over 70,000 local authority homes. Some 1,902 social homes in County Wicklow have been retrofitted under this programme, with funding support of over

€5.3 million.

Under the programme, each local authority receives an annual funding allocation and it is their responsibility to select properties for inclusion in the programme, including the blend of properties to be tackled between deep and shallow retrofits. My Department is not involved in the selection of the properties to be retrofitted, nor the sequence in which the works are prioritised by the local authority.

### Departmental Expenditure

269. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount spent by her Department and each agency under the aegis of her Department on the National Ploughing Championships in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by online advertising, offline advertising, promotional material, wages, photography, stand rental and other costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49536/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The information requested by the Deputy on the amount spent by the Department, and those bodies under its aegis, in respect of attendance at the National Ploughing Championships is set out in the table.

These costs relates to stand rental, marquee design and fit-out. The Department does not engage in promotional or advertising activities as described by the Deputy and no costs have arisen in this regard during the period in question. Where bodies under the aegis of the Department are represented at the Ploughing Championships they are accommodated within the Department's area.

Employee costs including salary, overtime and expenses in respect of staff attending this event are paid in accordance with standard civil service norms.

Year	Expenditure to date
2016	€ 54,569
2017	€125,282*
2018	€ 65,807
2019	€ 91,904

\* The higher figure for 2017 reflects the requirement to provide a larger area for the Department to accommodate the Rural and Community Affairs function of the Department at that time, as well as a one-off performance space which was jointly promoted by the Department and the Arts Council.