

## 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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### Cycle to Work Scheme

1. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by his Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form. [9990/20]

**The Taoiseach:** Since the introduction of the Cycle to Work scheme in January 2009, 100 applications have been made by staff of my Department. There is no discernible cost to my Department's vote in administering the Cycle to Work scheme, as the bicycles and equipment are paid for by way of salary sacrifice by those acquiring the bicycles. There are minor costs in processing forms and in carrying the up-front costs until such time as those are offset by the gradual deductions from salary. Neither of these is quantifiable. The only material cost of the scheme to the State is the tax relief inherent in the scheme.

The total amount sanctioned to date by way of bicycle purchases for staff of my Department is €77,279.69 which is in turn recouped from staff by way of salary deductions. The following table shows the number of applications and the breakdown of amounts sanctioned by year.

Request Year	Number of Applications	Amount Sanctioned
2009	6	€2,923.47
2010	10	€7,887.95
2011	4	€3,184.00
2012	11	€9,266.54
2013	11	€8,290.89
2014	10	€6,571.10
2015	15	€10,677.82
2016	9	€7,874.21
2017	9	€7,013.77
2018	6	€6,053.95
2019	6	€4,637.00
2020	3	€2,898.99
Total	100	€77,279.69

### Overseas Missions

2. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to

evacuate members of the Defence Forces from the Democratic Republic of the Congo due to the worsening security situation in the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9651/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Two Defence Force personnel serving in the MONUSCO mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were due to complete their 6 months deployments in March/mid-April but were extended within the mission by a further month. This then brought them into the period when the UN suspended rotations in all UN missions due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The rotation of these personnel was further extended at mission level by a further three months.

As the deployment of the personnel to a sub-Saharan African country had been extended beyond their initial six month deployment, there was a requirement to extract them as soon as possible to allow for a national medical assessment of the officers.

The officers in question returned to Ireland on Sunday, 31 May by commercial means, and following a medical assessment, they are currently self-isolating at home for a two week period.

New entrants into the mission are currently precluded under UN and MONUSCO mission protocols. The UN has recently advised that transitional measures will apply from July to December 2020 which will include a partial resumption of UN rotations with rigorous quarantine requirements and periodic reviews built into the process.

The full impact of Covid 19 on future rotations is currently being examined by my Department with the Defence Forces.

### **Air Corps**

3. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a full health and safety audit will be carried out on the entire Air Corps fleet of AW139 helicopters and other craft if deemed necessary in view of a recent safety incident; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9652/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I am advised by military management that, from initial investigations, they have not deemed it necessary to carry out a full health and safety audit on the entire Air Corps fleet of AW139 helicopters or other aircraft in the fleet. A formal investigation into the incident is on-going at present. I understand that this investigation is examining the technical and operational aspects of the incident and will make appropriate recommendations. I will await the outcome of this investigation. Thankfully, there were no casualties on the ground, and no Air Corps personnel were injured in the incident.

### **Overseas Missions**

4. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if members of the Defence Forces replacing those serving on UNIFIL missions by rotation will serve the full length of missions and receive allowable expenses and allowances that would be associated with a full mission on overseas duty in view of his announcement of a return date for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9653/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As part of its response to the global Covid pandemic, on 5 April, 2020 the United Nations Secretary General directed the suspension of all rotations and leave for military personnel serving in UN missions

until 30 June. The suspension was based on the protection of local communities as well as that of the peacekeepers during the Covid pandemic.

On foot of the subsequent efforts of the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces and the Department Foreign Affairs and Trade, a number of rotations of Irish Defence Forces personnel have been successfully concluded. While the rotation of troops to and from UNIFIL, which was to take place mid-May, has been delayed as a result of the UN suspension, Ireland has secured an exemption and approval for a rotation of the full contingent in June, during the UN moratorium.

The UN has recently advised that transitional measures will apply in the following six month period, July to December 2020, which will include a partial resumption of rotations with rigorous quarantine requirements and periodic reviews built into the process.

While the Defence Forces have advised that the duration of the next UNIFIL deployment will be shorter than the normal six months duration, the full impact of Covid 19 on future rotations continues to be examined by my Department with the Defence Forces. As you will appreciate, the health and welfare of Defence Forces personnel serving overseas remains our primary concern at this time.

### Departmental Staff

5. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he or his officials had an input into the drafting of the job specification for the recently advertised role of Secretary General of the Department of Defence; the reason the job specification does not stipulate the requirement for experience or qualifications in defence, security, international relations or a related field; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9778/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As the Deputy may be aware, the running of competitions for Secretaries General is a function of the Top Level Appointments Committee. As the competition is ongoing, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the requirements as set out the information booklet for the post. The booklet contains a range of factual information in relation to the organisation, which would have been provided by my Department, as is the norm for such competitions.

### Cycle to Work Scheme

6. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by his Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9980/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The following table outlines the number of staff in the Department of Defence that availed of the Cycle to Work Scheme since it was introduced in 2009 to date.

Year	Number of staff that availed of scheme
2009	20
2010	43
2011	44

Year	Number of staff that availed of scheme
2012	29
2013	19
2014	27
2015	28
2016	15
2017	20
2018	13
2019	16
2020 (to date)	6
Total	280

The Cycle to Work Scheme is implemented under a salary sacrifice arrangement through an employee's payroll. Under this arrangement my Department funds the purchase of the bicycle and/or safety equipment for the employee who agrees to forego or sacrifice part of his or her salary for over an agreed period in order to cover the cost. In this context there is no cost to my Department to implementing the Scheme.

### Defence Forces Data

7. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of members of the Defence Forces that have exited the services by retirement and resignation in each of the years 2017 to 2019 and to date in 2020. [10082/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The following table outlines the number of Defence Forces discharges in each of the years 2017 to end April 2020.

#### DEFENCE FORCES DISCHARGES

Year	Total Discharges	No. of Personnel who Discharged by Purchase	Other Discharges, incl voluntary retirements & retirements on age grounds
2020*	215	77	138
2019	882	367	515
2018	731	290	441
2017	742	315	427

*\*as at 30 Apr 2020*

There are a range of reasons why personnel discharge from the Defence Forces.

Discharge by purchase occurs when a Non Commissioned Officer or Private elects to resign from the Defence Forces and pays an appropriate sum to discharge, in accordance with Defence Force Regulation A10 Para 61 (3). Recruits can also elect to discharge by purchase and a significant proportion of recruits, approximately 22% on average, depart from the Defence Forces during the training phase for various reasons.

Voluntary early retirements occur when personnel wish to end their service at break points before reaching the mandatory retirement age limit for his/her respective rank. These retire-

ments occur at the persons own request, at his/her request after 12 years, expiry of PDF service, on pension after 21 years, or on termination of engagement.

Other discharges include retirement on age grounds, death, below medical standards, service no longer required, or unlikely to become effective.

### Defence Forces Data

8. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the average buy-out fee that serving soldiers were asked to pay to end their contract in each of the years 2017 to 2019 and to date in 2020. [10083/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The following table provides details of the number of Defence Forces personnel that discharged by purchase in each of the years 2017 to end April 2020, the amount received by the Department and the average cost for these discharges.

#### DEFENCE FORCES - DISCHARGE BY PURCHASE

Year	No. of Personnel who Discharged by Purchase	Amount received by the Department from Discharge by Purchase	Average Cost
2020*	77	€37,620.50	€488.58
2019	367	€241,149.75	€657.08
2018	290	€143,782.60	€495.80
2017	315	€109,233.49	€346.77

*\*To 30/04/2020*

It should be noted however, that the average cost is not reflective of the amount paid by the majority of personnel. Of the 1,049 personnel who have discharged by purchase since 2017, 46% have paid discharge costs of less than €100, with a further 46% paying between €100 and €300.

Discharge by purchase occurs when a Non Commissioned Officer or Private elects to leave the Defence Forces and pays an appropriate sum to discharge, in accordance with Defence Force Regulation A10 Para 61 (3). Recruits can also elect to discharge by purchase and a significant proportion of recruits, approximately 22% on average, depart from the Defence Forces during the training phase for various reasons.

Monetary sums in relation to discharge by purchase are assessed on a case by case basis depending on years of service, undertaking etc. The guidelines associated with determination of the amount payable on discharge are contained within DFR A10 Para 58(H), DFR A10 Para 61 and DFR A15 Para 19(2).

### Defence Forces Recruitment

9. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the targeted admission of new recruits for 2020 and 2021 to the Defence Forces. [10084/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** While there have

been 46 inductions to date in 2020, the capacity of the Defence Forces to induct and train recruits has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 situation as it resulted in the postponement of the majority of inductions in the first quarter of 2020.

The net effect of this postponement in recruitment activities is unclear at this time but the Defence Forces remain committed to optimising the number of personnel inducted during 2020. In that context, the military authorities have advised that they are currently finalising plans to re-commence collective training and recruitment, taking public health guidelines into account.

The results of this recruitment plan in 2020 will inform targets for 2021.

### **Army Barracks**

10. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount that has been spent on refurbishment and maintenance to Finner Camp, County Donegal in each of the years 2018, 2019 and to date in 2020; the refurbishment works that will be carried out in the camp over the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10232/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I am advised by the military authorities that refurbishment and maintenance works at Finner Camp, Co Donegal amounted to €329,010.92 in 2018, €431,864.98 in 2019 and €48,417.64 to date in 2020.

I am further advised that refurbishment and new works including photovoltaic installation, heat pump installation and a gym roof replacement costing in the region of €0.5m are planned for later in 2020.

### **Defence Forces Data**

11. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of personnel that re-enlisted in the Permanent Defence Force since 1 April 2020; the areas of the Permanent Defence Force these personnel are serving in; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10240/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** On 1 April last, I launched the scheme to re-enlist former PDF enlisted personnel who have the skills and expertise required to fill identified vacancies that currently exist. This includes technicians, fitters, chefs, communications and IT specialists and naval staff. The scheme will allow for initial re-enlistment for a minimum of six months and up to 3 years. The duration of the re-enlistment offered will be dependent on the vacancies that exist.

Since the announcement of the Scheme, over 600 applications have been received, with some 500 going forward for further assessment by the Chief of Staff. I am advised by the military authorities that interviews are currently underway. Given the numbers involved and the need for a transparent and consistent approach across the various specialties within the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, it is understandable that this process takes time. In addition, personnel recommended and approved for re-enlistment will also have to successfully meet medical and security clearance requirements. I understand however, that Chief of Staff will very shortly be submitting for my approval, a list of candidates recommended for re-enlistment.

### **Defence Forces Strength**

12. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of personnel serving in the Permanent Defence Force; his plans to bring personnel numbers to the approved establishment strength of 9,500; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10241/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The military authorities have advised that the strength of the Permanent Defence Force, at 30th April 2020, was 8,485 whole time equivalent personnel.

While the Government remains committed to returning to, and maintaining the agreed strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, the capacity of the Defence Forces to induct and train recruits has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 situation as it resulted in the postponement of the majority of inductions to date.

The net effect of this postponement in recruitment activities is unclear at this time but the Defence Forces remain committed to optimising the number of personnel inducted during 2020. In that context, the military authorities have advised that they are currently finalising plans to re-commence General Service training and recruitment, taking public health guidelines into account. A campaign to re-enlist former members of the Permanent Defence Force, to fill certain vacancies, is also underway

In addition, the report of the Public Service Pay Commission (PSPC) of 2019 contains a range of recommendations aimed at improving work-force planning, recruitment and conditions of service for members of the Defence Forces. A High Level Plan to give effect to the recommendations of the PSPC is being implemented.

It should be noted that as the High Level Implementation Plan contains short, medium and long term measures, the full impact of these measures will take time to determine. There are also a range of external variables which impact on recruitment and retention and which can change and these will be carefully monitored to assess their effect as they arise.

### **Defence Forces Review**

13. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of the high level Strengthening our Defence Forces – Implementation Plan; the progress to date in implementing the 15 projects identified in the plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10242/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Government's high level plan "Strengthening Our Defence Forces – Phase 1" sets out a range of actions to be undertaken in the short-medium and longer term. The plan is complemented by a range of other HR actions which were already underway.

The immediate pay measures set out in the plan i.e. an increase in Military Service Allowance, the reversal of 10% cuts to allowances and the restoration of weekend premium rates for overtime were implemented immediately upon their acceptance by the PDF Representative Associations. A service commitment scheme for pilots was also re-introduced, with very positive uptake.

The remaining projects in the plan contain both pay and non-pay measures.

The pay related projects include a review of pay structures, consideration of incentivised long service arrangements and a review of technical pay (grade 2-6) arrangements.

The review of pay structures is a medium term project being led by DPER . Some initial preliminary work has commenced on this project within my Department, however, the main body of work will be done as part of a wider review of public sector pay arrangements. The Defence Forces Representative Associations have submitted views regarding pay and allowances and these will be fully considered.

In relation to the project to consider incentivised long service arrangements, a report has been prepared on this matter which will be used to inform future pay negotiations. In relation to the review of technical pay, this has been undertaken in two phases and the reports produced are under consideration.

The Covid-19 emergency has impacted project timeframes for the remaining non-pay related projects. For some projects resources were necessarily reassigned to matters relating to the COVID-19 response and where other essential work necessarily took priority. However these challenges are now being overcome and work on all of the outstanding projects either remains ongoing or has recently re-started and projects are being progressed as quickly as is possible in the circumstances.

The following table summarises the current status for each of the 15 projects included in the plan:

-	Project	Current Status
V1	Review of Pay Structures - Led by DPER	Some initial preliminary work commenced within DoD. Main body of work to be done as part of a wider review of public sector pay arrangements. Timeframe for this wider review not confirmed at present.
V2, V3, V4	Increase in MRA, Restoration of allowances Restoration of weekend premium rates	Complete
R1	Restore Pilot Service Commitment Scheme	Complete
R2	Tech 2 – 6 arrangements	2 reports on the Review of Technical Pay Groups 2-6 arrangements remain under consideration. [It should be noted that these reports were completed in accordance with the timelines set out in the plan]
R3	Incentivised long service arrangements	Report was submitted to Project Sponsors [DPER and DoD] in October 2019. The report is due to be used to inform future pay negotiations.

-	Project	Current Status
R4	Barriers to extended participation in the PDF	This Project was divided into two phases. The first phase, which focuses on reviewing mandatory retirement ages for Officers is nearing completion. The second phase, which will look at enlisted contracts is about to commence. However, it was agreed with PDFORRA that enlisted privates and corporals who had reached 21 years' service, could remain in service until they reach age 50 until end 2022. Sergeants are also permitted to serve beyond 50 until that timeframe. These measures mean that the review can take place in an extended timeframe.
R5	Bespoke management training for leaders and managers	The final draft of this Report is currently being reviewed and it is hoped to finalise this project in the near future.
R6	Professional Military Education (PME) Strategy	First draft of the PME Strategy nearing completion. It is anticipated that the strategy will be finalised during Q3 2020.
R7	Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy	First draft of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy is under consideration by the DF Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group (DFMH-WWG). This project is on target for completion in August 2020.
R8	Non-Pay Retention Measures in the PDF	Phase 1 report (Review of Current Retention Measures) and Phase 2 report (Review of Retention Measures in other PDFS) are completed. Phase 3 Report (Proposed Further Non-pay Retention Measures PDF) was nearing completion in early March, however, the project team was temporarily reassigned to Covid-19 work. Work has now recommenced and the Phase 3 Report is currently being reviewed in light of any issues that arose due to Covid-19.
R9	Additional specialist posts for high turnover/long lead in appts	This project has required detailed consideration of turnover, specialist training and associated personnel requirements in specialist areas and was taking longer than originally planned. In addition, a number of the senior project team members were reassigned/diverted to deal with COVID-19 related work and as a consequence this project was temporarily suspended. Work has now recommenced on the project, albeit at a slower pace than prior to the COVID-19 crisis.
A1	Recruitments methods for PDF	Project teams meetings were temporarily suspended due to challenges arising in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, however the external recruitment specialist leading the review, Mr Pdraig Love, has continued to work on the project and the project is well advanced.

-	Project	Current Status
A2	Workforce Planning	Project A2 is being progressed with the assistance of an independent HR specialist. The timeframe set out for the development of an integrated workforce plan was overly ambitious when requirements were analysed in more detail, particularly given the range of specialisms in the Defence Forces and recruitment and training processes. In this context, there is significant overlap and interdependencies with other projects. When completed, this important project will better inform recruitment and retention and broader HR policy.

### Army Barracks

14. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if foliage emanating from Cathal Brugha Barracks, Rathmines, Dublin 6 onto the lane at the back of the houses at 16 to 30 Grosvenor Square, Dublin 6 will be cut back, in view of the fact it has obstructed access through the lane. [10403/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I am advised that environmental maintenance in military installations is overseen by the Defence Forces and that the Defence Forces in Cathal Brugha Barracks have prepared an annual plan for environmental care of the barracks.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the Defence Forces have also advised that the area referred to at the back of the houses 16 to 30 Grosvenor Square, Dublin 6 is included in scheduled environmental works and will be attended to subject to environmental guidelines and COVID 19 restrictions.

### Ministerial Communications

15. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has been in contact with the President of the United States of America and-or the US ambassador in view of the recent events in the US and recent comments regarding the dangers of racism. [10419/20]

24. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has or will communicate to the President of the United States of America the alarm and anger regarding incidents of racist police brutality and killings, the use of violent force and plastic bullets against protesters, threats to use the military against protestors and at the use of force against members of the press; and his views on whether several fundamental human rights have been and are being broken by the actions of the US. [10117/20]

25. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he is taking to convey the condemnation of persons here of the actions of the President of the United States of America and those that seek to fuel racial tensions and racial inequality in the United States of America and elsewhere. [10154/20]

37. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs

and Trade if he has contacted the US ambassador to condemn actions by a police force (details supplied) in view of the recent events in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10420/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 15, 24, 25 and 37 together.

Like the people of the United States, and indeed the people of Ireland, I was shocked and saddened by what happened on 25 May in Minneapolis. The death of George Floyd was appalling and the circumstances surrounding his death were deeply upsetting and unsettling.

I am also deeply concerned at the underlying issues of racial inequality that have given rise to protests in many cities across the United States and elsewhere. I join with all those who have raised their voices in recent weeks against racism in all its forms. Wherever such injustice occurs, voices must be heard. The right to peaceful assembly, freedom of expression, and a robust, independent media are fundamental values in any democratic society.

I have also been disappointed by the violent scenes witnessed at some of the protests in the US. Violence is not the way to bring about fundamental change and is not the answer to the problems of communities suffering racial and other forms of inequality. Rather, it is through solidarity, inclusive economic development, and community and political-level leadership that genuine and lasting change can be brought about.

Clearly, every State has the right, indeed the duty, to enforce its laws and police its communities. This duty must, however, be discharged in a proportionate and accountable manner, avoiding excessive use of force, in line with international obligations, and with respect for the human rights of all involved.

I continue to call for a de-escalation of tensions in the US, and a deepening of engagement at the community and political level to address the underlying issues of racial inequality which have led to such widespread protest.

The disturbing events over the past weeks in the US have also sharply brought into focus the need to look hard at our own societies, in Ireland and elsewhere. I welcome the debate it has opened up in Irish society. We must listen to those speaking out about their own experience of racism and exclusion, identify the challenges in our society, and tackle these scourges head-on, collectively and pro-actively.

Ireland and the United States share strong ties of kinship and enjoy deep and friendly relations, as well as enduring economic, cultural and social connections. As part of our regular dialogue, I have raised these issues with the US Ambassador, Edward Crawford, both on a telephone call we had last week and at a meeting this week. I clearly set out our concerns about the circumstances surrounding the death of George Floyd and the underlying issues of racial inequality, as well as some of the policing responses to peaceful protest. We had a good exchange of views on these issues and undertook to stay in ongoing contact in the period ahead.

### **Foreign Birth Registration**

16. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of a foreign birth registration in respect of a person (details supplied) in Qatar. [9666/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** For-

Foreign Births Registration, by its nature, can be a detailed and complex process, often involving official documentation related to three generations and issued by several jurisdictions.

With regard to the specific application the Deputy has enquired about, I can confirm that the Foreign Birth Registration team in my Department has been in direct contact with the father of the applicant and this application has now been approved.

### **Human Rights**

17. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will address the human rights concerns arising from the decision by China to impose new national security laws on Hong Kong; if he has made representations to the Chinese ambassador with respect to the violence being directed at peaceful protestors in Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9723/20]

28. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken recently to his EU counterparts regarding China's proposed new security laws for Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10229/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 17 and 28 together.

The Government is closely monitoring the situation in Hong Kong in light of the recent announcement by the Chinese National People's Congress to implement a national security law in Hong Kong.

Ireland, along with our EU partners, supports the principle of "One Country, Two Systems" under which Hong Kong enjoys a high degree of autonomy, along with an independent political and legal system, as set out in the Basic Law. We have a strong interest in the continued stability and prosperity of Hong Kong under this principle, underlined by Ireland's long history of engagement and the presence of a large Irish community there.

I have not yet spoken to the Chinese Ambassador in relation to this matter. However, the matter was discussed at the informal EU Foreign Minister's meeting on 29 May, after which a statement was released on behalf of the EU by High Representative Borrell, which Ireland fully supports. This statement expresses our grave concern at the decision and its conformity with the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 and the Hong Kong Basic Law. An earlier statement made on 22 May called for democratic debate, consultation of key stakeholders, and respect for protected rights and freedoms in Hong Kong when proceeding with the adoption of the proposed national security legislation.

I will continue to follow developments in Hong Kong closely as the situation evolves.

### **Brexit Issues**

18. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 21 of 27 May 2020, if he will provide more specific details on the legislative measures that will be required for the end of the Brexit transition period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9860/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** As part of the Government's ongoing Brexit readiness work, Government Departments have indicated

the potential need for further legislation to be in force at the end of the transition period.

Based on this analysis, the Government decided, at its meeting of 28 May, to approve the development of a scheme of a new Brexit Omnibus Bill. This work will now be brought forward across the relevant Government Departments and a draft scheme will be brought to Government for approval in due course. While work is now underway with Departments to determine the particular scope of the new Scheme, it is expected that many of its elements will draw to a large extent on legislation prepared in 2019 to address issues arising in the event the UK and EU failed to conclude a Withdrawal Agreement under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union.

### **Passport Applications**

19. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when persons will be able to apply online again to renew adult and children's passports respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9874/20]

23. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if passport applications are now being processed; if passports are being issued to those needing to travel for work or study abroad in circumstances in which travel is permitted; if processing has not resumed, when the service will resume; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10114/20]

26. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when he expects a return of regular passport services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10167/20]

31. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans for the reopening of passport offices; and the status of passport applications that were finalised as per tracking advice and awaiting dispatch. [10280/20]

38. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when passport applications received by the passport office prior to Covid-19 restrictions are due to be processed; when the passport office is due to reopen to the public under the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business; the estimated date for the reopening of passport applications online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10439/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 19, 23, 26, 31 and 38 together.

Once the potential impact of Covid-19 became obvious, contingency planning commenced to minimise the impact of restrictions on the delivery of passport services. In particular, plans were put in place to ensure that we continued to provide an emergency service for the issuance of passports in cases of serious illness or death abroad. The Passport Service also assisted those whose applications were regarded as urgent. While staff were on site during the pandemic, carrying out this necessary work, they also produced approximately 6,000 additional passports. The additional passports were adult passport renewal applications received online which required minimum staff intervention.

Personnel from the Passport Office were also redeployed into other essential public service roles, such as Covid-19 contact tracing for the HSE and working with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to facilitate the processing of Covid-related benefits.

The Passport Office has now started a phased return to full operation. This planning is in line with the wider Government plan to reopen in phases. The Passport Service resumed processing of non-essential online applications this week (in Phase 2 of the Government roadmap). The Passport Service has a great deal of experience in dealing with peaks in demand, and we believe that we are well-placed to ensure the online service will be meeting its usual turnaround times of approximately two weeks by phase 3 in July.

The Passport Online service has won awards for its user-friendly process, including a NALA award for the use of plain English. If an applicant is not familiar with using a computer, a friend or relative with basic computer skills can help them to apply online – the process only takes ten minutes to complete. Passport Online can also facilitate social distancing, given that a renewal application for an adult does not require the signature of a witness.

Passport Online expanded in 2019 to include first time applicants, both children and adults, in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Great Britain and Europe. Irish citizens, including children, can also renew their passports online 24/7, from anywhere in the world.

### Covid-19 Pandemic

20. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Ireland will support the WHO and Costa Rica proposal on a global pooling mechanism of Covid-19 related health technologies (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9876/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** Ireland welcomes Costa Rica's leadership on the Covid-19 Technology Access Pool. We share the objectives for the initiative to achieve a common outcome in public health for the benefit of all. Ireland has championed coherence, and coordinated and collaborative responses to the global public health challenges which we currently face, with a focus on ensuring that the needs of poorest and most vulnerable are served by our collective effort. The proposal touches on the work of a number of Government Departments and other stakeholders. My Department is consulting with relevant stakeholders with a view to considering practical engagement.

### Cycle to Work Scheme

21. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by his Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9984/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The information requested by the Deputy on the participation of my Department in the Cycle to Work Scheme is outlined in the following table:

Year	Number of Applicants	Cost €
2009	20	14,612
2010	40	28,978
2011	53	39,215
2012	48	36,972
2013	42	34,092

Year	Number of Applicants	Cost €
2014	46	35,355
2015	36	27,459
2016	31	25,241
2017	31	25,948
2018	41	36,990
2019	34	27,686
2020	20	17,986
Total	442	350,532

### Visa Applications

22. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the advice being given to a person (details supplied) attempting to return from New Zealand before the end of their work visa; and if assistance will be provided to obtain a transit visa from the Australian Department of Home Affairs. [10055/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Deputy will understand that transit visas, as with all issues relating to visas, are a matter for the authorities in Australia. At present, the Australian Department of Home Affairs advises that Irish citizens transiting through Australia to another country are not required to apply for a transit visa, provided that their transit time is less than eight hours and they do not intend to clear immigration or leave the airport transit lounge for any reason before boarding their onward flight. However, should the individual in question intend to spend longer than eight hours in Australia during their transit period, or to leave the airport during this time, they will be required to apply for an Australian transit visa.

Information on how to apply for a transit visa is available on the website of the Australian Department for Home Affairs here: <https://covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/transiting-australia>.

For additional consular advice or assistance, the individual may also wish to make contact with officials at the Embassy of Ireland in Wellington, who are available to provide support as required.

*Question No. 23 answered with Question No. 19.*

*Questions Nos. 24 and 25 answered with Question No. 15.*

*Question No. 26 answered with Question No. 19.*

### International Bodies

27. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the contribution made by Ireland to the World Health Organisation in 2019; the increase in funding being made available to the organisation in 2020; if this relates to additional services to be provided to Ireland in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic; the amount of the contribution that will now be payable by Ireland to the WHO in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10210/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** The World Health Organisation is a UN body, mandated to advocate for universal

healthcare, monitor public health risks, and coordinate responses to health emergencies. Each year Ireland makes an assessed contribution to the running costs of the body, through the Department of Health: in 2019 this amounted to €1.45m, and in 2020 the assessed contribution was €1.68 million. This is topped up with a voluntary contribution of €1 million from Ireland's budget for international cooperation, Irish Aid, managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

COVID-19 is a global crisis, requiring a collective, coordinated, global response. The WHO is at the centre of that global response, working to control the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate its impact.

Ireland was the first country to contribute to the WHO COVID-19 appeal: this appeal has since been rolled into the UN Global Humanitarian Response Plan, which aims at a coherent response across the UN system to COVID-19. To date, Ireland has contributed €6.8 million to the WHO appeal. Ireland's funding contributes to the evidence, guidance and advice produced by the WHO on COVID-19 which directly informs Ireland's domestic public health response to the pandemic, along with that of the Europe Centre for Disease Control and the European Union. Ireland also benefits from WHO's support to other countries as, if left uncontrolled in other regions, the virus will return to Europe. As Dr. Mike Ryan, Executive Director of the World Health Organization's Health Emergencies Programme, has said, "nobody is safe until everybody is safe."

*Question No. 28 answered with Question No. 17.*

### **Ministerial Communications**

29. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken formally to his New Zealand or Australian counterpart in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10230/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** As the Deputy will be aware, Ireland has strong bonds with both New Zealand and Australia, founded on shared values and on the vibrant Irish communities in both countries.

I recently sent letters to my counterparts in Australia and New Zealand, Ministers Marise Payne and Winston Peters respectively, conveying our solidarity with the victims of the pandemic in their countries, and outlining Ireland's response, as well as seeking to deepen bilateral and multilateral engagement with both countries. I had the pleasure of welcoming Minister Peters to Dublin in 2018 when he formally opened the Embassy of New Zealand here.

I wish to assure the Deputy that there have been close and frequent contacts at all levels with both Australia and New Zealand, especially following the State Visits of President Higgins to both countries in 2017. To mention just the most recent contacts, the Taoiseach wrote to Prime Minister Morrison to offer Ireland's support and condolences during the devastating bushfires in Australia earlier this year. Prime Minister Morrison responded to thank the Taoiseach and the people of Ireland. Minister Ciarán Cannon visited both New Zealand and Australia in June 2019 and Minister Jim Daly visited Brisbane in October 2019. New Zealand's Trade Minister, David Parker, visited Ireland last July while his colleague, Commerce Minister Kris Faafoi, visited us in May 2019. Senior officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade held political consultations with their Australian counterparts in Dublin in December 2019.

In my letters to my colleagues in New Zealand and Australia, I thanked both of them for the close cooperation in recent weeks with their respective authorities regarding COVID-19 and

related issues of repatriation and support of citizens in each other's countries. These contacts were invaluable in assisting the Irish communities in both countries during the pandemic.

### **Ministerial Communications**

30. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the ambassadors in Ireland he has spoken to formally since 16 March 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10231/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** In normal circumstances, opportunities to speak with Heads of Mission - Ambassadors or Chargés d'Affaires - arise on a frequent basis at different scheduled events. These include, for example, visits by my counterparts to Ireland; at regular events I attend across Ireland; when participating in credential ceremonies at Áras an Uachtaráin; and on numerous other occasions.

These events have, of course, not taken place since 16 March 2020.

Since 16 March 2020, I have spoken with two resident Ambassadors: the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China and the Ambassador of the United States of America.

*Question No. 31 answered with Question No. 19.*

### **Brexit Issues**

32. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had with his UK counterpart following the publication by the UK Government of the approach to the Northern Ireland Protocol document; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10296/20]

36. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had with members of the UK Government in relation to the need to honour the commitments it made in relation to the Protocol on Northern Ireland following the departure of the UK from the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10415/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 32 and 36 together.

The Taoiseach, my cabinet colleagues and I take every opportunity to engage with EU partners and, as appropriate UK counterparts, to advance Ireland's priorities in the context of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

Over recent weeks, I have had contacts with UK Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Michael Gove, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Brandon Lewis, including on matters arising from the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland. I have stressed the importance of ensuring the full implementation of the Protocol, as agreed, and continue to emphasise the importance of the protection of the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the peace process in the operationalisation of these arrangements.

Implementing the Protocol fully, in a way that meets all the obligations to which the UK has committed, will provide the clarity and stability which are vital for businesses and people in Northern Ireland - and ultimately for the sustainability of these arrangements which have been

designed to safeguard the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the Peace Process.

Implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement, including the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland is an essential part of ongoing EU-UK contacts. The first meeting of the EU-UK Specialised Committee on the Protocol took place on 30 April, and Ireland participated as part of the EU delegation. The Protocol will also be a matter for discussion in the upcoming meeting of the EU-UK Joint Committee on 12 June.

The paper published by the UK Government on 20 May, setting out its approach to implementing the Protocol, is an important step. The European Commission has also set out clearly and in detail what needs to be addressed for implementation of the Protocol, in its Technical Note of 30 April. What is imperative now is to see early and detailed work to ensure that the Protocol is fully operational by the end of transition.

### **Brexit Issues**

**33. Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the outcome of the most recent discussions he has had with the EU Commission in relation to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10297/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Taoiseach, my cabinet colleagues and I take every opportunity to engage with our EU partners to advance Ireland's priorities in matters arising from the UK's withdrawal from the EU, including the EU-UK Future Partnership negotiations, implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement, including the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland.

My engagement with key interlocutors on Brexit has continued in recent months, including recent contacts with EU Chief Negotiator Michel Barnier, and with a range of EU Foreign Ministers.

Four rounds of negotiations on the EU-UK Future Partnership have now taken place. While the atmosphere of the talks has been constructive, significant gaps remain between the two sides. Speaking after the fourth round of negotiations on 5 June, Michel Barnier underlined the objective of making parallel progress across all issues, and the importance of making progress on key 'sticking points - fisheries, the Level Playing Field, governance, and law enforcement and judicial and police cooperation issues.

The EU-UK future relationship is on the agenda of the informal meeting of Europe Ministers on 16 June and it is also expected to be on the agenda of the meeting of Heads of State and Government on 19 June. A planned High Level Conference between the EU and the UK in June will also assess progress made to date in Future Partnership negotiations.

Officials from across Government are continuing their work to make sure that Ireland's voice is heard at the Future Partnership negotiations in line with the EU's negotiating mandate, and that work to implement the Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland is taken forward. Ireland has participated, as part of the EU delegation, in the EU-UK Joint Committee and in Specialised Committees established under the Withdrawal Agreement, notably the Specialised Committee on the Implementation of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. Ireland will also participate at the next meeting of the EU-UK Joint Committee, which will take place on 12 June.

The Government will continue to engage closely and work with the Taskforce and the Commission, our EU partners, and stakeholders across this island on this vital issue.

## Human Rights

34. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the continued targeting of human rights and labour activists in Columbia resulting in hundreds of murders. [10307/20]

35. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent influx of US special forces into Columbia; his views on whether this will only ratchet tensions in a fragile peace higher, while also having a further destabilising impact on the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10308/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 34 and 35 together.

I am aware of the worrying levels of insecurity and violence against human rights defenders and social leaders in Colombia, and across the wider region. The potential for COVID-19 to worsen an already grave situation is also of concern, as the pandemic may inhibit peacebuilding efforts and may lead to increased violence against human rights defenders.

I have strongly and wholeheartedly condemned the use of any violence, threats or intimidation against those defending their rights and the rights and fundamental freedoms of others on numerous occasions. I once again call on the relevant authorities to fully investigate these crimes and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Colombia has made great progress in strengthening peace and stability in recent years, following signature of the peace agreement between the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP group in November 2016, ending over 50 years of armed conflict. It is clear, however, that significant challenges remain in a number of areas, including rural reform, the reintegration of former combatants, human rights and the strengthening of protections for human rights defenders and social leaders.

I firmly believe that an improved human rights situation in the country is linked to the full implementation of the peace accords. Ireland is a longstanding and committed supporter of the peace process in Colombia, having contributed over €14 million in funding since 2007, mainly channelled through the United Nations, and Colombian and international NGOs focusing on human rights, conflict prevention, peace-building and supporting livelihoods for rural populations.

As well as financial support, Ireland has also provided ongoing support in the form of lesson-sharing based on our own experience of peacebuilding and reconciliation on the island of Ireland. We also participate in the EU's ongoing campaign to recognise and champion the work of human rights defenders in the country.

I have reiterated Ireland's support for the peace process in recent engagements with the Colombian Government, including a meeting with then Minister for Foreign Affairs Carlos Holmes Trujillo during his visit to Dublin last year, and in my contacts with his successor, Minister Claudia Blum.

Our Embassy in Bogotá has been engaging with civil society, EU and UN partners on the human rights situation in the country since it opened last year. We also regularly raise this issue and the status of the peace process in our exchanges with the Colombian Government.

The Colombian Government continues to affirm its commitment to the full implementation of the peace agreement, and has expressed its appreciation for Ireland's support in this area, as

well as the important role played by former Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore as EU Special Envoy to the Colombian peace process.

Last year, Mr Gilmore led the 11th session of the EU-Colombia Human Rights Dialogue, raising the high levels of attacks and murders of human rights defenders, and the need for collective protection measures.

Officials in my Department in Dublin and at our Embassy in Bogotá will continue to monitor the human rights situation in Colombia, as Ireland continues to support Colombia in its transition to a stable, peaceful, post-conflict society.

*Question No. 36 answered with Question No. 32.*

*Question No. 37 answered with Question No. 15.*

*Question No. 38 answered with Question No. 19.*

### **Wage Subsidy Scheme**

39. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Finance the expenditure on the temporary wage subsidy scheme in respect of childcare providers and staff in each week since its establishment in tabular form. [9872/20]

43. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Finance if a company (details supplied) is availing of the temporary wage subsidy scheme for its workers; and if so, the number of workers. [9995/20]

61. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Finance if there are meat plants claiming the temporary wage subsidy scheme; if so, the number; the average payment being made to each processing plant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9992/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 39, 43 and 61 together.

Such statistical information as is collated on the Temporary Wage Supplement Scheme (TWSS) (including information by sector) is provided by the Revenue Commissioners on a weekly basis and set out at the following link:

[www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/number-of-taxpayers-and-returns/covid-19-wage-subsidy-scheme-statistics.aspx](http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/number-of-taxpayers-and-returns/covid-19-wage-subsidy-scheme-statistics.aspx).

Revenue advise that for statistical analysis purposes the sectors mentioned cannot be separately identified as groups and therefore it is not possible to provide specific statistics on them.

Notwithstanding any obligations imposed on Revenue under section 851A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 or any other enactment relating to the confidentiality of taxpayer information, section 28 of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 provides that the names and addresses of all employers to whom a temporary wage subsidy has been paid will be published by Revenue on its website.

I am further advised by Revenue that it will publish this information when the TWSS has ended. In the interest of fairness to all employers participating in the scheme, Revenue will not be commenting on whether any particular employer has, or on whether employers in particular sectors of the economy have, availed of the scheme until the scheme has ended.

## Tax Reliefs

40. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Finance if a further extension of five years will be granted for consanguinity relief for non-residential property at the current rate of 1% on all qualifying transfers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9924/20]

56. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if consanguinity relief for farm transfers will be retained at the current rate of 1% beyond 31 December 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9867/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 40 and 56 together.

Consanguinity relief is the relief that applies in relation to transfers of farmland between certain blood relatives whereby the applicable rate of stamp duty is reduced from 7.5% to 1%. The details and conditions of the relief are set out in Schedule 1(5) of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999. The relief is due to expire on 31 December 2020.

My Department is currently carrying out an ex-post evaluation of the relief which will examine the case for any amendment or extension of the relief beyond its current expiry date. In this regard, my officials have been in contact with the IFA, the ICMSA and Macra na Feirme, as well as with their colleagues in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Revenue in order to gather views and opinions which will help inform the evaluation of the relief. The findings of this evaluation will feed into the decision-making process in the run up to Budget 2021 and Finance Bill 2020.

The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment at this time, on what changes, if any, are being considered in this relief or any other tax relief.

## Tax Reliefs

41. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider retaining farm consolidation relief (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9925/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Farm Consolidation Stamp Duty relief is a measure which allow a farmer to claim relief from stamp duty where he or she sells land and purchases land, in order to consolidate his or her holding. The relief, as set out in section 81C of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999, is due to expire at the end of this year.

There are a number of conditions that must be satisfied for the relief to apply. There must be both a sale and a purchase of land within a period of 24 months of each other. Where other qualifying conditions are satisfied, stamp duty is chargeable only to the extent that the value of the land that is purchased exceeds the value of the land that is sold. A reduced rate of 1% is charged on the excess, if any, of the purchase value. If the sale takes place before the purchase, then relief will be given at the time of purchase. However, if the purchase takes place first, then stamp duty will have to be paid but can subsequently be refunded when the sale takes place.

An important condition for the relief is that Teagasc must issue a certificate stating that a sale and purchase (or an exchange of farmland) was made for farm consolidation purposes. The criteria to be used by Teagasc for this purpose and the information to be supplied are contained in guidelines published by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Following the farm consolidation, a farmer must retain ownership of the farmland for a period of five years and must use the land for farming. Where any part of the land is disposed of before the end of this five-year holding period, the stamp duty relieved can subsequently be recovered by Revenue, or partly recovered, as appropriate.

My Department is currently carrying out an ex-post evaluation of the Stamp Duty relief which will examine the case for any amendment or extension of the relief beyond its current expiry date. In this regard, my officials have been in contact with the IFA, the ICMSA and Macra na Feirme, as well as with their colleagues in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Revenue in order to gather views and opinions which will help inform the evaluation of the relief. The findings of this evaluation will feed into the decision-making process in the run up to Budget 2021 and Finance Bill 2020.

Consolidation relief in respect of capital gains tax (CGT) is also available under section 604B of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. This relief was extended to 31 December 2022 by section 35 of Finance Act 2019.

The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment at this time, on what changes, if any, are being considered in this relief or any other tax relief.

### **Cycle to Work Scheme**

42. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons that have availed of the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced by year; his plans to further enhance the scheme or modify it in 2020 and or 2021; the date on which the €1,000 threshold was reviewed; his plans to increase or decrease the threshold; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9973/20]

62. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to roll out the bike to work scheme to the self-employed in view of Covid-19 related increase in cycling; the estimated cost of extending the bike to work scheme to the self-employed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9993/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 42 and 62 together.

I am advised by Revenue that section 118(5G) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for the cycle to work scheme. This scheme provides an exemption from benefit-in-kind where an employer purchases a bicycle and associated safety equipment up to a maximum of €1,000 for an employee to use, in whole or in part, to travel to work. Safety equipment includes helmets, lights, bells, mirrors and locks but does not include child seats or trailers.

Benefit-in-kind is a charge to tax that applies where an employer provides an employee with a benefit such as a bicycle, car or accommodation. As stated above, an exemption from benefit-in-kind applies in relation to the cycle to work scheme, provided the required conditions are met. However, where an employer-employee relationship does not exist, for example, in the case of self-employed individuals, such individuals cannot qualify for the scheme.

Further information on the cycle to work scheme can be found on Revenue's website, available here.

It is not possible to estimate the tax cost of extending the scheme to self-employed individuals.

The scheme operates on a self-administration basis, and relief is automatically available provided the employer is satisfied that the conditions of their particular scheme meet the requirements of the legislation. There is no notification procedure for employers involved. This approach was taken with the deliberate intention of keeping the scheme simple and reducing administration on the part of employers.

Accordingly, there are no records available on the number of people availing of the scheme.

Finally, the expansion of any scheme does of course create a cost and that cost must be recovered elsewhere. For that reason, while the scheme is kept under review by officials, I have no plans at present for any change to the €1,000 limit or to change the scope of the scheme.

*Question No. 43 answered with Question No. 39.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

44. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance if third-level student accommodation providers that have refused to refund accommodation costs to students forced to leave college due to the pandemic will not receive State Covid-19 supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10025/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Temporary Wage Supplement Scheme (TWSS) is an emergency measure to deal with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy. The TWSS is intended to maximise staff retention and firm viability by maintaining the link between the employer and employee insofar as is possible through this period.

The statutory requirements for access to the scheme include that:

- the business is suffering significant negative economic impact due to the pandemic,
- the employees were on the payroll at 29 February 2020, and
- the employer had fulfilled its PAYE reporting obligations for February 2020 by 15 March 2020.

The particular circumstances outlined by the Deputy would not affect eligibility for the TWSS.

### **EU Funding**

45. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if there will be conditions assigned to the €750 billion stimulus proposal by the European Commission, specifically in relation to corporation tax or digital tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10327/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, the European Commission has, on 27 May, published revised proposals for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to run from 2021-2027 to be supplemented by a proposed temporary European recovery instrument called “Next Generation EU”.

The total amount being proposed for the period 2021-2027 is €1.85 trillion in commitments (2018 prices) - €1.1 trillion for the MFF and €750 billion for “Next Generation EU”.

It is proposed that the “Next Generation EU” financing be raised by “temporarily” increas-

ing the Own Resources ceiling to 2.00% of EU Gross National Income (GNI) allowing the Commission to borrow €750 billion on the financial markets to fund measures over the period 2021 - 2024. €500 billion of “Next Generation EU” financing will be in the form of grants to Member States, with the remaining €250 billion as loans.

The Commission proposes that the money raised for “Next Generation EU” be invested across three pillars:

1. **Support to Member States with investments and reforms, including** supporting Member States in accelerating the transition towards climate neutrality;

2. **Kick-starting the EU economy by incentivising private investments; and**

3. **Addressing the lessons of the crisis with a new Health Programme, EU4Health,** to strengthen health security and prepare for future health crises, and additional funding **for external action**, including humanitarian aid.

The Commission propose that the centre-piece of the recovery plan will be a new Recovery and Resilience Facility with a total fund of €560 billion (€310bn in grants and €250 billion in loans). The aim of the facility will be to support investment and reforms essential to a lasting recovery, to improve the economic and social resilience of Member States and to support the green and digital transitions. Support under this facility is to be focussed where the crisis impact and resilience needs are greatest. The Commission propose that this facility will be firmly embedded in the European Semester and that Member States will draw up national recovery and resilience plans as part of their National Reform Programmes. It is proposed these plans will set out investment and reform priorities and the related investment packages to be financed under the facility with support to be disbursed depending on progress made and on the basis of pre-defined benchmarks.

The Commission proposes that the “Next Generation EU” funding be channelled through EU Budget programmes, to be repaid back between 2028 and 2058 drawing on future EU Budget contributions from Member States or the Own Resources of the Union.

The Commission favours the introduction of new Own Resources to facilitate the repayment of the market finance raised and to help reduce the pressure on national budgets. They have indicated that they may propose additional new Own Resources (such as an extension of the Emissions Trading System based own resources to the maritime and aviation sectors, a carbon border adjustment mechanism, a single market levy and a digital tax) at a later stage of the 2021-2027 financial period.

Ireland has broadly welcomed publication of the Commission’s Post 2020 MFF proposals coming on top of the three safety nets of up to €540 billion already agreed by EU leaders to support citizens, businesses, and countries and the ECB measures to increase liquidity.

The Commission’s proposals are detailed and ambitious and are still being examined to assess the implications for Ireland’s priorities at an overall and sectoral level, for Ireland’s contributions to and receipts from the EU Budget, as well as for the domestic budget.

With regard to the Commission’s stated intentions’ to bring forward tax proposals for new Own Resources, the Deputy will have noted that the Commission have expressed their support for the OECD process as the best forum in which to address issues arising in the field of international taxation.

Nevertheless, Commissioner Gentolini recently re-affirmed his intention to propose a new EU levy on digital services and a minimum corporate tax rate in 2021, if global negotiations

fall short. While the Commission proposals for future new own resources echoes this ambition, such moves will require the agreement of all Member States. The economic context has changed dramatically in recent months and all countries are now considering what impact the current crisis may have on their overall tax systems, which may influence their views on international tax issues.

Much progress has been made in the current discussions at OECD, and technical work at the OECD is continuing. The intention is to find political agreement for work on addressing tax and digitalisation by the end of 2020 and we remain focused on that goal.

Heads of State and Governments are expected to discuss the Commission's MFF and "Next Generation EU" proposals at European Council on 19 June. There is considerable time pressure on the European Council to reach political agreement (requiring unanimity) on the revised package by July to facilitate negotiation with and consent from the European Parliament in time to ensure that the next MFF can come into operation from 1 January 2021.

## EU Funding

46. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which the €750 billion stimulus proposal from the European Commission will be distributed among the member states; the amount Ireland is expected to receive both in monetary terms and as a percentage of GDP and GNI; the way in which this will be paid for by the European Union; if it will lead to Ireland's contribution to the EU increasing; if so, the amount both in monetary terms and as a percentage of GDP and GNI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10328/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, the European Commission has, on 27 May, published revised proposals for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to run from 2021-2027 to be supplemented by a proposed temporary European recovery instrument "Next Generation EU".

The total amount being proposed for the period 2021-2027 is €1.85 trillion in commitments (2018 prices) - €1.1 trillion for the MFF and €750 billion for "Next Generation EU".

It is proposed that the "Next Generation EU" financing, which is designed to help Member States recover from the economic effects of Covid 19, will be raised by "temporarily" increasing the Own Resources ceiling to 2.00% of EU Gross National Income (GNI) allowing the Commission to borrow €750 billion on the financial markets to fund measures over the period 2021 - 2024. €500 billion of "Next Generation EU" financing will be in the form of grants to Member States, with the remaining €250 billion as loans. This additional funding to be channelled through EU Budget programmes, will be repaid back between 2028 and 2058 drawing on future EU Budget contributions from Member States or the Own Resources of the Union.

The Commission favours the introduction of new Own Resources to facilitate the repayment of the market finance raised and to help reduce the pressure on national budgets. They have indicated that they may propose additional new Own Resources (such as an extension of the Emissions Trading System based own resources to the maritime and aviation sectors, a carbon border adjustment mechanism, a single market levy and a digital tax) at a later stage of the 2021-2027 financial period.

While much of the details have yet to be teased out, a staff working document from the Commission estimates that Ireland may potentially receive a total of up to €3 billion from grants and loans upfront under the recovery package from 2021 to 2024, potentially requiring contributions from Ireland over a thirty year period of €18.7 billion from 2028 to 2058. How-

ever, the Commission proposals are detailed and will require careful examination in consultation with relevant Government Departments to assess the implications for Ireland's priorities at an overall and sectoral level and to assess the implications for Ireland's contributions to and receipts from the EU Budget.

In terms of initial assessment of the "Next Generation EU" package, it is understood that Ireland's allocation would be just under €2 billion in grants between 2021 and 2024 to include:

- €354 million in rural development – Green Deal, F2F, Biodiversity Strategy;
- €215 million from ReactEU (essentially Cohesion Programmes)
- €132 million from the Just Transition Fund;
- €1.209 billion from the new Recovery and Resilience - investments and reforms, including in relation to the green and digital transitions and the resilience of national economies.

Further receipts should be available to Ireland under competitively awarded programmes under the "Next Generation EU" package, but this is difficult to estimate at this point. Ireland should also be able to assess significant additional funds under the separate SURE Instrument and EIB Pandemic Guarantee Fund.

Heads of State and Governments are expected to discuss the Commission's MFF and "Next Generation EU" proposals at European Council on 19 June. There is considerable time pressure on the European Council to reach political agreement (requiring unanimity) on the revised package to facilitate negotiation with and consent from the European Parliament in time to ensure that the next MFF can come into operation from 1 January 2021.

## **Tax Code**

47. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the progress of BEPS 2.0 in the OECD and the proposals for a minimum effective tax rate and for a digital tax at OECD level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10329/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Deputy is aware that OECD is currently undertaking a significant project to address the tax challenges of the digital economy, sometimes referred to as BEPS 2.0. A series of proposals have been developed under two Pillars – Pillar One and Pillar Two.

The work under 'Pillar One' focuses on the distribution of taxing rights in respect of highly digitalised activities and seeks to undertake a coherent review of the profit allocation and nexus rules used in the existing international tax framework. The work under 'Pillar Two' is examining the possibility of agreeing global rules on minimum effective taxation for corporate profits.

My consistent view is that a certain, stable, and globally agreed international tax framework is vital to facilitate cross border trade and investment. The tax challenges that have arisen from the digitalisation of the economy are global in nature and thus require global solutions. I believe it is important the OECD work is successful to provide certainty in the international tax framework into the future.

Discussions continue to progress, albeit remotely, but there remains some way to go both in terms of reaching agreement at the OECD and subsequently in implementing whatever eventually emerges from the OECD discussion. The current crisis has impacted the OECD's planned timelines, with key meetings moved out from July to October 2020. The OECD's ambition to

find political agreement before the end of 2020 remains in place although further technical and implementation work is likely to continue over a longer period.

What is achievable at the OECD may be ultimately be affected by the current crisis as countries assess the cost of COVID-19 to their economies. Ireland remains fully engaged in the talks at the OECD and will continue to contribute constructively to the work.

### **Value Added Tax**

48. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 104, 105 and 112 of 20 May 2020, if it is permissible under EU rules to zero rate VAT for medical equipment for dentists and shops which provide PPE freely to their employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9655/20]

77. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if under existing EU rules and decisions, the zero rate of VAT can apply to businesses for as long as they are distributing personal protective equipment to their employees free of charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10321/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 48 and 77 together.

I outlined previously in my answer to Parliamentary Question Nos. 104, 105 and 112 of 20 May 2020 the VAT rate changes implemented by Revenue following the European Commission Decision C (2020)2146, adopted on 3 April 2020. These changes fully implemented the scope for zero rating imports of COVID-19 related goods permitted by the Decision and also implemented a corresponding temporary zero rating of similar, specified domestic supplies. Any further extension of zero rating to cover supplies of medical equipment and/or personal protection equipment to dentists and shop owners and indeed other sectors and businesses would require a change in legislation at EU level; the VAT Directive would not permit a legislative measure for the application of the zero rate of VAT to such supplies and there are no grounds in the Commission Decision that would support the adoption of such a measure, even on a temporary basis.

The Deputy will be aware that businesses such as shops which are registered for VAT and incur VAT in relation to goods which will be used for the purposes of the taxable business are entitled to reclaim the VAT incurred through their VAT return.

### **Wage Subsidy Scheme**

49. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Finance if the temporary wage subsidy scheme for the tourism and transport sector will be continued into the medium- term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9685/20]

63. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Finance his plans regarding the extension of the temporary wage subsidy scheme; and the way in which it will apply to different sectors. [10071/20]

73. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the lower 0.5% employer PRSI rate will continue for as long as the temporary wage subsidy scheme is in place; if this will be extended beyond the duration of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10317/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 49, 63 and 73 together.

The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) is provided for in section 28 of the recently enacted Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 (The Act).

The underlying legislation and the TWSS itself were developed having regard to the Government objective of providing assistance to employers and employees, where businesses have been seriously affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions which were introduced as a result. The scheme is available to eligible employers across all sectors, excluding the Public Service and Non-Commercial Semi-State Sector. This includes businesses that have closed due to the Covid-19 restrictions and those that continue to operate and employ their workforce. The sector to which Deputy Pringle refers is no different in this regard.

In relation to the future of the TWSS, I have always been clear that this support cannot last forever, but I am satisfied that the scheme should remain until the end of August. As the public health restrictions are eased in the coming weeks, I will expect to see a continued decline in reliance on the scheme throughout the summer as the economy continues to re-open and people are able to return to work. This economic recovery will be monitored and will inform a decision later in the summer on the need for further extension or tapering beyond August. Furthermore, I acknowledge that certain sectors will face particular challenges into the future as we gradually re-open our economy, and this is one of many factors that will inform future decisions.

### **Fuel Rebate Scheme**

50. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Finance if the restoration of the fuel rebate will be considered for the transport sector in view of the collapse in the tourism and transport sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9687/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** If the Deputy is referring to the Diesel Rebate Scheme for hauliers and bus operators, this scheme has been continuously in operation since 1 July 2013 and therefore the question of its restoration does not arise.

### **Value Added Tax**

51. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Finance if the reclassification of VAT status will be considered for the transport sector to harmonise the VAT system on the island of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9688/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the VAT rating of goods and services is subject to EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply. In general, the VAT Directive provides that all goods and services are liable to VAT at the standard rate, currently 23% in Ireland, unless they fall within categories of goods and services specified in the Directive, in respect of which Member States may apply a lower rate or exemption from VAT. In addition, the Directive allows for historic VAT treatment to be maintained under certain conditions and Ireland has retained the application of VAT exemption to the transport of passengers and their accompanying baggage. This means that the supplier does not register for VAT, does not charge VAT on the supply of their services and has no VAT recovery entitlement on costs where such costs are used for the exempt supply of passenger transport.

Ireland may continue to apply the VAT exemption on the supply of domestic passenger

transport as governed by Article 371 of the VAT Directive; however, it cannot change the conditions under which the exemption was granted. In accordance with the Directive a reduced rate of VAT (Ireland currently has two reduced VAT rates 9% and 13.5%) could be introduced to the supply of passenger transport in place of the exemption that currently applies; this would give the transport operator deductibility in relation to VAT on their business inputs but would involve charging passengers VAT on their fares. Under the Directive it is not possible to apply the zero rate in Ireland to these services, as their supply was never zero rated in the past.

In the UK, where these services were previously zero rated, the zero rate of VAT continues to apply to the supply of passenger transport, except for a taxi service which is standard rated, and suppliers established in the UK have an entitlement to deductibility on the costs relating to the supply of these services where the place of supply is the UK.

I would point out that there are reliefs from VAT available to passenger transport operators, whose businesses are established in this State, as follows:

- the Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (Touring Coaches) Order of 2012 provides for a refund of VAT on the cost of acquiring “qualifying vehicles” used for the carriage of tourists under contracts for group transport; and
- provisions within Section 59 of the VAT Consolidation Act 2010, which allow a person established in this State to claim deductibility in respect of input costs incurred in relation to the transport of passengers outside this State.

### Tax Yield

52. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of tax deducted from wagering at bookmaker offices here on greyhound and horse racing in 2019; and the estimated loss of revenue from this source in 2020 arising from the closure of horse and greyhound race-tracks due to Covid-19. [9701/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the 2019 receipts from Traditional Betting (in store), Remote Betting (online) and Betting Intermediary Duty on Commissions are shown in the following table.

	Traditional Betting	Remote Betting	Betting Intermediary Commissions	Total	
	€m	€m	€m	€m	
2019	51.9	40.6	2.5	95.0	

A breakdown by type of wager (greyhound racing, horse racing, etc.) is not available as this type of information is not included in Betting Duty returns. While records of the full particulars of bets must be kept by bookmakers for inspection, they are not required to include the details of the different types of sporting or other events which give rise to the liability to Betting Duty on their return to Revenue.

The Betting Duty forecast for 2020 has been revised downwards to €60 million due to COVID-19, which is €35 million lower than the receipts in 2019.

### Wage Subsidy Scheme

53. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated amount of tax to be received from employees in receipt of the temporary wage subsidy scheme; the way in which the amount of tax due will be worked out in practice; the way in which this will be paid in practice; if it is through the deduction of credits in 2021, if that will result in higher taxes being paid in 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9756/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that payments made to employees under the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) are liable to Income Tax and the Universal Social Charge (USC). However, in keeping with the Government's objective of getting much needed assistance to employees during the period of the crisis, the subsidy payments are not taxable in real-time through the PAYE system. Instead, employees will be liable to tax and USC on the subsidy amount paid to them by way of review at the end of the year.

It is not possible for Revenue to quantify the likely amount of tax to be received from employees arising from the TWSS payments at this point in the year. This will require assessment at year end of those who benefitted from the scheme, including their length of time on the scheme, the amounts of subsidy received, and any other income earned over the course of 2020.

When an end of the year tax review takes place, it may be the case that an employee's unused tax credits will cover any further liability that arises. Where this is not the case, Revenue has informed me that it is normal practice to collect any tax and USC owing in manageable amounts by reducing an individual's tax credits for a future year(s) in order to minimise any potential financial hardship. Additionally, if an individual has any additional tax credits to claim, for example health expenses, this may also reduce any tax owing.

Revenue has assured me that it will adopt a fair and reasonable approach to the collection of any tax owed arising from the TWSS, having regard to the financial circumstances of the persons concerned.

### **Wage Subsidy Scheme**

54. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 120 of 20 May 2020, the status of the issue regarding women returning from maternity leave being excluded from the temporary wage subsidy scheme; if the matter requires primary legislation in order to be rectified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9788/20]

59. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to ensure that the necessary changes are made to the temporary wage subsidy scheme to ensure that women that have been on maternity leave can avail of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9910/20]

67. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Finance when the change to the temporary wage subsidy scheme will come into effect to accommodate the salaries of those that have returned to work after a period of maternity or adoptive leave and that may not have been on the payroll of their employer on 29 February 2020 or paid in either January or February 2020. [10245/20]

78. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when the fix to the temporary wage subsidy scheme enabling mothers on maternity leave to apply to the scheme will be operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10322/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 54, 59, 67 and 78 together.

The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) is one of a number of significant measures that have been introduced since the beginning of March to attempt to minimise the negative impact on the labour market through an exceptional period, where at least one million workers are now relying on some form of State support.

The aim of the scheme is to maximise staff retention and firm viability by maintaining the link between the employer and employee. As of 8 June 2020, over 59,000 employers have registered with Revenue for the TWSS, over 520,900 employees have received at least one payment under the scheme and the cumulative value of payments made to employers is €1.43 billion.

On 29 May, I announced an important change to the TWSS to deal with the issue of those returning from maternity or adoptive leave which was raised by various parties and interest groups.

Officials had been looking at how it might be possible to address the issue in a way that ensures consistent treatment with other employees who were on the payroll in January and February, whose salaries were taken into account in determining TWSS payments for employers.

Following Government approval, a change to the TWSS will be made as an exceptional measure to accommodate the salaries of those who have returned to work after a period of maternity or adoptive leave who consequentially were not on the payroll during the relevant period.

The amendment will be legislated for later in the year as part of the usual Finance Bill 2020 process but in the interim, Revenue has agreed that this provision will be operational from 12 June and that the subsidy will be backdated, where applicable, to the later of either the date of recommencement of employment or 26 March 2020.

I am satisfied that this change addresses the matter raised and ensures appropriate operation of the TWSS in recognition of the unique circumstances applying to those returning to work after a period of maternity or adoptive leave by allowing for commensurate treatment with other employees who were on the payroll on 29 February.

Further details of how the measure will operate have now been published by Revenue, and I would highlight that the manual process being adopted will require input from employers so I would encourage them to contact Revenue to allow for payments to be processed as quickly as possible.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

55. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 863 of 27 May 2020, if a reply will issue to correspondence from a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9814/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I refer the Deputy to the reply given by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in relation to childcare for health care workers on the 27 May last.

The Temporary Wage Supplement Scheme was developed with the objective of getting much needed financial assistance to employers and employees as well as supporting the main-

tenance of the link between employers and their employees. The scheme is one of universal application across all the sectors of the economy and it would not be possible for it to be adapted to meet the particular circumstances as outlined in the details supplied.

*Question No. 56 answered with Question No. 40.*

### Tax Data

57. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Finance the cost in income tax foregone of income tax relief granted in 2019 on superannuation contributions, excluding the additional superannuation contribution paid by public service employees to public service and statutory occupational pension schemes in that year; the cost in income tax foregone of income tax relief granted in 2019 under section 790CA Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 on additional superannuation contributions paid by public service employees in that year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9890/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am informed by Revenue that the cost of Income Tax relief granted on superannuation contributions can be found in the ‘*Cost of Tax Expenditures*’ publication, which is available on the Revenue website at link; [www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-expenditures.aspx](http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-expenditures.aspx).

The relevant information is available under the heading ‘*Employees’ Contributions to Approved Superannuation Schemes*’.

The latest available data are for 2017, with the 2018 data due for publication in the coming months. The relevant tax returns for 2019 are not due to be filed until late 2020.

It is not possible to exclude the costs relating to public service employees from this information as public sector employers are not separately categorised in Revenue data.

### Mortgage Lending

58. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to cases in which mortgage customers that had received mortgage approval in principal from a bank prior to the Covid-19 crisis have now had their application rejected with the stated reason being that the applicants are in receipt of the temporary wage subsidy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9893/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The European Union (Consumer Mortgage Credit Agreements) Regulations 2016 (CMCAR) provide that, before concluding a mortgage credit agreement, a lender must make a thorough assessment of the consumer’s creditworthiness. The assessment must take appropriate account of factors relevant to verifying the prospect of the consumer being able to meet his or her obligations under the credit agreement. The CMCAR provide that a lender should only make credit available to a consumer where the result of the creditworthiness assessment indicates that the consumer’s obligations resulting from the credit agreement are likely to be met in the manner required under that agreement. The assessment of creditworthiness must be carried out on the basis of information on the consumer’s income and expenses and other financial and economic circumstances which is necessary, sufficient and proportionate. In addition, the Central Bank’s Consumer Protection Code 2012 imposes ‘Knowing the Consumer and Suitability’ requirements on lenders. Under these requirements, lenders are required to assess affordability of credit and the suitability of a

product or service based on the individual circumstances of each borrower.

Within the parameters of this regulatory framework, the decision to grant or refuse an individual application for mortgage credit is a commercial decision to be made by the regulated entity. A loan offer may contain a condition that the lender can withdraw or vary the offer if in the lender's opinion there is any material change in circumstances prior to drawdown. In such cases, the decision to withdraw or vary the offer is a commercial decision for the lender.

Lenders continue to process mortgage applications and have supports in place to assist customers impacted by COVID-19. The Banking & Payments Federation Ireland (BPFI) has published a Covid-19 Support FAQ which customers can consult, or customers can contact their lender directly, if they have any queries or concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on their mortgage application. The Central Bank has also indicated that it expects all regulated firms to take a consumer-focused approach and to act in their customers' best interests at all times, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 54.*

### Cycle to Work Scheme

60. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by his Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9983/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Cycle To Work scheme came into operation on 1 January 2009. The scheme operates on a self-administration basis and relief is automatically available provided the employer is satisfied that the conditions of their particular scheme meet the requirements of the legislation. There is no notification procedure for employers involved. This approach was taken with the deliberate intention of keeping the scheme simple and reducing administration on the part of employers.

There are no discernible costs in administering the cycle to work scheme. The bicycles and equipment are paid for by way of salary sacrifice by those acquiring the bicycles.

The following figures are for the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

#### Cycle to Work Applications per Year

Year	DFIN	DPER	OGP	Shared Services
2009	21	-	-	-
2010	31	-	-	-
2011	15	2	-	-
2012	16	9	-	-
2013	12	19	-	1
2014	15	10	1	10
2015	18	20	5	24
2016	10	15	9	27
2017	18	21	11	22
2018	15	18	5	17

Year	DFIN	DPER	OGP	Shared Services
2019	15	19	7	43
2020	1	5	2	7
Totals	187	138	40	151

*Question No. 61 answered with Question No. 39.*

*Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 42.*

*Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 49.*

### Credit Unions

64. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance if concerns raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10073/20]

65. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank regulations on credit unions will be reviewed (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10101/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 64 and 65 together.

First of all, I wish to inform the Deputy that both I and my officials have engaged extensively with the credit union representative bodies since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I spoke with the credit union representative bodies, by conference call on 23 March 2020 and again on 22 April 2020 to discuss the challenges and emerging issues facing the credit union sector as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. I noted the vital work the credit union sector is carrying out, which builds on the government's call for solidarity and community spirit which is synonymous with credit unions.

In addition to the above, my officials have had regular calls with the credit union representative bodies and with the Registry of Credit Unions in the Central Bank to review any emerging issues in the sector resulting from the pandemic, and to ensure smooth information flow between the sector and Government. The Credit Union Advisory Committee (CUAC) is also meeting regularly.

I recognise the key role that credit unions play in the delivery of financial services in local communities across Ireland, the need for which is heightened at this time. Credit unions account for approximately one third of the consumer credit market and are well positioned to provide access to credit to support the recovery from the current crisis.

In terms of the overall financial position of the sector, credit unions have come into this crisis with a strong reserves position, with a sector average reserve ratio of 16% as at 31 December 2019. This highlights that many individual credit union boards have chosen to prudently maintain additional reserves over the 10% regulatory minimum requirement. Credit unions have also maintained high levels of liquidity, with a sector average liquidity ratio of 39% as at 31 December 2019. Notwithstanding the strong financial position of the sector at December 2019, sustainability is a challenge for many credit unions.

Generally speaking, the current business model of Irish credit unions is suffering from low growth rates in loan demand over recent years (outpaced by stronger savings growth). Surplus funds not lent out to members yield limited investment returns reflective of the current low interest rate environment. This has translated into low loan to asset ratios (sector average 28%), low return on assets (sector average 0.6%) and high cost income ratios (sector average 82%).

The economic outlook arising by virtue of COVID-19, including reduced demand for new lending, has increased the challenges the sector is already facing. As a result it was agreed that the CUAC would report to me by 30 June on challenges and opportunities for the sector, incorporating implications of COVID-19, the role credit unions could play in the economic recovery and any relevant recommendations.

You may also wish to note that I have committed to a review of the Stabilisation Levy prior to introduction of the levies for 2021. As part of this review process the views of the credit union representative bodies will be sought and will help inform any decision I make. You may also be aware that a review of the Resolution Levy was completed in 2019, following which I made the decision to reduce the Resolution Fund levy for 2020, and that it is 44% lower than 2019. I will consider the Resolution Levy for 2021 this autumn.

The Central Bank also recognises the challenges being faced by many credit unions to continue providing services to members in light of COVID-19. The Central Bank has introduced some temporary flexibility for credit unions – alongside similar measures for other regulated sectors - in the areas of reporting deadlines and is taking a pragmatic approach to Fitness and Probity requirements where particular roles in a credit union may need to be filled on a temporary basis, as a result of COVID-19. The Central Bank has formally responded in writing to regulatory requests made by the representative bodies.

## EU Legislation

**66. Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the role of Ireland in relation to the support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency scheme proposed by the European Commission; if legislation is required here in order to put the scheme into effect; when such legislation is needed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10197/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) instrument is intended primarily to support Member States with efforts to protect workers and jobs, and also support some health-related measures.

Under the proposal, SURE will provide financial assistance to Member States of up to €100 billion in total. The Commission will borrow on financial markets to finance the loans to Member States at the same interest rate, allowing Member States benefit from the EU's strong credit rating and low borrowing costs. The loans are targeted to assist Member States to address sudden increases in public expenditure caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to preserve employment (such as short-time work schemes and other similar measures put in place for the self-employed) and certain health expenditure.

SURE would come with safeguards to ensure fair and equitable access to funding for Member States, with no more than €60 billion available to any three Member States, under the proposal.

The loans will be underpinned by a system of voluntary guarantees from Member States. For a lending volume of €100 billion under the SURE instrument, €25 billion in guarantee commitments are required from all Member States collectively. This guarantee mechanism ensures

Member States do not have to pay any money upfront. The instrument would not become available until all Member States sign up to their guarantee amount, and these commitments would remain in place for the full term of the loans which they are underwriting.

Each Member State contributes to the guarantee in proportion to its relative share in the total Gross National Income of the Union. For Ireland, this would be equivalent to €483 million (1.9% of EU-27 GNI).

SURE was adopted by ECOFIN Finance Ministers and published in the Official Journal on 19 May 2020. While the instrument is a regulation, which will have direct applicability in Irish law, signing the voluntary guarantee agreement, will require enabling legislation in Ireland. This requirement stems from Article 11 of the Constitution which provides that all the revenues of the State “*shall be appropriated for the purposes and in the manner and subject to the charges and liabilities determined and imposed by law*”. As no Member State can access SURE funding until all Member States have signed the voluntary guarantee, the timeline for introduction of legislation is urgent. The Government have decided to commence drafting legislation on this matter with a view to publishing a Bill as soon as possible.

*Question No. 67 answered with Question No. 54.*

### **Wage Subsidy Scheme**

68. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will raise an issue regarding the temporary wage subsidy scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10298/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the initial difficulties experienced by the business in question in accessing the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) arose because it failed to file its February submission by 15 March 2020 in accordance with the legislative provisions set down in Section 28 of Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (COVID-19) Act 2020. The business was subsequently provided with access to the TWSS under the concessionary arrangements introduced by Revenue under its care and management provisions and has been in receipt of payments since late April. The business also received additional payments in error due to a combination of duplicate employee submissions and temporary technology difficulties with Revenue’s IT systems.

Revenue has advised me that these issues have been resolved and the business has been provided with access to the TWSS on a retrospective basis from 26 March 2020.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment**

69. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the expected tax due from the pandemic unemployment payment for 2020; the way in which the Revenue Commissioners plan to collect this tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10313/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Payments made under the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) Scheme are income supports and share the characteristics of income. Other income earners in receipt of comparable “normal wages” are taxable on those wages and payments made under the PUP scheme are subject to income tax. However, tax will not be collected in real-time while the scheme is in operation. This is in keeping with the Government’s intention to get much needed financial support into the hands of affected workers as

quickly as possible.

I have been advised by Revenue that, at this stage, it is not possible to quantify the likely amount of tax to be received from persons in receipt of the PUP. This will require assessment at year end, to consider their length of time on the PUP Scheme, the amount of payments received, and any other income earned over the course of 2020. The taxation position will follow the general taxation rule for social welfare payments and, thus, while liable to income tax, the payments will be exempt from PRSI and the Universal Social Charge. This will be the case whether the recipient of the PUP is a former PAYE worker or a person who was previously self-employed.

While not liable to tax in real time under the PAYE system, the liability to tax on payments under the PUP Scheme will instead normally be determined by way of review at the end of the tax year. I am advised by Revenue that when an end of the year review takes place, it may be the case that an employee's unused tax credits will cover any further liability that may arise as a result of taxation of PUP payments. Where this is not the case and should a tax liability arise, it is normal Revenue practice to collect any tax owing in manageable amounts by reducing an individual's tax credits for a future year or future years in order to minimise any hardship. Additionally, if an individual has any additional tax credits to claim, for example health expenses, this will also reduce any tax that may be owing. I have been assured by Revenue that they will be adopting a fair and flexible approach to collecting tax due on payments made under the PUP scheme.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

70. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has considered increasing credits in 2021 to cater for those that have received the temporary wage subsidy scheme or the pandemic unemployment payment and have income tax due from those payments; the estimated cost of such a measure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10314/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I do not have any plan at this time to reconsider the existing tax credit arrangements that apply to all taxpayers in the manner suggested by the Deputy.

It is important to point out that the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS), the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) already represent a very significant support to those who have may have suffered a loss of income arising from the COVID-19 crisis.

Income tax receipts account for around 40% of Ireland's annual tax receipts, thereby making a significant contribution towards the cost of the various Exchequer funded State services, many of which are experiencing additional pressures at this time on account of the crisis we are facing as a result of the necessary response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ireland has a progressive income tax system which is structured such that the more income a taxpayer has, the more tax he or she will pay. As an individual's income increases, they move up through the various rates and bands and, as a result, while the levels of take home pay increase overall, the amount of tax paid also increases. It follows that those with a lower income as a result of benefitting from the TWSS or the PUP will have a lower income tax liability than might otherwise have been the case.

### **Wage Subsidy Scheme**

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the expected tax due from the temporary wage subsidy scheme for 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10315/20]

72. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of employers that have availed of the temporary wage subsidy scheme and that have paid PRSI at 0.5%; the amount received from employers from these PRSI payments; if an analysis has been undertaken to ascertain on average the number of employers that have topped up incomes from the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10316/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 71 and 72 together.

Regarding tax due from the temporary wage subsidy scheme for 2020 I am advised by Revenue that it is not possible to quantify at this stage the likely amount of tax to be received from employees in receipt of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) supports. This will require assessment at year end of those who availed of the Scheme, to consider their length of time on the Scheme, the amounts of subsidy received and any other income earned over the course of 2020.

Regarding the number of employers that have availed of the temporary wage subsidy scheme and related PRSI payments, Revenue has published detailed TWSS statistics on a weekly basis. These are available at:

[www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/number-of-taxpayers-and-returns/covid-19-wage-subsidy-scheme-statistics.aspx](http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/number-of-taxpayers-and-returns/covid-19-wage-subsidy-scheme-statistics.aspx).

In particular, Table 3 of the statistics dated 28 May shows the available information on PRSI payments for employees on TWSS and Table 6 shows an analysis of the TWSS employees in receipt of additional payments from their employers.

*Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 49.*

### **Apple Escrow Account**

74. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the value of an account (details supplied); the amount that was originally deposited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10318/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy is aware, the alleged State aid from Apple has been recovered by the State. The total amount recovered was €14.285 billion which constitutes the principal amount as well as the relevant EU interest. These sums have been placed into an Escrow Fund with the proceeds being released only when there has been a final determination in the European Courts over the validity of the Commission's Decision.

The 2018 accounts for the Escrow Fund were compiled and audited by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. As at 31 December 2018, the value of the assets held in the Escrow Fund amounted to €14.271 billion. Once the 2019 accounts are finalised and approved it will be possible to indicate the end 2019 financial position of the Fund. The accounts of the Fund are produced on an annual basis and no information will be provided on the value of the Fund outside this process.

## Rainy Day Fund

75. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the value of the Rainy-Day Fund; if there is consideration to avail of the resource; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10319/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The value of the National Surplus (Exceptional Contingencies) Reserve Fund (“the Rainy Day Fund”) as at 30 May was €1.5bn.

Given the scale of the impact on the economy of COVID-19 the Taoiseach has stated previously that the Rainy Day Fund (RDF) will be accessed as part of the Government’s response to the pandemic. The Stability Programme Update published in April set out that the Rainy Day Fund will be drawn down during the course of 2020. The exact timing of this drawdown remains to be decided as recent successful debt issuances by the National Treasury Management Agency means there is no immediate need for its drawdown.

When the drawdown of the Rainy Day Fund occurs, it will be to mitigate the occurrence of the exceptional circumstances arising from COVID-19 and it will be in accordance with section 9 of the National Surplus (Exceptional Contingencies) Reserve Fund Act 2019.

## Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

76. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the pandemic stabilisation and recovery fund is established and operational; if it requires primary legislation; if the fund is to be used as a last resort; the person or body that controls the fund; the person or body that makes the decision to invest; if this is reserved solely for the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund; if he has an input in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10320/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Pandemic Stabilisation and Recovery Fund (the “PSRF”), is a €2 billion sub-portfolio within the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (the “ISIF”). The ISIF is managed and controlled by the National Treasury Management Agency. The PSRF requires no primary legislation as it will operate under the existing ISIF statutory mandate (investing on a commercial basis in a manner designed to support economic activity and employment in the State) within the framework set out in the National Treasury Management Agency (Amendment) Act 2014. The ISIF are currently engaging with enterprises that are at various stages of exploring potential investment from the PSRF.

The initial focus of the PSRF will be on enterprises with over 250 employees or with an annual turnover of in excess of €50million, which have been materially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Such enterprises must demonstrate that the enterprise was viable pre COVID-19, and that it is expected to return to viability and to contribute to the Irish economy. Further, it should also be clear that ISIF investment, either alone or with co-investment, will be critical to supporting the enterprise in its return to financial viability. ISIF’s normal investment criteria also apply, in particular appropriate commercial return and economic impact remain core to the ISIF mandate. Further details have been published by the ISIF on the operation of the PSRF, these can be found on the ISIF website at <https://isif.ie/>.

*Question No. 77 answered with Question No. 48.*

*Question No. 78 answered with Question No. 54.*

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number and value of loans provided by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland in each month of 2020, by type of loan product in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10325/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

Scheme	Number of loans sanctioned from 1 January to 4 June 2020	Value of loans
Future Growth Loan Scheme	667	€161,566,068
Brexit Loan Scheme	48	€7,068,000
Covid19 Working Capital Scheme	372	€45,676,500
Credit Guarantee Scheme	11	€3,304,000
Liquidity	856	€44,396,385.89
Total	1954	€262,010,953.9

The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) has provided information on the number and value of loans sanctioned under the various loan schemes from the 1st January 2020 to the 4th June 2020. The SBCI has informed the Department of Finance that they do not currently have this information available on a month by month basis. The SBCI releases data on a periodic basis and expects to release updated scheme data to the end of June in mid July.

### Banking Sector

80. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Finance the plans for the reopening of closed branches of a bank (details supplied) in County Clare and nationally. [10333/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy is aware, I have engaged and will continue to engage, extensively with the Banking and Payments Federation (BPF) and the banks directly in relation to supports for personal and business customers affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, officials in my Department are alert to issues raised directly by the public and these inform the Department's ongoing engagement process and policy formation. All the banks, Bank of Ireland included, have continued to evolve and expand the supports they have available and I would expect that this process will continue.

Bank of Ireland has introduced a wide variety of solutions designed to help both personal and business customers affected by the COVID-19 crisis including mortgage breaks, cash flow supports for businesses and banking arrangements for customers who are cocooning/self-isolating.

The Deputy may also be aware that as Minister for Finance, I am precluded from intervening in how Bank of Ireland manages its day-to-day business and relationship with any of its customers. Decisions in this regard are solely the responsibility of the board and management of the bank which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The independence of the banks in which the State has a shareholding is protected by Relationship Frameworks which are legally binding documents that cannot be changed unilaterally. These frameworks which are publicly available, were insisted upon by the European Commission to protect competition in the Irish market.

Notwithstanding this, officials in the Department have requested a comment from Bank of

Ireland in relation to the manner in which it is managing its branch network during the current crisis and have received the following response:

“Due to COVID-19 Bank of Ireland has made a number of operational changes to safeguard critical services during the pandemic, respond to a significant shift in how customers are banking, and support social distancing requirements.

“To safeguard critical services we prioritised one hundred and sixty one of our larger branches nationwide, as well as our contact centres and online banking which have seen a surge in use over recent months. One hundred and one mainly smaller locations, which had seen a sharp drop in usage, were closed. Colleagues from these locations have been supporting our contact centres and online services manage high volumes of requests, as well as our larger branches where social distancing can be better maintained.

“We’re continuing to see shifts in customer behaviour towards online banking channels, and social distancing requirements remain in place. Our focus therefore remains on protecting the prioritised services across one hundred and sixty one branches, telephone and online banking, while keeping all developments under active review.”

### **Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman**

81. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Finance if the office of the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman has experienced a significant increase in complaints received during the Covid-19 pandemic period; the approximate year on year increase or decrease respectively; the financial sectors experiencing the largest number of complaints; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10337/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that from the 1 January to end May 2020, the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman (FSPO) received 2,103 complaints. The number of complaints for the same period in 2019 was 2,405.

In March of this year, the FSPO began to receive small numbers of complaints which included COVID-19 as an element of the complaint. At the end of May 2020, the FSPO had received 100 complaints that have been identified as relating to COVID-19. 70% of the complaints identified as relating to COVID-19 concern insurance, with 23% relating to banking and 7% relating to other sectors.

As with all complaints, the complaint must first be made to the financial service provider to allow the financial service provider to deal with the complaint in the first instance. If a complaint is not resolved by the financial services provider, a complaint can then be made to the FSPO.

### **Carbon Tax Yield**

82. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of revenue generated from carbon tax on liquid fuels, mineral oil tax and VAT on liquid fuel products in each of the years 2016 to 2019 and to date in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10340/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that information on mineral oil tax receipts (MOT) and carbon tax on liquid fuels for the years 2016 to 2018 are published on the Revenue website at link:

[www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/excise/net-receipts-by-commodity.pdf](http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/excise/net-receipts-by-commodity.pdf).

The provisional receipts from MOT and carbon tax for 2019 and the period January to May 2020 are shown in the following table.

	MOT 2019 €m	Carbon 2019 €m	MOT 2020 (to May ) €m	Carbon 2020 (to May ) €m
Petrol	537.6	47.6	180.7	18.9
Aviation Gasoline	0.5	0.05	0.1	0.02
Auto -diesel	1,550.0	192.8	552.6	82.5
Marked Gas Oil	45.3	54.4	21.7	22.9
Kerosene	0.0	53.8	0.0	35.3
Fuel Oil	0.7	1.2	0.3	0.4
LPG (Other)	0.0	10.2	0.0	5.0
Auto LPG	0.2	0.05	0.6	0.02

Regarding the VAT generated from liquid fuels, I am advised by Revenue that information is not available to provide this information, as traders are not required to separately identify the yield generated from an individual activity or product type on their VAT returns. However, using a combination of Revenue and third-party data, an estimate of the VAT yield across each of the different commodity types is provided below for the period January to April 2020 for the Deputy's information.

Estimated VAT yield €m	2016€m	2017€m	2018€m	2019€m	2020 (to April) €m
Petrol	318.8	317.8	293.5	277.0	65.5
Auto -diesel	177.2	229.6	269.8	297.3	64.0
Kerosene	64.2	75.0	93.5	85.7	47.3
Marked Gas Oil	44.5	50.4	59.7	58.5	20.5
Auto LPG	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.1
LPG (Other)	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0
Total	605.3	673.5	717.0	719.0	197.4

### Tax Yield

83. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Finance the number of instances and the value of tax involved in which divisions of the Revenue Commissioners (details supplied) issued reassessments of the amount of tax due between 2015 and 2019 and to date in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10341/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that its Large Cases Division was realigned to Large Corporates Division (LCD) and Large Cases – High Wealth Individuals Division (LC-HWID) in May 2018. On 1 November 2018, the Medium Enterprises Division (MED) was established. Details of the number of instances and the value of tax involved in amended assessments made by these Divisions to reflect additional tax due are set out for each of the Divisions concerned in the following tables.

#### Large Corporates Division

Year	Number of amended assessments	Amount of original assessments	Additional tax liabilities identified	Amount of amended assessments
2020 (to date)	108	€341,820,130	€9,846,227	€351,666,357
2019	255	€1,266,379,923	€85,138,705	€1,351,518,628
2018	819	€4,965,379,584	€2,331,699,093	€7,297,078,677
2017	615	€2,485,061,456	€255,273,190	€2,740,334,646
2016	413	€1,847,457,863	€61,706,280	€1,909,164,143
2015	319	€1,449,727,845	€230,806,803	€1,680,534,648
Total	2,529	€12,355,826,801	€2,974,470,298	€15,330,297,099

### Large Cases – High Wealth Individuals Division

Year	Number of amended assessments	Amount of original assessments	Additional tax liabilities identified	Amount of amended assessments
2020 (to date)	23	€7,046,764	€542,146	€7,588,910
2019	51	€6,076,083	€5,827,506	€11,903,589
2018	100	€26,529,798	€15,748,108	€42,277,906
2017	53	€11,195,318	€6,234,588	€17,429,906
2016	55	€2,825,358	€11,992,874	€14,818,232
2015	20	€1,748,834	€4,947,213	€6,696,047
Total	302	€55,422,155	€45,292,435	€100,714,590

### Medium Enterprises Division

Year	Number of amended assessments	Amount of original assessments	Additional tax liabilities identified	Amount of amended assessments
2020 (to date)	702	€311,373,884	€20,763,459	€332,137,343
2019	1,539	€991,838,190	€55,575,492	€1,047,413,682
2018	249	€248,531,089	€11,949,687	€260,480,776
Total	2,490	€1,551,743,163	€88,288,638	€1,640,031,801

The taxes reported in the above tables are Corporation Tax, Income Tax, Domicile Levy, Capital Gains Tax, Capital Acquisitions Tax, Relevant Contracts Tax, Value Added Tax and PAYE, PRSI and USC.

### Tax Code

84. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position in relation to the carry back for tax purposes of losses incurred by businesses; his plans to make changes in this area to support the cashflow of businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10375/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Loss relief for corporation tax is a long standing feature of the Irish corporate tax system and is a standard feature of corporation

tax systems in all OECD countries. I am advised by Revenue that, under existing legislation, a company can make a claim to carry back trading losses incurred in an accounting period against profits of its immediately preceding accounting period. The trading losses may be used to offset trading profits in the preceding accounting period on a euro for euro basis and, where the losses relate to a trade the profits from which would be chargeable at the 12.5% tax rate, they may be used to offset non-trading profits chargeable at the 25% tax rate in a manner that ensures the loss has a maximum tax value of 12.5%. An individual carrying on a trade can, where the trade is discontinued, carry back trading losses incurred in the final year of trading against the person's trading profits in the three years preceding the final year.

As the Deputy will be aware, and as outlined in my written responses of 20 May 2020 (6682/20) and 27 May 2020 (8008/20), Revenue has worked with my Department to introduce a series of measures and supports to help businesses deal with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the suspension of debt collection and interest charges in relation to certain VAT and PAYE (employer) liabilities. The tax debt warehousing scheme, which is being administered by Revenue, is also a substantial cashflow support for businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Consideration of all options to support the cashflow of businesses remains ongoing and the Deputy's input in this regard is welcome.

### **Mortgage Schemes**

85. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he has considered legislation, as has been implemented in other EU jurisdictions, that would prohibit the accrual of debt for the period of moratorium for those availing of a mortgage moratorium or payment break; the way in which it would interact with European Banking Authority guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10395/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, regulated entities in Ireland initially introduced a three-month payment moratorium on mortgages, and personal and business loans for customers affected by COVID-19 in March 2020. Since then regulated entities have also announced that they will make available a further three-month extension to the payment moratoria to customers that continue to be directly impacted by the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The European Banking Authority (EBA) issued '*Guidelines on legislative and non-legislative moratoria on loan repayments applied in the light of the COVID-19 crisis*' on the 2nd of April 2020 which set out the requirements for public and private moratoria which if fulfilled, will help avoid the classification of exposures as forborne or defaulted under distressed restructuring.

I am informed by the Central Bank of Ireland it is possible that moratoria can be set up in such a way as to allow for suspending, postponing or reducing the payments of principal amounts, interest or of full instalments, for a predefined limited period of time. However, the guidelines do not allow for other terms and conditions of the loans, such as the interest rate, to be altered.

The payment moratoria announced by Industry is compatible with the European Banking Authority Guidelines and was developed and implemented quickly in response to COVID-19. The agreement of a voluntary moratorium by industry ensures that affected customers could benefit immediately without the need for legislation, which may have delayed the provision of relief and exacerbated the issues faced by customers.

I understand that the Central Bank of Ireland continues to engage with the Banking and Payments Federation Ireland (BPF) and with firms themselves to ensure the effective implementation of these payment breaks. Credit unions are also supporting requests from their members, on a case-by-case basis.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

86. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the engagement he has had with the insurance industry in relation to business interruption caused by Covid-19 and in the event of further outbreaks of Covid-19 in 2020 and 2021; the impact the UK High Court test case on business interruption by the UK Financial Conduct Authority will have on businesses here but with insurance policies provided or underwritten by UK companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10396/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am aware that there have been many concerns expressed about how the insurance industry is responding to the needs of its business policyholders in these difficult times, particularly in terms of honouring business interruption claims. I have considerable sympathy for such policyholders, however the Deputy should note that I have no legal authority to compel an insurer to pay a claim as this forms part of a contract between the insurer and the policyholder. However, as a general rule, I believe that insurers should not attempt to reject claims on the basis of interpreting policies to their own advantage. Insurers should engage with those businesses honestly, fairly and professionally to honour those elements of the policies covered, in line with the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code. The Deputy should note however that neither I, as Minister for Finance, nor the Central Bank have any role in adjudicating on such matters. If there continues to be a disagreement between an insurer and a policyholder, then the appropriate channels for resolving them must be followed i.e. use of the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman (FSPO) or litigation. In this regard, I understand that there are a number of cases that have been referred to the FSPO or where litigation has been initiated.

The above said however, my officials and I have been engaging with the sector in an effort to get some much needed certainty for business policyholders. On business interruption claims, I wrote to Insurance Ireland on 27 March and indicated amongst other things that

(i) insurers should not attempt to reject claims on the basis of interpreting policies to their own advantage; and, (ii) that where a claim can be made because a business has closed as a result of a Government direction due to contagious or infectious disease, that the recent Government advice to close a business in the context of COVID-19 should be treated as a direction.

Insurance Ireland, on behalf of its membership, responded on 3 April and stated that it accepted both of my points. It did however indicate that each insurance policy is different and there may well be other factors which lead to the adjudication of whether a business interruption claim is valid or not, other than Government advice to close. Following on from this correspondence, I held a teleconference with Insurance Ireland, on 17 April, where I reiterated that some insurers, by adopting a "blanket" rejection of all business interruption claims, were doing the industry significant reputational damage and were not treating customers fairly.

My view in relation to business interruption and insurance should there be any further outbreaks of COVID-19 later this year or next year remains as it is for the current outbreak, that is, if a policy has an infectious diseases clause which does not exclude COVID-19, then as a general rule I believe they should honour it.

In relation to the actions of the UK's Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), I understand that the FCA is taking a test case to the UK High Court on the issue of business interruption insurance to achieve clarity for all parties concerned. In an update on their website on 1 June, the FCA stated that they have reviewed over 500 relevant policies from 40 insurers. They have identified a sample of 17 policy wordings that capture the majority of the key issues that could be in dispute. They will take these policy wordings to court, with insurers given a chance to file defences. I understand that a full court hearing is scheduled for the second half of July. Given that the FCA test case is still ongoing, it is still too early to say what the impact of any decision of the UK High Court would have on the Irish operations of UK-based insurers in terms of business interruption insurance claims. As I have stated already, it is not my role to adjudicate on such matters as Minister for Finance, and additionally it would be inappropriate for me to provide commentary on an ongoing court action, including one in another jurisdiction. That said, I would hope that UK insurers operating here would apply any favourable findings from a policyholder perspective, to their Irish policyholders, where applicable. My Department will be monitoring the test case and consulting with the Central Bank of Ireland on any potential implications it may have for Irish customers of these UK firms.

Finally, I believe it is important that other business interruption issues, such as the need for forbearance for businesses, are addressed also by UK-based insurers in the Irish market. My understanding is that they are aware of the forbearance arrangement I announced with Insurance Ireland in April, however a number of them have made the decision not to apply it for their own particular reasons. It should be noted again that I have no influence over these companies in relation to their day-to-day commercial decisions, however I think their response to their Irish customers is unsatisfactory and I have asked my officials to contact a number of the companies to ask if they could reconsider their decision. My Department will keep me updated on any developments in this area.

## **Tax Yield**

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of revenue generated from the land zoning windfall tax when previously in operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10442/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I assume the Deputy is referring to the 80% Windfall Tax which applied to certain disposals of land from 30 October 2009 to 31 December 2014.

As the Deputy is probably aware, the National Asset Management Agency Act 2009 amended the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 by providing for an 80% windfall tax on profits or gains arising from disposals of development land, to the extent that those gains were attributable to a relevant planning decision. Profits or gains from these activities that were not attributable to a relevant planning decision were taxed in the normal way. Section 31 of Finance Act 2014 repealed the 80% tax rate on these profits or gains with effect from 1 January 2015.

I am advised by Revenue that, based on information returned on Income Tax returns and Corporation Tax returns for the years 2010 to 2014, there is no record of any such profits or gains having been returned. However, it should be noted that the windfall gains provisions were introduced primarily to discourage overheating of the property market by way of speculative transactions involving rezoned land rather than as a revenue raising measure.

## **Tax Exemptions**

88. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider a once-off measure that each PRSA holder will be allowed to take a once-off withdrawal of €7,500 from their PRSA irrespective of other drawings they may or may not have made in the past (details supplied) in an effort to kickstart the economy following the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10448/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** In relation to the Deputy's proposal to allow people access a portion of their pension fund before retirement, the long established policy of providing tax relief for pension contributions is to encourage saving by employers, employees and the self-employed towards their retirement income. A repayment of contributions is only permitted in highly limited circumstances, for example due to ill-health, and as such, this would be subject to income tax.

The policy rationale underpinning this is the State provides generous tax relief on both pension contributions and fund growth to ensure that people have sufficient savings to fund their regular costs and expenses during their retirement. However, on actual drawdown a pension is subject to tax at the individual's marginal tax rate. In the event of any early encashment of a pension fund the tax relief received must be clawed back. It should also be noted that any refund of pension contributions is governed by the terms of the specific scheme or product.

As is the case with all matters of policy, while they are kept under review on a continuous basis, I do not have any plan at this time to revise these pension arrangements.

It is important to point out that a very significant and comprehensive package of measures has already been put in place to assist those who have suffered a loss of income arising from the COVID-19 crisis. This includes the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS), the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and bank-related forbearance measures.

### Public Sector Pensions

89. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of public service pensioners and the average pension before tax deductions, excluding those receiving spouse's and children's pensions; the proportion of current public service pensioners under 65 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9889/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The authorities responsible for the administration of the large number of pension schemes operating in the various sectors of the Irish public service are, in general, the relevant employers and Ministers in those sectors.

It would be a matter for those sectoral authorities, including relevant Ministers, to supply such information as may be available in respect of the wider public service.

I and my Department are responsible for the civil service pension schemes which are paid through Vote 12: Superannuation and Retired allowances and therefore I can only reply on this basis.

The statistics presented in the following table are taken as at end of May 2020 and were provided by the National Shared Services Office who process the Civil Service pension payroll.

Number of Pensioners	Average Annual Pension
22,572	€20,694

The current proportion of Civil Service pensioners that are under 65 years of age is 30%.

It is important to note here that all of these statistics are quoted at a point in time and as such will vary including the average annual pension which is dependent on a number of factors such as grade distribution and length of service of the specific cohort of retirees.

### **Departmental Reviews**

90. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date on which he will report on his review of the allowances of members of the Houses of the Oireachtas. [9772/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy observes, this matter is currently under review. An exact date for finalisation of the review is not available at present but I expect it to be completed shortly. When that review is completed, I will be in a position to inform Deputies of the outcome.

### **Garda Stations**

91. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to sell the obsolete Garda station building in Broadford, County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9946/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that all surplus properties, including the former Garda station at Broadford, are treated in line with the disposal policy of the Office of Public Works (OPW).

The OPW policy with regard to non-operational (vacant) State property, is to:

1. Identify if the property is required/suitable for alternative State use by either Government Departments or the wider public sector.

2. If there is no other State use identified for a property, the OPW will then consider disposing of the property on the open market if and when conditions prevail, in order to generate revenue for the Exchequer.

3. If no State requirement is identified, or if a decision is taken not to dispose of a particular property, the OPW may consider community involvement (subject to a detailed written submission, which would indicate that the community/voluntary group has the means to insure, maintain and manage the property and that there are no ongoing costs for the Exchequer).

Therefore, if no alternative State use is found for the property at Broadford Co Clare, the OPW will likely dispose of it by way of public auction.

### **Office of Government Procurement**

92. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of approved suppliers listed regarding the supplier list that the Office of Government Procurement maintains for the cycle to work scheme; the number of suppliers struck off the approved suppliers list since 2009 for non-compliance issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9974/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) is responsible for receiving applications for inclusion on the civil and public service Cycle-to-Work Scheme supplier listing. Applications are received from individual supplier outlets. There are currently 606 supplier outlets included on the listing. The OGP has no role in monitoring compliance with the scheme. No supplier outlets have been removed from the listing for non-compliance issues.

### Fire Stations

93. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of a site (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10022/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The provision of fire services in local authority areas, including the establishment and maintenance of fire brigades, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises, is a statutory function of the individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Acts, 1981 and 2003. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority projects.

In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on an annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised fire stations, an upgrade of the communications and mobilisation system, and improvements to training centres.

Macroom Fire Station is included in the programme of fire stations for construction within the five-year allocation announced in February 2016. Draft designs for the new station have been received and reviewed by my Department, and approval issued to Cork County Council on 19 February 2020 to proceed to seek tenders for the project.

On 26 May 2020 the Council submitted a tender proposal to my Department for approval prior to contract. This proposal is under review and a response will issue to the Council as soon as possible.

### Flood Relief Schemes

94. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding the formal confirmation process of the Enniscorthy flood defence scheme; the person or body that manages the confirmation process; the stage the confirmation process is at; if a third party has been appointed to carry out the formal review of the environmental impact assessment report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10057/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The Enniscorthy (River Slaney) flood defence scheme is being progressed by Wexford County Council on behalf of the Commissioners of Public Works as a scheme under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995. This is a significant scheme within the Office of Public Works €1 billion flood relief investment programme, and on completion will protect 236 properties in the town.

The Scheme requires formal confirmation to proceed from the Minister for Public Expen-

diture and Reform (MPER). This is a statutory requirement under the Arterial Drainage Acts, which now, under the recent European Union (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Arterial Drainage) Regulations 2019, also requires the MPER to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the proposed Scheme. This will involve, inter alia, a formal review by MPER of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) prepared by the Commissioners and recently submitted (along with a Natura Impact Statement) to the MPER as part of the formal confirmation process.

In order to assist the MPER in making an informed decision to consent to the scheme, the EIA will require appropriate assessment, as required under the 2019 regulations, public consultation for a period of 30 days and a detailed technical review of the scheme by environmental consultants appointed by the MPER.

I am advised that the current position on the confirmation process is that a request for tender of services for environmental consultants is currently being progressed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). The public consultation phase is also due to be commenced by DPER shortly. DPER will progress the formal confirmation process in the quickest possible timescale.

### **Public Sector Staff**

95. **Deputy Joe Flaherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if an extensive campaign aimed will be undertaken at encouraging civil servants to switch to roles at locations closer to their homes (details supplied) [10140/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** COVID-19 has resulted in a large proportion of civil and public servants working from home. Officials in my Department are currently preparing guidelines for both employers and employees which will aid them in this new way of working. The officials will also be looking at the longer term remote working project as part of Future Jobs Ireland, which will include working from home and from hubs which the Deputy is referring to.

As the Deputy points out the Civil Service Mobility scheme which comes under the remit of my department offers an opportunity for staff members to apply for mobility through an open and transparent system. The scheme is being implemented on a phased basis with Phase 1 for the general Civil Service grades of Clerical Officer (CO) and Executive Officer (EO) launching in 2017/18 for mobility between and within 46 location zones. Staff can apply for mobility within their current zone/organisation as well as other zones/organisations. To date over 500 staff members have moved to their chosen location/organisation and c.5,000 staff (24% of participating grades) have applied for a move.

Plans are on track to extend the scheme to include the grades of Higher Executive Officer, Administrative Officer and Assistant Principal. When this process is complete, mobility will be in place for all general Civil Service grades from Clerical Officer up to Assistant Secretary.

Further information on the Mobility scheme is available to view at <http://hr.per.gov.ie/civil-service-mobility/>.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

96. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the supports avail-

able for families of third-level students that received no refunds for accommodation from private accommodation providers for rental expenses incurred even though classes did not proceed and students were asked to stay at home during the Covid-19 emergency; if legislation is being reviewed in relation to rent refunds as a consequence of the negative experiences of many families during the Covid-19 emergency; and if guidance will be issued in relation to the 2020/2021 academic term and accommodation requirements. [9676/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is working with representatives from the higher education sector to address the challenges faced by students in this difficult time. I understand based on the information available to me that students in university-owned accommodation will receive pro-rata refunds if they have vacated their accommodation. I have indicated that I would wish to see this principle applied in the case of students who were residing in privately owned student accommodation however it is not within my remit to direct any accommodation provider to offer a refund.

Refund or cancellation policies in student accommodation should be set out in the license agreement signed at the beginning of the academic year. In the first instance students should engage with their accommodation provider to see if an arrangement can be reached in regard to a refund.

If this is not possible, under the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 students have access to the Dispute Resolution Services of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB).

The national co-ordination group for tertiary education is meeting on a regular basis to consider key issues impacting the tertiary sector, including arrangements for re-opening institutions. These arrangements will be dependent on public health advice, and will be communicated to learners as soon as possible. Higher Education Institutions are autonomous, and therefore the exact arrangements for re-opening are a matter for each institution to decide.

Rental agreements between students and accommodation providers are a private matter, and neither I nor my Department have any remit to issue instructions in relation to the private rental market.

### **SOLAS Training and Education Programmes**

97. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures undertaken to alleviate the situation facing workers whose safe pass accreditation expired prior to 1 March 2020 and that cannot now renew due to Covid-19 restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9878/20]

115. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine the need to resume safe pass courses during the Covid-19 pandemic using remote learning or socially distanced circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9728/20]

128. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps taken to restart safe pass courses and certification for the course issued in view of the fact a number of persons are awaiting to start employment. [9850/20]

138. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the suspension of the safe pass programme will be lifted; when he and SOLAS plan to roll out online training programs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9953/20]

156. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of

safe pass qualifications issued from other countries (details supplied); if they can be accepted or exchanged for an Irish safe pass whilst Covid-19 restrictions prevent courses resuming in order to allow holders of such passes to commence employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10094/20]

176. **Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has considered resuming safe pass courses in view of the fact they can be conducted with social distancing in place; the reason they have not been restarted in view of the reopening of the construction sector; and if he has considered extending to the start of the year, a reprieve on expired safe passes in order that workers that missed the 1 March 2020 cut-off can get back to work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10249/20]

196. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when safe pass courses will be permitted to commence again in view of the fact that construction workers have returned to work and new entrants to the sector have not had a safe pass certificate before; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10349/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 97, 115, 128, 138, 156, 176 and 196 together.

Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations 2013, construction workers in Ireland are legally bound to hold a valid Safe Pass Registration Card to work on site. The only course currently recognised as an equivalent to the SOLAS Safe Pass course is the Construction Skills Register (CSR Northern Ireland) one day health and safety course.

SOLAS has examined the potential for online delivery as a means of continuing national construction health and safety courses while adhering to public health measures. No immediate solution has been identified that is equitable with the existing Safe Pass course delivery model, in being accessible to all eligible workers, providing real time course participants supports (literacy and numeracy) and interpreter services, as well as ensuring assessment integrity.

On 5th June, the Government sanctioned the inclusion of Safe Pass, Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) and Quarrying Skills Certification Scheme (QSCS) course delivery in Phase 2 of the Government’s Roadmap for reopening society and business, on condition that public health guidelines are adhered to by approved training organisations.

This means that the onsite delivery of these courses can recommence with effect from 8th June 2020 in line with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation’s Return to Work Safely Protocols, relevant HSE advice and as set out in the SOLAS’ Standard Operational Procedures (SOP). Anyone wishing to book a Safe Pass training course should contact their local Safe Pass training provider. A list of approved Safe Pass providers is available on the SOLAS website at Safe Pass Accredited Tutors register.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

98. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the matter of mandatorily including workers on task forces set up to reopen sectors of industry, for example, English language schools will be clarified. [10011/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am aware of the challenges that are being encountered in the English language education sector and the substantial impact that the Covid-19 outbreak has had on students, teachers and providers in this sector.

My Department recognises the important role that teachers play in this sector and the support they have provided and continue to provide for students at this time. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, officials from my Department have had engagement with teacher representatives where they have outlined their concerns.

The English language education working group for this sector has been established with a remit to address the issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic with a priority and focus placed in the first instance on issues affecting students as well as other issues arising e.g. how stakeholders can work together to promote the sector as international markets move into recovery. The working group is comprised of key sectoral stakeholders including officials from my Department, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Enterprise Ireland, as well as lead sectoral representative bodies of providers and learner advocates.

The coordination of the response of the wider education system to the Covid-19 outbreak is a substantial challenge. In this context, the Department has found the current structure of the working group to be effective in delivering on its remit. The Department does not intend to mandate the inclusion of representatives of staff or teachers in this forum. While the Department remains open to views, there are no current plans to expand membership of this working group. To date, the group has facilitated an appropriate level of engagement with stakeholders alongside the ability to identify and help resolve issues as they arise. The Department and the members of the working group will continue to engage with external parties, to seek to exchange information where relevant and address queries where possible.

In respect of the safe re-opening of English language education providers, the timeline and arrangements for this will be guided by public health advice applicable at a given time. On May 1st, the Taoiseach announced the roadmap for the gradual lifting of the current Covid-19 restrictions. This roadmap sets out a number of phases with the re-opening of the wider education system contained in the later phases to coincide broadly with the beginning of the new academic year.

My Department will engage with provider representatives within the English language education sector as they develop more detailed plans for the re-opening of their premises on this basis. It is to be expected that ensuring the health and safety of staff and students will be central to the provider's plans and that necessary consultations will be undertaken as part of their development. It is anticipated that the "Return to Work Safely Protocol" recently published jointly by the Department of Health and the Department of Enterprise, Business & Innovation, and designed to support measures being put in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace will be used to inform these plans. This protocol envisions close engagement between workers and their employers during the development and implementation of these new workplace measures. The experience of the re-opening of educational facilities in other areas and jurisdictions will also be relevant.

### **School Transport**

99. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of private school bus operators (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10100/20]

**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 Depart-

ment of Education and Skills.

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

In the current school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, are 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 €219m in 2019.

Following the initial announcement that schools would be closed from the 13th to the 29th March to support efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19, and in light of the exceptional circumstances, it was agreed that school transport contractors operating on the School Transport Scheme would be paid at the normal rate for the period up to 29th March 2020. It was further decided that a payment of 50% would be afforded for the week commencing Monday 30th March until Friday 3rd April 2020. Thereafter, the normal arrangements applied for the period of scheduled school closures associated with the Easter Holidays (6th April – 17th April inclusive). It was subsequently agreed that contractors should be paid for a further 5 days at 50% to cover the period Monday 20th April to Friday 24th.

In light of the most recent announcement that schools will remain closed until the end of current school year it has been decided that contractors will continue to be paid at 50% while schools are closed in the current school year.

My Department is not in a position to provide funding for private bus contractors not contracted to operate on the Department's School Transport Scheme.

### **Education Policy**

100. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department is providing supports for children progressing from sixth class to first year; if he will consider a national graduation day for those students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10373/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is taking a number of actions to minimise the impact on schools due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

A range of guidance was published to assist schools and teachers while out of school. This guidance issued to schools to support the continuity of teaching and learning, to support those with special educational needs, to support those at risk of educational disadvantage and to support the wellbeing of students. This guidance was developed in consultation with all relevant stakeholders and there is ongoing consultation with the management bodies and unions from both sectors on all matters relating to Covid 19, which will continue for the foreseeable future.

Schools adopted various ways to engage with their students in accordance with the technology and broadband resources available in school and at home, including by post, e-mails, communication apps, the school website, use of other digital communicative platforms, including live meetings. Schools were asked to be conscious of pupils who may not have access to online facilities and to adapt approaches so that these pupils continued to have the opportunity to participate in learning.

The aim of these distant learning approaches, the guidance which issued to all schools and

the regular engagement with students, was to ensure that students stayed connected with and progressed their learning. These actions will, therefore, have helped to minimise the impact of school closure and assist pupils/students in the making of transitions.

In the context of planning for a return to school which is underway, my Department is, *inter alia*, considering the curriculum, i.e. what needs to be put in place to support ongoing progression for learners and addressing any shortfall that may result from school closures.

In relation to learners currently in sixth class, it is important that pupils/students move on with their peers and continue to the next stage of their education. The guidance that issued to primary schools on 28th May includes information on managing transitions including the move from primary to post-primary school. It sets out how existing resources such as the Education Passport, NEPs Continuum of Support and the Home School Liaison Officers in DEIS schools can be utilised. Communication between the primary and post primary schools and with the parents and children is of utmost importance in order to ensure progression is as seamless as possible.

Transitions are being further considered by the Department as part of the return to school advice which will issue to primary and post-primary schools in the coming months. This includes guidance in relation to the wellbeing of our students and school management and staff in order to support successful re-engagement with teaching and learning and will include a focus on transitions.

Many schools hold graduation ceremonies for pupils leaving sixth class each year. While it will not be possible for schools to carry these out in the traditional format, some schools are marking the occasion remotely, by hosting virtual meetings for the pupils or prerecording videos that can be sent to them to celebrate their time in school. Certificates of achievement, photo stories, scrapbooks and other memorabilia can also form part of the celebration.

My Department is acutely aware of the challenges faced by students at this difficult time, and how the current circumstances will continue to present challenges into the future. The welfare of students is, and will continue to be, front and centre in all decision making. My department will continue to be guided by the most up to date information from the National Public Health Emergency Team.

### **Special Educational Needs**

101. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he plans to run the July provision in 2020; if so, if it will be made available to all children with disabilities that have been out of school since 12 March 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9648/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is planning to provide a summer education programme for children with significant special educational needs as soon as it is safe to do so and in accordance with public health advice.

It is intended that this programme will be similar to the July Provision of previous years.

The Summer Education Programme will take place for children with significant special educational needs enrolled in special schools, special classes and mainstream classes.

The programme will be reliant on schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) choosing to participate on a voluntary basis.

Planning is under way and an announcement will be made shortly.

### **Special Educational Needs**

102. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the planning taking place for the educational needs of children with disabilities that have frail and complex medical health (details supplied); if there will be home tuition, one-to-one virtual access to a teacher or other provisions; and the status of such plans. [9649/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** On the 1st May 2020, the Taoiseach announced as part of the “Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business” that schools will commence opening on a phased basis at the beginning of the 2020/2021 academic year.

My Department is currently working with the Education Partners and relevant stakeholders in planning for this re-opening which will be based on public health advice. As part of this engagement, each of the education partners were given the opportunity to outline the key issues that they would like to have considered in the context of re-opening schools.

The issues raised by the education partners will now be worked through in detail as part of the development of the roadmap for reopening schools.

A core objective will be to ensure that students can return to their schools in a safe manner that is consistent with public health advice.

Further details of how and when schools will reopen and also as to whether some online teaching or remote access may continue next year, will be announced shortly.

In the interim, my Department has provided a range of support and guidance for schools on how to provide for the continuing education for pupils over the current school closure period.

Supports are provided to schools and teachers engaged in distance learning and these are available at [www.education.ie/en/covid-19/#14](http://www.education.ie/en/covid-19/#14).

In addition to the general guidance that has been provided for schools, additional support material has also been provided specifically on how schools should provide for the continuity of education for children with special educational needs. This guidance is available at:

[www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/National-Emergencies-Public-Health-Issues/guidance-continuity-of-schooling-supporting-pupils-with-sen-primary.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/National-Emergencies-Public-Health-Issues/guidance-continuity-of-schooling-supporting-pupils-with-sen-primary.pdf).

[www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/National-Emergencies-Public-Health-Issues/guidance-continuity-of-schooling-supporting-students-with-sen-post-primary.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/National-Emergencies-Public-Health-Issues/guidance-continuity-of-schooling-supporting-students-with-sen-post-primary.pdf).

The guidance notes that there is a particular need for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) to have regular, ongoing schooling. While all pupils need to be supported to maintain their engagement in learning, those with SEN are among those who need most support at this time. Examples of strategies and measures to ensure that the needs of pupils with SEN are catered for, are provided in the guidance documents and a range of resources are also identified for parents.

It sets out the role of schools and teachers in engaging with pupils with SEN and the role of teachers and school leaders to support such pupils. It advises schools as to how best to keep in touch with parents and guardians and how to keep pupils with SEN safe and engaged in the distance learning environment.

The guidance sets out the role of the special education teacher to support children with special educational needs at this time. It notes that the special education teacher's knowledge of their pupils' priority learning needs and agreed targets, as outlined in the pupil support file, will enable them to work with parents and guardians to choose appropriate supports in a remote learning environment.

Special Education Teachers (SETs) are asked to carefully examine how progress on the existing learning targets in student support plans can be reasonably extended by home learning. They are asked to use this knowledge to communicate with the pupils and their parents and guardians and to establish what methods will work best to achieve continuity of learning for the pupils.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is also providing a range of online resources for parents and teachers to support home learning for children with special educational needs during the Covid 19 restrictions.

In addition to the normal supports, the NCSE is providing online resources for children with Special Educational Needs who are at home as a result of the schools' closure.

Supports provided include those relating to general learning and difficulties for pupils with SEN, Curriculum support, speech language and communication, occupational therapy support, guidance around behaviour, and learning and resources on 'Visiting Teachers Support' for a teacher who teaches children with sensory impairment

Details of the full range of supports that the NCSE provides for teachers and parents is available at:

<https://ncse.ie/online-resources>.

The Department of Education and Skills' NEPS psychologists have also developed advice and resources for young people to manage and stay well when schools are closed. The NEPS advice & resources for keeping children and young people well during Covid-19 are available at [www.education.ie/covid19/wellbeing/](http://www.education.ie/covid19/wellbeing/).

Guidelines for continued provision of Guidance Counselling and resources available to support practice is available at [www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Post-Primary-School-Policies/Policies/Guidance-Plan.html](http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Post-Primary-School-Policies/Policies/Guidance-Plan.html).

Guidance for parents of primary school pupils, which sets out what they should expect in relation to engagement in distance learning from schools, and how they can support their child in a home schooling environment is also available at:

[www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/continuity-of-schooling/continuity-of-schooling.html](http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/continuity-of-schooling/continuity-of-schooling.html).

I also recently announced that a special €10 million fund is being made available to support the purchase of technology and devices for disadvantaged students, including students with special educational needs.

This is additional to the latest round of funding for ICT under the Digital Strategy for Schools whereby €40m grant funding will be distributed in the coming weeks to eligible. €10m additional funding is also now issuing to schools to support children and young people who are at risk of educational disadvantage during the period of school closures.

While recognising the difficulty that school closure has had for parents and pupils, particu-

larly in relation to pupils with special educational needs, my Department will continue to support and encourage schools to provide as much continuity of education as possible for such pupils, while continuing to engage with public health officials and stakeholders in relation to when schools may re-open and operate in a safe manner that is consistent with public health advice.

### **State Examinations**

103. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when examination fees will be refunded. [9654/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

### **Departmental Correspondence**

104. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a response will issue to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9662/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The school to which the Deputy refers has been approved funding for a building project under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2018 that will provide for 2 additional mainstream classrooms. The tender process with respect to this project is well advanced and is expected to conclude in the coming weeks.

My Department has also approved funding to the school for additional interim temporary accommodation to assist in addressing its current enrolment need.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

105. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the supports in place for the English language sector post-Covid-19. [9663/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is conscious of the issues in the English language education sector arising from the Covid-19 outbreak and has established a specific Working Group for this sector. This group is comprised of representatives of relevant Government Departments and representatives of both students and English language education providers.

As part of the wider Covid-19 response, the Government has introduced a number of measures to support businesses at this time. These measures include a temporary wages subsidy scheme to facilitate employers to keep employees on the payroll throughout the Covid-19 pandemic in order to retain this link for when business increases after the crisis. This scheme is administered by the Revenue Commissioners and is available to providers in the English language education sector. Additionally for those staff in this sector who have lost their jobs because of the pandemic, they are eligible to apply for the Government's Covid-19 Pandemic Unemploy-

ment Payment.

In addition to the above, providers in this sector will be eligible to apply, where appropriate, for further business supports made available by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation via Enterprise Ireland and through its network of Local Enterprise Offices.

In respect of the safe re-opening of English language education providers, the timeline and arrangements for this will be guided by public health advice applicable at a given time. On May 1st, the Taoiseach announced the roadmap for the gradual lifting of the current Covid-19 restrictions. This roadmap sets out a number of phases with the re-opening of the wider education system contained in the later phases to coincide broadly with the beginning of the new academic year.

My Department will engage with provider representatives within the English language education sector as they develop more detailed plans for the re-opening of their premises on this basis. It is to be expected that ensuring the health and safety of staff and students will be central to the provider's plans and that necessary consultations will be undertaken as part of their development. It is anticipated that the "Return to Work Safely Protocol" recently published jointly by the Department of Health and the Department of Enterprise, Business & Innovation, and designed to support measures being put in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace will be used to inform these plans.

Experience of the re-opening of educational facilities in other areas and jurisdictions will also be relevant.

### **Schools Building Projects**

106. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project (details supplied). [9675/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has received a Stage 2b report from the school to which he refers. My Department will be in contact with the school directly once its review of this report has been completed.

### **Schools Building Projects**

107. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a building project for a school (details supplied). [9677/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The project referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of the tender process; the Stage 3 tender report is currently under review within my Department.

Once this review is completed and subject to no issues arising, Department officials will be in contact with the school with regard to completing the tender process and with a view to commencing on site later this year.

### **School Accommodation**

108. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the planning and procurement for the installation of appropriate prefabs has been organised for a school (details supplied) to ensure the school can open in line with other secondary schools when it is safe to do so, with appropriate space to facilitate social distancing and the teaching of a wide variety of subjects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9694/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** A planning application for the school to which the Deputy refers was lodged with the relevant local authority on 2 April 2020 and a decision is awaited. The tendering process for the procurement of prefabricated accommodation for the project is currently ongoing. It is envisaged that the school will open in suitable interim accommodation with standard classroom sizes for the 2020/2021 academic year.

### **Language Schools**

109. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider allowing stakeholders representing both teachers and students in the English language education sector to participate in the Covid-19 Working Group for the English language education sector (details supplied). [9697/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am aware of the challenges that are being encountered in the English language education sector and the substantial impact that the Covid-19 outbreak has had on students, teachers and providers in this sector.

My Department recognises the important role that teachers play in this sector and the support they have provided and continue to provide for students at this time. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, officials from my Department have had engagement with a Trade Union in this sector and teacher representatives where they have outlined their concerns.

The English language education working group for this sector has been established with a remit to address the issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic with a priority and focus placed in the first instance on issues affecting students as well as other issues arising e.g. how stakeholders can work together to promote the sector as international markets move into recovery. The working group is comprised of key sectoral stakeholders including officials from my Department, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Enterprise Ireland, as well as lead sectoral representative bodies of providers and learner advocates.

The coordination of the response of the wider education system to the Covid-19 outbreak is a substantial challenge. In this context, the Department has found the current structure of the working group to be effective in delivering on its remit and, while the Department remains open to views, there are no current plans to expand membership. To date, the Group has facilitated an appropriate level of engagement with stakeholders alongside the ability to identify and help resolve issues as they arise. The Department and the members of the Working Group will continue to engage with external parties, to seek to exchange information where relevant and address queries where possible.

In respect of the safe re-opening of English language education providers, the timeline and arrangements for this will be guided by public health advice applicable at a given time. On May 1st, the Taoiseach announced the roadmap for the gradual lifting of the current Covid-19 restrictions. This roadmap sets out a number of phases with the re-opening of the wider education system contained in the later phases to coincide broadly with the beginning of the new

academic year.

My Department will engage with provider representatives within the English language education sector as they develop more detailed plans for the re-opening of their premises on this basis. It is to be expected that ensuring the health and safety of staff and students will be central to the provider's plans and that necessary consultations will be undertaken as part of their development. It is anticipated that the "Return to Work Safely Protocol" recently published jointly by the Department of Health and the Department of Enterprise, Business & Innovation, and designed to support measures being put in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace will be used to inform these plans. Experience of the re-opening of educational facilities in other areas and jurisdictions will also be relevant.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

110. **Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if supports will be provided for ACELS, QQI and MEI accredited English language schools which were closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic in March to reopen in 2020 (details supplied). [9698/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is conscious of the issues in the English language education sector arising from the Covid-19 outbreak and has established a specific Working Group for this sector. This group is comprised of representatives of relevant Government Departments and representatives of both students and English language education providers including those accredited by ACELS and MEI.

As part of the wider Covid-19 response, the Government has introduced a number of measures to support businesses at this time. These measures include a temporary wages subsidy scheme to facilitate employers to keep employees on the payroll throughout the Covid-19 pandemic in order to retain this link for when business increases after the crisis. This scheme is administered by the Revenue Commissioners and is available to providers in the English language education sector. Additionally for those staff in this sector who have lost their jobs because of the pandemic, they are eligible to apply for the Government's Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment.

In addition to the above, providers in this sector will be eligible to apply, where appropriate, for further Covid-19 business supports made available by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation via Enterprise Ireland and through its network of Local Enterprise Offices.

In respect of the safe re-opening of English language education providers, the timeline and arrangements for this will be guided by public health advice applicable at a given time. On May 1st, the Taoiseach announced the roadmap for the gradual lifting of the current Covid-19 restrictions. This roadmap sets out a number of phases with the re-opening of the wider education system contained in the later phases to coincide broadly with the beginning of the new academic year.

My Department will engage with provider representatives within the English language education sector as they develop more detailed plans for the re-opening of their premises on this basis. It is to be expected that ensuring the health and safety of staff and students will be central to the provider's plans and that necessary consultations will be undertaken as part of their development. It is anticipated that the "Return to Work Safely Protocol" recently published jointly by the Department of Health and the Department of Enterprise, Business & Innovation, and designed to support measures being put in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in

the workplace will be used to inform these plans.

Experience of the re-opening of educational facilities in other areas and jurisdictions will also be relevant.

### **Special Educational Needs**

111. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position in relation to securing a place at a special primary school for a child (details supplied) with special needs for the 2020/21 school year; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that no appropriate school place has been offered to them and they must start school this autumn; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9706/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Ensuring that every child has a suitable school placement is a key objective of this Department. Significant resources are allocated each year to ensure that appropriate supports are available for children with special educational needs.

Since 2011, the number of special classes in mainstream schools has increased almost three-fold, from 548 to 1,618 for the 2019/2020 school year; with 1,353 of these catering for children with autism.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has responsibility for coordinating and advising on the education provision for children nationwide; has well established structures in place for engaging with schools and parents; and seeks to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

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

It is open to any school to make an application to the NCSE for the establishment of a specialised provision and where sanctioned, a range of supports, including capital funding, is made available to the school. My Department works closely with the NCSE in this regard.

Normally, special class and school places are established with the full cooperation of the schools in areas where they are required. However there are some parts of the country where the NCSE has faced challenges in getting schools and their patrons to voluntarily agree to provide special class or school places. I know that this can cause much anguish for parents and families involved.

As Minister for Education and Skills, I have power under Section 37A of the Education Act 1998 to direct a school to provide additional provision where all reasonable efforts have failed. This legislation has been used to good effect in the recent past.

The NCSE has advised that they have experienced difficulties in securing special class or school placements in certain areas in Co Cork, but that they are continuing to work as a matter of urgency in accommodating students who require such placements.

The NCSE's Local Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) are available to assist and advise both schools and the parents of children with special educational needs. Parents may contact SENOs directly using the contact details available at: <https://ncse.ie/regional-services-contact-list>.

The local SENO remains available to offer further advice and assistance, and I would en-

courage the parents of the child referred to by the Deputy to continue to engage directly with them, as required.

### **Teaching Qualifications**

112. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the distanced teaching work newly qualified teachers are doing online at home will qualify towards their probation process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9707/20]

120. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address the commitment given to NQTs by the Teaching Council that no NQT would be disadvantaged in their progress through the Droichead process due to school closures after the lockdown to manage the Covid-19 crisis and that no NQT will be required to begin the Droichead process from day one due to school closures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9802/20]

127. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied) in relation to the completion of the Droichead programme in the context of primary school teaching; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9848/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 112, 120 and 127 together.

The Teaching Council is the statutory body with responsibility for professional standards at all stages of the teaching career. It has established standards for post-qualification professional practice, as set out in Droichead, the integrated professional induction framework for newly qualified primary and post-primary teachers.

Due to Covid-19 and the unprecedented situation of school closures, on May 22nd last the Teaching Council announced revised arrangements which provide additional flexibility to support newly qualified teachers (NQTs) engaging in Droichead in 2019/2020 to complete the process. These arrangements balance the core principles of the policy which is the school based supportive process coupled with engagement in additional professional learning activities.

The Council has made a significant concession for NQTs who had not completed the full Droichead process within the minimum period of time by 12 March. This includes the recognition of all elements of Droichead which have been completed up to that date i.e. additional professional learning activities, observations, professional conversations, cluster meetings, Taisce (the professional learning portfolio) and days/hours taught. In normal circumstances this would not be the position.

Droichead as a process is not simply about teaching time. From a professional standards point of view, it requires the agreement of the NQT and the Professional Support Team in the school that a quality induction process has occurred over the minimum period of time specified.

I am, however, also aware of concerns raised regarding a smaller group of NQTs who had not met the minimum time requirement by 12 March. I understand the Teaching Council has just completed a review of their situation and will be communicating directly with those concerned this week.

### **School Accommodation**

113. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will be operating at a temporary location on a greenfield site in Ballycullen, Dublin 24 in September 2020 and will not be operating in its current location in another school for the 2020/2021 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9708/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The school to which the Deputy refers will not operate from a Ballycullen, Dublin 24 location for the start of the 2020/2021 academic year and due to additional accommodation requirements in the schools in which they are currently located it is not possible for them to continue to operate from the existing location.

Interim accommodation for the school will be provided on the Citywest Education Campus for the 2020/2021 academic year.

### **School Staff**

114. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to manage teacher absences through certified illness and leave when schools reopen with regard to the already significant layers of social distancing management and other additional responsibilities if the Covid-19 disease is still spreading; if a plan has been put in place for substitute teachers to be assigned to schools in such cases that is additional to the systems already in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9724/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The general principles to apply to the management of COVID-19 includes the safety and welfare of employees and the minimisation of the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning.

On the 1st May 2020, the Taoiseach announced as part of the “Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business” that schools will commence opening on a phased basis at the beginning of the 2020/2021 academic year.

Because of the diversity of Institutions providing education, the opening of such Institutions needs to be carefully managed and planning has already commenced in my Department. This process includes consultation with stakeholders, takes into account the experience of other countries and the ongoing public health advice. The staffing of schools will be considered as part of this process.

*Question No. 115 answered with Question No. 97.*

### **School Staff**

116. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter regarding schools (details supplied) losing a teacher in September 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9753/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location. The staffing schedule includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals

Board.

The schools referred to have not submitted a staffing appeal to date. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board will next consider appeals in June. The closing date for the receipt of staffing appeals is 15th June.

### Schools Building Projects

117. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made on advancing to the construction phase of the new school buildings for a school (details supplied). [9782/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The major building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) - Detailed Design, which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents.

In December 2019, the Department received the Stage 2(b) submission for this project. In order to expedite the progression of the major building project, the Department authorised the school and its Design Team to commence the pre-qualification process to select a shortlist of contractors in parallel with the Department's review of the Stage 2(b) submission for this project.

The review of the Stage 2(b) submission and the pre-qualification process are currently on-going.

Upon review of the submission my Department will be in contact with the school regarding the further progression of the project at that time.

### Student Grant Scheme

118. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the additional income provided to students that were working part-time and are now in receipt of the pandemic unemployment payment will be factored into their income eligibility for student grants under SUSI in 2021. [9783/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Covid-19 payment will be treated as reckonable income for the SUSI means assessment process. This will mean that the Covid-19 payment will be treated in a similar fashion to other Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection payments (e.g. Jobseekers Benefit & Allowance), thus ensuring a consistency of approach and an equitable treatment of students and their families in the SUSI means assessment process. This approach is entirely consistent with well-established practice by SUSI and is in accordance with the statutory provisions of the scheme.

However, if a student or party to their application experiences a change in circumstances that is not a temporary change and is likely to continue for the foreseeable future they can apply to SUSI to have their application assessed under the change in circumstances provision.

In the case of a change of circumstances all household income, and not just the income of the person experiencing the change, will be assessed/reassessed on the basis of the current year (2020). Any award or adjustment will take effect from the month in which the change occurred. This provision may benefit some students whose income has fallen in 2020 due to Covid-19

issues.

### School Staff

119. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there will be no reduction in teacher numbers in primary schools for the 2020/2021 school year even if there has been a reduction in pupil enrolment in some areas in view of the Covid-19 crisis (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9785/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The redeployment of all surplus permanent/CID holding teachers is the mechanism used to fill teaching posts and is key to the ability of the Department to manage within its payroll budget. The redeployment panels are currently transacting and schools are filling teaching vacancies for the 2020/21 school year.

The National Return to Work Safely Protocol will inform discussions with all education partners so that appropriate guidance for schools is developed and arrangements put in place in time for the new school year.

*Question No. 120 answered with Question No. 112.*

### Special Educational Needs Staff

121. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine correspondence from a school (details supplied) and address the serious concerns raised regarding special needs assistant's allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9803/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Schools have been notified of the arrangements for the allocation of SNA support in respect of students in mainstream classes for 2020/21. The arrangements include the following provisions:

- 2019/20 mainstream class SNA allocations will be frozen, from the date of issue of Circular 0030/2020, and will automatically rollover into the 2020/21 school year. This means that no school will receive an allocation less than that which they have on the date of issue of this Circular and existing SNAs currently in standard SNA posts can continue in these posts for the next school year in the normal way.

- Schools may apply to the NCSE for additionality where they can demonstrate that the current allocation does not meet additional care needs within the mainstream classes in the school. Applications for additionality arising from significant new or emerging additional care needs, which cannot be catered within existing allocations, will be dealt with by way of an exceptional review process.

- A diagnosis of a disability, or a psychological or other professional report, will not be necessary for this process.

- The role of the SNA to support the care needs of students in mainstream classes, as set out in Circular 0030/2014, remains unchanged.

It is expected that schools will review and reprioritise the deployment of SNAs within mainstream settings and allocate resources to ensure those with the greatest level of need receive the greatest level of support. Providing access to SNA support continues to be based on primary care needs as outlined in DES Circular 0030/2014.

Detailed information on the NCSE exceptional review process is published on the NCSE website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

The NCSE will endeavour to respond to all applications for exceptional review received prior to 22nd May 2020 by 30th June 2020 and in that regard, it will prioritise applications from schools with no current SNA allocation and developing schools.

Applications for an Exceptional Review received after 22 May 2020 will continue to be processed once all other applications have been completed.

The exceptional review process for mainstream allocations will be available to schools throughout the 2020/21 school year.

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

A new frontloading model for allocating Special Needs Assistants to primary and post primary schools for students in mainstream classes only was to be introduced in the 2020/21 school year as part of the phased roll out of the School Inclusion Model (SIM). Due to the disruption caused by the Covid-19 public health crisis, the introduction of the model has been deferred for one year.

## Language Schools

122. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if English as a foreign language courses will be permitted to return to operation sooner than regular primary and secondary school operations in view of the fact that these settings involve the education of adults that may seek to join the workforce and need this qualification as a requirement to work in certain jobs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9813/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am aware of the challenges that are being encountered in the English language education (ELE) sector and the substantial impact that the Covid-19 outbreak has had on students, teachers and providers in this sector.

On May 1st, the Taoiseach announced the roadmap for the gradual lifting of the current Covid-19 restrictions. This roadmap sets out a number of phases with the re-opening of the wider education system contained in the later phases to coincide broadly with the beginning of the new academic year. There is no proposal at present to allow reopening of the ELE sector in advance of any other element of the educational sector and it is important to note that all decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of restrictions as envisaged in phases 2 to 5 of the roadmap will be balanced and guided in the first instance by the public health advice at that time.

My Department will engage with provider representatives within the English language education sector as they develop more detailed plans for the re-opening of their premises. It is to be expected that ensuring the health and safety of staff and students will be central to the provider's plans and that necessary consultations will be undertaken as part of their development. It is anticipated that the "Return to Work Safely Protocol" recently published jointly by the

Department of Health and the Department of Enterprise, Business & Innovation, and designed to support measures being put in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace will be used to inform these plans. Experience of the re-opening of educational facilities in other jurisdictions will also be relevant.

During this current period of closure, it is my understanding that English language education providers have continued to provide services to their students via alternative arrangements including the delivery of classes online.

### **Schools Building Projects**

123. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the new building school for a school (details supplied). [9817/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The major project for the construction of the new school building for the school referred to by the deputy is at an advanced stage of the tender process and my Department is currently awaiting the return of the supplementary tender report.

Subject to no issues arising, it is envisaged that construction should commence following the finalisation of the tender process with a contract duration of approximately 20 months.

The tender process for the provision of the second phase of the temporary accommodation on the existing school site has completed and the Letter of Acceptance has issued.

### **Schools Building Projects**

124. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the agreed new building for a school (details supplied). [9818/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Major Building Project for the school referred to by the deputy is included in my Department's Construction Programme which is being delivered under the National Development Plan. The project in question is at Stage 1 of architectural planning which entails preliminary design of site and location suitability and initial sketch scheme.

A review in 2019 of the demand for post primary provision in the area resulted in an increase in the schedule of accommodation to cater for up to 1300 pupils. The Department met with the school and the increase was accepted by the school. Agreement was also obtained from the school patron on a reservation of space on the school site for future educational development.

Initially, it had been anticipated that this project would be delivered in the form of an extension and refurbishment. However, through ongoing engagement with the school, its Board of Management and Trustees (CEIST), the option of a New Build is currently being explored by the Department.

The Design Team has been instructed to provide an initial sketch scheme for a 1300 pupil school, and submit to the Department for review.

Following this review my Department will then be in contact with the Board of Management of the school with regard to the progression of the project.

## Schools Building Projects

125. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the agreed new school to replace a school (details supplied) in order to provide needed spaces for Newbridge, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9819/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I can confirm for the Deputy that my Department is currently undertaking a site identification exercise in order to appraise suitable sites for the school to which you refer. This exercise is being conducted in line with current restrictions in place due to the covid-19 pandemic, nevertheless, my officials are making progress on the exercise. The exercise is considering options in Kildare & Newbridge. Due to obvious commercial sensitivities, I cannot elaborate any further at this juncture but please rest assured that the project is being given due consideration and attention.

## Language Schools

126. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) in relation to the Covid-19 Working Group for the English language education sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9825/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am aware of the challenges that are being encountered in the English language education sector and the substantial impact that the Covid-19 outbreak has had on students, teachers and providers.

My Department recognises the important role that teachers play in this sector and the support they have provided and continue to provide for students at this time. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, officials from my Department have had engagement with the Trade Union in question and teacher representatives where they have outlined their concerns.

The working group for the English language education sector has been established with a remit to address the issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic with a priority and focus placed in the first instance on issues affecting students as well as other issues arising e.g. how stakeholders can work together to promote the sector as international markets move into recovery. The working group is comprised of key sectoral stakeholders including officials from my Department, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Enterprise Ireland, as well as lead sectoral representative bodies of providers and learner advocates.

In respect of the safe re-opening of English language education providers, the timeline and arrangements for this will be guided by public health advice applicable at a given time. On May 1st, the Taoiseach announced the roadmap for the gradual lifting of the current Covid-19 restrictions. This roadmap sets out a number of phases with the re-opening of the wider education system contained in the later phases to coincide broadly with the beginning of the new academic year.

My Department will engage with provider representatives within the English language education sector as they develop more detailed plans for the re-opening of their premises on this basis. It is to be expected that ensuring the health and safety of staff and students will be central to the provider's plans and that necessary consultations will be undertaken as part of their development. It is anticipated that the "Return to Work Safely Protocol" recently published jointly

by the Department of Health and the Department of Enterprise, Business & Innovation, and designed to support measures being put in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace will be used to inform these plans. Experience of the re-opening of educational facilities in other areas and jurisdictions will also be relevant.

The coordination of the response of the wider education system to the Covid-19 outbreak is a substantial challenge. In this context, the Department has found the current structure of the working group to be effective in delivering on its remit and, while the Department remains open to views, there are no current plans to expand membership. To date, the Group has facilitated an appropriate level of engagement with stakeholders alongside the ability to identify and help resolve issues as they arise. The Department and the members of the Working Group will continue to engage with external parties, to seek to exchange information where relevant and address queries where possible.

*Question No. 127 answered with Question No. 112.*

*Question No. 128 answered with Question No. 97.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

129. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if arrangements for the return to national schools in September 2020 are in place; and when the boards of managements will receive details of same in view of the fact they will need to receive this information in advance in order to make adequate preparations. [9854/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** To assist with the development of contingency plans for the re-opening and operation of schools in an environment that may require social distancing and other public health requirements, my Department is engaging with education partners and relevant stakeholders. This work will be based on the National Return to Work Safely Protocol that was published by Government and will also be informed by guidance and experience from other jurisdictions.

A core objective of the contingency plans will be to ensure that schools and other education settings can reopen and operate in a safe manner that is consistent with public health advice. Following consultation, currently underway with the education partners, guidance will issue to schools as soon as possible on the logistical and curricular arrangements to be put in place to facilitate the phased re-opening of schools. This guidance will provide a framework for individual schools to develop plans for the re-opening of school in accordance with their own circumstances, the context and needs of their staff and students and in compliance with public health guidelines.

### **State Examinations**

130. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students that did not engage in the predictive grading online registration; the way in which this figure compares to students that did not present for exams in each of the years 2017 to 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9894/20]

202. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps which will be taken regarding the 994 students that failed to sign into the portal in time for the predictive grade deadline; and the way in which this compares to previous years for leaving certificate

non-sits. [10356/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 130 and 202 together.

The Calculated Grades Student Portal opened for registration to Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied students on Tuesday 26 May. All Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied students were required to register on the portal between 10am Tuesday 26 May and 10pm Thursday 28 May. The deadline for registration was subsequently extended to 12pm on Friday 29 May.

Every school was sent information on the portal and how to register, and was asked to circulate this to students and to parents and guardians. If a student had trouble getting access online, helpline support was made available from midday on Tuesday 26 May, and every effort was made to contact students to encourage them to register.

If an individual student has a particular difficulty in registering and has not been able to do so, my Department will look sympathetically at such circumstances where the student makes contact with the Department.

In each of the last three years (2017-19), around 800 students have been entered for Leaving Certificate examinations but have not sat the examinations. As of Friday 5 June, 878 students had yet to register via the Calculated Grades Student Portal. I want to thank the more than 98% of students who have registered to date and assure the Deputies that the Calculated Grades Executive Office continues to attempt to engage with those students yet to register.

### **Public Sector Pay**

131. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) that qualified here and is registered with the Teaching Council and worked in Bahrain for a number of years, can apply for incremental credit; if there is a circular with more information in relation to this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9916/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The terms and conditions of employment of teachers may be considered under the auspices of the Teachers’ Conciliation Council (TCC). The Council is comprised of representatives of teachers, school management, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Education & Skills and is chaired by an Official of the Workplace Relations Commission.

The criteria for the award of incremental credit to post-primary teachers is set out in Circulars 29/2007 & 29/2010 which were published following consideration by the TCC. In line with the circulars, teaching service given in a private post-primary school outside the European Union does not qualify for the award of incremental credit.

### **Special Educational Needs Staff**

132. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will restore the allocation of special needs assistants to five, as it was in September 2019, instead of the reduced amount of four after a review was carried out a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9917/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Schools have been notified of

the arrangements for the allocation of SNA support in respect of students in mainstream classes for 2020/21. The arrangements include the following provisions:

- 2019/20 mainstream class SNA allocations will be frozen, from the date of issue of Circular 0030/2020, and will automatically rollover into the 2020/21 school year. This means that no school will receive an allocation less than that which they have on the date of issue of this Circular and existing SNAs currently in standard SNA posts can continue in these posts for the next school year in the normal way.

- Schools may apply to the NCSE for additionality where they can demonstrate that the current allocation does not meet additional care needs within the mainstream classes in the school. Applications for additionality arising from significant new or emerging additional care needs, which cannot be catered within existing allocations, will be dealt with by way of an exceptional review process.

- A diagnosis of a disability, or a psychological or other professional report, will not be necessary for this process.

- The role of the SNA to support the care needs of students in mainstream classes, as set out in Circular 0030/2014, remains unchanged.

It is expected that schools will review and reprioritise the deployment of SNAs within mainstream settings and allocate resources to ensure those with the greatest level of need receive the greatest level of support. Providing access to SNA support continues to be based on primary care needs as outlined in DES Circular 0030/2014.

Detailed information on the NCSE exceptional review process is published on the NCSE website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

Where schools wish to seek a review of their existing SNA allocation they should apply via the NCSE exceptional review process.

### **Special Educational Needs Staff**

133. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to increase the number of special needs assistants across the State to help with the potential fallout from Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9919/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Budget 2020 has provided for 1,064 additional SNAs posts, for allocation in 2020, which will bring the total number of SNA posts in schools to over 17,000 in 2020, an increase of over 60% since 2011.

Schools have been notified of the arrangements for the allocation of SNA support in respect of students in mainstream classes for 2020/21. The arrangements include the following provisions:

- 2019/20 mainstream class SNA allocations will be frozen, from the date of issue of Circular 0030/2020, and will automatically rollover into the 2020/21 school year. This means that no school will receive an allocation less than that which they have on the date of issue of this Circular and existing SNAs currently in standard SNA posts can continue in these posts for the next school year in the normal way.

- Schools may apply to the NCSE for additionality where they can demonstrate that the current allocation does not meet additional care needs within the mainstream classes in the school.

Applications for additionality arising from significant new or emerging additional care needs, which cannot be catered within existing allocations, will be dealt with by way of an exceptional review process.

- A diagnosis of a disability, or a psychological or other professional report, will not be necessary for this process.

- The role of the SNA to support the care needs of students in mainstream classes, as set out in Circular 0030/2014, remains unchanged.

It is expected that schools will review and reprioritise the deployment of SNAs within mainstream settings and allocate resources to ensure those with the greatest level of need receive the greatest level of support. Providing access to SNA support continues to be based on primary care needs as outlined in DES Circular 0030/2014.

Detailed information on the NCSE exceptional review process is published on the NCSE website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

Applications for an Exceptional Review received after 22 May 2020 will continue to be processed once all other applications have been completed.

The exceptional review process for mainstream allocations will be available to schools throughout the 2020/21 school year.

A new frontloading model for allocating Special Needs Assistants to primary and post primary schools for students in mainstream classes only was to be introduced in the 2020/21 school year as part of the phased roll out of the School Inclusion Model (SIM). Due to the disruption caused by the Covid-19 public health crisis, the introduction of the model has been deferred for one year.

### **Schools Building Projects**

134. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when works will commence on a new school building for a school (details supplied); when the construction of same will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9926/20]

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

My Department is currently finalising the accommodation brief for the school in question and will be in further contact with the school authority when this process has been completed.

### **Language Schools**

135. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the timeframe for the reopening of English language schools; the supports his Department can provide to the sector in view of the impact of Covid-19 on it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9927/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is conscious of the issues in the English language education sector arising from the Covid-19 outbreak and

has established a specific Working Group for this sector. This group is comprised of representatives of relevant Government Departments and representatives of both students and English language education providers.

As part of the wider Covid-19 response, the Government has introduced a number of measures to support businesses at this time. These measures include a temporary wages subsidy scheme to facilitate employers to keep employees on the payroll throughout the Covid-19 pandemic in order to retain this link for when business increases after the crisis. This scheme is administered by the Revenue Commissioners and is available to providers in the English language education sector. Additionally for those staff in this sector who have lost their jobs because of the pandemic, they are eligible to apply for the Government's Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment.

In addition to the above, providers in this sector will be eligible to apply, where appropriate, for further Covid-19 business supports made available by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation via Enterprise Ireland and through its network of Local Enterprise Offices.

In respect of the safe re-opening of English language education providers, the timeline and arrangements for this will be guided by public health advice applicable at a given time. On May 1st, the Taoiseach announced the roadmap for the gradual lifting of the current Covid-19 restrictions. This roadmap sets out a number of phases with the re-opening of the wider education system contained in the later phases to coincide broadly with the beginning of the new academic year.

My Department will engage with provider representatives within the English language education sector as they develop more detailed plans for the re-opening of their premises on this basis. It is to be expected that ensuring the health and safety of staff and students will be central to the provider's plans and that necessary consultations will be undertaken as part of their development. It is anticipated that the "Return to Work Safely Protocol" recently published jointly by the Department of Health and the Department of Enterprise, Business & Innovation, and designed to support measures being put in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace will be used to inform these plans.

Experience of the re-opening of educational facilities in other areas and jurisdictions will also be relevant.

### **Special Educational Needs**

136. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide ASD units to secondary schools and feeder schools in Blessington, County Wicklow. [9931/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Ensuring that every child has a suitable school placement is a key objective of my Department.

Significant resources are allocated each year to ensure that appropriate supports are available for children with special educational needs.

Since 2011, the number of special classes in mainstream schools has increased almost three-fold, from 548 to 1,618 for the 2019/2020 school year. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has responsibility for coordinating and advising on the education provision for children nationwide; has well established structures in place for engaging with schools and parents; and seeks to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who

have been identified as needing special class placements.

167 new special classes were established nationally for 2019/20 school year. There are currently 55 classes for ASD in Co Wicklow, of which 11 are post primary.

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

It is open to any school to make an application to the NCSE for the establishment of a specialised provision and where sanctioned, a range of supports, including capital funding, is made available to the school. My Department works closely with the NCSE in this regard.

Normally, special class and school places are established with the full cooperation of the schools in areas where they are required. However there are some parts of the country where the NCSE has faced challenges in getting schools and their patrons to voluntarily agree to provide special class or school places. I know that this can cause much anguish for parents and families involved.

As Minister for Education and Skills, I have power under Section 37A of the Education Act 1998 to direct a school to provide additional provision where all reasonable efforts have failed. This legislation has been used to good effect in the recent past.

The NCSE advise that they are not aware of any specific issues with special class provision in the Blessington area in Co Wicklow. Where a parent has concerns about a placement for their child, I would encourage them to make contact with their local SENO who will be able to assist and advise.

### **Education Policy**

137. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for blended learning for primary school and secondary school pupils for the recommencement of the 2020/2021 academic year in September 2020; the ratio of days in school to online learning at home there will be; if children with special educational needs that are better suited to the in-school routine will be given preference to attend school instead of using online learning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9942/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** To assist with the development of contingency plans for the re-opening and operation of schools in an environment that may require social distancing and other public health requirements, my Department is engaging with relevant stakeholders and experts from within the education sector and the health sector. This work will be based on the National Return to Work Safely Protocol that was published by Government and will also be informed by guidance and experience from other jurisdictions.

A core objective of the contingency plans will be to ensure that schools and other education settings can reopen and operate in a safe manner that is consistent with public health advice. Following consultation, currently underway with the education partners, guidance will issue to schools as soon as possible on the logistical and curricular arrangements to be put in place to facilitate the phased re-opening of schools. This guidance will provide a framework for individual schools to develop plans for the re-opening of school in accordance with their own circumstances, the context and needs of their staff and students and in compliance with public health guidelines.

In the interim, my Department has provided a range of support and guidance for schools on

how to provide for the continuing education for pupils over the current school closure period.

Supports are provided to schools and teachers engaged in distance learning and these are available at

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/continuity-of-schooling/continuity-of-schooling.html#schools>

In addition to the general guidance that has been provided for schools, additional support material has also been provided specifically on how schools should provide for the continuity of education for children with special educational needs. This guidance is available at:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/continuity-of-schooling/continuity-of-schooling.html#schools>

The guidance notes that there is a particular need for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) to have regular, ongoing schooling. While all pupils need to be supported to maintain their engagement in learning, those with SEN are among those who need most support at this time. Examples of strategies and measures to ensure that the needs of pupils with SEN are catered for, are provided in the guidance documents and a range of resources are also identified for parents.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is also providing a range of online resources for parents and teachers to support home learning for children with special educational needs during the Covid 19 restrictions.

Details of the full range of supports that the NCSE provides for teachers and parents is available at: <https://ncse.ie/online-resources>

While recognising the difficulty that school closure has had for parents and pupils, particularly in relation to pupils with special educational needs, my Department will continue to support and encourage schools to provide as much continuity of education as possible for such pupils, while continuing to engage with public health officials and stakeholders in relation to reopening schools in a safe manner that is consistent with public health advice.

*Question No. 138 answered with Question No. 97.*

### **School Accommodation**

139. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the engagement his Department has had in relation to concerns regarding the school building and the prefabricated temporary accommodation at a school (details supplied); the steps taken following the engagement; his plans for the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9957/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has no current record of receiving an application, for capital funding, from the school in question.

Schools which identify that they have a shortfall in accommodation may apply for funding under my Department's Additional School Accommodation Scheme (ASA). The application form and information relating to this scheme are available on my Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

Furthermore, since mid-2018 all schools approved for additional accommodation under the ASA scheme are also having necessary prefabs replaced as part of their additional accommodation project.

The purpose of the scheme is to ensure that essential classroom accommodation is available to cater for pupils enrolled each year and where the need cannot be met by the school's existing accommodation.

### Post-Leaving Certificate Courses

140. **Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which students that are taking part in a post-leaving certificate course and have yet to complete their practical exams due to Covid-19 restrictions are to be graded if their teachers have received no instruction from his Department to carry out predictive grading; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that these students are fearful this lack of clarity will hinder them trying to secure a place in third-level. [9971/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** Further Education and Training providers have made proposals for the undertaking of practical assessment activity in the near future. These proposals are being considered by my Department and SOLAS, with appropriate public health advice. Providers will communicate arrangements to any learners affected as soon as possible.

### Cycle to Work Scheme

141. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by his Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9981/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The terms of the Cycle to Work Scheme are outlined in circular 66/2017 issued by my Department in respect of teachers and non-teaching staff of Primary, Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive Schools.

The information requested by the Deputy on the number of applications processed for teaching and non teaching staff paid on payrolls operated by my Department is set out in the following table.

#### The number of Cycle to Work Applications Processed

Years	Number of applications
2010	961
2011	3,985
2012	2,692
2013	2,553
2014	2,650
2015	2,577
2016	2,134
2017	2,114

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2018	1,877
2019	1,918
2020 year to date	856
Total	24,317

In addition, my Department also operates a Cycle to Work Scheme for admin staff and the number of applications under this scheme is set out in table 2.

YEAR	Number.
2010	93
2011	99
2012	75
2013	69
2014	63
2015	51
2016	62
2017	39
2018	50
2019	49
2020	15
TOTAL	665

The costs borne by my Department are in respect of the administration of the scheme. The information with regard to these costs is being compiled and they will be forwarded separately to the Deputy.

### **Schools Building Projects**

142. **Deputy Roderic O’Gorman** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the temporary buildings for a school (details supplied) will be ready by the start of the academic year 2020/2021; the schedule for the completion of the permanent building for the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10008/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** A contractor has been appointed to deliver the interim accommodation on the permanent site for the school to which the Deputy refers. My Department is liaising with the school Authority on the programme for delivery of this accommodation and any contingency arrangements if necessary in light of Covid 19.

The tender stage for the permanent build is due to issue shortly it is envisaged that construction for the permanent project will commence in quarter 4 2020.

### **Special Educational Needs**

143. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an additional year or term of school will be provided to those that attend a special school for their secondary education and that missed the extensive learning and training that happens towards the end of the year to prepare students for work or finishing school; if the extension of enrolment conditions for persons over 18 years of age can be widened further than those listed in the letter sent to

schools on 11 March 2020 due to the inability to complete this end of school training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10019/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Special schools funded by my Department are classified as primary national schools and are intended, in accordance with the provisions of Rule 64(1) of the Rules for National Schools, to cater for children and young persons with special educational needs from the age of 4 years until the end of the school year in which they reach their 18th year.

Special schools may however seek approval from my Department for an exemption from Rule 64(1) in respect of students over the age of 18 who are pursuing courses leading to accreditation on the National Qualifications Framework (e.g. Junior Certificate/LCA/FETAC 3).

A request for an exemption from Rule 64(1) can only be made by a school where:

1. The student is pursuing a course leading to accreditation on the National Qualifications Framework (e.g. Junior Certificate/Leaving Certificate Applied/FETAC 3)
2. The student requires one additional year in order to complete their course
3. Retaining the student in the school for another school year will not prevent a younger pupil being enrolled there
4. Plans are in place to transition the student to a post-school setting at the end of the additional school year

Special schools are invited each year to make applications for exemptions from Rule 64(1) in respect of pupils who meet the above criteria. Where the criteria are met, my Department will approve the exemptions.

Some people with a disability, over the age of 18, and who have complex needs, may require specialised support throughout their lives. Ongoing care and support services within the community, in a post school setting, are provided by voluntary or statutory organisations. Responsibility for such care and support rests with the HSE.

Special school staff typically have extensive engagement with parents, HSE multi-disciplinary teams and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) which involves planning for the child's future, including options for further education, training, employment or other placement options subject to the child's abilities, including the young person's transition to adult services when they reach the age of 18 years.

It is important to note that students with complex special educational needs who transfer to adult service settings can continue to participate in educational programmes through further adult educational programmes or in adult settings which are allocated resources towards educational provision.

Transition between schools and to post school settings can be a difficult time for students with special educational needs and their families and more so this year due to the COVID-19 crisis.

My Department acknowledges that school level transition planning for these students will have been well advanced prior to the school closures.

During school closures due to COVID 19, supports are provided to schools and teachers engaged in distance learning and these are available at <https://www.education.ie/en/covid-19/#14>

In addition to the general guidance that has been provided for schools, additional support material has also been provided specifically on how schools should provide for the continuity of education for children with special educational needs.

My Department will continue to engage with schools where they have submitted applications for exemptions from Rule 64(1), in order to retain pupils past their 18th birthday. Where such exemptions are sought specifically because of the school closures, my Department will engage with schools individually on how continuity of education and post-school transition planning have been implemented during the closures, in line with the guidelines for pupils with special educational needs.

### **Special Educational Needs**

144. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of his plans for the July provision. [10020/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is planning to provide a summer education programme for children with significant special educational needs as soon as it is safe to do so and in accordance with public health advice.

It is intended that this programme will be similar to the July Provision of previous years.

The Summer Education Programme will take place for children with significant special educational needs enrolled in special schools, special classes and mainstream classes.

The programme will be reliant on schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) choosing to participate on a voluntary basis.

Planning is under way and an announcement will be made shortly.

### **Departmental Correspondence**

145. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if contact will be made with a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10040/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Correspondence has issued to the person referred to by the Deputy on the 5th June 2020.

### **Teaching Council of Ireland**

146. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** 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. [10044/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The core function of the re-deployment arrangements is to facilitate the redeployment of all surplus permanent teachers to other schools that have vacancies. Thereafter, schools are required under the panel arrangements to fill permanent vacancies from supplementary panels comprised of eligible fixed-term (temporary/substitute) and part-time teachers.

The arrangements for panel access for fixed term (temporary/substitute) and part-time teach-

ers for the 2020/21 school year are set out in Department Circular 0064/2019.

I understand there was an issue with the Teaching Council record of the applicant concerned which has since been updated and the teacher has been informed of her eligibility for the Supplementary Panel.

### **State Examinations**

147. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the provisions in place for mature leaving certificate external candidates; and if, in circumstances in which an external candidate is being tutored, if the tutor will be permitted to submit a predicted grade on behalf of the student. [10050/20]

175. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10192/20]

206. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if special arrangements have been put in place to facilitate students due to sit leaving certificate examinations this summer that are not presently enrolled in a second-level educational institution and may be unable to obtain a calculated grade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10434/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 147, 175 and 206 together.

I published detailed guidance on calculated grades on 21 May. The document sets out information on the process of estimating marks for students to receive calculated grades. The document, together with Frequently Asked Questions, are available on [gov.ie/leavingcertificate](http://gov.ie/leavingcertificate).

Where a student is not connected to a school and is studying one or more subjects independently outside of school, the Department will look at such situations on a case by case basis and will be flexible in accepting estimated marks and rankings. Every effort will be made to provide an estimated mark where there is sufficient credible evidence of the student's achievement. Students will be able to use this calculated grade in the same way as a Leaving Certificate grade to satisfy minimum entry requirements.

Where it is not possible to provide a calculated grade students will have the opportunity to sit the 2020 Leaving Certificate examination at a later date when it is safe to do so.

The Calculated Grades Executive Office is currently in direct contact with external students who are taking subjects outside of school, with a view to determining on an individual basis whether it is possible to include them in the calculated grades model.

### **Special Educational Needs**

148. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there has been further development on the summer development programme which will serve as an alternative to the July provision in 2020. [10051/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is planning to provide a summer education programme for children with significant special educational needs

as soon as it is safe to do so and in accordance with public health advice.

It is intended that this programme will be similar to the July Provision of previous years.

The Summer Education Programme will take place for children with significant special educational needs enrolled in special schools, special classes and mainstream classes.

The programme will be reliant on schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) choosing to participate on a voluntary basis.

Planning is under way and an announcement will be made shortly.

### **Schools Building Projects**

149. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of plans to provide a school (details supplied) with temporary classrooms for the coming year; if the planning application will be through in time to provide these classrooms; if not, the emergency planning powers available to address this issue; if a project manager has been appointed for this work; his plans if these temporary classrooms will not be ready in September 2020; and the status of the location for the permanent school. [10060/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** A Project Manager has been appointed to assist my Department in the delivery of interim accommodation for the new schools to be established in 2020 and 2021. A planning application for the school to which the Deputy refers was lodged with the relevant Local Authority on 20 May 2020 and a decision is awaited. The tendering process for the procurement of prefabricated accommodation for the project is currently ongoing.

It is envisaged that the school will open in suitable interim accommodation for the 2020/2021 academic year. In anticipation of any potential delays on the decision on the planning application due to the current Covid-19 situation, contingency accommodation will be made available for the school on the Citywest Education Campus on a short-term basis until such time as the project for its planned interim accommodation is completed.

The permanent project for the school has recently been assigned for delivery under my Department's Design and Build Programme. This delivery programme uses a professional external Project Manager to progress the project through the relevant stages of architectural planning and construction. The project will now commence Architectural Planning. The permanent site for the project located at Coolamber Drive, Rathcoole is in the ownership of my Department.

### **Schools Building Projects**

150. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the land behind the temporary classrooms for a school (details supplied) will now be used for temporary classrooms for a new educate together school; the reason the land is not being used for a permanent building for the school; the reason there has been no communication with the school on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10061/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The permanent building for the Gaelscoil to which the Deputy refers will also be progressed at the same location. The school has been advised that its permanent building project has been assigned for delivery under my Department's Design and Build Programme. This delivery programme uses a profes-

sional external Project Manager to progress the project through the relevant stages of architectural planning and construction. The project will now commence Architectural Planning.

My Department was in correspondence with the School in March 2020 outlining the position and advised that a meeting would be arranged with the School to discuss the matter. Unfortunately, due to the current Covid-19 situation it has not yet been possible to make such arrangements, a meeting will be facilitated as soon as circumstances allow.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

151. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if supports will be put in place for seasonal workers (details supplied) that are out of work as a direct result of Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10077/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

### **Schools Building Projects**

152. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the schools in County Kildare that have received funding as part of the 2020 capital funding allocation for development works; and the stages they are at. [10081/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department's website shows the current position on all school projects on the Capital Programme, as well as listing the schools that have had large-scale projects completed from 2010 to date.

These are listed on a county basis. The information is available at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) and is updated regularly.

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

153. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprenticeship places that were taken up in County Kildare in 2018, 2019 and to date in 2020, by sector. [10085/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** There was a total of 212 apprentices registered by employers with an address in County Kildare in 2018, 262 in 2019 and 100 to date in 2020. The breakdown of these by sector is set out in the following table.

Apprentices registered by Employers with address in County Kildare in 2018, 2019 and 2020 ytd

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Trade	2018	2019	2020 ytd
Accounting Technician	2	2	0
Agricultural Mechanics	1	0	0
Auctioneering and Property Services	2	2	1
Brick and Stonelaying	2	3	1
Butcher	0	1	0
Carpentry and Joinery	32	35	10
Chef de Partie	1	0	0
Commis Chef	1	1	0
Construction Plant Fitting	8	6	11
Electrical	61	82	37
Electrical Instrumentation	2	5	0
Electronic Security Systems	0	1	0
Farriery	0	1	0
Heavy Vehicle Mechanics	11	8	2
Industrial Electrical Engineer	1	1	0
Insurance Practitioner	0	2	0
Logistics Associate	1	6	0
Mechanical Automation & Maintenance Fitting	9	8	2
Metal Fabrication	10	9	3
Motor Mechanics	21	18	9
Network Engineer Associate	0	1	0
OEM Engineer	0	2	0
Painting and Decorating	0	1	0
Pipefitting	0	1	1
Plastering	1	1	0
Plumbing	25	33	14
Polymer Processing Technology	0	1	0
Refrigeration and Air Conditioning	10	17	2
Retail Supervision	0	1	4

Trade	2018	2019	2020 ytd
Software Developer Associate	1	0	0
Telecommunications and Data Network Technician	0	0	1
Toolmaking	1	1	0
Vehicle Body Repairs	1	1	0
Wood Manufacturing and Finishing	8	11	2
Grand Total	212	262	100

### Student Grant Scheme

154. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the eligibility criteria for SUSI grants will be changed to take account of changed financial circumstances that parents of students are experiencing presently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10089/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter for the centralised student grant awarding authority SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) to determine.

The Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment will not affect student grants in the academic year 2019/20. Students will continue to receive their maintenance grants as normal and the duration or value of the grant will not change.

For the 20/21 academic year student grant applications will be assessed based on gross income from all sources for the period 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2019.

However, if a student or party to their application experiences a change in circumstances that is not a temporary change and is likely to continue for the foreseeable future they can apply to SUSI to have their application assessed under the change in circumstances provision.

In the case of a change of circumstances all household income, and not just the income of the person experiencing the change, will be assessed/reassessed on the basis of the current year (2020). Any award or adjustment will take effect from the month in which the change occurred. This provision may benefit some students whose income has fallen in 2020 due to Covid-19 issues.

SUSI's online application process for student grant applications for the 2020/21 academic year opened on 23rd April, 2020. Students are advised to submit their renewal student grant application as soon as possible. The priority closing dates for the 2020/21 academic year are 11th June 2020 for renewal applicants and 9th July 2020 for new applicants. Further information in relation to student grant assistance is available from SUSI's website, [www.susi.ie](http://www.susi.ie). The telephone number for SUSI's Helpdesk is 0761 087 874.

My Department is fully aware of the difficulties being experienced by students and their families as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A working group on mitigating educational disadvantage is supporting on-going responses to what is an evolving situation, to ensure the continuation of crucial funding sources such as SUSI grants, the 1916 Bursary Scheme, the

Student Assistant Fund, Fund for Students with a disability and other allowances. All stakeholders in this group have worked to support learners without access to sufficient technology and to ensure the continuation of services offered by access and disability offices, guidance counsellors and counselling services.

Students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists full-time and part-time students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Details of this fund are available from the Access Office in the third level institution attended. Institutions have the autonomy to maximise the flexibility in the Student Assistance Fund to enable HEIs to support students during the COVID-19 situation.

In addition, tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education. Further information on this tax relief is available from students' local Tax Offices or from the Revenue Commissioners website, [www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie)

### **State Examinations**

**155. Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students that recently took their HPAT exams; his views on whether these exams took place in and around the time of the pre-examinations those students with an ambition to study medicine would have focused more on the HPAT than the pre-leaving certificate; his further views on whether these students are now at a distinct disadvantage in view of the recent announcement that their calculated grades will be partially based on those pre-results; his plans to provide equity for these students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10093/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) independently administers the HPAT on behalf of the universities' medical schools and the RCSI. Neither I nor my Department has a function in the administration of the HPAT, and my Department does not hold information in relation to the number of students taking the HPAT.

I published detailed guidance for schools on calculated grades on 21 May. The document sets out information on the process of estimating marks for students to receive calculated grades, and this has been sent to all schools. The document, together with Frequently Asked Questions, are available on my Department's website.

In arriving at an estimated mark for each student, teachers are asked to use their professional judgement, drawing on existing records and available evidence. Teachers will use a number of records in assessing a student's performance and progress; for example, classwork and homework; class assessments; examinations in school at Christmas or summer, mock exams and also coursework. They will not be simply passing on results from mock examinations or other tests and the estimated mark will not be based on any one assessment or piece of coursework.

*Question No. 156 answered with Question No. 97.*

### **Schools Building Projects**

**157. Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application

for additional accommodation by a school (details supplied) in County Kerry will be examined. [10105/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is currently assessing an application, from the school in question, for capital funding.

Officials have been communicating with the school authority and additional information sought has now been received. The information is being reviewed and the school authority will be informed of a decision in relation to this application shortly.

### **Special Educational Needs**

158. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address matters raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10112/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Ensuring that every child has a suitable school placement is a key objective of my Department. Significant resources are allocated each year to ensure that appropriate supports are available for children with special educational needs.

Since 2011, the number of special classes in mainstream schools has increased almost three-fold, from 548 to 1,618 for the 2019/2020 school year. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has responsibility for coordinating and advising on the education provision for children nationwide; has well established structures in place for engaging with schools and parents; and seeks to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

167 new special classes were established nationally for 2019/20 school year.

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

It is open to any school to make an application to the NCSE for the establishment of a specialised provision and where sanctioned, a range of supports, including capital funding, is made available to the school. The Department of Education and Skills works closely with the NCSE in this regard.

Normally, special class and school places are established with the full cooperation of the schools in areas where they are required. However there are some parts of the country where the NCSE has faced challenges in getting schools and their patrons to voluntarily agree to provide special class or school places. I know that this can cause much anguish for parents and families involved.

As Minister for Education and Skills, I have power under Section 37A of the Education Act 1998 to direct a school to provide additional provision where all reasonable efforts have failed. This legislation has been used to good effect in the recent past.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter in the first instance for the parents/ guardians of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools.

The NCSE team of locally based Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) are avail-

able to assist parents/guardians to identify appropriate educational placements for children with special educational needs and to discuss their child's special educational needs. Parents may contact SENOs directly using the contact details available at: <https://ncse.ie/regional-services-contact-list>

The NCSE works in collaboration with the Educational Welfare Services (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency which is the statutory agency that can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child or can offer assistance where a child is out of school. The local service is delivered through the national network of Educational Welfare Officers (EWO). Contact details are available at <http://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/education-and-welfare/>.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. The selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to publish its enrolment policy.

It should be noted that where a parent/guardian seeks to enrol a child in a school and that school refuses to enrol the child, the school is obliged to inform the parents/guardians of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to the Secretary General of my Department. Only where an appeal under Section 29 is upheld, may the Secretary General of my Department direct a school to enrol a pupil.

I would encourage the family of the child in question to engage with their local SENO on the matter of a placement for their child in September 2021.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

**159. Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is putting in place contingency plans now for the possible scenario by which children are not able to return to school as normal in late August and September 2020; his views on whether there is a need for these plans to include formal timetabled online lessons by all schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10115/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** To assist with the development of contingency plans for the re-opening and operation of schools in an environment that may require social distancing and other public health requirements, my Department is engaging with education partners and relevant stakeholders.

As part of this engagement, each of the education partners were given the opportunity to outline the key issues that they would like to have considered in the context of re-opening schools. The issues raised by the education partners include those referred to by the Deputy in his question.

A core objective of the contingency plans will be to ensure that schools and other education settings can reopen and operate in a safe manner that is consistent with public health advice.

Following consultation, currently underway with the education partners, guidance will issue to schools as soon as possible on the logistical and curricular arrangements to be put in place to facilitate the phased re-opening of schools. This guidance will provide a framework for individual schools to develop plans for the re-opening of school in accordance with their own circumstances, the context and needs of their staff and students and in compliance with public

health guidelines.

### School Transport

160. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will be included in the school transport scheme. [10116/20]

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

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

In the current school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, are 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 €219m in 2019.

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

All school transport services are reviewed over the summer months. Arising from this review, routes may be altered, extended or withdrawn depending on the number and location of eligible children who will be availing of school transport for the following school year.

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

Children who are not eligible for school transport, but who complete the application process on time, will be considered for spare seats that may exist after eligible children have been facilitated; such seats are referred to as concessionary seats.

Further information on the School Transport Scheme is available on the Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

### School Curriculum

161. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a student (details supplied) in County Cork can benefit from online teaching for the 2020/2021 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10118/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** On the 1st May 2020, the Taoiseach announced as part of the "Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business" that schools will commence opening on a phased basis at the beginning of the 2020/2021 academic year.

My Department is currently working with the Education Partners and relevant stakehold-

ers in planning for this re-opening which will be based on public health advice. As part of this engagement, each of the education partners were given the opportunity to outline the key issues that they would like to have considered in the context of re-opening schools.

The issues raised by the education partners will now be worked through in detail as part of the development of the roadmap for reopening schools.

A core objective will be to ensure that schools and other education settings can re-open and operate in a safe manner that is consistent with public health advice.

Further details of how and when schools will reopen and also as to whether some online teaching may continue next year, will be announced shortly.

In the interim, my Department has provided a range of support and guidance for schools on how to provide for the continuing education for pupils over the current school closure period.

Supports are provided to schools and teachers engaged in distance learning and these are available at <https://www.education.ie/en/covid-19/#14>

In addition to the general guidance that has been provided for schools, additional support material has also been provided specifically on how schools should provide for the continuity of education for children with special educational needs. This guidance is available at:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/National-Emergencies-Public-Health-Issues/guidance-continuity-of-schooling-supporting-pupils-with-sen-primary.pdf>

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/National-Emergencies-Public-Health-Issues/guidance-continuity-of-schooling-supporting-students-with-sen-post-primary.pdf>

The guidance notes that there is a particular need for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) to have regular, ongoing schooling. While all pupils need to be supported to maintain their engagement in learning, those with SEN are among those who need most support at this time. Examples of strategies and measures to ensure that the needs of pupils with SEN are catered for, are provided in the guidance documents and a range of resources are also identified for parents.

It sets out the role of schools and teachers in engaging with pupils with SEN and the role of teachers and school leaders to support such pupils. It advises schools as to how best to keep in touch with parents and guardians and how to keep pupils with SEN safe and engaged in the distance learning environment.

The guidance sets out the role of the special education teacher to support children with special educational needs at this time. It notes that the special education teacher's knowledge of their pupils' priority learning needs and agreed targets, as outlined in the pupil support file, will enable them to work with parents and guardians to choose appropriate supports in a remote learning environment.

Special Education Teachers (SETs) are asked to carefully examine how progress on the existing learning targets in student support plans can be reasonably extended by home learning. They are asked to use this knowledge to communicate with the pupils and their parents and guardians and to establish what methods will work best to achieve continuity of learning for the pupils.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is also providing a range of online re-

sources for parents and teachers to support home learning for children with special educational needs during the Covid 19 restrictions.

In addition to the normal supports, the NCSE is providing online resources for children with Special Educational Needs who are at home as a result of the schools' closure.

Supports provided include those relating to general learning and difficulties for pupils with SEN, Curriculum support, speech language and communication, occupational therapy support, guidance around behaviour, and learning and resources on 'Visiting Teachers Support' for a teacher who teaches children with sensory impairment

Details of the full range of supports that the NCSE provides for teachers and parents is available at:

<https://ncse.ie/online-resources>

The Department of Education and Skills' NEPS psychologists have also developed advice and resources for young people to manage and stay well when schools are closed. The NEPS advice & resources for keeping children and young people well during Covid-19 are available at <https://www.education.ie/covid19/wellbeing/>

Guidelines for continued provision of Guidance Counselling and resources available to support practice is available at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Post-Primary-School-Policies/Policies/Guidance-Plan.html>

Guidance for parents of primary school pupils, which sets out what they should expect in relation to engagement in distance learning from schools, and how they can support their child in a home schooling environment is also available at:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/continuity-of-schooling/continuity-of-schooling.html>

I also recently announced that a special €10 million fund is being made available to support the purchase of technology and devices for disadvantaged students, including students with special educational needs.

This is additional to the latest round of funding for ICT under the Digital Strategy for Schools whereby €40m grant funding will be distributed in the coming weeks to eligible. €10m additional funding is also now issuing to schools to support children and young people who are at risk of educational disadvantage during the period of school closures.

While recognising the difficulty that school closure has had for parents and pupils, particularly in relation to pupils with special educational needs, my Department will continue to support and encourage schools to provide as much continuity of education as possible for such pupils, while continuing to engage with public health officials and stakeholders in relation to when schools may re-open and operate in a safe manner that is consistent with public health advice.

### **School Accommodation**

162. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the location a new primary school (details supplied) in County Cork will operate out of for the 2020/2021 school year; the status of the plans for the new school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10119/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Options in relation to the location of interim accommodation to facilitate the school to which the Deputy refers are still under consideration.

It is envisaged that the school will open in suitable interim accommodation for the 2020/2021 academic year.

### **State Examinations**

163. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to support students that are due to take the leaving certificate exam in 2021 in view of the fact they have missed out on a long period of in-class time as a result of Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10124/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Following the school closure in March 2020, my Department published a range of guidance to assist schools and teachers in ensuring continuity of teaching and learning for students as well as supporting their wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This guidance aimed, inter alia, to ensure regular engagement of students in lessons, tasks and learning experiences across the range of curriculum subjects, provision of regular assignments and regular, practical, supportive and customised feedback on work submitted.

Schools adopted various ways to engage with their students in accordance with the technology and broadband resources available in school and at home, including by post, e-mails, communication apps, the school website, use of other digital communicative platforms, including live meetings. Schools were asked to be conscious of pupils who may not have access to online facilities and to adapt approaches so that these pupils continued to have the opportunity to participate in learning.

The aim of these distant learning approaches, the guidance which issued to all schools and the regular engagement with students, was to ensure that students stayed connected with and progressed their learning. These actions will, therefore, have helped to minimise the impact of school closure.

In the context of planning for a return to school which is underway, my Department is, inter alia, considering the curriculum, i.e. what needs to be put in place to support ongoing progression for learners and addressing any shortfall that may result from school closures. Those going into sixth year in post primary schools are a group that will receive a particular focus in the context of preparations for the Leaving Certificate examinations in 2021.

My Department is acutely aware of the challenges faced by students at this difficult time, and how the current circumstances will continue to present challenges into the future. The welfare of students is, and will continue to be, front and centre in all decision making.

### **Student Grant Scheme**

164. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if financial assistance is available for a student (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10129/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** At postgraduate level, eligible

students attending an approved course in an approved institution may receive supports via the statutory based Student Grant Scheme. To qualify for grant support, a grant applicant must meet various criteria including those relating to means, residency, nationality and progression. The decision on eligibility for grant assistance is a matter for the student grant awarding authority SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland).

In relation to fees, postgraduate students pursuing an approved course in Northern Ireland who meet the qualifying conditions for the special rate of grant under the Student Grant Scheme are eligible to have their tuition fees paid up to a maximum fee limit of €6,270; the income threshold for this grant under the Student Grant Scheme 2020 is €24,500.

Alternatively a postgraduate student attending an approved course in Northern Ireland may qualify to have a €2,000 contribution made towards the cost of his/her fees. The income threshold for this payment is €31,500 for the 2020/21 academic year, increasing relative to the number of family dependents.

However, a student or tuition student in receipt of, or eligible for, full assistance towards the tuition fee element from any other source including sponsorship or an award is not eligible for a fee grant under the Student Grant Scheme.

In relation to maintenance grant assistance, the source of funding towards tuition fees is unclear from the information provided. This has a bearing on whether the student may be eligible for maintenance grant assistance under the terms and conditions of the Student Grant Scheme.

In his regard, the student may wish to discuss her particular circumstances and make further enquiries in relation to eligibility for student grant assistance with SUSI's Helpdesk, who may be contacted by telephone at 0761 087 874 or email [support@susi.ie](mailto:support@susi.ie).

In addition, I understand guidance in relation to funding as well as support for students with financial issues is provided by Ulster University via their Student Money Team. Further information in relation to this service is available from: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/wellbeing/student-money-advice>

## State Examinations

165. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the considerations or special exceptions that will be made when predicting grades for leaving certificate students that have had low attendance or struggled with class participation due to mental health related issues. [10147/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I published detailed guidance for schools on calculated grades on 21 May. The document sets out information on the process of estimating marks for students to receive calculated grades, and this has been sent to all schools. The document, together with Frequently Asked Questions, are available on [www.gov.ie/leavingcertificate](http://www.gov.ie/leavingcertificate).

Additional guidance to schools on the avoidance of unconscious bias, interpreting evidence of achievement in the case of students with disabilities, and further guidance on bonus marks that would have applied for answering the written examinations through Irish issued to schools on 28 May.

Teachers are asked to use their professional judgement, drawing on existing records and available evidence to arrive at an estimated mark for each student. Teachers will use a num-

ber of records in assessing a student's performance and progress; for example, classwork and homework; class assessments; examinations in school at Christmas or summer, mock exams and also coursework. They will not be simply passing on results from mock examinations or other tests.

It is assumed that all teachers have a very good knowledge of their students and are aware of their individual learning needs. Teachers are asked to be alert to the issue of unconscious bias and to examine the available evidence objectively, focussing on evidence that is clearly about attainment in the subject and not about other factors, such as absences from school-based summative assessments due to illness, for example.

### **School Transport**

166. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if children and young persons travelling to primary school from offshore islands will be provided with adequate funding in line with the principles of the primary school transport scheme through a mechanism such as a remote area grant to ensure they are not disadvantaged in accessing their education. [10149/20]

**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 current school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, are 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 €219m in 2019.

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

Under the terms of the Primary School Transport Scheme, children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest primary school as determined by the Department of Education/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language. It is open to families residing in off-shore islands to apply for transport under the terms of the School Transport Scheme.

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

If there are specific queries regarding eligibility or availability of services, families are advised to contact their local Bus Éireann office or School Transport Section of my Department.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

167. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has commenced consultation with principals, teachers, parents, students, SNAs and other stakeholders

regarding the reopening of schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10164/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** To assist with the development of contingency plans for the re-opening and operation of schools in an environment that may require social distancing and other public health requirements, my Department is engaging with education partners and relevant stakeholders which include representatives of students, parents, school staff, school leadership and management bodies on planning arrangements for the re-opening of schools in accordance with the timeframe outlined in the “Roadmap for Re-opening Society & Business”.

As part of this engagement, each of the education partners and stakeholders were given the opportunity to outline the key issues that they would like to have considered in the context of re-opening schools.

These will now be worked through in detail as part of the development of contingency plans for re-opening schools. This work will also be informed by guidance and experience from other jurisdictions and from advice published by international bodies such as the World Health Organisation and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

### **School Transport**

168. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when refunds will be issued in respect of school bus fees paid for the period of school closures as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10165/20]

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

In the current school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, are 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 €219m in 2019.

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.

The decision taken by the Government to close schools with effect from 13th March 2020 was taken in the interest of protecting our pupils, their families, teachers and those members of the wider community and is one of the many measures taken to support efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19.

Given that the school transport services have not been available to children from 13th March, it was recently decided that at the end of the current school year a refund for that period of closure will be issued to parents. The Department is currently engaging with Bus Éireann in considering how best to facilitate these refunds.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

169. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if special arrangements will be made for sixth class students to return to their primary schools for a period before

they commence secondary school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10166/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I acknowledge that this is a particularly challenging time for all students, and parents across the education system, but particularly for those students who will be transferring from primary to post-primary school. I recognise that at this stage of the school year, teachers focus in particular on supporting the children who will be leaving the school to start the next stage of their education.

My Department's Continuity of Schooling Group has developed guidance for schools which includes advice on how best 6th class pupils can be supported to make the transition to post-primary school, given that they will not have the opportunity to engage in all of the traditional transition activities that they would normally have engaged in.

It is important that pupils move on with their peers and continue on to the next stage of their education. The guidance that issued to primary schools on Thursday 28th May includes information on managing transitions to include the move from primary to post-primary school. It sets out how existing resources such as the Education Passport, NEPs Continuum of Support and the Home School Liaison Officers in DEIS schools can be utilised.

The guidance can be accessed via the below link;

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/National-Emergencies-Public-Health-Issues/guidance-on-continuity-of-schooling-primary.pdf>

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

170. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there will be an additional budget provided for schools to ensure that the increased hygiene needs of schools when they reopen will be met, including greater cleaning, sanitiser and so on; and if he will provide for the deep cleaning of schools. [10182/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** On the 1st May 2020, the Taoiseach announced as part of the "Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business" that schools will commence opening on a phased basis at the beginning of the 2020/2021 academic year.

The Department is currently working with the Education Partners and relevant stakeholders in planning for this re-opening which will be based on public health advice. A core objective will be to ensure that schools and other education settings can re-open and operate in a safe manner that is consistent with public health advice.

### **School Curriculum**

171. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional provision will be made for online access and access to devices for teachers and students; if an element of schooling will take place remotely after September 2020; and the strategies he has for tackling the digital divide beyond the additional funding already provided (details supplied). [10183/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As part of the implementation of the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 Enhancing Teaching Learning and Assessment, funding of €210m for ICT Infrastructure will be distributed to schools over the five years of the Strategy. €110m has issued over the lifetime of the strategy to date with €40m recently issuing

in the form of a grant payment to all eligible schools and a further €10m top-up funding issued to all schools to enable schools to support any of their students experiencing difficulty in engaging with remote learning.

In the context of the current public health crisis the funding can be focussed on assisting schools to address ICT needs including devices, software and other ICT solutions to support the provision of remote learning. This can include the purchase of ICT devices that can be shared with students who do not have access to devices, essential learning platforms and other ICT infrastructure to support the provision of remote learning.

Since the announcement that schools would close and the extension of that closure, my Department has provided guidance to schools and teachers in the education sector to ensure that they continue to work and to engage with their students to continue the delivery of education. A series of guidance notes to support schools to effectively support and engage with their students are published on my Department's website at: <https://www.education.ie/en/covid-19/#guidance>. Further guidance will continue to be compiled to address the various challenges that arise for schools in providing programmes of continued learning in the remote learning environment and to accommodate blended learning solutions if required. Various surveys and studies has conducted across the education system has informed the development of guidance.

Resources to support the transition to distant learning are being provided by the Department support service, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), at <https://www.pdst.ie/DistanceLearning>. Scoilnet the Department's educational portal has open access to a wide variety of resources and information developed by various services including: the PDST, Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the National Council for Special Education. These resources can all be accessed at <https://www.scoilnet.ie/support/>. Scoilnet also provides open access to extensive educational resources including Worldbook Online, at [www.scoilnet.ie](http://www.scoilnet.ie)

Schools have been asked to be conscious of students who may not have access to online facilities or where digital approaches may not be appropriate and to consider this actively in their approaches to provision of remote learning. As part of reopening of society roadmap and the lifting of current restrictions, school and college buildings are now opened for access by teachers for the organisation and distribution of remote learning in line with public health advice and restrictions and essential work that cannot be done remotely with continued observance of public health guidelines.

Officials in my Department have liaised with colleagues in the DCCAIE to raise the issue of barriers to connectivity impacting access to remote learning. Minister Bruton has announced a package of additional supports from the telecoms companies including that access to health-care and educational resource websites identified by the Government will be zero-rated for all customers where technically feasible. The Telecommunications industry has also introduced update for data limits for consumers to assist their customers during the Covid-19 to access online services without exceeding their data limits.

My Department is supporting a pilot initiative, under which Cisco and IBM are providing support directly to schools to operate the WebEx platform. This facilitates schools, with no alternative capability, with a collaborative platform to enable them engage with their students and staff.

My Department will continue to work with the education partners to address challenges and provide solutions in areas where digital remote learning options may not be possible, and will continue to provide guidance to schools at this time.

## **Education Policy**

172. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the strategies he is putting in place for ensuring that educational disadvantage is not exacerbated during this time. [10184/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department has put in place a number of measures to support children at risk of educational disadvantage at this time.

My Department has set up a Continuity of Learning Group and a series of guidance documents has been developed for schools. This guidance focuses on how schools can effectively support and engage with their students and address challenges in providing programmes of continued learning in the current context. The series of guidance notes includes advice on supporting pupils at risk of educational disadvantage and children with special needs. Guidance for parents to support their children's learning has also issued. In a collaborative effort, the Department continues to work with management bodies and other partners to develop further support and advice which will be made available on an ongoing basis. The guidance documents are available here: <https://www.education.ie/en/covid-19#guidance>

The need for at risk learners to have regular, ongoing schooling is particularly important. While all pupils need to be supported to maintain their engagement in learning, learners at risk of educational disadvantage need even more support at this time. The teachers of pupils at risk of educational disadvantage in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools have been particularly focussed on ensuring that they provide support to these students when schools have been closed. All schools and teachers, including teachers of students with special educational needs, have been asked to communicate regularly and engage with students to ensure that there is continuity in their learning. Schools have been asked to continue to plan lessons and, where possible, provide resources for students or online lessons where schools are equipped to do so. Schools have also been asked to be conscious of students who may not have access to online facilities or technology and to adapt approaches to ensure that these pupils' ability to participate in learning is not compromised. Many schools have introduced a range of strategies and measures to ensure that the needs of these pupils are catered for, including pupils who have limited access to technology or whose parents are not in a position to support their learning.

Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) emphasizes the promotion of school attendance, participation and retention for children and young people and is working with schools, families and other relevant services to achieve the best educational outcomes for children and young people. To date, the School Completion Programme (SCP) has ensured that school work, materials & resources, as well as games and activities have been delivered to those most directly impacted by the closure of schools, while continuing to maintain contact with target children, young people and families. TUSLA Education Support service has also arranged ongoing contact with students and families.

In addition to the above, my Department has taken a number of measures to date to support children and young people who are at risk of educational disadvantage during the period of school closures.

They include:

- Guidance and resources developed by the National Council for Special Education on supporting children with special educational needs

- Continuation of the School meals programme, funded through the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, to provide food parcels to children who are at risk of food

poverty

- Continued funding of Home Tuition or, where this is not possible, flexibility to bank hours for use at a later time in the year

- Resources to support good mental health and wellbeing amongst students produced by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

- €50m in ICT Grant funding has issued to all schools of which €10m is to assist schools to support continuity of learning for all students, including provision of devices to students to facilitate them engaging with remote learning

On Wednesday 6 May 2020, I announced the early payment of the €16million DEIS grant for the 2020/21 school year. The funding is being paid ahead of schedule to all schools in the DEIS programme to help support students who are most at risk of educational disadvantage during the Covid-19 school closures.

There are 890 schools with more than 180,000 students in the DEIS programme. The grants, normally paid in June and September, are worth €12m to the 692 primary schools and €4m to the 198 post-primary schools. Schools around the country are providing invaluable supports to young people in the most trying of circumstances. They will now be able to use this grant funding, if required, to support existing programmes to ensure continuity of learning, particularly for those most at risk.

In addition to the above I recently announced that a Summer Education Programme will take place for children with significant special educational needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage. Further engagement with the school sector will take place as proposals are finalised over the coming week.

### **Third Level Education**

**173. Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to, and his views on a document (details supplied); if he will be in a position to provide additional funding to the third-level sector; if this will include additional funding to ensure places through SUSI, HEAR and DARE spaces; and if it will increase the number of university places overall and increase funding to ensure that sustainability and innovation within the sector is safeguarded. [10185/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am aware of the document in question which sets out the universities' proposed role as our partners in the post-pandemic recovery. Among a range of proposals, the document includes the concept of additional university places to help replace the projected significant drop in income across the sector along with a proposal for increased State support. My Department has provided a detailed response to the document and a meeting with relevant officials has been arranged.

As part of the collaborative response to this pandemic with key tertiary education stakeholders, the Department has established working groups composed of experts to assess and respond to the impacts of Covid 19 across the Sector. These working groups members are reviewing immediate operations, medium term contingency planning and the review of specific and acute needs within Tertiary Education. This process continues to facilitate the provision of key information from stakeholders, that will inform immediate and medium term actions to respond to the rapidly changing circumstances.

Mitigating the impact for Higher Education Providers and safeguarding that capacity against the backdrop of the broader economic crisis is a priority. By ensuring that core provision is maintained and in particular by assessing the level of financial vulnerability that may threaten the viability of any specific institution, the Department, the HEA and representative bodies can work together to respond to this crisis.

As part of the assessment of the financial impact on the HE sector, significant work has been undertaken by the stakeholder group chaired by the Higher Education Authority in consultation with the IUA and other representative bodies to collect information on the increased costs and projected income losses advised by HEIs arising from the crisis, based on an agreed set of assumptions.

In order to mitigate the risk for the viability of individual institutions, my Department is now engaging closely with the HEA to provide specific and granular institutional-level detail essential to assess the risk of institutional failure as a means to safeguard future recovery for the sector as a whole. The department has provided a template of required detail to the HEA for analysis, which is being prepared at present in consultation with higher education Providers.

Furthermore my Department has met with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to discuss the potential impact of COVID on the Tertiary Education Sector and the issue has also been highlighted at Government. The Higher Education sector is a key element of the economy's economic and social infrastructure which also has a crucial role in recovery in supporting economic and social recovery.

The provision of additional financial support to support Tertiary Education to ensure that it can contribute fully to economic recovery and to meeting priority skill needs will be examined in the context of overall expenditure management and budgetary policy in the forthcoming period and also in light of the future Programme for Government priorities and commitments.

Against the backdrop of the projected impact of Covid19 on the financial position of the higher education system, it should also be noted that a significant programme of investment into higher education is continuing in 2020, amounting to additional public investment estimated at €101.8m following on from additional public investment in 2019 of €99.7m – a cumulative increase over the past two years in excess of €200m.

My Department is very aware of the difficulties being experienced by students and their families as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A working group on mitigating educational disadvantage is supporting on-going responses to what is an evolving situation, to ensure the continuation of crucial funding sources such as SUSI grants, the 1916 Bursary Scheme, the Student Assistant Fund, Fund for Students with a disability and other allowances. All stakeholders in this group have worked to support learners without access to sufficient technology and to ensure the continuation of services offered by access and disability offices, guidance counselors and counselling services.

My Department is also conscious of the importance of the Student Grant Scheme and related supports, such as the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities. These supports have a fundamental role in assisting families who are putting their children through further and higher education.

The HEAR and DARE schemes are operated by the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and regulated by the higher education institutions. Each institution determines its own admissions policy in relation to the schemes, the number of places they reserve and the allocation of those places. As such, my Department of Education and Skills has no role in the policy criteria of the scheme.

My Department will continue to engage actively with all key stakeholders to ensure the innovation and sustainable operation of the tertiary education system is safeguarded in light of its importance for the recovery of the economy overall.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

174. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the situation many students face due to the lack of income and employment available to them over the summer months which may otherwise have been available; if he is considering income supports for such students; and if he has had discussions with the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection in connection with the issue. [10186/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am conscious of the difficulties being experienced by students and their families as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The key supports available to students are Student Grant Scheme and related supports, such as the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities. These supports have a fundamental role to play in assisting students in further and higher education.

The 2020/21 SUSI grant scheme opened for applications in April and the priority closing date is 9 July. Further information in relation to student grant assistance is available from SUSI's website ([www.susi.ie](http://www.susi.ie)). The telephone number for SUSI's Helpdesk is 0761 087 874.

Higher education institutions have been given the autonomy to maximise the flexibility in the Student Assistance Fund to enable them to support students during the COVID-19 situation.

My officials are in contact with their counterparts in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. They have advised me that full-time students who had part-time employment when the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment was introduced in March, can avail of this support payment. The Deputy will be aware that this payment has supported over 600,000 people who lost their income due to Covid-19. My colleague Minister Regina Doherty has recently extended the availability of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) from 9 June until 10 August. I welcome this decision which further supports workers who have lost their income due to the pandemic.

*Question No. 175 answered with Question No. 147.*

*Question No. 176 answered with Question No. 97.*

### **Special Educational Needs**

177. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of national schools that provide ASD classes for children with special educational needs in Dublin 4. [10260/20]

178. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will invoke section 8 of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 to ensure that children with special educational needs in Dublin 4 will have access to their local national schools if at present they do not provide ASD classes. [10261/20]

179. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will have ASD classes as part of its national school. [10262/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Question Nos. 177 to 179, inclusive, together.

The provision of education for children with special needs is an ongoing priority for Government.

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

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

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

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

Special Schools funded by my Department are established as special primary schools and cater for children and young persons with complex special educational needs from the age of 4 years until the end of the school year in which they reach their 18th year.

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

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

There are currently no primary ASD classes and one post-primary ASD class in Dublin 4.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has responsibility for coordinating and advising on the education provision for children nationwide; has well established structures in place for engaging with schools and parents; and seeks to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

It is open to any school to make an application to the NCSE for the establishment of specialised provision and where sanctioned, a range of supports, including capital funding, is made available to the school. My Department works closely with the NCSE in this regard. In considering these applications, however, the NSCE, in conjunction with the school buildings unit of my Department, will be required to take into account the capacity of a school to establish such a class, including the provision of sufficient accommodation space within the school.

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

Normally, special class and special school places are established with the full cooperation of the schools in areas where they are required. However there are some parts of the country where the NCSE has faced challenges in getting schools and their patrons to voluntarily agree to provide special class or special school places.

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

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

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

The legislation was used for the first time in April 2019, in respect of the Dublin 15 area.

Significant progress was made in a relatively short period with the establishment of Danu Special School as well as six schools offering to open special classes.

The experience of Dublin 15 shows that real and practical challenges can be addressed by working together to provide additional special class and special school places.

The legislation was activated for a second time on the 29th October, 2019 following a report by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) which identified 82 children in South Dublin needing special education school places in the current school year and a further potential 68 children needing special education school places in 2020/21.

Since then, as required under the Act, the NCSE in consultation with the relevant education stakeholders, has been testing the capacity among schools in the South Dublin area.

On 21 April 2020 I received a report from the NCSE, pursuant to Section 37A(2) of the Education Act 1998 (as inserted by section 8 of the Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018) in respect of South Dublin, as the NCSE Council remains of the opinion that there is an insufficient number of special class and special school places within the South Dublin area for September 2020.

Before reaching this opinion, the NCSE has undertaken substantial work reviewing provision and accommodation in the 231 mainstream primary and 23 special schools in South Dublin.

Following engagement between NCSE local personnel and school management and Patrons, very good progress has been achieved. 78 ASD primary school special class placements and 12 ASD early intervention special class places have been created in 14 schools in South Dublin, with 13 new ASD special classes and 2 new ASD early intervention special classes to open for September 2020.

However, the NCSE has reported that to date, an insufficient number of schools have indicated a willingness to open additional special classes. The NCSE is of the opinion that should this continue, there remains a need for an additional 43 ASD primary special class places and 36 special school places in South Dublin.

The report also outlines the schools that should be requested to make additional provision.

This report will now be considered and if I agree with the position as set out by NCSE, next steps in the process will be considered which may include serving a statutory notice on schools identified if required.

At each stage of the process, schools are given the opportunity to make representations and there is also an option for arbitration.

Statutory notices issued under the Act together with the representations received from the schools are published on the Department's website.

The necessary steps in the Admissions Act process, will continue to be expedited to ensure that every child has a suitable school placement, which is the key objective of my Department.

Regarding the school named by the Deputy, I wish to confirm to the Deputy that a special education needs base is included in the permanent school building to be constructed for this school.

### **Teacher Training Provision**

180. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action he has taken in response to the recommendations by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in relation to his Department (details supplied). [10263/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I published detailed guidance for schools on calculated grades on 21 May. The document sets out information on the process of estimating marks for students to receive calculated grades, and this has been sent to all schools. The document, together with Frequently Asked Questions, are available on [gov.ie/leavingcertificate](http://gov.ie/leavingcertificate).

Additional guidance to schools on the avoidance of unconscious bias, interpreting evidence of achievement in the case of students with disabilities, and further guidance on bonus marks that would have applied for answering the written examinations through Irish issued to schools on 28 May. The additional guidance is also on [gov.ie/leavingcertificate](http://gov.ie/leavingcertificate), and includes an instructional video for schools.

### **Institutes of Technology**

181. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the decision to downgrade the LYIT school of tourism to a department within the school of business; the plans in relation to the future of the LYIT Killybegs campus; if there are plans to facilitate other courses from other departments in LYIT within the campus; his plans to ensure that the Killybegs campus will have a representative at the governing board of LYIT in the future that will represent the interests of the Killybegs campus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10265/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Under the statutory framework governing the Institute of Technology sector, as Minister for Education and Skills I have no legal role, function or responsibility in relation to the specific matters raised in the Deputy's question.

Letterkenny Institute of Technology's Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023 highlights the role of the Killybegs campus in the context of the achievement of the Institute's strategic objectives over that period as well as proposed development of an Ocean Innovation Centre in Killybegs to enable greater engagement with industry similar to the CoLab model in Letterkenny and the digital hubs throughout the county supported by LYIT.

The Deputy may wish to note that investment of €1.8 m is committed to capital works for improving and updating the Killybegs campus up to 2022.

### **Special Educational Needs**

182. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if children with Down's syndrome will be granted access to the July provision in 2020; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [10268/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is planning to provide a summer education programme for children with significant special educational needs as soon as it is safe to do so and in accordance with public health advice.

It is intended that this programme will be similar to the July Provision of previous years.

The Summer Education Programme will take place for children with significant special educational needs enrolled in special schools, special classes and mainstream classes.

The programme will be reliant on schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) choosing to participate on a voluntary basis.

Planning is under way and an announcement will be made shortly.

### State Examinations

183. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will accommodate students that wish to take a written leaving certificate exam by allowing them to do so in August 2020 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10282/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The timeframe for sitting the postponed Leaving Certificate 2020 examinations cannot be determined at this time pending public health advice that would identify a safe period of time to do so and the number of candidates in each subject has been identified. It is not expected that students who seek to rely on the results of the postponed examinations will be able to commence a third level place in the 2020/2021 academic year.

### Education Policy

184. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide schools and students with the necessary software to accommodate blended learning in schools in September 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10283/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As part of the implementation of the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 Enhancing Teaching Learning and Assessment, funding of €210m for ICT Infrastructure will be distributed to schools over the five years of the Strategy. €110m has issued over the lifetime of the strategy to date with €40m recently issued in the form of a grant payment to all eligible schools and a further €10m top-up funding issued to all schools to enable schools to further support any of their students experiencing difficulty in engaging with remote learning.

In the context of the current public health crisis the funding can be focussed on assisting schools to address ICT needs including devices, software and other ICT solutions to support the provision of remote learning. This can include the purchase of ICT devices that can be shared with students who do not have access to devices, essential learning platforms and other ICT infrastructure to support the provision of remote learning.

Since the announcement that schools would close and the extension of that closure, my Department has provided guidance to schools and teachers in the education sector to ensure that they continue to work and to engage with their students to continue the delivery of edu-

cation. A series of guidance notes to support schools to effectively support and engage with their students are published on my Department's website at: <https://www.education.ie/en/covid-19/#guidance>. Further guidance will continue to be compiled to address the various challenges that arise for schools in providing programmes of continued learning in the remote learning environment and to accommodate blended learning solutions if required. Various surveys and studies has conducted across the education system has informed the development of guidance.

Resources to support the transition to distant learning are being provided by the Department support service, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), at <https://www.pdst.ie/DistanceLearning>. Scoilnet the Department's educational portal has open access to a wide variety of resources and information developed by various services including: the PDST, Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the National Council for Special Education. These resources can all be accessed at <https://www.scoilnet.ie/support/>. Scoilnet also provides open access to extensive educational resources including Worldbook Online, at [www.scoilnet.ie](http://www.scoilnet.ie)

Schools have been asked to be conscious of students who may not have access to online facilities or where digital solutions may not be appropriate and to consider this actively in their approaches to delivering remote learning. As part of reopening of society roadmap and the lifting of current restrictions, school and college buildings are now opened for access by teachers for the organisation and distribution of remote learning in line with public health advice and restrictions and essential work that cannot be done remotely with continued observance of public health guidelines.

### **Teacher Training Provision**

185. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide training for teachers that may have to implement a blended teaching approach in September 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10284/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Since the closure of schools on 12 March, my Department has provided a range of guidelines for schools and teachers in relation to the continuity of learning. In addition, the Teacher Education Support Services funded by my Department have provided a range of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) supports to schools and teachers, particularly in the area of supporting digital teaching and learning.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department continues to work on developing guidelines for schools, schools leaders and teachers on the re-opening of schools after the summer. My Department will be guided by the public health advice on re-opening of schools. My Department has also undertaken extensive consultation with the education partners in relation to the issues facing schools and teachers in terms of re-opening schools.

I am confident that guidelines for schools on re-opening after the summer will be available shortly and if required any information in relation to blended teaching and associated supports will also be provided at that time.

### **Mental Health Services**

186. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the specific mental health and well-being resources available to students at this time; the resources available to leaving certificate students that are coping with a particularly stressful and unprecedented ex-

perience of education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10285/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am acutely aware of the challenges faced by students, teachers and families at this difficult time. The welfare of students and that of their families is front and centre in all decision making. My Department has worked closely with the Department of Health and the HSE on the In This Together campaign which aims to help everyone in Ireland to Stay Connected, Stay Active, and look after their Mental Wellbeing throughout the Covid-19 Emergency. The In This Together campaign draws together the huge range of advice and support that is available for people of all ages. To support the wellbeing and mental health of our Leaving Certificate students at this time, a dedicated page on the InThis Together site contains online advice for Leaving Certificate students. This webpage includes a series of supports on managing wellbeing, stress and anxiety, developed by NEPS. The webpage also includes links to more individualised support for students to access, should these be needed. It is recognised that some vulnerable groups of students may require a more focused, stepped-up level of intervention and the Department has worked with the Department of Health and HSE to ensure the most appropriate services and resources are clearly signposted for those students. A planning group has been established by my colleague, the Minister for Health and includes representatives from the Department of Health, the HSE, and the NGO sector, in recognition of the fact that prior to, during and following national emergencies there is a need to support certain members of the population with their emotional, cognitive, social and physical needs.

The stepped care approach recognises that at present, there already exists services that offer online text and telephone supports to people seeking mental health information and advice. These include the Samaritans; Pieta House; MyMind; Turn2Me; Aware; Crisis Text Ireland; Shine; BeLongTo; LGBT Ireland; Jigsaw; Bodywhys and Childline. The YourMentalHealth.ie website provides a ‘one-stop-shop’ portal for people seeking information, supports and services, including information on accessing urgent help and a mental health text messaging support service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days each week to connect people with trained volunteers. These services augment the work of NEPS and assist students who may be feeling anxious at this time. In addition, additional support services have been identified for the general population that can assist students and their families at this time.

During this challenging time the school building may be closed but schools have structures in place to support students. It has often been the case, that the first port of call for Leaving Certificate students who are experiencing distress has been their school. Schools have developed excellent and flexible systems of support. Many schools have a designated Student Support Team, while other schools have equivalent systems and structures, but may use different terminology to describe their arrangements, such as ‘Care Team’ or ‘Pastoral Care Team’. Either way, the structures schools have in place will continue to have a key role identifying issues and students for discussion by the Student Support Team with appropriate action/ follow-up. In these uncertain times, the familiarity of these school structures and personnel will offer continuity and reassurance to students. A guidance document for Post-Primary Schools on supporting the wellbeing of students and the role of Student Support Teams was written by NEPS and has been published by my Department.

NEPS psychologists continue to be available to provide advice and support to school principals, teachers, students, parents. NEPS provides consultation for school staff who may have concerns about individual students. NEPS supports schools in putting interventions in place for students with identified difficulties, and in signposting to more specialist support, when needed, including onward referral to the HSE and other local mental health services.

NEPS is proactively exploring a number of innovative ways to continue to provide educa-

tional psychological services to school communities at this time.

My Department is developing a plan for supporting the wellbeing of school communities as part of the plan for reopening schools. A key element of supporting wellbeing at this time is the need for schools to manage and support transitions, including those transitions that have been impacted by school closures. Neaps is developing guidance on transitions for all students including students with special and additional needs.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

187. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the financial resources that will be made available to schools for the 2020/2021 academic year to facilitate the meeting of Covid-19 stay safe measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10286/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** On the 1st May 2020, the Taoiseach announced as part of the “Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business” that schools will commence opening on a phased basis at the beginning of the 2020/2021 academic year.

The Department is currently working with the Education Partners and relevant stakeholders in planning for this re-opening which will be based on public health advice. A core objective will be to ensure that schools and other education settings can re-open and operate in a safe manner that is consistent with public health advice.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

188. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to make training available to staff, management and school communities on best practice implementation of Covid-19 stay safe measures in advance of the 2020/2021 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10287/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** To assist with the development of contingency plans for the re-opening and operation of schools in an environment that may require social distancing and other public health requirements, my Department is engaging with education partners and relevant stakeholders. This work will be based on the National Return to Work Safely Protocol that was published by Government and will also be informed by guidance and experience from other jurisdictions.

As part of this engagement, each of the education partners were given the opportunity to outline the key issues that they would like to have considered in the context of re-opening schools. The issues raised by the education partners include those referred to by the Deputy in his question.

A core objective of the contingency plans will be to ensure that schools and other education settings can reopen and operate in a safe manner that is consistent with public health advice. Following consultation, currently underway with the education partners, guidance will issue to schools as soon as possible on the logistical and curricular arrangements to be put in place to facilitate the phased re-opening of schools. This guidance will provide a framework for individual schools to develop plans for the re-opening of school in accordance with their own circumstances, the context and needs of their staff and students and in compliance with public health guidelines.

## **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

189. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if extra resources will be made available to schools to ensure students will not have to share resources, for example, library books and so on. [10288/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** On the 1st May 2020, the Taoiseach announced as part of the “Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business” that schools will commence opening on a phased basis at the beginning of the 2020/2021 academic year.

The Department is currently working with the Education Partners and relevant stakeholders in planning for this re-opening which will be based on public health advice. A core objective will be to ensure that schools and other education settings can re-open and operate in a safe manner that is consistent with public health advice.

## **Special Educational Needs**

190. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for the implementation of traditional summer programmes for children with additional needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10289/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is planning to provide a summer education programme for children with significant special educational needs as soon as it is safe to do so and in accordance with public health advice.

It is intended that this programme will be similar to the July Provision of previous years.

The Summer Education Programme will take place for children with significant special educational needs enrolled in special schools, special classes and mainstream classes.

The programme will be reliant on schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) choosing to participate on a voluntary basis.

Planning is under way and an announcement will be made shortly.

## **Education Policy**

191. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if arrangements for the leaving certificate in 2021 are being explored in view of the loss of class time in 2020 and a likely similar scenario in 2021; his plans to amend courses or make an allowance for same (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10290/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Following the school closure in March 2020, my Department published a range of guidance to assist schools and teachers in ensuring continuity of teaching and learning for students as well as supporting their wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This guidance aimed, inter alia, to ensure regular engagement of students in lessons, tasks and learning experiences across the range of curriculum subjects, provision of regular assignments and regular, practical, supportive and customised feedback on work submitted.

Schools adopted various ways to engage with their students in accordance with the tech-

nology and broadband resources available in school and at home, including by post, e-mails, communication apps, the school website, use of other digital communicative platforms, including live meetings. Schools were asked to be conscious of pupils who may not have access to online facilities and to adapt approaches so that these pupils continued to have the opportunity to participate in learning.

The aim of these distant learning approaches, the guidance which issued to all schools and the regular engagement with students, was to ensure that students stayed connected with and progressed their learning. These actions will, therefore, have helped to minimise the impact of school closure.

In the context of planning for a return to school which is underway, my Department is, *inter alia*, considering the curriculum, i.e. what needs to be put in place to support ongoing progression for learners and addressing any shortfall that may result from school closures. Those going into sixth year in post primary schools are a group that will receive a particular focus in the context of preparations for the Leaving Certificate examinations in 2021.

My Department is acutely aware of the challenges faced by students at this difficult time, and how the current circumstances will continue to present challenges into the future. The welfare of students is, and will continue to be, front and centre in all decision making.

### **Schools Building Projects**

192. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the extension of a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10292/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is currently reviewing the building project to which the Deputy refers in the context of construction sites restarting and projects at tender stage progressing. Department officials will be in contact with the school shortly with regard to the next stage for this project.

### **Schools Building Projects**

193. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a proposed development (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10299/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to inform the Deputy that there were a number of issues with the final stages of the tender process in respect of the projects in question including issues with the documentation provided to my Department by the school authority. These matters have now been addressed and the school authority has been given approval to proceed to construction in that context.

### **School Transport**

194. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an extension of the school bus service will be provided for the 2021 school year from Annascaul village to Inch, County Kerry to accommodate nineteen students that are reliant on such a service. [10311/20]

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

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

In the current school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, are 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 €219m in 2019.

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

All school transport services are reviewed over the summer months. Arising from this review, routes may be altered, extended or withdrawn depending on the number and location of eligible children who will be availing of school transport for the following school year.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application process on time will be accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation.

Children who are not eligible for school transport, but who completed the application process on time, will be considered for spare seats that may exist after eligible children have been facilitated; such seats are referred to as concessionary seats.

Because of the nature of concessionary transport for non-eligible children and the priority of providing places for eligible children, there may be an excess of demand over supply for concessionary places, in these cases Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for spare seats using a random selection process.

Under the terms of the scheme, the availability of concessionary transport varies from year to year based on the capacity on the buses running on all of the various routes and the number of eligible children accommodated on each route.

In cases where the Department is satisfied that the nearest school is full, eligibility for school transport will be determined based on the distance that children reside from their next nearest school having regard to ethos and language. If a family has further information in regard to the closest school being full they should contact School Transport Section of my Department. Further information in this regard is available on my Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

### **Special Educational Needs**

195. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to roll out a summer education programme for children with additional needs; when the details will be finalised and announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10330/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is planning to provide a summer education programme for children with significant special educational needs as soon as it is safe to do so and in accordance with public health advice.

It is intended that this programme will be similar to the July Provision of previous years.

The Summer Education Programme will take place for children with significant special educational needs enrolled in special schools, special classes and mainstream classes.

The programme will be reliant on schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) choosing to participate on a voluntary basis.

Planning is under way and an announcement will be made shortly.

*Question No. 196 answered with Question No. 97.*

### **School Transport**

197. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the status of bus route D520 Enfield to Maynooth remains the same; and if it has been revised or has been considered for revision to more formally accommodate Enfield-based students attending schools (details supplied). [10351/20]

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

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

In the current school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, are 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 €219m in 2019.

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

All school transport services are reviewed over the summer months. Arising from this review, routes may be altered, extended or withdrawn depending on the number and location of eligible children who will be availing of school transport for the following school year.

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Children who are not eligible for school transport, but who completed the application process on time, will be considered for spare seats that may exist after eligible children have been facilitated; such seats are referred to as concessionary seats.

Because of the nature of concessionary transport for non-eligible children and the priority of providing places for eligible children, there may be an excess of demand over supply for concessionary places, in these cases Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for spare seats using a random selection process.

Under the terms of the scheme, the availability of concessionary transport varies from year

to year based on the capacity on the buses running on all of the various routes and the number of eligible children accommodated on each route.

Further information on the School Transport Scheme is available on the Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

### **School Transport**

198. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the status of bus route D520 remains the same; and if Enfield-based students of schools (details supplied) that were accessing the service as concessionary travel will continue to be accommodated and transported to their school in view of the fact that are relocating to an educational campus one kilometre away from a school. [10352/20]

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

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

In the current school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, are 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 €219m in 2019.

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

All school transport services are reviewed over the summer months. Arising from this review, routes may be altered, extended or withdrawn depending on the number and location of eligible children who will be availing of school transport for the following school year.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application process on time will be accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation.

Children who are not eligible for school transport, but who completed the application process on time, will be considered for spare seats that may exist after eligible children have been facilitated; such seats are referred to as concessionary seats.

Because of the nature of concessionary transport for non-eligible children and the priority of providing places for eligible children, there may be an excess of demand over supply for concessionary places, in these cases Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for spare seats using a random selection process.

Under the terms of the scheme, the availability of concessionary transport varies from year to year based on the capacity on the buses running on all of the various routes and the number of eligible children accommodated on each route.

Further information on the School Transport Scheme is available on the Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

*Questions - Written Answers*  
**Schools Building Projects**

199. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the overall capital construction cost of schools (details supplied) in County Meath. [10353/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

Roll Number	School	Construction Costs to date (VAT inclusive)
16655P	ST NICHOLAS PRIMARY SCHOOL	3,650,101.03
19813W	KILDALKEY NS	3,273,391.36
20396Q	ASHBOURNE ETNS	4,032,979.42
71970L	ST FINTAN'S POST PRIMARY,	10,510,459.53
20382F	GAELSCOIL NA MI	3,091,950.28
76196W	DE LACY COLLEGE	9,664,980.64

**Departmental Expenditure**

200. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the expenditure by year incurred in the rental of past and present premises since the opening of schools (details supplied). [10354/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I can confirm that my Department is funding the rental of buildings for the schools referred to by the Deputy.

From 1st January 2011 to the present date, the per annum rental cost of the first named school is €162,000.

From 1st July 2014 until 30th June 2018, the per annum rental cost for the second named school was €30,000. This rental ceased in June 2018 as the school relocated to a larger premises to cater for the increase in enrolments. As such, from 1st September 2018 to the present date, the per annum rental cost is €73,800.

**State Examinations**

201. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if predictive grades will have an impact on the points reduction offered to students that are eligible for the higher education access route. [10355/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) is an alternative admissions scheme to tertiary education, offering places on reduced points and extra college support to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The scheme is operated by the Irish Universities Association (IUA), and applications to the scheme are through the CAO.

Whilst criteria for applications and the processes for application itself are centralised, admissions under the HEAR scheme are regulated by the institutions themselves. Each institution determines its own admissions policy in relation to the schemes, the number of places it

reserves and the allocation of those places.

Calculated Grades will have the same status as Leaving Certificates awarded to students in previous years and will be used as a basis for entry into tertiary education in 2020 for all candidates, including access to the HEAR scheme as usual.

*Question No. 202 answered with Question No. 130.*

### **Special Educational Needs Staff**

203. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children that applied for the July provision in 2019 and to date in 2020 that were unable to source a tutor; the number of home tutor teachers and SNAs that volunteered to take part in 2019; the number that have volunteered to take part in 2020 in the programme and are available for home tuition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10362/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** In 2019, 10,563 children availed of July Provision with the delivery of the school and home based programmes involving approximately 5,000 Home Tutors, 640 school teachers and 1,454 SNAs.

573 eligible schools were invited to participate in the 2019 Programme. Participation in the scheme, by the school is voluntary and subject to the availability of suitably qualified personnel in July. It is therefore a matter for the Board of Management of the school having regard to the resources available to it and taking into account the health and safety of the children, whether or not it will participate in the programme in any given year. Of the 573 eligible schools invited in 2019, 232 schools opted to participate in the Programme.

Where an eligible school did not participating in the school based programme, it was open to parents to apply for the home based July Provision Grant Scheme.

My Department does not hold information on the number of Parents that could not find tutors in 2019.

The application process for the 2020 summer education programme has not yet commenced.

My Department is planning to provide a summer education programme for children with significant special educational needs as soon as it is safe to do so and in accordance with public health advice.

It is intended that this programme will be similar to the July Provision of previous years.

The Summer Education Programme will take place for children with significant special educational needs enrolled in special schools, special classes and mainstream classes.

The programme will be reliant on schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) choosing to participate on a voluntary basis.

Planning is under way and an announcement will be made shortly.

### **Teachers' Panel Rights**

204. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a decision will be reviewed on a supplementary panel application by a person (details supplied); and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [10402/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The core function of the re-deployment arrangements is to facilitate the redeployment of all surplus permanent teachers to other schools that have vacancies. Thereafter, schools are required under the panel arrangements to fill permanent vacancies from supplementary panels comprised of eligible fixed-term (temporary/substitute) and part-time teachers.

The arrangements for panel access for fixed term (temporary/substitute) and part-time teachers for the 2020/21 school year are set out in Department Circular 0064/2019.

The application of the teacher concerned has been updated since her contact with the Department and she has been informed of her eligibility for the Supplementary Panel 2020/21.

### **School Staff**

205. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the need to maintain 2019/2020 teacher allocations will be addressed; and if teacher allocations will be increased for the 2020/2021 school year in view of additional demands placed on schools as a result of Covid-19 stay safe measures. [10429/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Budget 2020 has provided for a budget of more than €11 billion for the Department of Education and Skills in 2020. This is the highest ever allocation to the sector and an increase of nearly €2 billion since 2016.

The number of teachers has increased from 63,556 in 2015/16 to almost 70,900 in 2019/20, an increase of over 7,300 teaching posts.

Teacher numbers at primary level have increased by almost 3,500 when comparing the 2015/16 school year with the current school year and this has led to a steady improvement in the pupil teacher ratio and average class size statistics during this period.

The latest figures in relation to pupil teacher ratio show an improved ratio of teachers to students from 16:1 to 15.2:1 at primary level when comparing the 2015/16 school year to the 2018/19 school year. Average class sizes at primary level improved from 24.9 to 24.3 in the same period. Corresponding statistics from post primary level show an improved ratio of teachers to students from 13.8:1 to 13:1 during the same period.

The annual staffing schedule determines the allocation of teachers to schools. For the current school year, it operates on a general average of 26 pupils to every 1 teacher (26:1) which is historically the lowest ever allocation ratio at primary level. At post-primary level teachers are allocated at a ratio of 19:1 in the Free Education System and 23:1 to schools in the fee-charging sector.

The National Return to Work Safely Protocol will inform discussions with all education partners so that appropriate guidance for schools is developed and arrangements put in place in time for the new school year.

*Question No. 206 answered with Question No. 147.*

### **School Accommodation**

207. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if adequate provision is being made in primary and second-level schools throughout County Kildare to accommodate the needs of children that are living in the area or that have moved permanently to the area; the degree to which such accommodation needs have been identified; the proposals for resolution including special needs accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10440/20]

**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.

Major new residential developments in a school planning area have the potential to alter demand in an area. In that regard, as part of the demographic exercises, my Department engages with each of the local authorities to obtain the up-to-date information on significant new residential developments 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) including the following new schools to serve the area referred to by the Deputy:

- a new 8-classroom primary school established in 2019 to serve the Leixlip school planning area;
- a new 8-classroom primary school established in 2019 to serve the Maynooth school planning area;
- a new 8-classroom primary school to be established in 2021 to serve the Naas school planning area; and
- a new post-primary school to be established in 2020 to serve the Kilcock school planning area to be located in Enfield.

This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country. In addition, a new gaelcholáiste will be established in 2020 in Maynooth.

The requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular will have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040. My Department will also continue to monitor areas where the accommodation of existing schools may need to be expanded in order to meet the needs of the local population.

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

The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed under Project Ireland 2040. I wish to advise the Deputy that the current status of large-scale projects being delivered under Project Ireland 2040, including projects in Kildare, 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. In the case of all new schools, it is general practice to include a Special Education Needs Base (SEN Base) in the accommodation brief for new school buildings, unless local circumstances indicate that it will not be required.

The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, including accommodation for pupils with special educational needs, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed. Details of schools listed on this programme can be found on my Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) and this information is also updated regularly.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has responsibility for coordinating and advising on the education provision for children with special educational needs nationwide; has well established structures in place for engaging with schools and parents; and seeks to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

It is open to any school to make an application to the NCSE for the establishment of a specialised provision and where sanctioned, a range of supports, including capital funding, is made available to the school. The Department of Education and Skills works closely with the NCSE in this regard.

### **Direct Provision System**

208. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of financial support provided from March to May 2020 to ensure children in the direct provision system have access to information technology equipment during the Covid-19 pandemic to enable them to keep up-to-date with schoolwork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10473/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is working closely with the Department of Justice and Equality International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) and Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) to ensure that school pupils who reside in accommodation centres for International Protection applicants are identified and supported. A communication pathway for schools, parents and centre managers in relation to education issues has been put in place by IPAS. Tusla Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) are assisting children and families who may need support, liaising with schools and sourcing additional services/resources where necessary. With regard to Wi Fi, all accommodation centres, which are under contract to the Department of Justice and Equality, are contractually obliged to have Wi-Fi available to residents. An examination of the level of Wi Fi access in these centres is currently being carried out by the International Protection Procurement Service.

Since the announcement that schools would close, schools have been asked to put in place arrangements to continue the delivery of education to students. A Continuity of Learning Group has been established within my Department and a series of guidance documents have been developed for schools on how they can effectively support and engage with their students in providing programmes of continued learning and address challenges at this time. The guidance also includes advice on supporting pupils at risk of educational disadvantage and children with

special needs. All schools and teachers have been asked to communicate regularly and engage with students to ensure that there is continuity in their learning and to continue to plan lessons and, where possible, provide resources for students or online lessons where schools are equipped to do so.

Schools have also been asked to be conscious of students who may not have access to online facilities or technology and to adapt approaches to ensure that these pupils' ability to participate in learning is not compromised. Many schools have introduced a range of strategies and measures to ensure that the needs of these pupils are catered for, including pupils who have limited access to technology or whose parents are not in a position to support their learning.

In addition, €50m in ICT funding for schools has been announced. Along with the annual €40m annual grant available to eligible schools to buy equipment for use by students and teachers in developing digital technology approaches to teaching and learning, a further €10m in the form of top-up funding was made available to all primary and post-primary schools to assist schools further in the purchase of devices for students and teachers to support continuity of learning during the current school closures due to COVID-19. DEIS schools have been allocated an additional 10% relative to non-DEIS schools to support their students to engage with online learning and educational resources.

Schools are being asked to use this funding to support the continuity of teaching and learning during this period and to address situations where students are disadvantaged in their engagement with the schools remote teaching and learning due to lack of access to digital devices. The devices will remain the property of the schools and loaned to the student to assist them in their studies.

My Department has recently published a guidance document for parents and guardians of children of school going age. This document has been translated into a number of languages so that it can be understood by residents who are residing in IPAS accommodation centres. A newsletter incorporating this guidance document has been issued to all accommodation centres and this includes communication pathways by which residents can communicate on education related issues.

RTE has developed the RTE Home School Hub, which is an additional support for parents and primary school pupils. Pupils are able to watch, download and engage with curriculum-based content, project work, and fun activities to keep them entertained and learning. This broadcast is a supplement to the ongoing learning being provided by teachers.

My Department will continue to work closely with IPAS and TESS to ensure that children of school going age who are residing in accommodation centres under contract to the Department of Justice and Equality to accommodate international protection applicants are supported during the period of this pandemic.

## **Maternity Leave**

209. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to address the position of women that are on maternity leave and provide an extension of maternity leave and benefit payments at this very difficult time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9892/20]

210. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the mothers of newborn babies that are on maternity leave at this time will be supported; his views on the request to extend the maternity leave and benefit for them (details supplied); and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [9921/20]

211. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he is considering temporarily extending the period of paid maternity leave in view of the ongoing uncertainty regarding the availability of childcare and the other disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic; if this will require amending primary legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10219/20]

217. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if maternity leave and maternity benefit will be extended in view of the issues faced by new parents in relation to the outbreak of Covid-19 and the lockdown measures. [9858/20]

227. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the extension of maternity benefit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10056/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 209 to 211, inclusive, 217 and 227 together.

As the law now stands, a mother is entitled to this leave irrespective of the duration of her current employment. The mother can take maternity leave from casual or part-time employment. She can take up to 26 weeks of paid maternity leave, and up to a further 16 weeks of unpaid leave. Two weeks must be taken before the baby is due, and at least four weeks must be taken after the birth. As Minister of State for Justice and Equality, the legislation that governs the provision of maternity leave is my responsibility and any such amendment would likely require primary legislation. The provision of maternity benefit is under the remit of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These matters are currently being examined by Government.

As you will be aware, on 29 May the Minister for Finance announced changes to the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme to accommodate the salaries of parents returning from maternity or adoptive leave. The changes are aimed at individuals who may not have been on the payroll of their employer on 29 February, or been paid in either January or February 2020 and will allow for consistent treatment with other employees.

The amendment will be legislated for later in the year as part of the usual Finance Bill 2020 process, but in the interim Revenue has agreed to provide a facility to accommodate such cases. Although expected to be implemented on the 12th June, Revenue launched a new process on Monday 8th June which allows employers to include employees returning to employment after a period of paternity, parental or related unpaid leave or were in receipt of Health and Safety Benefit, Parent's Benefit or Illness Benefit paid by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP). Employers who wish to access the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme on behalf of eligible employees covered by these changes can do so by completing a short form available for download via *MyEnquiries* in Revenue's Online Service (ROS). The relevant details that employers will need to provide to Revenue include current contractual gross pay, pay frequency, normal PRSI class, type of leave the returning employee availed of and the date of return to work. Any retrospective subsidy payments due to impacted employees will be processed by Revenue in due course. This retrospection will apply from 26 March 2020, the date of return to employment or the date the employer was registered for the scheme, whichever is the latest

I am conscious of demands on parents at this time and hope that the additional measures to support working parents that I have introduced in recent years, including the new parent's leave scheme and an extension of parental leave, are helping to ease some of these demands. In addition to maternity leave, each parent may also avail of two weeks of parent's leave during the

first year of a child's life and may qualify for parent's benefit during this period. Parental leave is also available which entitles parents to take unpaid leave from work to spend time looking after their children. Parents can take up to 22 weeks of parental leave for each eligible child before their 12th birthday.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

212. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on proposals raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) regarding reopening businesses in the hospitality sector. [10464/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Licensing Acts 1833 to 2018 contain important statutory provisions that govern the licensing of premises for the sale and supply of intoxicating liquor, and regulate such sale and supply. One of the key objectives of the licensing system, which generally requires that an applicant obtains a certificate from the Circuit Court or the District Court prior to obtaining the licence from the Revenue Commissioners, is to ensure that the person concerned is a fit and proper person and competent to undertake the statutory responsibilities of a licensee. It is for this reason that the Gardaí are a notice party to such applications. In order to ensure compliance with licensing law provisions, licensees must display a detailed knowledge of the applicable licensing rules, including restrictions applicable to sales and supply to underage persons, ensure appropriate training of staff and be in a position to maintain proper conduct on the premises.

A further objective of the licensing system is to ensure that premises are suitable for the sale and supply of intoxicating liquor and that they provide a safe and secure environment for both customers and staff. This requires knowledge of, and compliance with, the relevant statutory fire safety standards, as well as workplace health and safety rules. Compliance with these aspects are of particular importance for the health and welfare of staff where intoxicating liquor is consumed on the premises.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that licensees are liable to be prosecuted in the event of any infringements of licensing law. For example, under the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003 it is an offence for a licensee to permit drunkenness or disorderly conduct on the licensed premises. In a similar manner, improper sale or supply on intoxicating liquor to underage persons is an offence under the Intoxicating Liquor Act 1988. Fines may be imposed in the event of convictions. Moreover, claims for damages may arise where, for whatever reason, detriment is suffered by a customer or other person on the premises.

In light of these important factors, I do not consider that the establishment of bars in local community centres and the authorisation of mobile outlets would be in the public interest at this time. Further changes may be considered by the incoming Government.

### **Drugs in Prisons**

213. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps, for example, replacing netting and Garda presence during yard time, he is taking to reduce the incidence of drugs being thrown into Mountjoy Prison from the surrounding streets especially Glengarriff Parade. [9683/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that several steps are being taken to combat the throw-over of drugs into prisons,

including Mountjoy Prison.

The Deputy will appreciate that for operational reasons I cannot go into detail on those measures.

However I can confirm that management at Mountjoy Prison advise me they are in regular contact with An Garda Síochána on this issue and that a number of arrests have been made.

### **Garda Reports**

214. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 272, 273, 274, 275 and 276 of 15 October 2019, when the report referred to will issue to this Deputy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9733/20]

215. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 134, 135 and 136 of 16 October 2019, when the report will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9734/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 214 and 215 together.

First it is important to say that the Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including human resources matters. These are not matters within my responsibility as Minister.

In relation to medical certification requirements for Garda members, I am advised by the Garda authorities if an absence lasts for more than one tour of duty, the member is required to submit a short medical certificate (not exceeding one month) to local management. I am further advised that HR require medical certificate if the absence exceeds 28 days or if the member has exceeded 92 days in 12 months and/or 183 days in 4 years (and is therefore pay affected). Failure to submit proper medical certification may result in disciplinary action and/or removal from the payroll.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that Garda Human Resources do not keep central records of difficulties relating to the submission of medical certificates – rather, I understand that if a case is brought to the attention of Human Resources by local management, these cases are dealt with on an individual basis. As such the information requested by the Deputy is not readily available and the time required to compile it would be unduly onerous.

In relation to the arrest of Garda staff since 1973 and the charges on which they have been arrested, I am informed by the Garda authorities while information relating to individual incidents is recorded on Pulse, the information requested is not readily available or easily collated. I am informed that the effort required in order to compile this information would be unduly onerous and an unjustified use of limited Garda time and resources. As such, I am not in a position to provide the Deputy with this specific information.

In relation to the number of Garda staff who were reduced to zero pay whilst under investigation, I am informed by the Garda authorities that in recent years there was one case of a Garda staff member who was availing of sick leave while under investigation and, due to exceeding the paid sick leave limits, had their level of pay reduced to zero.

I am further informed by the Garda authorities that between 2010 and 15 October 2019, a total of three Garda staff were suspended while under investigation. One person was suspended

in 2010 and two were suspended in 2018. I am informed that there was no case in which a member of Garda staff was suspended without pay.

With regard to the promotion of sworn members following or whilst the subject of a public interest inquiry, I am informed that the Competitions Office in An Garda Síochána runs competitions in accordance with the Code of Practice Appointment to Positions in the Civil Service and Public Service and HQ Directive 23/12 (Guidelines for Internal Appointments and Promotions). It is important to say that the fact of an investigation does not imply wrongdoing or guilt. I understand that An Garda Síochána carries out a number of checks on candidates for matters such as sick leave, discipline and signing of the Code of Ethics. The successful candidates selected by the Interview Board are sent to the Garda Commissioner for approval.

### **Prison Inspections**

216. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the decision has been made to move the office of the Inspector of Prisons from Nenagh, County Tipperary to Dublin; when the move is due to take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9779/20]

225. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the office of the Inspector of Prisons is to be moved from Nenagh, County Tipperary; the criteria or protocols being used for such a move; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10016/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 216 and 225 together.

The main function of the Inspector of Prisons is to carry out regular inspections of prisons and places of detention in Ireland. It plays a vital role in ensuring effective independent oversight of our prison system and I was pleased to see an increase in the budget by €0.7m in Budget 2020, bringing the total allocation to €1.2 million this year.

The Inspector is independent in the performance of her functions and it has been a matter for the Inspector of the day to decide how the functions of the Office should be performed, within allocated resources.

I understand it has for some time been intended that the Office of the Inspector of Prisons would move from Nenagh, Co Tipperary to the greater Dublin area where a large percentage of the overall prison population are located and the advertisement for the role of Inspector in late 2017 reflected that. I understand that since 2018 the Office has been operating in two locations - in temporary office space in Dublin and the office in Nenagh - and that there are currently a very small number of staff in both of these locations.

While the office is small at present with a total of 5 staff, of whom 3 are in Dublin, there are plans to expand this cohort and recruitment is ongoing at present for roles at Inspector and Senior Inspector level. Work is also continuing to identify a permanent office in Dublin.

*Question No. 217 answered with Question No. 209.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

218. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new households created by IPAS since the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak here, households be-

ing persons not from the same family sharing a bedroom. [9896/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** The figures requested by the Deputy are currently being collated by my officials in the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS). They will be forwarded to the Deputy in the coming days as soon as this process is completed.

### **Citizenship Applications**

219. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of citizenship applications outstanding; and the average timeframe for decisions in relation to citizenship applications through marriage. [9934/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can inform the Deputy that the total number of citizenship applications on hands currently is 18,330.

Applications from a spouse of an Irish citizen under Section 15A of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended, made between 2010 and 2019, were processed in an average time of 9.6 months.

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. It is important therefore that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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

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

### **Garda Reserve**

220. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Garda Reserve programme will be reopened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9936/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for the management of An Garda Síochána as well as the allocation and distribution of resources. This includes responsibility for the recruitment, training and deployment of Garda members and members of the Garda Reserve. As Minister, I have no responsibility in these matters. I am assured however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review, in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use.

I understand that there are currently 436 Garda reserves. The Deputy may be interested to know that the strength of the Garda Reserve in each of the years from 2009 to 30 April 2020,

as provided by me by the Garda Commissioner, is available on my Department's website at the following link: [http://justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Garda\\_Reserve](http://justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Garda_Reserve)

The Deputy will appreciate that the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, endorsed by the Government in December 2018, suggested that the Garda Reserve programme as it stands is not realising its potential. The Commission recommended that future recruitment to the Garda Reserve should be paused, pending the outcome of a comprehensive strategic review, in order to examine how best to structure the Garda Reserve to meet the needs of An Garda Síochána. This was subsequently included in "*A Policing Service for the Future*"; the 4-year implementation plan for the Commission's report.

I understand from the Garda authorities that the Garda Commissioner commenced a review of the Reserve in 2019.

I am further informed that a new Garda Reserve class commenced training in March 2019. I understand that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, completion of training, certification and attestation is taking a longer period than usual.

I understand that further recruitment to the Garda reserve was closed in November 2019 and that candidates remaining in the appointments process were informed of that at the time. I understand that commencement of further recruitment for the reserve will be dependent on factors including capacity to provide training.

### Garda Operations

221. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of drug searches that have taken place in County Cavan since the beginning of 2019; and the number of arrests and convictions for the possession and supply of illegal drugs in County Cavan since January 2019, in tabular form. [9941/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for the management of An Garda Síochána, including personnel matters, deployment of resources and operational action. As Minister, I have no responsibility for these matters.

I am assured 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.

The following table, furnished to me by the Garda authorities, sets out the number of incidents recorded by An Garda Síochána or '*Possession of Drugs for Sale or Supply*' and '*Simple Possession*' (personal use) in the County of Cavan between 01/01/2019 and 31/05/2020.

Incident Type	2019	2020 YTD	Total
Possession of Drugs for Sale or Supply	24	16	40
Simple Possession	166	94	260
Total	190	110	300

It is important to note that these figures are operational and subject to change .

In relation to the information requested by the Deputy on the number of persons convicted of relevant offences in Cavan, the following table, furnished to me by the Courts Service, out-

lines the number of convictions in the District Courts and the Circuit Court in Cavan for the period January 2019 to 31 May 2020.

District Court Areas(January 2019-31 May 2020)	Offence	No. of Persons Convicted in District Court	No. of Persons sent forward for Trial to the Circuit Court
Cavan and Virginia	Unlawful Possession of Drug(s)	101	9
Cavan and Virginia	Possession of Drug for the Purpose of Sale or Supply	16	8

The Courts Service notes that a person may be convicted or sent forward for trial in relation to both offences and in such a case, they would appear on the report twice.

Circuit Court	No. of persons before the Circuit Court	No. of persons convicted	No. of persons not convicted
Jan '19 to May 2020	9	8	1

It should be noted that offences addressed in the Circuit Court in this period may have been sent forward for trial from the District Court prior to the period in question.

Finally, the Deputy may be interested to know that overall and benefiting from record financial provision of €1.88 billion this year, the Garda workforce is now at its highest ever, consisting of over 14,700 Gardaí nationwide, supported by over 3,000 Garda staff.

The continued disruption of the supply of all illicit drugs remains a priority for An Garda Síochána and the other state agencies tasked with responsibilities in this regard. An Garda Síochána continue to work to protect and support communities by preventing and detecting crime, while taking extensive action in support of public health restrictions in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Cycle to Work Scheme

222. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by his Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9987/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will recall that the Cycle to Work scheme came into operation on 1 January 2009 and is primarily an environmental measure. It was introduced on to help lower carbon emissions, reduce traffic congestion, and encourage more employees to cycle to work and help improve health and fitness levels.

The employer makes the initial purchase and then recoups this amount through a salary sacrifice. A benefit-in-kind tax exemption applies and the employee will not pay tax, PRSI or income levies on the remuneration sacrificed. This approach was taken to keep the scheme simple for employers and employees alike.

Under the scheme my Department has purchased bicycles and equipment and has made arrangements to recoup initial expenditure by way of salary sacrifice. Accordingly, there is an

up-front cost until such time as those are offset by the gradual deduction from salary over a 12 month period. The purchase of bikes and safety equipment is subject to normal Revenue audit procedures.

The details requested are set out in the following table.

#### **Cycle to Work Amounts by Year**

Request Year	No. of Applications	Initial Cost - repaid by employee
2009	83	€57,501.86
2010	112	€82,526.53
2011	108	€80,599.68
2012	89	€68,236.92
2013	64	€60,179.87
2014	70	€57,226.63
2015	76	€62,820.73
2016	72	€58,011.58
2017	64	€51,048.41
2018	67	€58,473.84
2019	70	€57,658.51
2020	27	€22,566.95
Total	902	€716,851.51

#### **Direct Provision System**

223. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address concerns outlined in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9996/20]

247. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address the situation in a direct provision centre (details supplied); if he will engage with the residents directly and not through the management of the centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10272/20]

254. **Deputy Roderic O’Gorman** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the discussions he has held with residents and the operators of a direct provision accommodation centre (details supplied) regarding the standard of food and accommodation there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10405/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**  
I propose to take Questions Nos. 223, 247 and 254 together.

I can inform the Deputy that we are taking the issues raised in relation to this emergency accommodation premises extremely seriously. The welfare of residents is, at all times, our key concern.

Last week (4 June 2020), officials from the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) of my Department held a clinic via video call with residents of the centre. This was attended by 12 of the 19 residents currently residing at the centre. The clinic was held off-site in the Miltown Malbay Community Centre and was facilitated by a volunteer from the Limerick and Clare Educational Training Board (LCETB). Other than the residents and the facilitator,

only the manager of the Community Centre and the caretaker were present onsite at the time.

Each resident attended their own clinic appointment in a separate room away from the facilitator and the manager of the Community Centre.

A small number of the residents who participated in the clinics stated that the food was not to their liking. The majority of residents who attended the clinic stated they were happy with the food and with the accommodation in general.

Following the clinics, an unannounced visit was made to the accommodation the next day (5 June 2020) by a senior official from my Department. During this visit, a number of issues raised in recent correspondence to my Office were investigated. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that no health and safety issues were identified during this visit during which all rooms were viewed.

Concerns had previously been raised with my Office around rodent activity on the premises and water leaking. I am advised that there was no evidence of any rodent activity or water leaking on the day my official visited. When questioned by my official on these matters, the owner confirmed that a resident had reported mice in his room in February. The owner engaged a pest control company who could not find any evidence of rodents. They subsequently monitored the room for three weeks and could not find any evidence of rodents. Regarding the water, I am advised that the owner confirmed that an incident occurred some months ago where water was leaking from a bath/shower on the second floor into a bedroom on the first floor. It was reported to him by the residents in the room and he sought to engage a plumber. One of the residents said he was a plumber and asked if he could fix it. It was addressed within a few hours and no reoccurrence of the leaking has been reported since.

My official identified no concerns about the quality or variety of food available during their visit. Food is prepared onsite by a professional chef and all meat is Halal certified. Residents also have use of the kitchen for special occasions and regularly cook meals of their choice from food supplied by management. Arrangements were also made during Ramadan recently for residents to use the kitchen at night.

I can also advise the Deputy that IPAS officials previously visited the premises unannounced on 13 February last, on foot of concerns raised by a local support group. During the course of this visit, they inspected all bedrooms and recreation rooms and the kitchen and dining facilities and they had lunch with the residents. I am advised that my officials did not find any major issues to report and the residents they spoke to did not raise any issues about the standard of the centre. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) also carried out a visit to the premises in February as part of a programme of visits to a variety of centres over a two week period. No specific issues were brought to my Department's attention regarding the premises arising from their visit.

Our intention is to accommodate all international protection applicants currently living in emergency accommodation in dedicated accommodation centres as soon as places become available.

## **Garda Recruitment**

224. **Deputy Roderic O’Gorman** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures taken to date to achieve strategic priority 3, outcome 5, of the An Garda Síochána Diversity and Integration Strategy 2019-2021 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10010/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, the Garda Diversity and Integration Strategy 2019-2021 was launched last year and includes a wide range of elements, including a working definition of hate crime and upskilling Gardaí to understand the needs of diverse communities and respond to crimes perpetrated against them. It may also be noted that the Garda Code of Ethics also commits members to opposing and challenging any behaviour or language that demonstrates discrimination or disrespect, in particular with regard to minority groups.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that relevant actions taken under the Strategy to date include completion by the Garda National Diversity and Integration Unit (GNDIU) of the following:

- Organisation of the annual Consultation Day in December 2019, which involved representation from a wide spectrum of our diverse and minority communities. The identification and removal of barriers to recruitment was among the issues included on the agenda and addressed.

- Organisation during 2020 of dialogue days, tailored to specific minority groups and including discussion of barriers to entry. Dialogues have been organised to date with members of the travelling community and LGBT groups. Further dialogue days with other groups were planned but had to be postponed, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. These will be rescheduled when circumstances allow.

- Establishment of a Diversity Forum. The terms of reference of the Diversity Forum will include addressing the barriers to recruitment and retention as well as monitoring progress relating to strategic priority 3, outcome 5 of the Strategy. Representatives for the Forum have been identified but progress has been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

More broadly, the Deputy will recall that In December 2018 the Government endorsed the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland and the report is now being implemented in accordance with the targets and timelines set out in the 4-year plan “*A Policing Service for the Future*”.

Among the issues highlighted in the Commission’s report was that An Garda Síochána should reflect the diversity of Irish society and should therefore develop recruitment strategies to achieve a more diverse intake. These recommendations echoed those of the Garda Inspectorate following their examination of entry routes into An Garda Síochána.

It is planned that these and other questions on recruitment to An Garda Síochána will be considered as part of review of entry routes to An Garda Síochána. Work is currently underway on the drafting of Terms of Reference for a Working Group which will bring this review forward, once established.

Finally, I note that increasing numbers of persons born outside the State have in recent years joined An Garda Síochána. For example, across 2019 and 2020, a total of 67 persons born outside the state, with 19 different nationalities, attested and became members of An Garda Síochána.

*Question No. 225 answered with Question No. 216.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

226. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the housing situation of a person (details supplied) will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [10018/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**

The person referred to by the Deputy is, as of 30 May 2020, being accommodated in our dedicated self-isolation facility in Dublin.

This is a temporary arrangement to enable precautionary isolation under COVID-19 protocols until the person can be transferred to an accommodation centre at a future date.

The HSE has issued new protocols to the international protection accommodation service (IPAS) of my Department advising that anyone applying for return to IPAS accommodation must first undergo a minimum of 14 days isolation in an IPAS self-isolation facility. Following this, persons who are successful in seeking readmission to IPAS accommodation centres will be re-accommodated as vacancies arise in centres nationwide. Whilst every effort will be made to return persons to their original accommodation centre following the required period of isolation, this will depend on the situation existing when the 14 days is completed.

*Question No. 227 answered with Question No. 209.*

**Direct Provision System**

228. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of units of PPE provided to each direct provision centre for staff use and for use by persons seeking international protection. [10066/20]

262. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of additional financial support given from March to May 2020 to provide PPE to persons in direct provision during the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10472/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**

I propose to take Questions Nos. 228 and 262 together.

I can inform the Deputy that the total expenditure for the provision of PPE for International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) accommodation centres for the period from March to end May 2020, was €521,488.27.

During this time, centre managers have been advised to increase the standard and frequency of cleaning throughout the centres, paying particular attention to communal areas. A regular supply of hand sanitiser for centres is in place and this is distributed to centres as required. Other PPE is distributed, as needed, and in line with the HPSC guidelines for its appropriate use in residential settings.

The overall figures for PPE items which were dispatched to the various IPAS accommodation centres are as follows:

Category of PPE	Quantity
Hand Sanitiser	5,300 litres
FFP 2 Face Masks	150,000
Surgical Masks	95,000
Face Visors	200
Body Suits	200

Category of PPE	Quantity
Gloves	350,000
Aprons	19,000
Assorted Hand Sanitiser Dispenser Bottles	3,700
Hand Sanitiser Wall Dispenser Units	335
Defibrillator	1

These figures are approximate. Unfortunately, my Department is not currently in a position to extract the detail of what was dispatched to each location due to staffing resources and the fact that it would take a significant amount of time to collate the data.

In partnership with the HSE and Safetynet, my Department has also put in place a national clinical telephone service to provide public health advice to support centre staff. It is also being used to advise, support and work with locations where vulnerable groups are present relating to the implementation of COVID-19 guidelines and measures.

My Department and I will continue to work hard with local management, health agencies, and NGOs to provide every support possible to the residents and staff in our accommodation centres at this difficult time.

### **Direct Provision System**

229. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has consulted with a nutritional and dietary professional in respect of the catering and food services provided in direct provision centres; and if persons with special dietary requirements are catered for in respect of food services in direct provision. [10067/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** It is a contractual obligation on all service providers of accommodation centres that culturally appropriate food options should be provided to residents. Service providers must also prepare menus that meet the reasonable dietary needs of the different ethnic groups accommodated at the accommodation centre and the reasonable prescribed dietary needs of any person accommodated at the centre.

Menus must include a vegetarian option and all food products provided must have a traceability system that complies with food safety requirements. It is a contractual obligation for catered accommodation centres that a 28 day menu be provided and that residents are consulted on that 28 day menu. Residents can advise their centre manager of any dietary requirement that they have and this will be facilitated, where possible. Arrangements can also be made to cater for particular religious dietary needs, for example, Muslim residents observing Ramadan.

Accommodation centres which have moved to the independent living model, where residents are provided with ingredients and household items and cook for themselves, must provide a wide range of products which are culturally appropriate and meet the dietary needs of residents. Approximately half of all residents now have access to independent living.

We have continued the roll-out of independent living with self-catering facilities to centres and regional tenders now mandate independent living for all new centres procured through that process.

All accommodation centres are subject to regular unannounced inspections by both staff from the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) of my Department and an in-

dependent inspector. Part of the inspection process deals directly with the provision of food services. Meals are assessed during inspection for quality, cultural appropriateness and variety of menu options. Any issues identified are notified to the contractor to be addressed immediately.

In August 2019, Minister Flanagan and I published new National Standards for accommodation centres. These Standards were developed through an Advisory Group including representatives from UNHCR Ireland and the NGO sector. The Standards will come into force in January 2021, and they contain commitments in relation to food including access to a varied diet that respects residents' cultural, religious, dietary, nutritional and medical requirements.

Any complaints in relation to dietary matters should be brought to the centre manager in the first instance. If the resident is not satisfied with the outcome, they can make a complaint directly to IPAS, which will be investigated by IPAS officials and acted on appropriately. If the matter is still not resolved to the resident's satisfaction, they can raise a complaint with the Office of the Ombudsman for their investigation.

### **Direct Provision System**

230. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if each direct provision centre has conducted a risk assessment regarding Covid-19; if each centre has sufficient self-isolation rooms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10068/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** The International Protection Accommodation Services Unit (IPAS) of my Department is working very closely with the HSE and centre management centre to protect the health and welfare of our residents and centre staff as well as that of the wider community at this time. We have been assured by both the HSE and the Office of the Chief Medical Officer that our approach is appropriate.

All accommodation centres are carefully following the guidelines for our centres that have been published by the HSE's Health Protection Surveillance Centre, which can be found on its website [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie). That guidance exists precisely because it is recognised that congregated settings such as Direct Provision centres present specific challenges in this pandemic.

IPAS has a dedicated team in place to work with accommodation centre managers so that they can manage any situation that may arise and the team are in daily contact with centre managers.

At the outset of the pandemic, a contingency plan was prepared for each Centre, including provision of some onsite self-isolation at each centre, a plan for a response to an outbreak, enhanced cleaning regime required, etc. Building on these contingency plans, a Risk Assessment Framework for our centres has been developed with the HSE. This allows all centres to be assessed for risk and any additional supports or interventions required can then be appropriately targeted. This is important for the medium to longer term and takes account of the range of accommodation types across the Direct Provision system, from own-door accommodation to communal settings. A similar framework is applied by the Mental Health Commission for its residential settings. Assessments for all centres have been completed and follow-up work on the findings is underway.

The established procedure across all centres where a person is confirmed as having the virus, is that, where advised by Public Health, they are moved to a dedicated offsite self-isolation facility. Supports are available for the duration of their period of isolation until such time as the HSE considers that they can safely return to their centre. My Department has opened four

dedicated self-isolation facilities for residents in Dublin, Cork and Limerick, and Dundalk, with a total capacity of 299 rooms. Residents in these facilities have their own bedroom and their own bathroom.

Since the start of the year over 1,550 permanent and temporary Direct Provision bed spaces have been procured, including the dedicated new centres opened in Rosslare Harbour, Cahersiveen and Tullamore.

We have relocated over 600 residents to support social and physical distancing in centres and cocooning measures for the most vulnerable. By doing this, we have ensured that no more than three single people are sharing a room in any of our centres. We intend to continue this policy when the crisis is over.

We have cocooned all residents aged 65 or older and those advised to my Department by the HSE as requiring cocooning on medical grounds.

In addition to the daily calls to centres, we are communicating directly with centre managers and residents via regular newsletters, which can also be found on our website [www.accommodationcentres.ie](http://www.accommodationcentres.ie). The newsletters have provided practical information on implementing social and physical distancing at this time and promoted shared learning and best practice across our network of centres. Residents have also been made aware of the need for good hand hygiene and coughing/sneezing etiquette. Information and posters have been distributed to all centres and translations of public health information have also been provided.

In partnership with the HSE and Safetynet, my Department has put in place a national clinical telephone service to provide public health advice to support centre staff. It is also being used to advise, support and work with locations where vulnerable groups are present relating to the implementation of COVID-19 guidelines and measures.

During this time, centre managers have also been advised to increase the standard and frequency of cleaning throughout the centres, paying particular attention to communal areas. A regular supply of hand sanitiser for centres is in place and this is distributed to centres as required. Other PPE is distributed, as needed, and in line with the HPSC guidelines for its appropriate use in residential settings.

### **Garda Deployment**

231. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí assigned to County Wexford by rank and district; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10090/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Garda Commissioner is responsible under the Garda Síochána Act 2005 for the management of An Garda Síochána, including personnel matters and the deployment of resources. As Minister, I have no responsibility for these matters. I am assured 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.

The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation for 2020 of €1.88 billion. This level of funding is enabling sustained, ongoing recruitment of Garda members and staff and as a result, An Garda Síochána is a growing organisation. There are now over 14,700 Gardaí nationwide, supported by over 3,000 Garda staff and these numbers are continuing to grow. Taken together, this increase in the

number of Garda members and staff is delivering a significant increase in operational policing hours nationwide.

A detailed breakdown of Garda numbers is available on my Department's website and this information is updated every month with the latest data provided by An Garda Síochána. Information on the Garda Workforce is available at the following link: [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Garda\\_Workforce](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Garda_Workforce)

Specifically in relation to Wexford, I am informed by the Garda authorities that as at 30 April 2020 there are 336 Gardaí assigned to the Wexford Division. This represents a significant increase of 81 Gardaí in the Division since the end of 2015. A full breakdown by of this total by rank and location is available on my Department's website at the following link: [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_March\\_2020.xlsx/Files/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_March\\_2020.xlsx](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_March_2020.xlsx/Files/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_March_2020.xlsx)

[http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_March\\_2020.xlsx](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_March_2020.xlsx)

### **Proposed Legislation**

232. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for the proposed draft legislation to replace sworn affidavits with statements of truth; and the difference between the proposed statement of truth and a sworn affidavit in practical and operational terms and in terms of legal consequence and validity. [10092/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The statement of truth is intended to provide a new means of submitting evidence or verifying documents or information in legal proceedings. However, the statement of truth is not intended to replace all affidavits in all circumstances. The proposal is that the statement of truth, which may be made in an electronic form, is to be used in place of an affidavit or statutory declaration as a means of submitting evidence or verifying documents electronically. Without a statement of truth, the Courts Service is limited in its ability to effectively provide electronic services to its users. While the COVID-19 crisis highlights the benefits and necessity of providing electronic services, the statement of truth is not merely a response to that crisis. It is a long term solution with the aim of improving the effectiveness of the courts system for members of the public accessing court services.

It is intended that legislation allowing for a statement of truth will include provision for a false statement of truth to be a contempt of court and will also provide that any person knowingly making or causing the making of a false declaration will be guilty of an offence.

### **Crime Data**

233. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number and location of racial crimes and the rate of prosecution between January 2015 and December 2019, inclusive in tabular form. [10150/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will appreciate that Ireland does not currently have specific legislation dealing with hate crime, although a hate motive is an aggravating factor that judges can take into account (on a non-statutory basis) at sentencing for any criminal offence.

In addition, the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989 Act prohibits certain forms of

threatening, abusive or insulting conduct that are intended or likely to stir up hatred against a group of persons on account of certain characteristics. These characteristics are race, colour, nationality, religion, ethnic or national origins, membership of the travelling community and sexual orientation.

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. The Director of Public Prosecutions is independent in the exercise of her functions.

The information requested by the Deputy potentially covers a number of circumstances and relates to a significant period of 5 years. I have requested relevant information including from the Garda authorities and the Courts Service on this matter and I will write directly to the Deputy when it is received.

The Deputy will be aware that work is underway in my Department to prepare legislation specifically dealing with hate crime and hate speech.

### **Direct Provision System**

234. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his Department has been in negotiations with a private company regarding the supply of direct provision or emergency accommodation in Castleblayney, County Monaghan; if so, if consultation will take place with the local community and representatives of asylum seekers with respect to the suitability of a proposed centre prior to the finalisation of an agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10169/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** I can inform the Deputy that my Department currently has no plans to increase the capacity of emergency accommodation for international protection applicants in County Monaghan.

I can also advise that a regional tender process for Direct Provision accommodation for the Border Region is ongoing and is currently in the assessment phase. As the Deputy will appreciate, it would not be appropriate for me to make any further comment while this procurement process is ongoing.

### **Garda Stations**

235. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to ensure the reopening of Emyvale Garda station, County Monaghan following a previous fire at the site; the time frame for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10170/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the Office of Public Works (OPW) has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As a result, all works to the Garda estate involve close cooperation between the OPW and the Garda authorities. This includes identifying and progressing any necessary remedial or refurbishment works required at individual stations. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

Emyvale Station was largely destroyed following a fire which occurred in the early hours of 28 October 2019.

I am informed that the OPW and Garda authorities have identified that the former married

quarters in Emyvale can meet the Garda operational accommodation requirements as an interim measure. I understand that the planning process to facilitate this was commenced earlier this year.

In terms of Garda resources in the area, the Deputy may wish to be aware that at end April 2020, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 103 Gardaí assigned to Monaghan District. This is an increase of 6% since end October 2019. I am further informed by Garda management that there will be no depletion of Garda resources in the Emyvale area during this period.

### **Direct Provision System**

236. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he is examining the abolition of the direct provision system and the replacement of same with a form of international protection and reception which can better respect human rights and dignity and to ensure own door accommodation for asylum seekers; and if an improved system of decision making in relation to applications will be ensured. [10176/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** Last year Minister Flanagan and I asked Dr. Catherine Day to bring together an expert group with representation from asylum seekers and NGOs to examine best practice in other European States in the provision of services to international protection applicants, to examine likely longer term trends and to set out recommendations and solutions. The Group is examining both the reception system for accommodating applicants and the system for processing applications, and is expected to make recommendations for changes in both areas. A briefing paper on the work of the group, prepared by the Chairperson to inform programme for government talks, has been circulated to members of both Houses of the Oireachtas.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Briefing Note includes a list of measures, identified so far, which would immediately improve the situation of those currently in Direct Provision, and on which officials of the Department have been asked to prepare proposals for the incoming Government. The work of the group is advancing at pace and their report is expected by the end of September.

Minister Flanagan and I are happy that this Briefing Note signals far-reaching proposals and we were anxious to ensure that Dr. Day and her Group were free to make any recommendations they deemed appropriate based on an expert analysis.

Last year we also established a high level Interdepartmental Group chaired by a senior official of my Department, to ensure that all Departments are proactively delivering on their responsibilities. The Group is reviewing the management of services for applicants for international protection and considering the short-to-medium term options which could be implemented to improve the system. Its Report has been finalised and is ready to be submitted to a new Government.

The system of Direct Provision refers to the suite of State services and supports that are provided by a range of Government Departments and agencies to persons seeking international protection in the State. It includes provision of medical cards, an exemption from prescription charges, access to education for children, a weekly payment, access to Exceptional Needs Payments, when required, and, of course, ensuring that all basic needs are met, like accommodation and food.

It is important note that significant efforts have been made to reform the system in recent

years. Mr. Justice Bryan McMahon, whose report in 2015 has been the basis for introducing improvements to the system, has himself noted that the system has improved considerably compared to what it was five years ago.

Significant improvements made to the system in recent years include access to the services of the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children; agreed National Standards for accommodation providers; the introduction of labour market access; and the continued roll-out of self-catering facilities for residents (now available to more than half of all residents).

The new National Standards contain specific actions to improve the lives of children in accommodation centres. As well as the aforementioned access to the services of the Ombudsman for Children, they are also supported by the Child Protection Policies that we have put in place in the centres. In addition, there is a Tusla official seconded to my Department to work with our International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS). This ensures that any child protection issues are swiftly followed up and that the process for referrals is as streamlined as possible.

Currently, around 25% of residents (1,974 people) in the Direct Provision system have own door self-catered accommodation. While, at this time, all available accommodation of this type is fully utilised, families are prioritised when this type of accommodation becomes available.

It is to be noted that the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality, in its report on Direct Provision and the International Protection Application Process, published last December, found that there was no clear consensus from the Committee as to what alternatives could or ought to replace the current system. Their Report also acknowledged that any new system of reception and accommodation will need time to ensure the right system is put in place.

Finally, Minister Flanagan and I look forward to the completion of the work of Dr. Day's expert group and the implementation of major changes, should the incoming Government accept the proposals.

### **Direct Provision System**

237. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons in direct provision centres at present by country of origin; the number in direct provision on 1 January 2019 and 1 January 2020, respectively; the steps being taken to reduce this number by a speedier assessment process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10220/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** I can inform the Deputy that there were 6,115 persons residing in Direct Provision accommodation as of 1 January 2019. The corresponding figure at 1 January 2020, was 7,683 persons. In 2019, the total figure for grants of status or permission to remain was 1,284. Between January and April of this year that total figure was 301 grants.

The table below shows the number of persons residing in accommodation as of 31 May 2020, by nationality. At that date, there were people from a total of 110 different nationalities residing in our accommodation. The figures include both international protection applicants and people who are no longer in the process, having already been granted an international protection status (refugee status or subsidiary protection) or a permission to remain in the State. Currently, we continue to accommodate almost 1,000 such people. We are assisting these residents to transition to permanent mainstream accommodation, working closely with the City and County Managers Association, the Local Authorities and organisations like DePaul Ireland, the Peter McVerry Trust and the Jesuit Refugee Service. People with status or permission to remain in the State have the same entitlement to housing supports and State services as everyone else.

*Questions - Written Answers*

No breakdown is provided for nationalities with less than 10 people due to the increased risk of their identification, which is prohibited under Section 26 of the International Protection Act 2015.

Nationality	Total
Afghanistan	178
Albania	558
Algeria	199
Angola	30
Bahrain	11
Bangladesh	189
Benin	11
Bolivia	35
Botswana	41
Brazil	20
Burundi	12
Cameroon	79
China (including Hong Kong)	12
Congo, The Democratic Republic of	310
Cote D'Ivoire	12
Egypt	29
El Salvador	22
Eritrea	15
Ethiopia	25
Georgia	655
Ghana	89
Guatemala	19
India	69
Iran (Islam Republic of)	37
Iraq	84
Israel	10
Jordan	14
Kenya	34
Kosovo/UNSCR 1244	34
Kuwait	15
Lesotho	11
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	21
Malawi	228
Malaysia	16
Mauritius	36
Morocco	50
Nepal	13
Nigeria	987
Pakistan	509
Palestinian Territory, Occupied	56
Russian Federation	28

Nationality	Total
Sierra Leone	64
Somalia	199
South Africa	610
Sri Lanka	15
Sudan	49
Swaziland	29
Syrian Arab Republic	85
Tanzania, United Republic of	11
Togo	25
Uganda	46
Ukraine	26
Venezuela	17
Yemen	10
Zambia	13
Zimbabwe	1034
Others (54 countries)	159
Total	7,195

The procedures to be followed in the assessment of applications for international protection are set out in law under the provisions of the International Protection Act 2015. As such, there are certain steps that the International Protection Office (IPO) is required by law to follow in assessing every application. The IPO is constantly exploring all options that will lead to a more timely processing of such applications.

The IPO currently has an existing caseload of approximately 5,700 cases (at end April 2020) having received almost 4,800 applications in 2019. Applications have been increasing year on year since the IPO's creation at the end of 2016, with applications up 30% approximately at the end of 2019 on the total received in 2018. However, it is acknowledged that the impacts of COVID-19 on travel to Ireland since March 2020 will somewhat distort that upward trend.

Efforts to improve processing times have been impacted upon by the current COVID-19 pandemic which has reduced the output of cases considerably. The IPO's main focus going forward is to get its processing system functioning as effectively and efficiently as possible, while adhering to all measures in place to combat the spread of COVID-19.

It is recognised that no single solution will achieve faster processing times but rather a targeted suite of measures, including additional staffing resources. Options that are being explored include greater automation of the process including ICT improvements, revision of key documentation and the use of remote interviewing.

Historically, the majority of international protection interviews were conducted at the IPO in Dublin with applicants travelling from their accommodation to Dublin for interview. Early in 2019, the IPO commenced a pilot to conduct protection interviews in suitable locations. These locations were closer to applicant's accommodation and removed the challenge for applicants of having to travel sometimes considerable distances for interview. This pilot was successful and in November 2019 the IPO moved to the next stage - interviews by video conference (VC). The first VC interviews took place in the south and, in early 2020, were also successfully trialled in the north west. The successful trials suggest that interview by VC may be suitable for many, though not all applicants. The success of these trials will also factor into the IPO planning for the resumption of protection interviews in the context of COVID-19 restrictions.

## **Courts Service**

238. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the discussions he has had with the Courts Service to ensure speedier hearings of court cases in relation to asylum and immigration in the courts and in particular cases involving judicial review proceedings relating to asylum; the results of such discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10221/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions. Furthermore, the scheduling of court cases and the allocation of court business are matters for the Presidents of the Courts and the presiding judges who are, under the Constitution, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions.

I can therefore inform the Deputy that no discussions have taken place between me or my Department officials and the Courts Service in relation to the matter referred to.

I am informed that there were no delays in the hearing of Immigration cases in the High Court prior to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions being implemented.

## **Immigration Data**

239. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons in direct provision that have been given permission to remain under a stamp 4 visa; the reason these persons are not afforded housing in the community; the steps being taken to provide them with housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10222/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** I can inform the Deputy that a total of 916 people living in Direct Provision have a permission to remain in the State, as of the end of May 2020. These residents have the same entitlement to access housing supports and services as citizens and EEA nationals.

Considerable work is being undertaken to support these residents to move out of accommodation centres and into secure permanent accommodation. My Department has a specific team who work in collaboration with DePaul Ireland, the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Peter McVerry Trust, officials in the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, and the City and County Managers Association to collectively support residents with status or permission to remain to access their housing options.

Since the beginning of the year and up to the end of May 2020, a total of 433 persons have moved from Direct Provision accommodation into the community. This compares with a figure of 203 people the previous year (2019), when the project commenced. We will continue to work with the remaining residents to assist them to do the same.

## **Asylum Applications**

240. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons that sought asylum here in each of the years 2010 to 2019 and to date in 2020, by country of origin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10223/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following link.

Where the numbers of applications received from individual countries are low (less than 10), a breakdown by country is not provided. This is for reasons of confidentiality, as provided for under Section 26 of the International Protection Act 2015.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2020-06-09\_pq240-9-06-20\_en.docx ">Asylum nos.</a>]

### Immigration Data

241. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications by asylum seekers given a final decision on their cases in each year since 2010; the number of these applications that resulted in refugee status being granted; the number of cases that resulted in subsidiary protection being granted; the number that resulted in humanitarian leave to remain being granted; the number refused; the number of persons deported; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10224/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Since the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 on 31 December 2016, a single application procedure applies where all aspects of a person's application (refugee status, subsidiary protection status and permission to remain) are examined and determined in one process. Prior to this, the three strands were examined sequentially and this could lead to long delays in obtaining a final decision.

Upon the commencement of the 2015 Act, approximately 3,500 legacy cases were carried over to be dealt with under the new single application procedure (1,500 of these cases were from the former Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and 2,000 from the former Refugee Appeals Tribunal). A further 500 cases transitioned in the months following commencement. These cases would have been the longest in the system at the commencement of the Act.

The International Protection Office (IPO) committed to scheduling these legacy cases for interview by the end of 2018 and for completion by the end of Q2 2019, where possible.

The IPO achieved the first part of this commitment in 2018 by scheduling all transition cases for interview, where it was possible to do so. The vast majority of the legacy cases have now been processed to completion in the IPO, and the focus is now on post commencement single procedure cases.

Some legacy cases will continue to be dealt with. These include transition applicants who had not co-operated up to this point but who are now re-engaging with the process and applicants who have come back into the process through Judicial Review. These cases are prioritised and scheduled for interview at the earliest possible opportunity and are processed accordingly.

I append a number of tables providing the details requested by the Deputy on the number of applications by asylum seekers or International Protection applicants, as they are now known, who received a final decision on their cases by the Ministerial Decisions Unit in each year since 2010 .

Year of Decision	Total Decisions
2010	3,705*

2011	1,815*
2012	1,021*
2013	965*
2014	2,032
2015	2,804
2016	2,766
2017	1,191
2018	1,603
2019	2,872
2020	693
Grand Total	21,467

\* These figures were collated from the Department’s AISIP database. However, Subsidiary Protection figures for 2010 to 2013 were not included on that database and were therefore compiled under a different process for which an annual breakdown is not available. Therefore a further 92 cases granted Subsidiary Protection between 2010 and 2013 must be added to the grand total for the period from 2010 to date, giving an overall total of 21,559.

The following table sets out the number of these applications that resulted in refugee status (RS) being granted, the number of cases that resulted in subsidiary protection (SP) being granted and the number that resulted in humanitarian leave to remain (PTR) being granted.

Grants by year and grant type	Type of grant			
Year Decision	RS Grant	SP Grant	PTR Review Grant	Grand Total
2010	159	#		159
2011	132	#		132
2012	93	#		93
2013	195	#		195
2014	212	270		482
2015	325	231		556
2016	590	137		727
2017	685	106		791
2018	828	224	29	1081
2019	947	168	169	1284
2020	257	68	48	373
Grand Total	4,423	1,204#	246	5,873#

# As noted above, 92 Subsidiary Protection permissions were granted in the period between 2010 and 2013 which were recorded on Repatriation systems rather than on the AISIP database. An annual breakdown of the total for those years is not available. However, including those grants, the total number of Subsidiary Protection grants for the period from 2010 to date would come to 1,296 and the overall total for the period would come to 5,965.

The table below sets out the various categories of refusal, including those deemed refused due to withdrawal by the applicants or deemed withdrawn due to lack of response from the applicant.

Refusal by year and refusal type	Type of Refusal								
Year Decision	PTR Review Refusal	Refuse All	RS Deemed Withdrawn	RS Refusal	RS Refused-Withdrawn	SP Deemed Withdrawn	SP Refusal	SP Refused-Withdrawn	Grand Total
2010				3,546			728		4,274
2011				1,683			1,161		2,844
2012				926	2		681		1,609
2013				768	2		40		810
2014			7	431	71	447	104	490	1,550
2015			8	610	266	481	571	312	2,248
2016			21	941	347	229	454	47	2,039
2017		7		61		6	323	3	400
2018	299	116		52			55		522
2019	533	924		59			71	1	1,588
2020	178	126		6			10		320
Grand total	1,010	1,173	36	9,083	688	1,163	4,198	853	18,204

\* Refuse All figures are applications under the IP Act 2015 (single procedure) that were not appealed to the IPAT and a decision issued from the Ministerial Decisions Unit. The decision is a refusal by the Ministerial Decisions unit of both Refugee Status (RS) and Subsidiary Protection (SP) only.

\*PTR Review Refusal are applications that were refused Refugee Status (RS) and Subsidiary Protection (SP) and post appeal to the IPAT were also refused Permission to Remain (PTR) by the Ministerial Decisions Unit.

\*SP Refusals and RS Refusals are refusals that were not made under the single procedure but were either legacy cases under the Refugee Act 1996 or cases processed under the transitional provisions of the IP Act 2015.

**The table below sets out the number of Deportations\***

Year Departed	Total Departed
2010	343
2011	280
2012	302
2013	209
2014	114
2015	251
2016	428
2017	140
2018	163
2019	298
2020 (up to 04.06.2020)	87
Total	2615

\*The figures above are for effected deportations, i.e., it includes those deported and those deemed to be deported, who left the state themselves having received a deportation order.

Since the International Protection Act 2015 (the 2015 Act) commenced on 31 December 2016, the International Protection Office has carried out the function of considering Permission to Remain (under section 49 of the 2015 Act).

**Permission to Remain decisions**

Year	Grant	Refusal
2020 (to end April)	42	618
2019	266	2,083
2018	198	1,833
2017	66	618

**Garda Resources**

242. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of evidential intoxilyzer machines in each Garda division as of 1 June 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10233/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will appreciate that under the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the administration and business of An Garda Síochána as well as the efficient use of resources. This includes responsibility for decisions on the allocation of Garda resources across the Divisions, in light of identified operational demands. As Minister, I have no role in those matters.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that there are 86 Evidential Intoxilyzer Machines currently in use by An Garda Síochána. The following table, furnished to me by the Garda authorities, details the number of Intoxilyzer Machines currently in use in each of the Garda Divisions.

Division	Evidential Intoxilyzer Machines
Cavan/Monaghan	5
Clare	4
Cork City	2
Cork North	5
Cork West	3
D.M.R. Eastern	1
D.M.R. North Central	1
D.M.R. Northern	2
D.M.R. South Central	1
D.M.R. Southern	1
D.M.R. Western	3
Donegal	5
Galway	5
Kerry	4
Kildare	4
Kilkenny/Carlow	2
Laois/Offaly	3
Limerick	3
Louth	2
Mayo	3

Division	Evidential Intoxilyzer Machines
Meath	4
Roscommon/Longford	2
Sligo/Leitrim	3
Tipperary	6
Waterford	2
Westmeath	2
Wexford	4
Wicklow	4

### Garda Equipment

243. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if funding has been secured to update the batons available to gardaí; when batons were last updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10234/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** In accordance the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. The allocation of Garda resources, including equipment and specialist equipment, is also a matter for the Commissioner, in light of identified operational demands. Other than in the case of certain less-lethal weapons, as Minister I have no role in these matters.

I am informed by the Garda authorities the current ASP baton utilised by An Garda Síochána was introduced in 2007.

I am further informed that there are currently no plans to introduce a new baton and that as a result, no extra funding has been sought in that regard.

More generally, the Deputy may be interested to know that the resources provided to An Garda Síochána have reached record levels, with an unprecedented allocation of €1.88 billion for 2020. A substantial programme of capital investment is also being undertaken in An Garda Síochána, including an investment of €342 million in the Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021, an investment of €46 million in the Garda fleet for the period 2016-2021 and a very significant investment in the Garda estate over the same period. Decisions on the best use of these resources are operational matters for the Commissioner.

### Garda Operations

244. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Donegal Garda divisional protective services unit will be established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10235/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for management of An Garda Síochána and for the allocation and efficient use of Garda resources. This includes responsibility for 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.

I have been informed by the Commissioner that 16 Divisional Protective Services Units (DPSUs) are now operational across 15 Divisions.

I am assured that An Garda Síochána continues to implement the roll-out of DPSUs nationwide and aims to ensure that a DPSU will be in operation within every Garda Síochána division as soon as possible. Roll-out of these Units will meet a key commitment in *A Policing Service for the Future*, the four-year implementation plan giving effect to the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland.

I am informed by An Garda Síochána that a competition for staffing of a DPSU in the Donegal Division was launched but that in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated public health restrictions, interviews for the positions have been postponed. I understand that that these will be arranged to take place as soon as circumstances allow. I am further informed that a Sexual Assault Investigation Unit is currently operating in the Donegal Division, pending the establishment of a DPSU, and that procedures are in place to ensure all alleged sexual crimes reported to Gardaí in the Division are appropriately investigated.

### Garda Operations

245. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when each remaining divisional protective services unit will be established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10236/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for management of An Garda Síochána and for the allocation and efficient use of Garda resources. This includes responsibility for 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.

I have been informed by the Commissioner that 16 Divisional Protective Services Units (DPSUs) are now operational across 15 Divisions.

I am assured that An Garda Síochána remains committed to implementing the roll-out of DPSUs nationwide and aims to ensure that a DPSU will be in operation within every Garda Division as soon as possible. Roll-out of these Units will meet a key commitment in *A Policing Service for the Future*, the four-year implementation plan giving effect to the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on the pace of progress and Gardaí inform me that in light of the pandemic, it is difficult to provide specific dates for establishment of the DPSUs in each of the remaining Garda Divisions. I am informed however that competition stage to permit for the staffing and establishment of DPSUs in these 13 Divisions has been reached and that Garda management will seek to conclude this process as soon as possible.

The Deputy will appreciate that existing arrangements for the investigation of sexual crimes continue in place, pending establishment of the DPSUs in the remaining Divisions.

### Alcohol Sales

246. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of

alcohol test purchases that were carried out within the Donegal Garda division; the number of premises that were found in breach of licensing laws; the frequency with which alcohol test purchases were carried out in each of the years 2018, 2019 and to date in 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10237/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for the direction and control of An Garda Síochána as well as for operational matters such as that referred to. As Minister, I have no direct role in that matter.

As the Deputy will appreciate, under the Intoxicating Liquor Act 1988, the holder of a licence shall not sell or deliver, or permit any person to sell or deliver, intoxicating liquor to persons under 18 years of age.

Test purchasing is governed by section 37C of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 1988, which came into operation in October 2010. It involves a person who is at least 15 but under the age of 18 years, acting on the instruction of a member of the Garda Síochána, entering into a licensed premises for the purpose of purchasing alcohol. The objective of test purchasing is to identify if a licensee is complying with statutory provisions regarding the sale of alcohol to underage persons and, if not, to obtain evidence for possible legal proceedings. The Act sets out the basis on which licensed premises will be selected for test purchasing and contains a number of safeguards for the test purchaser including a requirement for parental consent or consent of his/her guardian.

I am informed by Garda management that test purchasing of intoxicating liquor is intended to form only one part of the overall Garda Síochána programme for enforcing licensing law provisions relating to persons under the age of 18 years of age. I am further informed by Garda management that decisions concerning specific enforcement policies and actions will necessarily reflect local needs and priorities.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that a search of Pulse was carried out and that no such text purchased are recorded as having been conducted in Donegal in the period referred to by the Deputy. The following table, furnished to me by the Garda authorities, sets out the number of test purchases recorded as having been carried out on a national level during the same period.

#### **Test Purchasing of intoxicating Liquor nationally**

National Data	2018	2019	2020 (to date)	Total
Total	295	164	84	543

*Question No. 247 answered with Question No. 223.*

#### **Direct Provision System**

248. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address concerns raised by residents of a direct provision centre (details supplied); if urgent action will be taken to protect residents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10273/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** A number of measures were introduced in the Skellig Accommodation Centre in Cahersiveen in recent weeks to make life more comfortable for the residents and in particular the children who are living there.

Families with children were provided with arts and crafts materials, toys, books and tablets, to use as they wished. This was coordinated by the local Family Resource Centre with the cost of the tablets specifically covered by Tusla. Additionally, I am advised that the service provider at the centre has provided 12 laptops for residents' use, including the children of school going age.

I can also inform the Deputy that all international protection accommodation centres are contractually obliged to have Wi-Fi available to residents and TVs are provided in all bedrooms to enable children to access web-based educational resources and educational programmes such as the RTE Home School Hub, which is an additional support for parents and primary school pupils.

With regard to issues related to warm weather, I am advised that during the recent period of exceptionally warm weather, it took some time to adjust the central heating system but that this issue is now resolved. Centre management has advised that during the Summer months it would not be unusual for some flies to come through any open window but there is no question of an infestation of insects on the premises.

I hope this information provides the Deputy with some reassurance on the issues raised. My Department officials and I will continue to work closely with centre management to ensure the comfort and safety of all residents in the centre.

### **Road Traffic Offences**

249. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the problem in many communities in which it is unwise and not safe to walk due to the use of scramblers, mopeds and quads in parks and greens; if his attention has further been drawn to the different approaches to this problem in different Garda divisions; and if there is a code or best practice being used in different areas. [10301/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** My Department, alongside colleagues in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and An Garda Síochána, is acutely aware of the severe difficulties and dangers this activity caused in the communities it impacts and my officials have been working to find solutions to this complex policing issue. It should be noted that targeted enforcement measures have been introduced in a number of areas where quad bikes and scramblers were causing difficulties. For example, Gardaí in areas like Finglas have had recent success in reducing the number of issues with scramblers through targeted enforcement, while youth community engagement groups in Limerick have had successes diverting young people away from using these vehicles in a dangerous manner in public places, and towards properly organised motorcross events.

As I have outlined in previous Parliamentary responses, a cross-agency group has been examining the misuse of scramblers. This process has involved my Department, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Housing, Planning and Local Government and Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, as well as An Garda Síochána, the Road Safety Authority, the Revenue Commissioners and representatives of local authorities.

On foot of advice from the Office of the Attorney General, it was agreed that, in the main, current legislative provisions appeared to be sufficient. Nonetheless it was also agreed that the group would remain open to considering workable legislative solutions to any specific legislative gaps specifically identified by An Garda Síochána.

My officials wrote to the Garda Commissioner to seek his formal views on the matter. The

response from the Office of the Garda Commissioner does suggest potential legislative changes which the organisation believes could assist in improving policing in this area.

The cross-agency group most recently met in December 2019. The group agreed that the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport – which has primary responsibility for road traffic legislation – would explore the feasibility of developing new legislative provisions in road traffic legislation, which would seek to deliver the benefits sought by An Garda Síochána without unintended consequences for existing law.

Addressing the misuse of scramblers is a complex matter requiring a considered and multi-faceted approach directed at those in individual communities whose actions and behaviour impact negatively on those around them. At the December meeting, An Garda Síochána agreed to explore further targeted enforcement measures; while also advising that they would have a visible presence in affected communities over the Christmas period – which traditionally comes with an increase in this form of behaviour.

It was also agreed that my Department would consider and develop actions in order to increase awareness of the dangers of these vehicles jointly with affected communities, community groups and other stakeholders, and explore how best to engage with young persons who are drawn to this behaviour. My Department is examining options in this area, with due regard to social distancing requirements.

More broadly, the Deputy may also wish to be aware that the draft Youth Justice Strategy 2020-2026 has recently been published for public consultation by my colleague, the Minister for State David Stanton. An online questionnaire is available until the end of June to allow members of the public, including of course young people, to express their views. Further information is available on my Department's website at the following link: [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Youth\\_Justice\\_Strategy\\_Public\\_Consultation](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Youth_Justice_Strategy_Public_Consultation)

### **Direct Provision System**

250. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way in which persons in direct provision are being supported in terms of being able to social distance, PPE provision and online tools and internet that is vital at this time for education, well-being and communication. [10361/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** I can assure the Deputy that my Department, the HSE and centre management are doing everything that we can to protect the health and welfare of our residents and centre staff as well as that of the wider community at this time. We have been assured by both the HSE and the Office of the Chief Medical Officer that our approach is appropriate.

All accommodation centres are carefully following the guidelines for our centres that have been published by the HSE's Health Protection Surveillance Centre, which can be found on its website [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie). That guidance exists precisely because it is recognised that congregated settings such as Direct Provision centres present specific challenges in this pandemic.

Shared bedrooms and communal living space are provided in numerous settings. Similar arrangements apply in homeless and disability services and, indeed, in private rented accommodation. The direction from the HSE is that during the COVID crisis non-family members sharing a room in Direct Provision centres are considered to be a household. As such, they should implement social distancing measures from other households, i.e. residents in other rooms, and self-isolate if displaying symptoms or if directed by the HSE. In such instances, we provide

facilities for self-isolation both on and off-site.

The established procedure across all centres where a person is suspected of having the virus or is confirmed as having the virus, is that, where advised by Public Health, they are moved to a dedicated offsite self-isolation facility. Supports are available for the duration of their period of isolation until such time as the HSE considers that they can safely return to their centre. My Department has opened four dedicated self-isolation facilities for residents in Dublin, Cork and Limerick, and Dundalk, with a total capacity of 299 rooms. Residents in these facilities have their own bedroom and their own bathroom.

Since the start of the year over 1,550 permanent and temporary Direct Provision bed spaces have been procured, including the dedicated new centres opened in Rosslare Harbour, Cahersiveen and Tullamore.

We have relocated over 600 residents to support social and physical distancing in centres and cocooning measures for the most vulnerable. By doing this, we have ensured that no more than three single people are sharing a room in any of our centres. We intend to continue this policy when the crisis is over.

We have cocooned all residents aged 65 or older and those advised to my Department by the HSE as requiring cocooning on medical grounds.

We are communicating directly with centre managers and residents via regular newsletters, which can also be found on our website [www.accommodationcentres.ie](http://www.accommodationcentres.ie). The newsletters have provided practical information on implementing social and physical distancing at this time and promoted shared learning and best practice across our network of centres. Residents have also been made aware of the need for good hand hygiene and coughing/sneezing etiquette. Information and posters have been distributed to all centres and translations of public health information have also been provided.

During this time, centre managers have also been advised to increase the standard and frequency of cleaning throughout the centres, paying particular attention to communal areas. A regular supply of hand sanitiser for centres is in place and this is distributed to centres as required. Other PPE is distributed, as needed, and in line with the HPSC guidelines for its appropriate use in residential settings.

Regarding internet access, I can inform the Deputy that all accommodation centres in my Department are contractually obliged to have Wi-Fi available to residents. My officials have been undertaking a review of access across all centres in recent weeks in order to ensure that signal strength is adequate. Televisions are also provided in all bedrooms. This enables children to access educational programmes such as the RTE Home School Hub, which is an additional support for parents and primary school pupils. Pupils are able to watch, download and engage with curriculum-based content, project work, and fun activities to keep them entertained and learning. This broadcast is a supplement to the ongoing learning being provided by teachers.

Children who reside in Direct Provision accommodation centres are in the care of their parents and guardians. Similar to all other parents, they are responsible for ensuring that their children are engaging with education at this current time. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) and TUSLA Education Support Service (TESS) are supporting the schools and parents at this time. The International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) of my Department is liaising with these services to ensure that the most vulnerable children are identified and supported. A communication pathway for schools, parents and centre managers in relation to education issues has been put in place. TESS Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) will identify children and families who may need assistance, liaising with schools and sourcing additional

services/resources where necessary. Children and their parents or guardians living in accommodation centres are also supported by a Tusla official and a Department of Education official seconded to my Department to work with IPAS. This ensures that any education or child support issues can be quickly followed up.

My Department has developed a Strategic Framework for Engagement on Child and Family Issues in the context of school closures and social distancing requirements put in place during the COVID-19 crisis. The International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) and Child and Family Welfare Team has developed this framework to support families living in our centres. In preparing the framework, outreach has taken place with key stakeholders including centre managers, TUSLA, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Rural and Community Development, the HSE, the Children's Rights Alliance, One Family and UNHCR. We will continue to work closely with these and other partners. The Framework encompasses three broad themes under which actions will be rolled out: child and family welfare, identifying education requirements, and the general provision of activities for children.

I understand that existing supports for groups under-represented in higher level education and at risk groups in further education and training, will be maintained and re-oriented as part of the response to COVID-19 by the Department of Education and Skills. These groups include learners in Direct Provision settings. A working-group on mitigating educational disadvantage is consulting with stakeholders in the further and higher education sectors on how best to ensure continuity of learning for individuals most at risk of being impacted by the pandemic.

I hope this information provides the Deputy with some reassurance of the steps we are taking at this time to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of all residents and centre staff as a priority.

### **Prison Staff**

251. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has considered introducing flexibility in the retirement age for prison officers with the capacity and the willingness to continue working; the way in which prison officer retirement rules compare with those in Northern Ireland and elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10377/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will appreciate that it is the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, rather than my Department, which has overall responsibility for public service pension matters.

With regard to the particular question posed, I can inform the Deputy that the retiring age of 60 years for prison officers to whom the Superannuation (Prison Officers) Act, 1919 applies is set out at section 8(1)(a) of the Civil Service Regulation Act, 1956 (as amended).

As noted in a recent response on this topic, a review of the compulsory retirement age was carried out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in 2017. I do not have any immediate plans to change this but the matter is kept under review in consultation with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

### **Citizenship Applications**

252. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the average waiting time for the processing of citizenship applications in each of the years 2016 to 2019 and to date in 2020; the number of persons that were waiting more than six months for an application to be processed at the end of each of the years 2016 to 2019; the number of persons that were waiting to have their applications processed at the end of each of the years 2016 to 2019 and the end of May 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10380/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation under the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements, not only within the State but also at European Union as well as international level. It is therefore important that appropriate procedures are in place to ensure that the integrity of the regime for granting Irish citizenship through the naturalisation process is held in high regard both at home and internationally. These procedures are continually evolving arising from, for example, service improvements due to the introduction of new technology and updated work practices.

In general (and absent exceptional delaying events referred to below), it takes around 6 months for a standard application to be processed from the date it is received to the date a decision is made. However, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases can take longer than others to process. Additional security checks can result in some applications taking longer than this average timescale. Such checks are fundamental to maintaining the legitimacy of the naturalisation process both nationally and internationally.

In addition, processing timescales can be impacted due to incomplete applications having to be returned, further documentation being required from the applicant, or where payment of the required certificate fee is awaited, or the applicant has not been engaging with the Immigration Service of my Department. Sometimes the input of several government agencies, both within and outside this jurisdiction is needed and the request and receipt of information from these sources can result in delays in processing some applications. In other instances, issues can arise at the final stage of the naturalisation process, for example, where additional information comes to light which is required to be considered before a final decision is taken.

It should be noted that once an applicant has been approved, there are a number of further steps which must be completed before they can be scheduled for attendance at a citizenship ceremony, which can result in an additional delay.

**Processing Times: Months from Date application received to Date of Decision 2016 - 2019**

Year	Number of applications Decided	Average Processing Time - all decisions (Months)	Median Processing Time To Approval (Months)*	Median Processing Time to Refusal (Months)
2016	11,081	6	3	27
2017	9,190	7	6	23
2018	11,139	11	7	23
2019	9,319	12	10	19
2020	3,551	13	11	19

\* Median processing time in 2016 is skewed by a large number of minor applications being decided.

The number of persons waiting more than six months for an application to be processed at the end of each of the years 2016 to 2019 was as set out in the following table.

### Applications Decided by number of months from application to decision 2016 - 2019

Year	Less than 6 months	6 to less than 12 months	12 to less than 18 months	18 to less than 24 months	24 months+	Total
2016	8565	1289	275	259	684	11072
2017	3874	4033	469	245	527	9148
2018	3394	3740	2101	841	983	11059
2019	779	4142	2305	940	468	8634
2020	228	1556	916	266	290	3256

### % breakdown

Year	Less than 6 months	6 to less than 12 months	12 to less than 18 months	18 to less than 24 months	24 months+
2016	77%	12%	2%	2%	6%
2017	42%	44%	5%	3%	6%
2018	31%	34%	19%	8%	9%
2019	9%	48%	27%	11%	5%
2020	7%	48%	28%	8%	9%

The number of persons waiting to have their applications processed at the end of each of the years 2016 to 2019 and the end of May 2020 are presented in the following table.

### Applications open at Year end 2016 - 2019

Year End	Standard Adult	Spouse of Irish Citizen (S15a)	Refugee	Minor*	Total
2016	5,995	1,402	258	667	8,322
2017	7,483	2,044	439	1,030	10,996
2018	8,233	2,605	634	1,350	12,822
2019	12,703	3,959	1,116	2,167	19,945
2020 (Q1)	11,415	3,622	1,210	2,249	18,496

Minor includes applications under S28a of the Act.

As well as demands caused by increased checks and a larger number of applications, the process for citizenship has had a number of specific challenges in the last year which have led to delays. Firstly, on foot of a challenge taken in the High Court last year by an applicant who was refused a certificate of naturalisation due to their absences from the State during the last year prior to the date of their application, significant delays were caused to processing, as the naturalisation consideration had to be suspended pending the outcome of an appeal.

While it was subsequently possible to organise a naturalisation ceremony for thousands of applicants, the restrictions attendant to the current COVID-19 pandemic have regrettably resulted in significant challenges to the delivery of normal services. As a result of these restrictions, the Citizenship Division of the Immigration Service, along with many other public and private sector organisations is experiencing significant disruption in delivering its core func-

tions. Working within these restrictions, public safety and the wellbeing of staff are of course both urgent priorities. As the Deputy may be aware, the next scheduled citizenship ceremony due to take place in the INEC in Killarney in July 2020 has unfortunately been postponed due to the current restrictions. I have instructed my officials to examine feasible mechanisms and processes whereby procedures such as citizenship ceremonies can take place while fully complying with the criteria outlined in the Government Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. As the Deputy will appreciate, the number of applications on hand at a given point in time is impacted by ceremony schedules.

### **Personal Insolvency Arrangements**

253. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 364 of 27 May 2020, the provisions which will be contained in the short urgent Bill referenced; the changes to the Personal Insolvency Acts necessitated by Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10385/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** In my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 364 of 27 May, I indicated that my officials are considering certain specific formal or procedural statutory requirements which may be difficult or impracticable to comply with, due to COVID-19 restrictions, including a small number of requirements under the Personal Insolvency Acts, so that any necessary amendments could be addressed in an urgent forthcoming bill.

It is not possible at this stage to provide further details on the exact changes to be included in the forthcoming COVID-related bill, as these have not been finalised at this point in time.

*Question No. 254 answered with Question No. 223.*

### **Departmental Funding**

255. **Deputy Roderic O’Gorman** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details of funding for an organisation (details supplied) in each of the years 2008 to 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10406/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The National Collective of Community based Women’s Networks (NCCWN) consists of 17 women’s groups located in various parts of the country, and is involved broadly in activation and outreach for disadvantaged women. The Department of Justice and Equality has funded the NCCWN since 2016. Prior to this, funding was provided by the Department of the Environment. Since 2016, my Department has provided funding of over €6,362,028 to the NCCWN.

This funding is towards salaries, administration and overhead costs incurred in the implementation of the activities set out in the agreed Women’s Equality and Development Programme, NCCWN Support Scheme to Enhance the Inclusion of Women in Communities 2019, in line with the objectives contained in the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020.

The summary of payments from the Department of Justice and Equality to NCCWN to date from 2016 to 2020 totalling €6,362,028.22 breaks down as:

2016 €1,385,000.01

2017 €1,502,083.34

2018 €1,410,642.36

2019 €1,438,969.51

2020 to date €625,333.00

NCCWN have also received payments under the ESF PEIL 2.9 2019 call of €318,231.96 and ESF PEIL 2.9 2016 call of €250,000.

### **Direct Provision System**

256. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if provisions will be made for residents in a direct provision centre (details supplied) in County Clare to access suitable snacks and hot and cold drinks outside of mealtimes between the hours of 6pm and 8am; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10411/20]

257. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the provisions in place for residents in a direct provision centre (details supplied) in County Clare in relation to personal sanitation products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10412/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**  
I propose to take Questions Nos. 256 and 257 together.

I have made inquiries and I have been informed of the following in relation to the Centre referred to. Hand sanitiser was issued to each individual resident at the commencement of the COVID-19 crisis. It is replenished from reception as and when required. Hand sanitisation stations are located outside bedrooms and also at the entrances to each accommodation block. Stations are also located in several locations throughout the administration building including the restaurant and communal areas.

Cleaning packs containing disinfectant spray, tissues, brushes and mops have also been distributed to each bedroom.

With regard to personal hygiene products, sanitary towels and tampons are issued to residents as part of their toiletries packs and are also available as and when required by residents. Packs also include toilet paper, shampoo, shower gel and toothpaste.

Residents who require nappies are issued with a weekly payment by the Community Welfare Officer for their purchase. In addition to this weekly payment, the Northside Family Resource Centre have visited the centre several times over the past number of weeks with additional supplies of nappies for all children.

The catering area for each block in the centre referred to is accessible 24 hours a day, where there is a Burco boiler available to residents to prepare refreshments. Snacks, including cereals and biscuits, are also made available for residents in the catering area.

### **Direct Provision System**

258. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to end the direct provision system here in view of the recent events in the United States of America and increased awareness of the dangers of racism and discrimination; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10421/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**

Last year Minister Flanagan and I asked Dr. Catherine Day to bring together an expert group with representation from asylum seekers and NGOs to examine best practice in other European States in the provision of services to international protection applicants, to examine likely longer term trends and to set out recommendations and solutions. The Group is examining both the reception system for accommodating applicants and the system for processing applications, and is expected to make recommendations for changes in both areas. A briefing paper on the work of the group, prepared by the Chairperson to inform programme for government talks, has been circulated to members of both Houses of the Oireachtas.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Briefing Note includes a list of measures, identified so far, which would immediately improve the situation of those currently in Direct Provision, and on which officials of the Department have been asked to prepare proposals for the incoming Government. The work of the group is advancing at pace and their report is expected by the end of September.

Minister Flanagan and I are happy that this Briefing Note signals far-reaching proposals and we were anxious to ensure that Dr. Day and her Group were free to make any recommendations they deemed appropriate based on an expert analysis.

Last year we also established a high level Interdepartmental Group chaired by a senior official of my Department, to ensure that all Departments are proactively delivering on their responsibilities. The Group is reviewing the management of services for applicants for international protection and considering the short-to-medium term options which could be implemented to improve the system. Its Report has been finalised and is ready to be submitted to a new Government.

The system of Direct Provision refers to the suite of State services and supports that are provided by a range of Government Departments and agencies to persons seeking international protection in the State. It includes provision of medical cards, an exemption from prescription charges, access to education for children, a weekly payment, access to Exceptional Needs Payments, when required, and, of course, ensuring that all basic needs are met, like accommodation and food.

It is important to note that significant efforts have been made to reform the system in recent years. Mr. Justice Bryan McMahon, whose report in 2015 has been the basis for introducing improvements to the system, has himself noted that the system has improved considerably compared to what it was five years ago.

Significant improvements made to the system in recent years include access to the services of the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children; agreed National Standards for accommodation providers; the introduction of labour market access; and the continued roll-out of self-catering facilities for residents (now available to more than half of all residents).

The new National Standards contain specific actions to improve the lives of children in accommodation centres. As well as the aforementioned access to the services of the Ombudsman for Children, they are also supported by the Child Protection Policies that we have put in place in the centres. In addition, there is a Tusla official seconded to my Department to work with our International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS). This ensures that any child protection issues are swiftly followed up and that the process for referrals is as streamlined as possible.

Currently, around 25% of residents (1,974 people) in the Direct Provision system have own door self-catered accommodation. While, at this time, all available accommodation of this type is fully utilised, families are prioritised when this type of accommodation becomes available.

It is to be noted that the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality, in its report on Direct Provision and the International Protection Application Process, published last December, found that there was no clear consensus from the Committee as to what alternatives could or ought to replace the current system. Their Report also acknowledged that any new system of reception and accommodation will need time to ensure the right system is put in place.

Finally, Minister Flanagan and I look forward to the completion of the work of Dr. Day's expert group and the implementation of major changes, should the incoming Government accept the proposals.

### Personal Insolvency Arrangements

259. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide statistical information in relation to section 115A of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 (details supplied). [10432/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Insolvency Service of Ireland, (ISI) is an independent statutory body under my remit. I have had the necessary enquiries made and the Insolvency Service of Ireland has provided the information sought by the Deputy.

Numbers represent figures available up to 4 June 2020.

Statistical Information	
Number of applications commenced under section 115A of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 to date.	1909
Number of cases in which at least one notice of objection has been filed by at least one creditor.	1608
Number of first instance applications commenced under section 115A in which a final order has been made by the court.	1186
Number of first instance cases in which at least one notice of objection has been filed in cases in which the court has approved the application under section 115A.	264
Number of appeals that have been brought against a refusal of the Circuit Court to confirm a personal insolvency arrangement under section 115A to date.	404
Number of appeals that have been brought against a refusal of the Circuit Court to confirm a personal insolvency arrangement under section 115A in which the High Court has made a final order on the appeal.	313
Number of appeals brought against a refusal of the Circuit Court to confirm a personal insolvency arrangement under section 115A, in which an order has been made by the High Court confirming the coming into effect of a Personal Insolvency Arrangement.	85 (further 22 remitted back to court of first instance for final determination)

### Immigration Status

260. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination for residency and naturalisation in the case of a person (details sup-

plied) who is awaiting a decision in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10443/20]

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

The IPO may be contacted either by email to [info@ipo.gov.ie](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 were introduced. Such applications are now processed, as part of a single application procedure, by the International Protection Office (IPO) which has replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) from that date. The staff of that Office (the Chief International Protection Officer and International Protection Officers) are independent in the performance of their protection functions.

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

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

### **Immigration Status**

261. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10447/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can inform the Deputy that written representations have been submitted on behalf of the persons concerned in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended).

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

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.

*Question No. 262 answered with Question No. 228.*

### **Health and Safety Inspections**

263. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of requests and the details that the Health Safety Authority has received regarding a safety site inspection and audit at the construction site at the national children's hospital at St James's Hospital campus; the status of actions and responses taken and planned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9645/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The management of specific individual inspection cases by the Health and Safety Authority, is a day-to-day operational matter for the Health and Safety Authority in which the Minister has no role.

The Deputy might wish to note that for operational as well as confidentially reasons the Health and Safety Authority does not disclose information regarding individual places of work.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

264. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will address a matter regarding caravan parks (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9781/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Under the reconfiguration of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business announced on the 5th June, there are now just two remaining phases instead of three, with Phase 3 starting on the 29th of June, and Phase 4 on the 20th of July. Further work will be carried out in the coming days and weeks to determine which actions will take place in each phase. Updates to the roadmap can be found at [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie).

The Roadmap is a living document and Government has demonstrated great flexibility in its decision to accelerate the phases as set out in the original Roadmap.

The input and advice of National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) informed the Government's decision to proceed with Phase 2 and to accelerate elements of the Roadmap. The Government also had regard to a paper which was developed by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to provide an updated assessment of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify, from an economic perspective, some priority issues for re-opening of economic activity under Phase 2. This paper, "Economic Considerations for Reinstating Economic Activity - Update for Phase 2", is available on my Department's website at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Economic-Considerations-for-Reinstating-Economic-Activity-Update-for-Phase-2.pdf>.

On 8th June the Minister for Health, Simon Harris T.D., signed SI No.206 of 2020, Health

Act 1947 (Section 31A – Temporary Restrictions)(COVID-19)(No. 2) Regulations. These Regulations, which shall remain in operation until 29th June, provide for the unwinding of certain restrictions, including the reopening of retail outlets and extending the distance that may be travelled for specified purposes. The Regulations also provide for continued restrictions for some businesses or services and for offences, including in relation to events. Businesses should carefully review these Regulations. Schedule 2 of SI No.206 of 2020 sets out which businesses or services are not permitted to reopen at this time. Caravan parks are included in Schedule 2 other than insofar as they are providing:

(a) essential accommodation (including accommodation for homeless persons and persons in direct provision and persons who are unable to reside in their usual place of residence due to reasons related to the spread of Covid-19 or otherwise),

(b) accommodation for a person that is necessary for the purposes of his or her work or employment,

(c) accommodation for a person that is necessary to permit or enable him or her to attend a funeral,

(d) accommodation for a person that is necessary to permit or enable him or her to fulfil legal obligations,

(e) accommodation for a person that is necessary to permit or enable him or her to receive medical or dental treatment, or

(f) accommodation for a person that is necessary for vital family reasons.

As the Deputy will be aware, it is hoped that in three weeks' time we will be able to move to a more advanced Phase 3, which would include the reopening of domestic tourism, and bring forward the opening of hotels, restaurants, bars that also operate as restaurants, hostels, caravan parks, galleries and museums to the 29th of June. On 9th June, Fáilte Ireland published guidelines for reopening for various sectors of the tourism industry, including caravan and camping parks; <https://covid19.failteireland.ie/industry-updates/guidelines-for-re-opening-published/>.

I recognise the impact that this pandemic is having on businesses right across the country. I know that employers and employees want to get back to work and I support them in that ambition, but it must be safe to do so. My Department contributed to the considerations around the phased re-opening of sectors under Phases 1 and 2 and I will work within Government to secure further details and clarity for businesses as we progress through the remaining phases in the Roadmap.

It is important to note that all decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of restrictions as envisaged in the next two phases of the Roadmap will be informed by the public health advice at the time.

### **Health and Safety Inspections**

265. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the necessary health and safety inspections by the HSA of workplaces will commence; and if the HSA has been resourced with the requisite number of staff to meet these responsibilities. [9786/20]

277. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the

areas from which she plans to draw additional Covid-19 inspectors in view of the fact the HSE will need to deploy its own inspectors to carry out food safety and Covid-19 checks in restaurants and pubs when they reopen in June and July 2020 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9799/20]

295. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of inspectors retained by the Health and Safety Authority. [10251/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 265, 277 and 295 together.

The Health and Safety Authority is the lead agency in monitoring adherence to the national Return to Work Safely Protocol. Upon the commencement of Phase 1 of the Roadmap for the Reopening of Society the Health and Safety Authority, along with its usual workload, began a national programme of inspections to check compliance with the Protocol. Between 18 May and close of business on 5th June the Health and Safety Authority has recorded 1276 inspections/investigations of which 1089 relate to the Protocol. The 1276 inspections were completed across a range of industry sectors including construction which accounted for around half of the inspections. The HSA normally undertakes about 200 inspections per week as part of its workplace health and safety remit so this level of inspections represents a significant increase overall.

The results from inspections are encouraging. Broadly speaking and based on an initial analysis of the specific COVID-19/Protocol inspections, compliance with the Return to Work Safely Protocol is high and employers are generally taking a responsible and proactive approach.

In terms of staff numbers, the Health and Safety Authority has a total staff complement of 182 which is made up of staff in administration and inspector grades. Of the 109 inspectors currently in the Authority across all grades, 67 inspectors have been made available to inspect on foot of the Return to Work Safely Protocol. This number covers both existing field inspectors as well as others redeployed internally from their existing roles.

The Health and Safety Authority inspectorate will be supplemented significantly by deploying, other inspectors from across the system who already have an environmental health, agriculture or other workplace/business inspection responsibilities. These resources will be drawn from the Workplace Relations Commission, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the cohort of Environmental Health Officers and will result in an additional 500 inspectors checking compliance with the Protocol as part of their normal inspection programme.

All of these groups of inspectors are fully committed to working with the Health and Safety Authority and I am confident that the approach being taken is a logical, and good, use of available existing resources to cover all business sectors.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

266. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the restart grant for small businesses is open to golf clubs that are privately owned and operated through limited companies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9801/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** On Friday, May 15th, 2020 the Government announced details of the new €250m Restart Grant providing direct grant aid to micro and small businesses. The grant is a contribution towards the

cost of re-opening or keeping a business operational.

The Restart Grant support is just one part of the wider €12bn package of supports for commercial firms of all sizes, which includes grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities, all of which will help those businesses to continue trading and to maintain employment.

To avail of the Restart Grant, applicants must be a commercial business and be in the Local Authorities' Commercial Rates Payment System, and:

- have a turnover of less than €5m and have 50 or less employees.
- have suffered a projected 25%+ loss in revenue from 1st April 2020 to 30th June 2020.
- commit to remain open or to reopen if it was closed.
- declare the intention to retain employees that are benefitting from the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS).

The primary objective, therefore, is to get funding into small businesses that:

- Are reliant solely on local trading income;
- Are financially independent from any group structure;
- Have suffered significant financial losses;
- Have had to bear ongoing fixed costs or faced costs associated with re-opening the business;
- Provide local paid employment.

A fully commercial trading entity is eligible, if it meets the criteria.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

267. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the phase of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business which ice cream trucks fall under; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9820/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Under the reconfiguration of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business announced on the 5th June, there are now just two remaining phases instead of three, with Phase 3 starting on the 29th of June, and Phase 4 on the 20th of July. Further work will be carried out in the coming days and weeks to determine which actions will take place in each phase. Updates to the roadmap can be found at [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie).

The Roadmap is a living document and Government has demonstrated great flexibility in its decision to accelerate the phases as set out in the original Roadmap.

The input and advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) informed the Government's decision to proceed with Phase 2 and to accelerate elements of the Roadmap. The Government also had regard to a paper which was developed by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to provide an updated assessment of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

and to identify, from an economic perspective, some priority issues for re-opening of economic activity under Phase 2. This paper, “Economic Considerations for Reinstating Economic Activity - Update for Phase 2”, is available on my Department’s website at <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Economic-Considerations-for-Reinstating-Economic-Activity-Update-for-Phase-2.pdf>.

On 8th June the Minister for Health, Simon Harris T.D., signed SI No.206 of 2020, Health Act 1947 (Section 31A – Temporary Restrictions)(COVID-19)(No. 2) Regulations. These Regulations, which shall remain in operation until 29th June, provide for the unwinding of certain restrictions, including the reopening of retail outlets and extending the distance that may be travelled for specified purposes. The Regulations also provide for continued restrictions for some businesses or services and for offences, including in relation to events. Businesses should carefully review these Regulations.

Where a business is not specifically listed, businesses should review the Roadmap and the updates carefully and carry out a detailed assessment of their activities with regard to the continuing public health measures. Businesses should, based on their assessment, identify which category in which phase of reopening they will be in a position to reopen safely and in line with the continued public health measures. It is not necessary for businesses to seek official authorisation to reopen.

The National Return to Work Safely Protocol is a useful guide for businesses in making their assessments and adapting their workplace procedures and practices to comply fully with the COVID-19 related public health protection measures. It sets out in very clear terms for employers and employees the steps that they must take firstly before a workplace reopens, and then while it continues to operate. The Protocol is available at <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/Publications/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html>. The Health and Safety Authority, which is an agency of my Department, is the lead agency in overseeing compliance with the National Return to Work Safely Protocol in the workplace. If employers or employees need further guidance on the Protocol, the HSA Helpline can be contacted at 1890 289 389 or [wcu@hsa.ie](mailto:wcu@hsa.ie).

In order to assist businesses to address the challenges posed by COVID-19, the Government has put in place a comprehensive suite of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes the wage subsidy scheme, grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities. These supports are designed to build confidence, to further assist businesses in terms of the management of their companies and to allow them to begin looking to the future and start charting a path forward for weeks and months ahead. For a full list of supports for business please see <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

I recognise the impact that this pandemic is having on businesses right across the country. I know that employers and employees want to get back to work and I support them in that ambition, but it must be safe to do so. My Department contributed to the considerations around the phased re-opening of sectors under Phases 1 and 2 and I will work within Government to secure further details and clarity for businesses as we progress through the remaining phases in the Roadmap.

It is important to note that all decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of restrictions as envisaged in the next two phases of the Roadmap will be informed by the public health advice at the time.

## **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

268. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the funding available for persons that operate businesses from their own homes further to the introduction of start-up grants for businesses following closure due to Covid-19; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10110/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Restart Grant is just one part of the wider €12bn package of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes the wage subsidy scheme, the pandemic unemployment payment for the self-employed, grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities, all of which will help to improve cashflow amongst SMEs. I would encourage businesses that operate from their own homes with employees to continue to make use of the Temporary Wage Scheme as they transition to reopen.

I would also encourage all businesses to contact their Local Enterprise Office (LEO) to determine the most appropriate supports to meet their needs. On 8th June I announced with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, Richard Bruton TD, a major expansion of the LEOs' Trading Online Voucher Scheme to help small and micro enterprises to get online quickly.

The LEOs Trading Online Voucher is a scheme, designed to assist small and microenterprises (10 or less employees) by offering financial assistance of up to €2,500 towards training and advice to help businesses trade online. The Trading Online Voucher scheme is administered by the LEOs. The support is available to cover 90% of the costs of an online initiative and recipients can claim up to €5,000 in two vouchers worth €2,500 each. Participating in this scheme can make the process of trading online much easier for businesses. See: [localenterprise.ie/Discover-Business-Supports](https://localenterprise.ie/Discover-Business-Supports)

Trading Online Vouchers can be used for:

- development or upgrade of an e-commerce website, such as implementing online payments or booking systems
- purchase of internet related software - online advertising (subject to limits)
- development of an app
- development and/or implementation of a digital marketing strategy
- consultation with ICT experts
- training and support to develop and manage your online trading activity and subscriptions to low cost online retail platform solutions,

Full details on all COVID19 supports for business are available at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

269. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if charity shops which paid rates to their local authority in 2019 are eligible for the business restart grant; and if not, the reason they are excluded. [9692/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Restart Grant is aimed at commercial business. We have sought to prioritise commercial enti-

ties that are totally dependent on their trading income which in turn creates paid employment locally and will drive economic activity and get money circulating. Within our limited funding, the aim is to get these businesses back up and running, trading as normally as possible so that they can retain employees who will no longer need a temporary wage subsidy or be able to take back workers who are on the Pandemic Unemployment Payment.

The €250m Restart Grant is just one of a range of supports provided by the Government to support businesses, employers and employees on foot of the crisis.

My colleagues Michael Ring TD, the Minister for Rural and Community Development and Seán Canney TD, Minister of State with responsibility for Community Development, on Friday, 8th May announced the launch of a €40 million package of supports specifically for Community and Voluntary Organisations, Charities and Social Enterprises. The package consists of:

- A €35 million ‘COVID-19 Stability Fund’ which will provide a level of support to qualifying organisations who are most in need and have seen their trading and/or fundraising income drop significantly during the crisis; and

- A €5m Government commitment to a Philanthropy Fund, (Innovate Together) which will focus on supporting responses to the COVID-19 crisis that require innovative and adaptive solutions to existing and emerging challenges.

The Stability Fund is being administered by Pobal. The Government will continue to support the needs of different sectors with well-tailored and targeted initiatives.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

270. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when guidance will be issued to hairdressers and barbers regarding the steps they will need to take in order to get their businesses ready for reopening; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9695/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Under the reconfiguration of the Government’s Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business announced on the 5th June, there are now just two remaining phases instead of three, with Phase 3 starting on the 29th of June, and Phase 4 on the 20th of July. Further work will be carried out in the coming days and weeks to determine which actions will take place in each phase. Updates to the roadmap can be found at [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie).

The Roadmap is a living document and Government has demonstrated great flexibility in its decision to accelerate the phases as set out in the original Roadmap.

The input and advice of National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) informed the Government’s decision to proceed with Phase 2 and to accelerate elements of the Roadmap. The Government also had regard to a paper which was developed by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to provide an updated assessment of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify, from an economic perspective, some priority issues for re-opening of economic activity under Phase 2. This paper, “Economic Considerations for Reinstating Economic Activity - Update for Phase 2”, is available on my Department’s website at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Economic-Considerations-for-Reinstating-Economic-Activity-Update-for-Phase-2.pdf>.

On 8th June the Minister for Health, Simon Harris T.D., signed SI No.206 of 2020, Health Act 1947 (Section 31A – Temporary Restrictions)(COVID-19)(No. 2) Regulations. These Regulations, which shall remain in operation until 29th June, provide for the unwinding of certain restrictions, including the reopening of retail outlets and extending the distance that may be travelled for specified purposes. The Regulations also provide for continued restrictions for some businesses or services and for offences, including in relation to events. Businesses should carefully review these Regulations.

Where a business is not specifically listed in SI No.206 of 2020, it should review the Roadmap and the updates carefully and carry out a detailed assessment of its activities with regard to the continuing public health measures. Businesses should, based on their assessment, identify which category in which phase of reopening they will be in a position to reopen safely and in line with the continued public health measures. It is not necessary for businesses to seek official authorisation to reopen.

The National Return to Work Safely Protocol is a useful guide for businesses in making their assessments and adapting their workplace procedures and practices to comply fully with the COVID-19 related public health protection measures. It sets out in very clear terms for employers and employees the steps that they must take firstly before a workplace reopens, and then while it continues to operate. The Protocol is available at <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/Publications/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html>. The Health and Safety Authority, which is an agency of my Department, is the lead agency in overseeing compliance with the National Return to Work Safely Protocol in the workplace. If employers or employees need further guidance on the Protocol, the HSA Helpline can be contacted at 1890 289 389 or [wcu@hsa.ie](mailto:wcu@hsa.ie).

In response to their request, I met recently with members of the hairdressing and beauty industry via teleconference where they discussed developing guidelines and safety protocols, with reference to the Government's Return to Work Safely Protocol. I requested that, where sectors are developing such protocols or guides, they should work together to align this work. Last week the Irish Hairdressing Federation submitted their protocol to my Department, COVID-19 Reopening Guidance for Irish Hair Salons and Barber Shops, and I have sent this to my colleague, the Minister for Health, Simon Harris TD. and the HSE for consideration.

In order to assist businesses to address the challenges posed by COVID-19, the Government has put in place a comprehensive suite of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes the wage subsidy scheme, grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities. These supports are designed to build confidence, to further assist businesses in terms of the management of their companies and to allow them to begin looking to the future and start charting a path forward for weeks and months ahead. For a full list of supports for business please see <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

I recognise the impact that this pandemic is having on businesses right across the country. I know that employers and employees want to get back to work and I support them in that ambition, but it must be safe to do so. My Department contributed to the considerations around the phased re-opening of sectors under Phases 1 and 2 and I will work within Government to secure further details and clarity for businesses as we progress through the phases outlined in the Roadmap.

It is important to note that all decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of restrictions as envisaged in the next two phases of the Roadmap will be informed by the public health advice at the time.

## Covid-19 Pandemic

271. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when guidance will be issued to beauty salons regarding the steps they will need to take in order to get their business ready for reopening; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9696/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Under the reconfiguration of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business announced on the 5th June, there are now just two remaining phases instead of three, with Phase 3 starting on the 29th of June, and Phase 4 on the 20th of July. Further work will be carried out in the coming days and weeks to determine which actions will take place in each phase. Updates to the roadmap can be found at [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie).

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The input and advice of National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) informed the Government's decision to proceed with Phase 2 and to accelerate elements of the Roadmap. The Government also had regard to a paper which was developed by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to provide an updated assessment of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify, from an economic perspective, some priority issues for re-opening of economic activity under Phase 2. This paper, "Economic Considerations for Reinstating Economic Activity - Update for Phase 2", is available on my Department's website at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Economic-Considerations-for-Reinstating-Economic-Activity-Update-for-Phase-2.pdf>.

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In response to their request, I met recently with members of the hairdressing and beauty industry via teleconference where they discussed developing guidelines and safety protocols, with reference to the Government's Return to Work Safely Protocol. I requested that, where sectors are developing such protocols or guides, they should work together to align this work. Last week the Irish Hairdressing Federation submitted their protocol to my Department, COVID-19 Reopening Guidance for Irish Hair Salons and Barber Shops, and I have sent this on to and to my colleague, the Minister for Health, Simon Harris TD. and to the HSE for consideration.

I recognise the impact that this pandemic is having on businesses right across the country. I know that employers and employees want to get back to work and I support them in that ambition, but it must be safe to do so. My Department contributed to the considerations around

the phased re-opening of sectors under Phases 1 and 2 and I will work within Government to secure further details and clarity for businesses as we progress through the phases outlined in the Roadmap.

It is important to note that all decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of restrictions as envisaged in the next two phases of the Roadmap will be informed by the public health advice at the time.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

272. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the options available to businesses in non-rateable properties, for example, heritage buildings or those which were not in business in 2019 and did not have to pay rates in that year in the context of the business restart grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9715/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Application forms for the new €250m Restart Grant providing direct grant aid to micro and small businesses are now available online on all local authority websites. The grant is a contribution towards the cost of re-opening or keeping a business operational.

To qualify for the Restart Grant, a business must be in a rateable premises and;

- have a turnover of less than €5m and have 50 or less employees,
- have suffered a projected 25%+ loss in revenue from 1st April 2020 to 30th June 2020,
- commit to remain open or to reopen if it was closed. The business must also declare the intention to retain employees that are benefitting from the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS).

Subject to the qualifying criteria outlined above, any business that has a commercially rateable premises including those businesses with outstanding rates bills are eligible to make an application if they meet the criteria. The grant will be the amount of the rates demand in respect of calendar year 2019 only, subject to a minimum of €2,000 and a maximum of €10,000.

A recently established company that has moved into a rateable premises, or any company that is currently in a rateable premises but was not rate-assessed in 2019, is still eligible to apply. The local authority can pay the grant based on an estimate of what the rates demand for 2019 would have been.

Applications for the Restart Grant can be made online directly to local authorities and further information is available on the application form. If there are queries that are not addressed on the application form, businesses can contact the Business Support Unit in each local authority.

### **Work Permits**

273. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to release additional horticulture or similar employment permits; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9771/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** In

May 2018, I introduced a pilot quota-based scheme to remove the occupations of horticulture worker, meat processing operative and dairy farm assistant from the ineligible occupations list. This pilot scheme allows workers from non-EEA countries to access employment opportunities.

The application of a quota-based system is to ensure that in the longer-term, strategies are put in place to source labour supply from both the domestic and European labour markets and to invest in innovative technologies.

To date this pilot scheme has proved very successful for a range of employers in the sector. 500 permits have been made available to the Horticulture sector and 150 to Dairy Farm Assistants. A quota of 1,500 permits for Meat Processing Operatives was also extended on 1 January 2020 by a further 1000 permits, this followed a review completed at the end of 2019. In addition, from July 2019, a further quota of 300 permits for Meat Deboners was made available.

The quota for horticulture workers has now expired, with all 500 permits issued. An evidence-based case from the horticulture sector has been received requesting that the quota be extended, and this is under active consideration by my officials and by officials of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, which is the lead policy Department for the sector.

The Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, Teagasc and sector representatives have also been working closely with the Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection on a recruitment campaign to support enlisting a large number of temporary workers from the live register to work in the Horticulture sector. This campaign is timed for the Fruit harvest peaking mid-May to Mid-June and the vegetable harvest from mid-June.

### **Enterprise Support Services**

274. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will encourage the employment agencies of the State to proactively engage with the private and community enterprises across County Donegal in textile and other sectors to develop their potential to continue to manufacture personal protective equipment, hospital scrubs and other health service garments and to sustain this supply chain into the future. [9784/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Since March of this year, Enterprise Ireland's Strategic Sourcing staff have been working tirelessly with public health officials and companies throughout the country to increase the supply of a whole range of personal protective equipment (PPE). As part of this, the agency has connected both clients and non-client Irish companies with capability to produce hand sanitiser/PPE with the HSE from across the country, including from Donegal.

This engagement has resulted in numerous Irish companies pivoting their product lines to supply PPE, responding to a national need, while turning a challenging environment into one of opportunity.

In the context of the clothing/textile industry in general in Donegal, the Local Enterprise Offices remain available to work with firms and other organisations involved in the sector.

### **Workplace Relations Commission**

275. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the WRC appears to be making no preparations to redeploy its workplace inspectors to work with the HSA to carry out Covid-19 workplace

inspections. [9797/20]

276. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she has instructed her officials at the WRC not to redeploy their workplace inspectors to work with the HSA doing Covid-19 workplace inspections. [9798/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 275 and 276 together.

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is an independent statutory office under the aegis of my Department. The Commission's primary statutory functions include the inspection of employment law compliance, the provision of information on employment law, mediation, adjudication, conciliation, facilitation and advisory services. As part of its functions in this area, WRC Inspectors carry out announced and unannounced inspections at employer premises.

I am informed by the WRC that on-site visits will resume in tandem with the commencement of next phase of the Government Roadmap on 8 June and that the WRC has engaged with key stakeholders on the employer and employee representative sides in this regard.

WRC Management has also been in direct discussions over the last 3 weeks with senior Health and Safety Authority (HSA) officials to offer assistance to the HSA in carrying out Covid-19 workplace inspections. In this regard the bodies are agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding between them to ensure that this assistance is provided in an efficient and effective manner.

To give effect to this operationally:

- The WRC Inspectorate has completed the safety training required in the Return to Work Protocol in preparation for the recommencement of on-site visits and the necessary PPE (similar to what is being used by the HSA) has been procured and

- The related on-site HSA inspection procedures to carry out Covid-19 workplace inspections have been circulated by the HSA in the last week in advance of the start of the on-site visits commencing week commencing 8 June 2020.

While on-site inspection activity was suspended, WRC Inspections of employment law compliance continued to be undertaken and finalised remotely by way of desk top enquiries, interviews with employers and employees on the telephone and examination of company records (such as payroll and hours worked) following their secure upload to the WRC.

To date this year, a total of 1,640 inspections have been finalised by the WRC inspectorate. Since March, the WRC Inspectors have completed over 900 inspections, with approx. €640,000 in unpaid wages recovered and 66 cases approved for prosecution. They also have currently over 1,200 open inspections being progressed.

*Question No. 277 answered with Question No. 265.*

## **Language Schools**

278. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason all English language schools are expected to gain ILEP listing yet Enterprise Ireland only promote schools that achieved an accreditation which closed to new members in 2012; her views on whether this is a clear anticompetitive practice; and her further views on whether Enterprise Ireland should promote all Irish-based English language schools in order to boost

employment and the success of Irish business in a post-Covid-19 world. [9800/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Unlike the Higher Education Institutions in Ireland, where Enterprise Ireland (EI) has been given the mandate, by the Department of Education & Skills under the Education in Ireland brand to promote Ireland as a third level destination for international students, EI does not have the mandate to promote English Language Schools on a national basis yet. When the International Education Mark is introduced, EI has agreed to take on this responsibility for a defined part of the business.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), through its Accreditation and Co-ordination of English Language Services (ACELS) function, provides quality assurance for English language services in Ireland. ACELS manages and operates an Inspection/Recognition Scheme for ELT organisations and an Accreditation Scheme for English Language teacher training providers.

On the Education in Ireland website – [www.educationinireland.com](http://www.educationinireland.com), EI does not list English language schools, but provides a link to the ACELS website which is for information purposes only.

EI has confirmed that they only list nationally accredited schools as per the Education in Ireland brand guidelines and if they were to introduce other links, the Department of Education & Skills would need to approve this change to the brand criteria. EI does have a number of English Language Schools as client companies based on their size and international focus, all these companies are eligible for supports from EI.

On the website of the Department of Justice and Equality, it is highlighted that a provider and courses are listed on the ILEP in accordance with Ireland's student immigration policy, attendance at that college in respect of one of their listed full time courses on the ILEP is an eligible purpose for a non-EEA national coming to Ireland. The Interim List includes information on education and training programmes which meet specified criteria.

The Interim List is a reference point primarily for the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of the Department of Justice and Equality, in considering visa and residency applications from non-EEA applicants wishing to study on a full-time basis in Ireland and to avail of a concession to take up casual employment in the State with certain restrictions. The Department of Education and Skills has an advisory role in identifying appropriate criteria for the inclusion of programmes in the Interim List. The Interim List is administered by the Department of Justice and Equality.

In relation to EI promoting all Irish-based English language schools in a post-COVID-19 world, this is a matter to be considered as part of the review of the international education strategy 2016-2020 which is currently underway by the Department of Education and Skills.

### **Enterprise Support Services**

279. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the position in relation to the business continuity voucher scheme; if the scheme is still open for applications; the number of vouchers that have been issued to applicants; the overall value of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9824/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Business Continuity Voucher scheme was launched on 26th March. The purpose of the scheme was to provide expert guidance and advice to SMEs employing up to 50 people and enable busi-

ness owners make informed decisions about what immediate measures and remedial actions could be taken at the outset of this crisis, to protect staff and sales and eventually help the business recover.

The scheme was a resounding success in terms of uptake due to it being an appropriate response and support to recognised business needs for that point in time. The Business Continuity Voucher provided up to €2,500 in consultancy costs, to develop short and long-term strategies to respond to the initial pandemic and to plan for the eventual recovery and reopening of the economy.

As the reopening of the economy proceeds, more and more businesses are transitioning from the planning to the implementation phase as we progress through the 5 stages of the Government Roadmap. It is in this context that the Business Continuity Voucher is being phased out and is now closed to new applicants. In recognition of this new stage the new €250m Restart Grant was introduced to assist micro and small businesses to help them with the costs associated with reopening and reemploying workers following COVID-19 closures.

The LEOs will continue to work with existing applicants and recipients of Business Continuity Voucher vouchers and their subsequent business continuity plans. The awarding of vouchers under the Business Continuity Voucher scheme will naturally taper off in the coming weeks as the Local Enterprise Offices process the outstanding applications. The Local Enterprise Offices have thus far approved over 8,200 Business Continuity Vouchers with an overall value thus far of €18.9m and had received over 14,000 applications prior to the closing date.

The Restart Grant is available to businesses with a turnover of less than €5m employing up to 50 people, which were closed or impacted by at least a 25% projected reduction in turnover to the end of June 2020. The grants will be equivalent to the rates bill of the business in 2019, or a minimum grant of €2,000, with a maximum grant of €10,000.

## **Brexit Preparations**

280. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans and the plans of the agencies under her remit to minimise the impact of Brexit on the supply of medicines; the engagement she has had on the matter with the European Union; the details of discussions she is having on the matter with her counterparts in the UK Government; the measures she plans to put in place to help protect the medicines and pharmaceutical export sector in the event of Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9829/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My colleague, the Minister for Health, is leading the health sector's response to Brexit. This includes the key priority of ensuring the continued supply of medicines and medical devices post-Brexit. The Department of Health and its agencies have published comprehensive details about the work undertaken in relation to this issue, which can be found in Chapter 24 of the Brexit Contingency Action Plan Update.

My Department has examined a broad spectrum of Brexit-related issues affecting business in Ireland. The agencies of the Department are also contributing to our efforts to mitigate any potential disruption to supply chains. The agencies continue to deliver as well a broad range of Brexit supports to support companies, build commercial resilience and to maintain and increase export levels.

In the pharmaceutical and life sciences sectors, exports to the United Kingdom account for approximately 6% of total exports. For IDA client companies, the continued functioning of

the UK land bridge also remains important for the transport of final and intermediate products further afield. The use of the land bridge varies by product type; for example, the high-value, low-weight nature of final pharmaceutical products makes air transport a more logical choice relative to lower value, heavier products.

The work of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport therefore remains important in this context, as is the engagement the Government has had with other EU Member States on minimising disruption to the land bridge. The Government will continue, in the time ahead, to engage with key stakeholders and inform businesses - whether those involved in medicines production or otherwise - on how best to prepare for Brexit.

The issue of preserving supply chains of medicine and medical devices is also, of course, particularly important in the context of COVID-19. The Government has engaged extensively with both the British Government and the Northern Ireland Executive on our response to the crisis, with the intention of delivering the best outcomes for all the people of the island. In April, a Memorandum of Understanding was formally agreed between the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive and senior officials from both sides remain in active dialogue on our collective response.

### **Enterprise Support Services**

281. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the Enterprise Ireland retail scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9885/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As Chair of the Retail Consultation Forum, I am acutely aware that Covid-19 has brought particular challenges for retailers - large and small, across the country. Trading online is a very important route for retail businesses to grow and improve their business in the current crisis and will be an important element in their recovery over the longer term.

The objective of the Covid-19 Online Retail Scheme, administered on my Department's behalf by Enterprise Ireland, is to support companies in the indigenous retail sector who have already started an online journey, to further enhance and strengthen their online presence, which will have the most immediate impact enabling them to respond to both domestic and international consumer demand with a competitive online offer.

My Department proposed this Scheme in response to the COVID-19 crisis and the urgent need for retail companies to achieve a step change in online capability. Applicant companies must employ 10 or more people, have an existing online presence (e.g. website or social media), and have a retail outlet through which they derive the majority of their revenue. Successful applicants will be awarded funding to support a maximum of 80% of the project costs. Grants ranging from €10,000 to €40,000 will be awarded under the competitive scheme.

This Scheme is not about taking the first steps; it is about raising the bar, in an informed, planned and strategic way. Further details on this Scheme available at <https://www.enterpriseireland.com/en/funding-supports/online-retail/online-retail-scheme/online-retail-scheme.html>.

The Scheme closed for applications on the 27 May 2020 and applications are currently under assessment by Enterprise Ireland.

The Covid-19 Online Retail Scheme required that all applicants to the Scheme must be registered with the Companies Registration Office (CRO). There were some automatic techni-

cal entry issues in relation to CRO status for a number of applications on entry. The applicant, which the Deputy references, was one of a number of applications which were independently assessed by Enterprise Ireland after the closing date to examine eligibility in relation to their CRO status. I understand that Enterprise Ireland has been in direct contact with all of those applicants, including the applicant in question, and have clarified eligibility of their application. All applicants deemed eligible go forward to be scored under this competitive call, which is in progress.

I am committed to supporting the needs of the retail sector in developing their online capability and enhancing their competitiveness.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

282. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the way in which clothing shops are to operate when they reopen with specific regard to trying on clothes and returns. [9912/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business sets out how the COVID-19 restrictions will be lifted. Ireland is now in Phase 2 of the roadmap.

The Roadmap is a living document and Government has demonstrated great flexibility in its decision to accelerate the phases as set out in the original Roadmap which is based on the input and advice of NPHE. The Government also had regard to a paper which was developed by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to provide an updated assessment of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify, from an economic perspective, some priority issues for re-opening of economic activity under Phase 2. This paper, "Economic Considerations for Reinstating Economic Activity - Update for Phase 2", is available on my Department's website at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Economic-Considerations-for-Reinstating-Economic-Activity-Update-for-Phase-2.pdf>.

As a result of the Government's decision of 5 June 2020 more retail outlets are permitted to open up from Monday 8 June 2020. The advice on this matter is that retailers must put measures in place in their stores to minimise the spread of infection among customers and staff.

These could include:

- protective screens and barriers
- operating new queueing approaches
- limiting the number of customers and staff per store at any one time
- providing cleaning stations
- increasing store cleaning and hygiene
- considering store layout to facilitate social distancing
- closing changing room facilities
- controlling the number of individuals that staff and customers interact with at any one time
- introducing frequent cleaning of customer touchpoints and providing hand sanitiser at

entrance and exit points

- limiting customer handling of stock, for example, through different display methods, new signage or rotation of high-touch stock

- storing items that have been returned or handled extensively (footwear) in a separate room for 72 hours before displaying them on the shop floor

- removing seating areas (with exception of those for people with mobility/disability requirements)

- extending opening hours to reduce crowding

- implementing car park restrictions

This advice is available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/cf9b0d-new-public-health-measures-effective-now-to-prevent-further-spread-o/>.

The National Return to Work Safely Protocol is a useful guide for businesses in making their assessments and adapting their workplace procedures and practices to comply fully with the COVID-19 related public health protection measures. It sets out in very clear terms for employers and employees the steps that they must take firstly before a workplace reopens, and then while it continues to operate. The Protocol is available at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html>.

The Health and Safety Authority, which is an agency of my Department, is the lead agency in overseeing compliance with the National Return to Work Safely Protocol in the workplace. If employers or employees need further guidance on the Protocol, the HSA Helpline can be contacted at 1890 289 389 or [wcu@hsa.ie](mailto:wcu@hsa.ie).

Additionally, the National Standards Authority of Ireland's (NSAI) published the 'COVID-19 Workplace Protection and Improvement Guide', which is available at <https://www.nsai.ie/covid-19workplaceprotection/> and the 'Covid-19 Retail Protection and Improvement Guide' which is available at <https://www.nsai.ie/covid-19retailprotection/>

These Guides contain useful 'how to' information that can be applied across many businesses.

In order to assist businesses to address the challenges posed by COVID-19, the Government has put in place a comprehensive suite of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes the restart grant (to help small businesses with the costs associated with reopening and reemploying workers following COVID-19 closures), wage subsidy scheme, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities. These supports are designed to build confidence, to further assist businesses in terms of the management of their companies and to allow them to begin looking to the future and start charting a path forward for weeks and months ahead. For a full list of supports for business please see <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

Under the reconfiguration of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business announced on the 5th June, there are now just two remaining phases instead of three, with Phase 3 starting on the 29th of June, and Phase 4 on the 20th of July. Further work will be carried out in the coming days and weeks to determine which actions will take place in each phase. Updates to the roadmap can be found at [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie)

It is important to note that all decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of

restrictions as envisaged in the next two phases of the Roadmap will be informed by the public health advice at the time.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

283. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when casinos may reopen in accordance with public health guidance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9928/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Under the reconfiguration of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business announced on the 5th June, there are now just two remaining phases instead of three, with Phase 3 starting on the 29th of June, and Phase 4 on the 20th of July. Further work will be carried out in the coming days and weeks to determine which actions will take place in each phase. Updates to the roadmap can be found at [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie).

The Roadmap is a living document and Government has demonstrated great flexibility in its decision to accelerate the phases as set out in the original Roadmap.

The input and advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) informed the Government's decision to proceed with Phase 2 and to accelerate elements of the Roadmap. The Government also had regard to a paper which was developed by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to provide an updated assessment of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify, from an economic perspective, some priority issues for re-opening of economic activity under Phase 2. This paper, "Economic Considerations for Reinstating Economic Activity - Update for Phase 2", is available on my Department's website at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Economic-Considerations-for-Reinstating-Economic-Activity-Update-for-Phase-2.pdf>.

On 8th June the Minister for Health, Simon Harris T.D., signed SI No.206 of 2020, Health Act 1947 (Section 31A – Temporary Restrictions)(COVID-19)(No. 2) Regulations. These Regulations, which shall remain in operation until 29th June, provide for the unwinding of certain restrictions, including the reopening of retail outlets and extending the distance that may be travelled for specified purposes. The Regulations also provide for continued restrictions for some businesses or services and for offences, including in relation to events. Businesses should carefully review these Regulations. Casinos and Private Members' Clubs at which gambling activities are carried out are included in Schedule 2 of SI No.206 of 2020 which sets out which businesses or services are not permitted to reopen in this Phase.

As regards the reopening of casinos in a later phase, the Roadmap and the updates should be reviewed carefully and a detailed assessment of their activities carried out with regard to the continuing public health measures. Businesses should, based on their assessment, identify which category in which phase of reopening they will be in a position to reopen safely and in line with the continued public health measures. It is not necessary for businesses to seek official authorisation to reopen.

The National Return to Work Safely Protocol is a useful guide for businesses in making their assessments and adapting their workplace procedures and practices to comply fully with the COVID-19 related public health protection measures. It sets out in very clear terms for employers and employees the steps that they must take firstly before a workplace reopens, and then while it continues to operate. The Protocol is available at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/>

Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html. The Health and Safety Authority, which is an agency of my Department, is the lead agency in overseeing compliance with the National Return to Work Safely Protocol in the workplace. If employers or employees need further guidance on the Protocol, the HSA Helpline can be contacted at 1890 289 389 or [wcu@hsa.ie](mailto:wcu@hsa.ie).

In order to assist businesses to address the challenges posed by COVID-19, the Government has put in place a comprehensive suite of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes the wage subsidy scheme, grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities. These supports are designed to build confidence, to further assist businesses in terms of the management of their companies and to allow them to begin looking to the future and start charting a path forward for weeks and months ahead. For a full list of supports for business please see <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

I recognise the impact that this pandemic is having on businesses right across the country. I know that employers and employees want to get back to work and I support them in that ambition, but it must be safe to do so. My Department contributed to the considerations around the phased re-opening of sectors under Phases 1 and 2 and I will work within Government to secure further details and clarity for businesses as we progress through the remaining phases in the Roadmap.

It is important to note that all decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of restrictions as envisaged in the next two phases of the Roadmap will be informed by the public health advice at the time.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

284. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the supports and grants available to small businesses, self-employed persons and tradespersons that conduct their business by way of a van and do not have rateable premises (details supplied); the supports available for these persons that suffered a serious fall-off in business due to the Covid-19 crisis and will have to make changes to their work practices; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9962/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Restart Grant support is just one part of the wider €12bn package of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes the wage subsidy scheme, the pandemic unemployment payment for the self-employed, grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities, all of which will help to improve cashflow amongst SMEs.

I understand the concerns relating to the Restart Grant from businesses that do not operate from commercial premises. However, tradespersons and service providers that operate on a mobile basis or that could continue to work remotely have been better placed to continue to trade and many don't have the same levels of losses, of ongoing overheads or reopening costs that a fixed premises business will have. Within the funding available, the priority has been to support those who have suffered most, including closure of the business, but who will still have incurred ongoing costs.

Full details on all COVID19 supports for business are available at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/> .

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

285. **Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when or if sector by sector guidelines which will be required to be put in place will be issued; and if each sector will be given notice to implement such requirements as they prepare to reopen their business (details supplied). [9968/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Under the reconfiguration of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business announced on the 5th June, there are now just two remaining phases instead of three, with Phase 3 starting on the 29th of June, and Phase 4 on the 20th of July. Further work will be carried out in the coming days and weeks to determine which actions will take place in each phase. Updates to the roadmap can be found at [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie).

The Roadmap is a living document and Government has demonstrated great flexibility in its decision to accelerate the phases as set out in the original Roadmap.

The input and advice of National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) informed the Government's decision to proceed with Phase 2 and to accelerate elements of the Roadmap. The Government also had regard to a paper which was developed by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to provide an updated assessment of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify, from an economic perspective, some priority issues for re-opening of economic activity under Phase 2. This paper, "Economic Considerations for Reinstating Economic Activity - Update for Phase 2", is available on my Department's website at <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Economic-Considerations-for-Reinstating-Economic-Activity-Update-for-Phase-2.pdf>.

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Where a business is not specifically listed in SI No.206 of 2020, it should review the Roadmap and the updates carefully and carry out a detailed assessment of its activities with regard to the continuing public health measures. Businesses should, based on their assessment, identify which category in which phase of reopening they will be in a position to reopen safely and in line with the continued public health measures. It is not necessary for businesses to seek official authorisation to reopen.

The National Return to Work Safely Protocol is a useful guide for businesses in making their assessments and adapting their workplace procedures and practices to comply fully with the COVID-19 related public health protection measures. It sets out in very clear terms for employers and employees the steps that they must take firstly before a workplace reopens, and then while it continues to operate. The Protocol is available at <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/Publications/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html>. The Health and Safety Authority, which is an agency of my Department, is the lead agency in overseeing compliance with the National Return to Work Safely Protocol in the workplace. If employers or employees need further guidance on the Protocol, the HSA Helpline can be contacted at 1890 289 389 or [wcu@hsa.ie](mailto:wcu@hsa.ie).

Bodies such as the National Standards Authority of Ireland, the HSE and the HSA have also provided guidance, advice and best practice for a number of sectors.

In response to their request, I met recently with members of the hairdressing and beauty industry via teleconference where they discussed developing guidelines and safety protocols, with reference to the Government's Return to Work Safely Protocol. I requested that, where sectors are developing such protocols or guides, they should work together to align this work. Last week the Irish Hairdressing Federation submitted their protocol to my Department and I have sent this on to my colleague, the Minister for Health, Simon Harris T.D. and to the HSE.

In line with the national Return to Work Safely protocol, Fáilte Ireland, in association with relevant authorities and following consultation with all industry sectors, has published guidelines for reopening of various sectors of the tourism industry and these are available here <https://covid19.failteireland.ie/industry-updates/guidelines-for-re-opening-published/>. Based on public health advice, this guidance document aims to assist businesses within the tourism sector in re-opening, helping them ensure that measures concerning health and safety are incorporated throughout all aspects of business operations in order to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

In order to assist businesses to address the challenges posed by COVID-19, the Government has put in place a comprehensive suite of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes the wage subsidy scheme, grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities. These supports are designed to build confidence, to further assist businesses in terms of the management of their companies and to allow them to begin looking to the future and start charting a path forward for weeks and months ahead. For a full list of supports for business please see <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

I recognise the impact that this pandemic is having on businesses right across the country. I know that employers and employees want to get back to work and I support them in that ambition, but it must be safe to do so. My Department contributed to the considerations around the phased re-opening of sectors under Phases 1 and 2 and I will work within Government to secure further details and clarity for businesses as we progress through the phases outlined in the Roadmap.

It is important to note that all decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of restrictions as envisaged in the next two phases of the Roadmap will be informed by the public health advice at the time.

### **Cycle to Work Scheme**

286. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by her Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9976/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The National Shared Services Office (NSSO) administers the Cycle to Work scheme on behalf of my Department. The bicycles and any related equipment which qualify under the scheme are paid for by staff themselves by way of salary sacrifice spread over a single year. Accordingly there are no direct costs incurred by the Department in the facilitation of the scheme.

Details regarding the number of staff from my Department who have availed of the scheme on an annual basis since 2009 to-date are set out in the following table.

Year	No. of Applications by staff	Total Cost of bicycles & related equipment purchased by staff inclusive of VAT
2009	25	€18,865.02
2010	42	€29,464.08
2011	53	€36,886.49
2012	42	€29,897.30
2013	34	€24,606.27
2014	37	€29,638.74
2015	31	€25,987.62
2016	24	€20,851.40
2017	30	€24,417.02
2018	24	€17,932.30
2019	23	€19,968.60
2020 to-date	12	€9,448.79
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>€287,963.63</b>

### Covid-19 Pandemic

287. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if clothes shops may reopen their changing rooms as they reopen in line with public health guidance; if persons will be allowed to try on clothes; the length of time clothes must be set aside following their use; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10027/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business sets out how the COVID-19 restrictions will be lifted. Ireland is now in Phase 2 of the roadmap.

The Roadmap is a living document and Government has demonstrated great flexibility in its decision to accelerate the phases as set out in the original Roadmap which is based on the the input and advice of NPHE. The Government also had regard to a paper which was developed by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to provide an updated assessment of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify, from an economic perspective, some priority issues for re-opening of economic activity under Phase 2. This paper, “Economic Considerations for Reinstating Economic Activity - Update for Phase 2”, is available on my Department’s website at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Economic-Considerations-for-Reinstating-Economic-Activity-Update-for-Phase-2.pdf>

As a result of the Government’s decision of 5 June 2020 more retail outlets are permitted to open up from Monday 8 June 2020. The advice on this matter is that retailers must put measures in place in their stores to minimise the spread of infection among customers and staff.

These could include:

- protective screens and barriers
- operating new queueing approaches
- limiting the number of customers and staff per store at any one time

- providing cleaning stations
- increasing store cleaning and hygiene
- considering store layout to facilitate social distancing
- closing changing room facilities
- controlling the number of individuals that staff and customers interact with at any one time
- introducing frequent cleaning of customer touchpoints and providing hand sanitiser at entrance and exit points
- limiting customer handling of stock, for example, through different display methods, new signage or rotation of high-touch stock
- storing items that have been returned or handled extensively (footwear) in a separate room for 72 hours before displaying them on the shop floor
- removing seating areas (with exception of those for people with mobility/disability requirements)
- extending opening hours to reduce crowding
- implementing car park restrictions

This advice is available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/cf9b0d-new-public-health-measures-effective-now-to-prevent-further-spread-o/>

The National Return to Work Safely Protocol is a useful guide for businesses in making their assessments and adapting their workplace procedures and practices to comply fully with the COVID-19 related public health protection measures. It sets out in very clear terms for employers and employees the steps that they must take firstly before a workplace reopens, and then while it continues to operate. The Protocol is available at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html>

The Health and Safety Authority, which is an agency of my Department, is the lead agency in overseeing compliance with the National Return to Work Safely Protocol in the workplace. If employers or employees need further guidance on the Protocol, the HSA Helpline can be contacted at 1890 289 389 or [wcu@hsa.ie](mailto:wcu@hsa.ie).

Additionally, The National Standards Authority of Ireland's (NSAI) published the 'COVID-19 Workplace Protection and Improvement Guide' which is available at <https://www.nsai.ie/covid-19workplaceprotection/> and the 'Covid-19 Retail Protection and Improvement Guide' which is available at <https://www.nsai.ie/covid-19retailprotection/> These Guides contain useful 'how to' information that can be applied across many businesses.

In order to assist businesses to address the challenges posed by COVID-19, the Government has put in place a comprehensive suite of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes the restart grant (to help small businesses with the costs associated with reopening and reemploying workers following COVID-19 closures), wage subsidy scheme, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities. These supports are designed to build confidence, to further assist businesses in terms of the management of their companies and to allow them to begin looking to the future and start charting a path forward for weeks and months ahead. For a full list of supports for business please see <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

Under the reconfiguration of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business announced on the 5th June, there are now just two remaining phases instead of three, with Phase 3 starting on the 29th of June, and Phase 4 on the 20th of July. Further work will be carried out in the coming days and weeks to determine which actions will take place in each phase. Updates to the roadmap can be found at [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie)

It is important to note that all decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of restrictions as envisaged in the next two phases of the Roadmap will be informed by the public health advice at the time.

### **Trading Online Voucher Scheme**

288. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on a matter relating to the online trading voucher for businesses (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10033/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Trading Online Voucher Scheme is delivered nationwide through the 31 Local Enterprise Offices. The Scheme offers skills training, mentoring and financial support of up to €2,500 to help small and micro-businesses to develop their ecommerce capability.

I introduced new flexibilities to the Scheme in April including reducing the requirement for co-funding from 50% to 10% and allowing businesses to apply for a second voucher of up to €2,500 where they have successfully utilised their first one. There has been a positive response to these changes and significant uptake of the Scheme.

On 8th June I further enhanced the scheme and announced with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, Richard Bruton TD, a major expansion of the LEOs' Trading Online Voucher Scheme to help small and micro enterprises to get online quickly. We are expanding the Scheme by €14.2m after the Local Enterprise Offices received 3 years' worth of applications in 3 months following the outbreak of COVID-19 in Ireland. Following a previous expansion of the Scheme in early April, total additional funding for the Scheme is now almost €20m in 2020. See: [localenterprise.ie/Discover-Business-Supports](http://localenterprise.ie/Discover-Business-Supports)

Trading Online Vouchers can be used for:

- development or upgrade of an e-commerce website, such as implementing online payments or booking systems
- purchase of internet related software - online advertising (subject to limits)
- development of an app
- development and/or implementation of a digital marketing strategy
- consultation with ICT experts
- training and support to develop and manage your online trading activity and subscriptions to low cost online retail platform solutions,

Full details on all COVID19 supports for business are available at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

## Enterprise Support Services

289. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the measures she can take to encourage consumers to buy Irish products and services in shops and retail outlets and which are sourced here, rather than buying such products and services online and sourced outside the EU; if she will initiate a buy Irish campaign; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10063/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I would very much like to see consumers here buying locally produced and sourced products in order particularly to help retailers and producers recover as quickly as possible from the effects of Covid-19 on businesses and jobs. It is not open to me however to initiate a Buy Irish campaign or to take other measures to influence consumers to buy Irish goods and services. In 1981, the European Commission took infringement proceedings against a Buy Irish campaign then in operation which received financial and other support from the Irish Government. In its subsequent judgment (*Commission v Ireland*, case C-249/81), the European Court of Justice held that the campaign was a reflection of the Irish Government's intention to substitute domestic products for imported products on the Irish market and thereby to check the flow of imports from other Member States. A campaign of this kind was subject to the prohibition on measures that have equivalent effects to a quantitative restriction on imports under what is now Article 34 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. In the view of the Court, even measures adopted by the government of a Member State which do not have binding effect may be capable of influencing the conduct of consumers and traders in that Member State and thus of frustrating the Treaty and the principle of the free movement of goods.

## Covid-19 Pandemic

290. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she is satisfied that the number of persons entering a location (details supplied) are safe; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10072/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** In order to assist businesses to reopen safely in accordance with the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, the National Return to Work Safely Protocol was developed. The Protocol is a useful guide for businesses in making their assessments and adapting their workplace procedures and practices to comply fully with the COVID-19 related public health protection measures. It sets out in very clear terms for employers and employees the steps that they must take firstly before a workplace reopens, and then while it continues to operate. The Protocol is available at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html>. The Health and Safety Authority, which is an agency of my Department, is the lead agency in overseeing compliance with the National Return to Work Safely Protocol in the workplace. If employers or employees need further guidance on the Protocol, the HSA Helpline can be contacted at 1890 289 389 or [wcu@hsa.ie](mailto:wcu@hsa.ie).

I understand that Dublin Zoo recently announced that it was reopening to the public on 2 June in a reduced capacity and under new strict health and safety protocols.

## Covid-19 Pandemic

291. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if

gastropubs may reopen in line with phase 3 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10098/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Under the reconfiguration of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business announced on the 5th June, there are now just two remaining phases instead of three, with Phase 3 starting on the 29th of June, and Phase 4 on the 20th of July. Further work will be carried out in the coming days and weeks to determine which actions will take place in each phase. Updates to the roadmap can be found at [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie).

The Roadmap is a living document and Government has demonstrated great flexibility in its decision to accelerate the phases as set out in the original Roadmap.

The input and advice of National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) informed the Government's decision to proceed with Phase 2 and to accelerate elements of the Roadmap. The Government also had regard to a paper which was developed by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to provide an updated assessment of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify, from an economic perspective, some priority issues for re-opening of economic activity under Phase 2. This paper, "Economic Considerations for Reinstating Economic Activity - Update for Phase 2", is available on my Department's website at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Economic-Considerations-for-Reinstating-Economic-Activity-Update-for-Phase-2.pdf>

As the Deputy will be aware, it is hoped that in three weeks' time we will be able to move to a more advanced Phase 3, which would include the reopening of domestic tourism, and bring forward the opening of hotels, restaurants, bars that also operate as restaurants, hostels, caravan parks, galleries and museums to the 29th of June.

The National Return to Work Safely Protocol is a useful guide for businesses in making their assessments and adapting their workplace procedures and practices to comply fully with the COVID-19 related public health protection measures. It sets out in very clear terms for employers and employees the steps that they must take firstly before a workplace reopens, and then while it continues to operate. The Protocol is available at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html>. The Health and Safety Authority, which is an agency of my Department, is the lead agency in overseeing compliance with the National Return to Work Safely Protocol in the workplace. If employers or employees need further guidance on the Protocol, the HSA Helpline can be contacted at 1890 289 389 or [wcu@hsa.ie](mailto:wcu@hsa.ie).

In order to assist businesses to address the challenges posed by COVID-19, the Government has put in place a comprehensive suite of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes the wage subsidy scheme, grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities. These supports are designed to build confidence, to further assist businesses in terms of the management of their companies and to allow them to begin looking to the future and start charting a path forward for weeks and months ahead. For a full list of supports for business please see <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

I recognise the impact that this pandemic is having on businesses right across the country. I know that employers and employees want to get back to work and I support them in that ambition, but it must be safe to do so. My Department contributed to the considerations around the phased re-opening of sectors under Phases 1 and 2 and I will work within Government to secure further details and clarity for businesses as we progress through the remaining phases in the Roadmap.

It is important to note that all decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of restrictions as envisaged in the next two phases of the Roadmap will be informed by the public health advice at the time.

### **Enterprise Support Services**

292. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason applications made by companies (supplied supplied) for business continuity vouchers were rejected; if the applications can be reassessed; if there is scope for the preferred option of vouchers over mentoring; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10099/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The primary aim of the Business Continuity Voucher scheme was to support companies to make informed decisions regarding the immediate measures needed to continue trading during the COVID lockdown phase while securing the safety of all employees and future business viability through identification of remedial actions. Examples of what it could be used to support include:

- Develop business continuity plan
- Assess current financial needs in the short term to medium term
- Reduce variable costs, overheads and expenses,
- Review and explore supply chain financing options
- Implement remote working processes or procedures
- Leverage HR expertise
- Leverage ICT expertise
- Prepare a business case for application to emergency financial interventions available through Banks, Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland and Micro Finance Ireland.

In this instance relating to two specific companies in Galway, I understand from the Local Enterprise Office in Galway that they have reviewed this case on three separate occasions, 7th May, 12th May and most recently on receipt of this Parliamentary Question. On each occasion, LEO Galway has determined that the Business Continuity Voucher was unsuitable for the following reasons:

- Following communication with the applicant it was determined that the scale of the business or business model complexity in relation to the eligible uses of the Business Continuity Vouchers would not warrant the level of intervention proposed to be undertaken by the 3rd party accountant stated in the application as the preferred advisor whom had completed the application forms initially

- Subsequent discussion with the applicant in fact indicated concern mostly over post Covid operations in the absence of, at that time, published advice from HSA or publication of the the Return to Work Safely Protocol

- The client was advised that the most suitable support would be to avail of LEO Galway mentoring for post Covid back to work practices for both business and to review financials at that time once clarity on the businesses' post Covid business model was achieved

In the circumstances, LEO Galway, in keeping with LEO policy of offering alternative supports where possible, has offered mentoring to the business owners and I would urge them to take up this offer with the Local Enterprise Office in Galway. I am aware that this is a very popular support at this time and many businesses have benefited from this type of intervention.

Furthermore, you will be aware that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic the Government has put in place a range of supports for businesses that have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 and continues to explore every available avenue for the delivery of further supports for business which were announced in May such as:

- A restart grant of up to €10,000 for micro and small businesses based on a rates/waiver rebate from 2019;

- A three month commercial rates waiver for impacted businesses; Commercial rates are being waived for a three month period beginning on 27 March 2020 for businesses that have been forced to close due to public health requirements.

Full details on all COVID19 supports are available at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

### **Health and Safety Inspections**

293. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of HSA inspections that have taken place at meat factories up to and including 5 June 2020; if the inspections were unannounced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10163/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Health and Safety Authority is a member of the National Outbreak Control Team (NOCT). The NOCT is led by the HSE and it is working to address the issue of outbreaks in meat processing plants with input from professionals in public health, environmental health, animal health and the Health and Safety Authority, in relation to occupational health and safety. The NOCT and local Outbreak Control Teams are in place to address outbreaks of COVID-19 and to recommend steps and measures to ensure that current and future outbreaks can be managed and brought under control as quickly as possible. COVID-19 is first and foremost a public health issue so the first step must always be ensuring that measures are in place to manage and prevent outbreaks not just for the workers involved but also for the wider community where such workers live.

As of Friday 5th June, the Health and Safety Authority has completed 19 inspections in meat plants in support of the NOCT. Of these 19 inspections, 16 involved plants where outbreaks have been recorded, some of the inspections were unannounced the majority were announced.

It is worth noting that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, who have an ongoing role in meat processing plants, is also a member of the National Outbreak Control Team and they too will be checking compliance with the Return to Work Safely Protocol in such plants.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

294. **Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she has considered making supports such as the business restart grant available for

non-rate paying businesses such as bed and breakfasts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10250/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Application forms for the new €250m Restart Grant providing direct grant aid to micro and small businesses are now available online on all local authority websites. The grant is a contribution towards the cost of re-opening or keeping a business operational.

To qualify for the Restart Grant, a business must be in a rateable premises and;

- have a turnover of less than €5m and have 50 or less employees.

- have suffered a projected 25%+ loss in revenue from 1st April 2020 to 30th June 2020.

- commit to remain open or to reopen if it was closed. The business must also declare the intention to retain employees that are benefitting from the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS).

The Restart Grant support is just one part of the wider €12bn package of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes the wage subsidy scheme, the pandemic unemployment payment for the self-employed, grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities, all of which will help to improve cashflow amongst SMEs.

The eligibility criteria will be subject to ongoing review and we will continue to consider issues as they arise.

In relation to the reopening of bed and breakfasts, my colleagues the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Shane Ross and Minister of State for Tourism and Sport, Brendan Griffin TD, announced on 20th May the formation of a special Tourism Recovery Taskforce dedicated to spearheading economic recovery for the tourism sector, with an independent chairperson, Ruth Andrews, Chair of Irish Tourism Industry Confederation. The membership of the Taskforce includes the CEOs of Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. The Taskforce is charged with preparing a Tourism Recovery Plan for submission to the Minister which will include a set of recommendations on how best the Irish tourism sector can adapt and recover in the changed tourism environment as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. The plan will identify priority aims, key enablers and market opportunities for the sector for the period 2020-2023. The Taskforce will consult with stakeholders to inform its deliberations and report back to the Minister.

Full details on all COVID19 supports for business are available at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

*Question No. 295 answered with Question No. 265.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

296. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applications, loans or grants approved under the Covid-19 working capital scheme, the credit guarantee scheme, the Covid-19 loan through Microfinance Ireland and the €250 million restart grant for small businesses since 23 March 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10257/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Government has agreed a new €2 billion COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme as a further development of the existing Credit Guarantee Scheme already available. This Scheme forms a major

component of the government's strategy to aid SMEs in these difficult times by providing critical support to ensure businesses are facilitated in having access to credit facilities to assist a return to a more regular trading environment. It will provide an 80% guarantee on lending to SMEs until the end of this year, for terms between 3 months and 6 years. The guarantee will be able to be used for a wide range of lending products between €10,000 and €1 million that have a maximum term of 6 years or less.

The Scheme will be available to all SME sectors, including primary producers. It will also have interest rates below current market rates. The implementation of this Scheme will require primary legislation, the drafting of which has commenced.

There are a number of liquidity supports for COVID 19 impacted businesses available now, including the existing Credit Guarantee Scheme which was implemented in 2012, supporting loans up to €1 million for periods of up to 7 years. The scheme is designed to support a range of debt products appropriate to the borrowing needs of SMEs. An application to access the Credit Guarantee Scheme can be made through one of the participating lenders which are currently Allied Irish Banks, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank Ireland.

The SBCI Covid-19 Working Capital Scheme is offered by my Department in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and is supported by the InnovFin SME Guarantee facility. The scheme is operated by the SBCI, through participating finance providers. Loans range from €25,000 up to €1.5 million (first €500,000 unsecured) with a maximum interest rate of 4% for up to three years.

This scheme is now being expanded to make available significant additional lending under the scheme. The scheme is available to eligible businesses that have been negatively affected by impacts arising from the outbreak of Covid-19 to enable those businesses to innovate, change or adapt in response to the current business environment.

Microenterprises can access COVID-19 Business Loans of up to €50,000 from Microfinance Ireland. The terms include a six months interest free and repayment free moratorium, with the loan to then be repaid over the remaining 30 months of the 36-month loan period. Loans are available at an interest rate of between 4.5% and 5.5%. Businesses can apply through their Local Enterprise Office or directly to Microfinance Ireland.

Details on uptake of the various supports as of Friday 5th June is available at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Take-up-of-DBEI-COVID-19-Business-Supports.pdf>.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

297. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the value of applications, loans or grants approved under the Covid-19 working capital scheme, the credit guarantee scheme, the Covid-19 loan through Microfinance Ireland and the €250 million restart grant for small businesses since 23 March 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10258/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Government has agreed a new €2 billion COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme as a further development of the existing Credit Guarantee Scheme already available. This Scheme forms a major component of the government's strategy to aid SMEs in these difficult times by providing critical support to ensure businesses are facilitated in having access to credit facilities to assist a return to a more regular trading environment. It will provide an 80% guarantee on lending to SMEs until the end of this year, for terms between 3 months and 6 years. The guarantee will be

able to be used for a wide range of lending products between €10,000 and €1 million that have a maximum term of 6 years or less.

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There are a number of liquidity supports for COVID 19 impacted businesses available now, including the existing Credit Guarantee Scheme which was implemented in 2012, supporting loans up to €1 million for periods of up to 7 years. The scheme is designed to support a range of debt products appropriate to the borrowing needs of SMEs. An application to access the Credit Guarantee Scheme can be made through one of the participating lenders which are currently Allied Irish Banks, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank Ireland.

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Details on the uptake of the various supports as of Friday 5th June is available at: <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Take-up-of-DBEI-COVID-19-Business-Supports.pdf>.

## **Covid-19 Pandemic**

298. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if sector specific guidelines are available to businesses for a safe reopening of same; if businesses are required to tailor guidelines to meet their own needs; and the person or body charged with responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the guidelines. [10281/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Under the reconfiguration of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business announced on the 5th June, there are now just two remaining phases instead of three, with Phase 3 starting on the 29th of June, and Phase 4 on the 20th of July. Further work will be carried out in the coming days and weeks to determine which actions will take place in each phase. Updates to the roadmap can be found at [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie).

The Roadmap is a living document and Government has demonstrated great flexibility in its decision to accelerate the phases as set out in the original Roadmap.

The input and advice of National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) informed the Government's decision to proceed with Phase 2 and to accelerate elements of the Roadmap.

The Government also had regard to a paper which was developed by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to provide an updated assessment of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify, from an economic perspective, some priority issues for re-opening of economic activity under Phase 2. This paper, “Economic Considerations for Reinstating Economic Activity - Update for Phase 2”, is available on my Department’s website at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Economic-Considerations-for-Reinstating-Economic-Activity-Update-for-Phase-2.pdf>.

On 8th June the Minister for Health, Simon Harris T.D., signed SI No.206 of 2020, Health Act 1947 (Section 31A – Temporary Restrictions)(COVID-19)(No. 2) Regulations. These Regulations, which shall remain in operation until 29th June, provide for the unwinding of certain restrictions, including the reopening of retail outlets and extending the distance that may be travelled for specified purposes. The Regulations also provide for continued restrictions for some businesses or services and for offences, including in relation to events. Businesses should carefully review these Regulations.

Where a business is not specifically listed in SI No.206 of 2020, it should review the Roadmap and the updates carefully and carry out a detailed assessment of its activities with regard to the continuing public health measures. Businesses should, based on their assessment, identify which category in which phase of reopening they will be in a position to reopen safely and in line with the continued public health measures. It is not necessary for businesses to seek official authorisation to reopen.

Bodies such as the National Standards Authority of Ireland, the HSE and the HSA have provided guidance, advice and best practice for a number of sectors in that regard.

The National Standards Authority of Ireland’s ‘Retail Protection and Improvement Guide’ helps retailers manage business continuity during the COVID-19 emergency. The NSAI will also be publishing guidelines for shopping centres in the coming days. Please visit [www.nsai.ie](http://www.nsai.ie) for further updates.

In response to their request, I met recently with members of the hairdressing and beauty industry via teleconference where they discussed developing guidelines and safety protocols, with reference to the Government’s Return to Work Safely Protocol. I requested that, where sectors are developing such protocols or guides, they should work together to align this work. Last week the Irish Hairdressing Federation submitted their protocol to my Department and I have sent this to my colleague, the Minister for Health, Simon Harris TD and to the HSE.

In line with the national Return to Work Safely protocol, Fáilte Ireland, in association with relevant authorities and following consultation with all industry sectors, has published guidelines for reopening of various sectors of the tourism industry and these are available here <https://covid19.failteireland.ie/industry-updates/guidelines-for-re-opening-published/>. Based on public health advice, this guidance document aims to assist businesses within the tourism sector in re-opening, helping them ensure that measures concerning health and safety are incorporated throughout all aspects of business operations in order to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

The National Return to Work Safely Protocol is a useful guide for businesses in making their assessments and adapting their workplace procedures and practices to comply fully with the COVID-19 related public health protection measures. It sets out in very clear terms for employers and employees the steps that they must take firstly before a workplace reopens, and then while it continues to operate. The Protocol is available at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html>. The Health and Safety Authority, which is an agency

of my Department, is the lead agency in overseeing compliance with the National Return to Work Safely Protocol in the workplace. If employers or employees need further guidance on the Protocol, the HSA Helpline can be contacted at 1890 289 389 or [wcu@hsa.ie](mailto:wcu@hsa.ie).

In order to assist businesses to address the challenges posed by COVID-19, the Government has put in place a comprehensive suite of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes the wage subsidy scheme, grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities. These supports are designed to build confidence, to further assist businesses in terms of the management of their companies and to allow them to begin looking to the future and start charting a path forward for weeks and months ahead. For a full list of supports for business please see <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

I recognise the impact that this pandemic is having on businesses right across the country. I know that employers and employees want to get back to work and I support them in that ambition, but it must be safe to do so. My Department contributed to the considerations around the phased re-opening of sectors under Phases 1 and 2 and I will work within Government to secure further details and clarity for businesses as we progress through the phases outlined in the Roadmap.

It is important to note that all decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of restrictions as envisaged in the next two phases of the Roadmap will be informed by the public health advice at the time.

### **Enterprise Data**

299. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of companies that have entered examinership, receivership or liquidation each month since February 2019, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10323/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Companies Registration Office has provided information on the number of companies that have entered examinership, receivership or liquidation in 2019 and to date in 2020, as set out in tabular form below.

The Companies Act 2014, which provides the statutory framework for each of these mechanisms, reflects international best practice. Statutory provision for limited liability, and the mechanisms of examinership, receivership and liquidation, serve to facilitate entrepreneurship and job creation, while also protecting the interests of other stakeholders, including business creditors, employees and investors.

The challenge that COVID-19 presents for our economy is not at this stage reflected in increased numbers of companies entering examinership, receivership or liquidation. The Government is doing everything possible to limit the impact on companies and employment, as we work collectively to tackle COVID-19.

In order to assist businesses and protect employment, the Government has put in place a comprehensive €12 billion suite of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes the Wage Subsidy Scheme, grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities. These supports are designed to build confidence, to further assist businesses in terms of the management of their companies and to allow them to begin looking to the future and start charting a path forward for weeks and months ahead

Examinership :

Year	Month	Appointment of Examiner	Application to appoint Examiner	Appointment of Interim Examiner
2019	January	5	3	3
2019	February	0	1	1
2019	March	2	3	0
2019	April	3	3	0
2019	May	3	3	0
2019	June	2	2	2
2019	July	0	2	1
2019	August	2	3	2
2019	September	3	5	4
2019	October	1	0	0
2019	November	2	0	0
2019	December	1	1	1
Total		24	26	14

Year	Month	Appointment of Examiner	Application to appoint Examiner	Appointment of Interim Examiner
2020	January	0	0	0
2020	February	1	2	1
2020	March	1	1	1
2020	April	2	3	0
2020	May	2	0	1
YTD		6	6	3

Receiverships registered :

Year	Month	Receivers appointed
2019	January	4
2019	February	12
2019	March	9
2019	April	5
2019	May	12
2019	June	11
2019	July	32
2019	August	8
2019	September	22
2019	October	14
2019	November	10
2019	December	7
Total		146

Year	Month	Receivers appointed
2020	January	8
2020	February	3

Year	Month	Receivers appointed
2020	March	15
2020	April	1
2020	May	5
YTD		32

Liquidations registered :

Year	Month	Members	Creditors	Court
2019	January	130	60	6
2019	February	91	44	8
2019	March	97	63	8
2019	April	103	45	7
2019	May	110	60	11
2019	June	96	43	2
2019	July	134	57	8
2019	August	139	30	4
2019	September	153	45	3
2019	October	131	54	1
2019	November	87	35	5
2019	December	201	75	4
Total		1472	611	67

Year	Month	Members	Creditors	Court
2020	January	104	44	3
2020	February	80	60	4
2020	March	71	29	5
2020	April	10	11	9
2020	May	109	14	9
YTD		374	158	30

### Legislative Process

300. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of legislation needed for the credit guarantee scheme to be set up; if the Bill has been drafted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10324/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government approved the drafting of legislation to amend the Credit Guarantee Act 2012 (as amended) on 1st May last, as part of a range of new measures to assist businesses to reopen or change their business models in response to the Covid-19 health crisis. Also approved at that Government meeting were proposals which required amendments to two other Acts - the Microfinance Loan Fund Act 2012 and the European Investment Fund Agreement Act 2018.

Officials in my Department have been working urgently with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel on priority drafting all of these amendments since the beginning of May to progress all of these amendments as a matter of urgency.

The amendments which are being made to the Microenterprise Loan Fund Act 2012 are necessary to facilitate Microfinance Ireland (MFI) to be able to borrow moneys from bodies other than its parent body, the Social Finance Foundation, and to raise the ceiling on the amount of Exchequer grant that can be provided to Microfinance Ireland. This is intended to allow MFI to have access to greater sources of funding, to enhance its ability to provide more microenterprise loans to those qualifying enterprises in need of financing support. The amendments to the European Investment Fund Agreement Act 2018 will increase the ceiling from €75 million to €500 million on agreements which the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine or myself, with the consent of both the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, may enter into with the European Investment Fund. This will allow the Government to respond to the Covid19 crisis by increasing the size of the Future Growth Loan Scheme and other schemes for Irish enterprises. The Microenterprise Loan Fund (Amendment) Bill 2020, which will amend the Microenterprise Loan Fund Act 2012 (as amended) and the European Investment Fund Act 2018, was approved for publication at Cabinet on Friday 29th May last.

Separately, the implementation of the new Covid-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme requires amendments to the Credit Guarantee Act 2012 (as amended). Since the Government approved the scheme, officials in my Department have been working urgently alongside the Office of Parliamentary Counsel on the priority drafting of the necessary legislation and are also continuing to work with the steering group to design and operationalise the scheme as soon as possible.

My priority is to ensure that both of these Bills can be progressed through the Oireachtas as a matter of urgency following the formation of a new Government. I am very aware of the pressure for enterprise to access these supports in order to be able to resume economic activity and hope that all Parliamentarians will facilitate its urgent commencement.

### **Small and Medium Enterprises**

301. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number and value of loans provided by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland by bank or lending institute for each type of loan product in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10326/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The SME Credit Guarantee Scheme encourages additional lending to SMEs by offering a partial Government guarantee to banks against losses on qualifying loans to eligible SMEs. Loans under the scheme range from €10,000 to €1m for terms of up to seven years.

Government has agreed a new €2 billion COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme as a further development of the existing Credit Guarantee Scheme already available. This Scheme forms a major component of the government's strategy to aid SMEs in these difficult times by providing critical support to ensure businesses are facilitated in having access to credit facilities to assist a return to a more regular trading environment. This Scheme will be available to all SME sectors, including primary producers. It will also have interest rates below current market rates. The implementation of this Scheme will require primary legislation, the drafting of which has commenced.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme currently makes up to €300 million of loans available with a term of 8-10 years and is operated by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through participating lenders. We have seen strong demand for the scheme since its launch in April 2019, resulting in a rapid take up of the scheme. Funding made available by the scheme facilitates long-term, strategic investment. Our department is working toward an expansion of

the scheme which should be announced shortly.

The SBCI Covid-19 Working Capital Scheme is offered by my Department in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and is supported by the Innov-Fin SME Guarantee facility. The scheme is operated by the SBCI. This scheme is now being expanded to make available significant additional lending under the scheme. The scheme is available to eligible businesses that have been negatively affected by impacts arising from the outbreak of Covid-19 to enable those businesses to innovate, change or adapt in response to the current business environment.

The Brexit Loan Scheme makes lending available to eligible Irish businesses that have been negatively impacted as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. Finance provided under the scheme is easier to access, more competitively priced, and offered at more favourable terms than other lending for such businesses.

With the exception of the Credit Guarantee Scheme, these schemes feature a two-stage application process, whereby businesses must first apply to the SBCI to confirm their eligibility under the scheme. Once they have received eligibility confirmation, they can apply to one of the participating finance providers for a loan under the scheme.

Regarding the specific number and value of loans provided by each of the participating finance providers, the SBCI does not release scheme data by bank or lending institution to preserve market confidentiality.

Details of uptake are set out in the following table.

Available Scheme	Total eligibility applications received	Total Loans (Sanctioned)	Value of Loans (Sanctioned)
Credit Guarantee Scheme	N/A	867	€152,559,224
Future Growth Loan Scheme(as of 05/06/20)	3,741*	1,098	€240,793,048
Covid-19 Working Capital Scheme (as of 05/06/20)	2,984	372	€45,676,500
Brexit Loan Scheme (as of 22/05/20)	1,163	270	€54,667,300

\*The figure for total applications under the Future Growth Loan Scheme is that as at 29/05/20, as an updated figure was not yet available at time of writing.

### Job Losses

302. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the efforts made by her Department and the IDA to replace the 500 jobs lost by the decision of a company (details supplied) to close by 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10409/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The announcement of redundancies at Molex in Shannon last November was very disappointing. My Department, IDA Ireland and the other enterprise agencies under my remit are determined to source new investment and employment opportunities for Clare that will help offset many of

these job losses.

The Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plan, which I launched last year, will be a critical tool in that respect. This plan is designed to support the growth of business in the Mid-West and its implementation will help to create quality new jobs for the region. IDA Ireland, for its part, has been continuously engaging with Molex through frequent meetings with senior executives in Shannon. The Agency continues to work proactively to attract and win new investment for Shannon as part of the Mid-West region. They are also working to preserve and grow existing multinational operations in the region with a particular focus on increased global business services and high-tech manufacturing investments.

More broadly, the overall outlook of foreign direct investment (FDI) remains positive for the Mid-West. The region witnessed the creation of 1,133 net new jobs by IDA Ireland client companies in 2019 with County Clare accounting for 222 of these net new jobs. The region has also witnessed significant investment over the last three years and key employers in the region include many large-scale manufacturing employers such as Becton Dickinson, Edwards Lifesciences, Analog Devices, Johnson and Johnson, Regeneron, Stryker and Zimmer.

Notwithstanding this broadly positive FDI landscape for the Mid-West, I am determined, together with the IDA, to intensify our efforts in attracting new investments and jobs for those who have been impacted by the Molex announcement.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

303. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the supports being made available to private bus and coach companies negatively affected by the Covid-19 crisis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10445/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** In order to assist businesses to address the challenges posed by COVID-19, the Government has put in place a comprehensive suite of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes the wage subsidy scheme, grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities.

These supports are designed to build confidence, to further assist businesses in terms of the management of their companies and to allow them to begin looking to the future and start charting a path forward for weeks and months ahead. For a full list of supports for business please see <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

The full range of Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Office (LEO) and Údarás na Gaeltachta grant and advisory supports continue to be available to eligible firms to help with strategies to access finance, commence or ramp-up online trading activity, reconfigure business models, cut costs, innovate, diversify markets and supply chains and to improve competitiveness.

In that regard, Government will continue to explore funding potential for all enterprises including micro-enterprises as they work through the challenges facing them, including through any mechanisms allowable through the EU's state aid framework. The SBCI Covid-19 Working Capital Scheme was announced on 11 March and opened for eligibility applications on 23 March which also include bus and coach operators. The Covid-19 Working Capital Scheme is offered by my Department in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and is supported by the InnovFin SME Guarantee facility. The scheme is operated by the SBCI. It currently makes available a fund of up to €200 m to eligible businesses that have been negatively affected by impacts arising from the outbreak of Covid-19 to enable those businesses to innovate, change or adapt in response to the current business environment. Following

my further announcement on April 8 this Scheme is now being expanded to make available an additional €250 million in lending, which will bring the total amount of lending available under this scheme to €450 million.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme makes up to €300 million of loans available with a term of 8-10 years and is operated by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through participating lenders. We have seen strong demand for the scheme since its launch in April 2019 across all sectors and regions including in exporting businesses and family businesses.

These measures are in addition to the €150m of funding capacity in the Government's Credit Guarantee Scheme, which is available to bus and coach operators.

For microenterprises (under 10 employees), Microfinance Ireland (MFI) are administering special COVID-19 Loans, with an additional €13m in capital support bringing its total lending capacity up to €20m for the coming period. There is also a substantial reduction in interest rates on these loans from 7.8% to 4.5%. Loans can be made up to €50,000 with no repayments required and no interest charged in the first six months.

I can assure the Deputy that I continue to work with my colleagues across Government to examine further appropriate supports to assist businesses impacted by Covid-19.

My colleague, Minister Shane Ross T.D., Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport may be able to provide more specific guidelines or supports designed to suit your particular business.

### **Enterprise Data**

304. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of firms that have applied for each enterprise support measure and scheme since 1 March 2020 in response to Covid-19 provided by her Department and each State agency under her remit; the number of firms that have received assistance to date; the value of supports that have been granted in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10461/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** In order to assist businesses to address the challenges posed by COVID-19, the Government has put in place a comprehensive suite of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes the wage subsidy scheme, grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities.

These supports are designed to build confidence, to further assist businesses in terms of the management of their companies and to allow them to begin looking to the future and start charting a path forward for weeks and months ahead. For a full list of supports for business please see <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

The full range of Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Office (LEO) and Údarás na Gaeltachta grant and advisory supports continue to be available to eligible firms to help with strategies to access finance, commence or ramp-up online trading activity, reconfigure business models, cut costs, innovate, diversify markets and supply chains and to improve competitiveness.

The most recent data on the number of firms that have applied for each of the Covid-19 enterprise support measures are available at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Take-up-of-DBEI-COVID-19-Business-Supports.pdf>

In that regard, Government will continue to explore funding potential for all enterprises including micro-enterprises as they work through the challenges facing them, including through

any mechanisms allowable through the EU's state aid framework.

The Covid-19 Working Capital Scheme is offered in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and is supported by the InnovFin SME Guarantee facility. The scheme is operated by the SBCI. It currently makes available a fund of up to €200 million to eligible businesses that have been negatively affected by impacts arising from the outbreak of Covid-19 to enable those businesses to innovate, change or adapt in response to the current business environment. Following a further announcement this Scheme is now being significantly expanded. The scheme is open to eligible SMEs and small mid-caps (businesses of up to 499 employees) negatively impacted by Covid-19. Loans under the scheme range from €25,000 to €1.5m and are for periods of up to three years. The maximum interest rate under the scheme is 4% and loans of up to €500,000 are available unsecured.

The Covid-19 Loan, available from Microfinance Ireland (MFI), was introduced as a support to microenterprises to help them access funding arising from the Covid-19 crisis. These loans are available for eligible microenterprises responding to Covid-19-related difficulties, the negative impact of which must be a minimum of 15% of actual or projected income or profit. Loans up to €50,000 are available with terms that include a six months interest free and repayment free moratorium, with the loan to then be repaid over the remaining 30 months of the 36-month loan period. An interest rate to 4.5% applies on the Covid-19 loans provided by MFI. This reduced rate is available to all micro-enterprises where the application is made through the Local Enterprise Network or referred by a bank or Local Development Committees. The new rate for direct applications to MFI is reduced to 5.5%. As these loans are available interest free for the first six months, the net effect is to further reduce the net interest rate payable over the period of the loan.

My Department is encouraging any affected business to take advantage of the LEO COVID-19 supports. The situation is still developing from day to day and the Government continues to respond to these developments in an effort to protect and support Irish businesses. The LEOs will continue to work with existing applicants and recipients of Business Continuity Vouchers (BCV) and their subsequent business continuity plans. The awarding of vouchers under the BCV scheme will naturally taper off in the coming weeks as the Local Enterprise Offices process the outstanding applications.

InterTradeIreland launched two new business supports, these are currently being targeted at companies who are already on one of their programs. *E-merge* enables companies to engage consultancy support & advice (to the value of £2500/€2800) to help them develop online sales & ecommerce solutions.

*Emergency Business Solutions*: Fully funded consultancy support & advice (to the value of £2000/€2250) to address key business challenges in areas such as emergency cashflow, loan applications and HR/People.

The COVID-19 outbreak will result in a serious downturn in the Irish, EU and wider global economy. The downturn will be sudden and wide reaching. Businesses, the labour market and household spending will all be negatively impacted. To assist companies to respond to these challenges, and in doing so stabilise and rebuild their business, Enterprise Ireland, on behalf of the Department of Business Enterprise and Innovation has launched a suite of COVID-19 supports; these are:

- **Sustaining Enterprise Fund**: This €180 million fund will provide support to eligible manufacturing and internationally traded services companies employing 10 or more employees who have been impacted by a 15 per cent or more reduction in actual or projected turnover or profit, and/or have a significant increase in costs as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. The

objectives of the scheme are to:

- Ensure eligible companies have access to the necessary liquidity; and
- Sustain business so that companies can return to viability and contribute to the recovery of the Irish economy.

The Fund will provide financial assistance in the form of repayable advances of up to a maximum of €800,000 per company.

This fund will provide a €25k to €50k short term working capital injection to eligible smaller companies to support business continuity and strengthen their ability to return to growth and be trading strongly in 3-years' time.

- **COVID 19 – HPSU Fund (SEF – HPSU):** This fund is aimed at EI High Potential Start-Up companies who, due to the Covid-19 pandemic are facing delays to projected sales growth and whose fundraising plans are significantly impacted or stalled. Under this fund, HPSUs can apply for co-investment of €50,000 per undertaking in the form of equity or convertible debt instruments.

In addition to this fund Enterprise Ireland has launched the following supports:

- **Covid-19 Business Financial Planning Grant:** A €5k grant for eligible companies to work with third party consultants to prepare a detailed financial plan with forecasts and assumptions.

- **Lean Business Continuity Voucher:** A €2.5k voucher for eligible companies to access training or advisory services support related to the continued operation of their business during the current pandemic.

- **Covid-19 Online Retail Scheme** is a grant for retail companies with greater than 10 employees to develop a more competitive online offer. This competitive call has a budget of €2 million. Successful applicants will receive funding support of up to 80% of project costs, with a maximum grant of €40,000.

- **Restart Grant:** This grant provides direct grant aid to micro and small businesses. The grant is a contribution towards the cost of re-opening or keeping a business operational and re-connecting with employees and customers.

Funding in respect to the Restart Grant is provided by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and is administered by the 31 Local Authorities.

Enterprise Ireland provides support for new start-ups and existing business through a wide range of initiatives and supports. The awarding of funding by the agency is based on eligibility, evaluation criteria and assessed company need.

I can assure the Deputy that I continue to work with my colleagues across Government to examine further appropriate supports to assist businesses impacted by Covid-19 and will continue to keep the supports provided for enterprise under review.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

305. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on matters raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) regarding the return to

work safely protocol. [10465/20]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As the Deputy is aware the Return to Work Safely Protocol was launched on 9th May 2020 in advance of the Phase 1 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business which came into effect on 18th May.

The Protocol sets out in very clear terms for employers and workers the steps that they must take before a workplace reopens, and while it continues to operate. The protocol incorporates current advice about measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the community as issued by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE). As the advice issued by NPHE continues to evolve, this Protocol and the measures employers and workers need to address in the workplace may also change. The Protocol is, therefore, a living document insofar as details in the Protocol are non-exhaustive and are also subject to change as necessary. The Protocol is generally aimed at worker and public health protection and strong communication and a shared collaborative approach between employers and workers will be key in protecting against the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. Data Protection will play an important role in this success, where employers feel confident that they are meeting their data protection obligations and workers feel their personal data and right to privacy is protected in the workplace. It is intended to provide additional guidance within the Protocol on Data Protection matters to assist employers and employees in meeting requirements.

I would add that matters concerning the organisation and delivery of contact tracing systems is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Health.

### **Labour Court**

306. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health when he expects to sign-off on the Labour Court recommendations which were endorsed by the HSE regarding the completed wage review for chefs' grade recalibration evaluation in the HSR and is awaiting his decision since 24 February 2020. [9775/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** My Department is currently engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the content of this report. Once this engagement is complete, a decision will be made on the outcome of the review.

### **Paediatric Services**

307. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health when paediatric occupational therapists and speech and language therapists can reopen their centres and begin operations again; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9809/20]

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

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be

referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Medicinal Products**

308. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if his attention was drawn to the report by an organisation (details supplied); his views on whether greater reforms are possible to achieve more sustainable and affordable medicines for patients here; the engagement he or his officials have had on the matter with the organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9830/20]

309. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if his attention was drawn to the report by an organisation (details supplied); his views on whether greater reforms are possible to achieve more sustainable and affordable medicines for patients here; the engagement he or his officials have had on the matter with the organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9846/20]

348. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a report by an organisation (details supplied); his views on whether greater reforms are possible to achieve more sustainable and affordable medicines for patients; the engagement he or his officials have had on the matter with the organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9863/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 308, 309 and 348 together.

The timely and sustainable access to medicines is a priority for Government. The Oireachtas put in place a robust legal framework, in the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, to give full statutory powers to the HSE to assess and make decisions on reimbursement of medicines, taking account of a range of objective factors and expert opinion as appropriate. By assessing medicines in this manner, we help ensure that the finite resources of our health service are used most effectively.

The legislative underpinning of the 2013 Act is backed up by the Framework Agreement on the Supply of Medicines 2016-2020 between the State and the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA). This Agreement contains a number of measures intended to increase sustainable drug access and supply, including setting prices relative to those in other EU member states, reviewing prices to achieve better value for money and formal health technology assessment of new treatments to inform reimbursement decision making.

The Framework Agreement shall continue in force until 31 July 2020, unless continued by mutual agreement of the parties. My Department, the HSE and IPHA are in contact with each other, in the context of these specific provisions of the current Agreement and with a view to progressing the process of discussions on a successor agreement. My officials shall consider all relevant stakeholders as part of the preparatory work of a successor agreement.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

310. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health if an exemption will be made to the requirement for passengers to self-isolate for a passenger that has recently tested negative for Covid-19 by the public health authorities in Germany and the purpose of the trip is to see their children for a few days; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9856/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The public health advice for passengers arriving into the State from overseas is to self-isolate for 14 days. Self-isolation means staying indoors and completely avoiding contact with other people.

Information for those who are self-isolating and for people living with those who are self-isolating is published by the HSE on [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie).

In the absence of a test that definitively shows that a passenger arriving from overseas neither has nor is incubating the virus, the public health advice for passengers is to self-isolate during the 14 days – the duration of possible incubation - after arrival into the State.

By contrast, since 28 May, it is a legal requirement for passengers arriving from overseas to complete a COVID-19 Passenger Locator Form. The information on the form may be used to assist our contact tracing teams.

My Department, in consultation with other relevant Departments including the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, is developing proposals to strengthen the 14-day self-isolation arrangements for travellers from overseas. Careful consideration is being given to exemptions to any mandatory regime of quarantine. Any mandatory arrangements would be kept under regular review.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

311. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); the reason Ireland has chosen a different course of action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9963/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The measures taken are underpinned by a clear public health rationale.

As the number of indigenous cases here declines and Ireland eases some restrictions, the relative importance of the risk of importation of cases from overseas increases. Ultimately, the progress towards suppression of community transmission which has been achieved and which should allow for greater resumption of social and economic life in Ireland could be endangered.

The public health advice for passengers arriving into the State from overseas is to self-isolate for 14 days. Since 28 May it is a legal requirement for passengers arriving from overseas to complete a COVID-19 Passenger Locator Form. The information on the form may be used to assist our contact tracing teams.

The issue of imposing mandatory self-isolation for a 14-day period, to be considered as the situation evolves, was mentioned in the Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business.

My Department, in consultation with other relevant Departments including the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, is developing proposals to strengthen the 14-day self-isolation arrangements for travellers from overseas.

Any mandatory arrangements would be kept under regular review.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

312. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if a joint order of PPE from China

was agreed with the Northern Ireland Executive in view of a statement by the Minister for Finance in Northern Ireland on 27 March 2020; and if so, the details of the order and agreement. [10142/20]

313. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the discussions the Chief Procurement Officer and the Office of Government Procurement had with departments of the Northern Ireland Executive regarding the potential order and purchase of PPE in March and April 2020; if the statement by the Minister for Finance in Northern Ireland on 27 March 2020 that a joint order for PPE from China had been agreed with the Government actually was in place; and if so, the details of same. [10155/20]

400. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if joint orders for PPE have been made with the Northern Ireland Executive since the Covid-19 crisis commenced; if so, when they were agreed; the persons with whom they were agreed; and the cost of same. [10146/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 312, 313 and 400 together.

The Office of Government Procurement (OGP), has a longstanding working relationship with the Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) office of the Northern Ireland Department of Finance. Significant engagement had taken place between the OGP and CPD as part of the response to Covid-19, including exploring the option of a joint procurement to meet PPE needs. This joint option was progressed but was not ultimately concluded and both jurisdictions made their own arrangements for PPE supplies. There is ongoing dialogue between the OGP and CPD on Covid-19. A Memorandum of Understanding was formally agreed on 7 April between the Departments of Health in Ireland and Northern Ireland to underpin and strengthen North South co-operation on the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on facilitating greater co-operation on areas such as public health messaging, research, programmes of behavioural change, ethics, evidence base/ modelling and public health and non-pharmaceutical measures. Other areas will be considered, such as procurement, where this is of mutual benefit.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

314. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the number of disability therapy staff that have been redeployed on Covid-19 work; the number that have returned to their original posts; the timetable for all therapy staff to recommence working with children with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9646/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

315. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the way in which Covid-19 has affected waiting lists for disability services for children; the waiting lists for speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and psychology for disability services children for those waiting less than 12, between 12 to 52 and more than 52 weeks by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9647/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As the Depu-

ty's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### Disabilities Data

316. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the time frame for moving all persons with disabilities out of congregated settings in view of the fact the time frame in the national policy *Time to Move on from Congregated Settings* has passed; and when the remaining 2,000 or 2,900 persons will move into homes in the community. [9650/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Report "*Time to Move on from Congregated Settings – A Strategy for Community Inclusion*" proposes a new model of support in the community moving people from Congregated settings to the community in line with Government policy. The Report identified around 4000 people (based on 2008 census) with disabilities in Ireland living in congregated settings, defined as a residential setting where people live with ten or more people.

The Programme for Partnership Government contains a commitment to continue to move people with disabilities out of congregated settings, to enable them to live independently and to be included in the community. The objective is to reduce this figure by one-third by 2021 and ultimately, to eliminate all congregated settings.

*Time to Move On from Congregated Settings* is progressing and continues to demonstrate very positive results for service users who have transitioned to living in homes in community settings. Overall, the population in congregated settings at the year end will be 50% lower than those identified in the original report with less than 2,000 people remaining in congregated settings.

I want to emphasise that the appropriate supports and resources are being put in place to ensure that people are supported as they move out of residential centres. The model of care for individuals will be based on a person centred plan (PCP). The PCP may change over time in line with an individual's needs and circumstances and the model of service delivery applicable at a particular time.

Any opportunity for residents to live in smaller settings in the community will come after considerable planning and discussion with those residents and their families. It will be on the basis that it will enhance their life, and anyone who moves will continue to access the services they require.

The HSE has prioritised the transition of a further 132 people from congregated settings in 2020 under its Service Plan.

As the HSE is responsible for leading out on the recommendations of "*Time to Move on from Congregated Settings - A Strategy for Community Inclusion*", I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy in relation to the questions posed.

### Mental Health Services

317. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health when appointments for outpatients are due to resume at the department of psychiatry in St. Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny [9665/20]

**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.

### **Covid-19 Tests**

318. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if a commitment will be given to priority testing for employees in meat plant factories in view of the close proximity of the working conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9672/20]

331. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the number of inspections of meat plants carried out to date by the infection outbreak control team; the number of different plants inspected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9762/20]

332. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the number of announced and unannounced inspections, respectively of meat plants that have been carried out by the infection outbreak control team. [9763/20]

333. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health if all workers will be tested when a cluster appears in a meat plant; and if workers of such facilities should only return to work when they have been cleared of Covid-19. [9764/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 318 and 331 to 333, inclusive, together.

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

319. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for an operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9682/20]

**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 response to the Covid-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to defer all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity, including outpatient clinics. This was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for Covid-19 related activity and time-critical essential work. This decision was in line with the advice issued by the World Health Organisation, and the National Action Plan published on 16 March. The trajectory of the disease means there is now an opportunity for increasing the provision of non-covid care including

more routine care.

My Department, the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund are currently working together to estimate the impact of Covid 19 on Scheduled Care waiting lists, in order to be prepared to address any backlog or pent up demand. My Department continues to ensure that the resources available throughout our health system are best utilised at this unique and challenging time.

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

### **General Practitioner Services**

320. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if refunds are available for those that were charged for an over the phone consultation with their doctor regarding potential Covid-19 before the decision was made to waive fees for such consultations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9693/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Recognising that general practitioner services, in their totality, have a key role in the collective efforts to contain and mitigate the impact on public health during the current COVID-19 public health emergency, a number of measures were put in place to support general practice. These measures included payment of a fee of €30 by the HSE to GPs for the provision of remote consultations to patients who may have contracted COVID-19 infection, including referral for testing if clinically required in line with the latest clinical algorithm. This fee which came into effect on 16 March is payable in respect of all patients, regardless of eligibility status. Refunds are not available for COVID-19 related phone consultations prior to 16 March.

### **Health Screening Programmes**

321. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that many persons are experiencing anxiety and stress while waiting for cancer screening services to resume; if a date will be committed to for their earliest resumption; if a guarantee will be given that extra resources will be deployed to ensure that waiting lists for the services are cleared as quickly as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9712/20]

**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.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

322. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will address concerns that non-Covid-19 patients are being adversely impacted by the HSE contract with the private hospital sector; if a matter will be investigated regarding the case of a person (detail supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9721/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A major part of the Government's Action Plan in response to Covid-19 was to substantially increase the capacity of public healthcare facilities to cope with the anticipated additional demand. In order to urgently ramp up capacity for acute care facilities, an arrangement was agreed with the private hospitals to use their facili-

ties as part of the public system on a temporary basis, to provide essential services. A Heads of Terms of Agreement between the HSE and the Private Hospitals was agreed at the end of March 2020 and all 18 of the acute private hospitals signed up to it. Under the arrangement, all patients in the private hospitals are treated as public patients and their treatment is prioritised based on clinical need. Provision was made under the agreement to allow for continuity of care for patients who were in a private hospital or attending for treatment at the time the Heads of Terms of Agreement were agreed, on the grounds that these patients would be treated as public patients.

The agreement was reviewed at the end of May and the Government decided that the existing arrangement should not be extended beyond the end of June. It has however mandated the HSE to negotiate a new arrangement with private hospitals which would provide the HSE with full access to private hospital capacity in the event of a surge of Covid-19 and separately with ongoing agreed access, to enable the HSE to meet essential and elective care needs

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to defer all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity, including outpatient clinics. This was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for COVID-19 related activity and time-critical essential work. This decision was in line with the advice issued by the World Health Organisation, the measures set out in the Action Plan in Response to Covid-19 and the recommendation of NPHET. The NPHET has now recommended that steps be taken to resume non-urgent scheduled care in the context of the safe care guidelines set out by its Expert Advisory Group.

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.

In relation to the procedure for the person concerned, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Services**

323. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding Kenmare Hospital and Covid-19 patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9722/20]

**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.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

324. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if Ireland is in discussions with the UK in terms of making a Covid-19 vaccine available to both jurisdictions if and when trials are successful that would run additionally to an EU agreement for access; if his officials have met with their UK counterparts on this matter; if so, the details of those discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9726/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Leading experts, scientists and medicine manufacturers around the world, including in Ireland, are working collaboratively on the devel-

opment of treatments and vaccines to rapidly respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), as at 15th May, there are already eight candidate vaccines in clinical evaluation and 110 in pre-clinical evaluation. No decisions have yet been made on the distribution of an as yet undiscovered vaccine. It is expected that global coordination and agreement on allocating stocks to countries around the world will be the basis for distribution.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

325. **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. [9727/20]

**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 response to the Covid-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to defer all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity, including outpatient clinics. This was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for Covid-19 related activity and time-critical essential work. This decision was in line with the advice issued by the World Health Organisation, and the National Action Plan published on 16 March. The trajectory of the disease means there is now an opportunity for increasing the provision of non-covid care including more routine care.

My Department, the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund are currently working together to estimate the impact of Covid 19 on Scheduled Care waiting lists, in order to be prepared to address any backlog or pent up demand. My Department continues to ensure that the resources available throughout our health system are best utilised at this unique and challenging time.

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

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

326. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a date for surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9729/20]

**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 response to the Covid-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to defer all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity, including outpatient clinics. This was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for Covid-19 related activity and time-critical essential work. This decision was in line with the advice issued by the World Health Organisation, and the National Action Plan published on 16 March. The trajectory of the disease means there is now an opportunity for increasing the provision of non-covid care including more routine care.

My Department, the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund are currently working together to estimate the impact of Covid 19 on Scheduled Care waiting lists, in order to be prepared to address any backlog or pent up demand. My Department continues to ensure that the resources available throughout our health system are best utilised at this unique and challenging time.

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

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

327. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce waiting lists and outpatient appointments at Mallow General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9730/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to defer all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity, including outpatient clinics. This was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for Covid-19 related activity and time-critical essential work. This decision was in line with the advice issued by the World Health Organisation, and the National Action Plan published on 16 March. The trajectory of the disease means there is now an opportunity for increasing the provision of non-covid care including more routine care.

The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) has approved a number of recommendations relating to protecting and maximising the delivery of essential time-critical non-Covid-19 care alongside Covid-19 care. On 5 May, NPHE agreed that its recommendation of 27 March, in regard to the pausing of all non-essential health services should be replaced, in relation to acute care, with a recommendation that delivery of acute care be determined by appropriate clinical and operational decision making. Application of the essential risk mitigation steps set out in the guidance developed under the auspices of the NPHE Expert Advisory group will have operational implications, which will impact on throughput.

As the system continues to deliver Covid-19 and non-Covid 19 care side-by-side over a more prolonged period, my Department and the HSE will continue to work closely together to protect essential non-Covid 19 acute care and progress the provision of more routine non Covid-19 care.

Where possible, hospitals are working to find innovative ways to enable service provision,

which include virtual clinics for some out-patient department appointments. The HSE website provides details on services currently available and operational in each hospital on its website. This information is reviewed frequently and provides up-to-date announcements on services available at each site (<https://www2.hse.ie/services/hospital-service-disruptions/hospital-service-disruptions-covid19.html>).

In relation to specific plans to reduce waiting lists and outpatient appointments at Mallow General Hospital, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

328. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a series of matters regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9750/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am advised by Saolta Hospital Group that appropriate control measures are currently in place in Mayo University Hospital in relation to Covid-19.

Saolta Hospital Group has also advised that Mayo University Hospital will fully examine all of the elements of the care provided to the individual. I am informed that the General Manager of the hospital has been in contact with the person's family to advise of this, and that the process of reviewing the individual's care is underway. The hospital will be in direct contact with the individual's family in this regard.

I am also requesting a report from the CEO of the HSE on the Covid-19 measures taken at Mayo University Hospital from the outset of the pandemic, his views on the appropriateness of these measures at the particular points in time involved and his reassurance that all reasonable measures are now being taken to protect the safety of patients and staff in Mayo University Hospital.

### **Dental Services**

329. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in dealing with the issues outlined by an association (details supplied); if financial support will be provided to assist the sector due to the difficulties that have arisen as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9755/20]

369. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health the supports available to dentists under financial pressures due to the requirement to restructure their practice due to Covid-19 and additional costs for PPE and the safe disposal of PPE as clinical waste; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9089/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 329 and 369 together.

Legislative amendments have been made and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) has worked with the dental profession and in particular the Dental Council, to provide revised guidance for the profession to allow for the resumption of the safe provision of routine care. This was in line with Phase 1 of the Government's plan for the easing of COVID-19 restrictions which commenced on 18th May.

Dentists are responsible for disposing of their clinical waste in accordance with the Dental Council Code of Practice relating to Infection Prevention and Control.

The Government has put in place a suite of measures to support small, medium and larger businesses that are negatively impacted by COVID-19 including a Restart grant for which application can be made on line to local authorities. The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation has published a Return to Work Safely Protocol, which is designed to support employers and workers to put measures in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. The Health and Safety Authority also provides information and advice for employers and employees in this regard.

The HPSC supports the use of the normal Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) used in routine dentistry. The Dental Council has indicated that dentists should take a case by case assessment when deciding if additional PPE is warranted. I am following up with the HSE on the issue of supply of PPE for dentists.

### **Cannabis for Medicinal Use**

330. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the arrangements in place and the situations in which cannabis can be provided on a medicinal basis; the number of persons receiving same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9761/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In June 2019, I signed legislation to underpin the operation of the Medical Cannabis Access Programme (MCAP). The programme will run on a 5-year pilot basis and is restricted to prescribing of cannabis-based products at medical consultant level, for those patients with certain medical conditions who have exhausted all other available treatment options. The 3 medical conditions are:

- spasticity associated with multiple sclerosis;
- intractable nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy;
- severe, refractory (treatment-resistant) epilepsy.

To date three products have been added to Schedule 1 of the Misuse of Drugs (Prescription and Control of Supply of Cannabis for Medical Use) Regulations 2019. While the MCAP is not currently operational, engagement is ongoing with the HSE in regard to progressing same. For more information relating to the Programme please visit the Department of Health's website.

Pending full operation of the MCAP and for medical indications not included in the MCAP, Doctors may continue to utilise the Misuse of Drugs Act Section 14 Ministerial licencing route to prescribe cannabis-based products for their patients. In line with the Chief Medical Officer's advice, the granting of a licence for cannabis for medical purposes must be premised on an appropriate application being submitted to the Department of Health, which is endorsed by a consultant who is responsible for the management of the patient and who is prepared to monitor the effects of the treatment over time.

This information, including the clinical guidelines, can also be found on the Department's website at the following address:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/fb8912-cannabis-for-medical-use/>

**It is important to note that the medical decision to prescribe or not prescribe any**

**treatment, including cannabis treatment, for an individual patient is strictly a decision for the treating clinician, in consultation with their patient. I have no role in this clinical decision-making process.**

To date, clinicians for thirty-five individual patients have received a Ministerial Licence under Section 14 of the Misuse of Drugs Act.

*Questions Nos. 331 to 333, inclusive, answered with Question No. 318.*

### **Medical Cards**

334. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health his views on a situation (details supplied) regarding the medical card. [9773/20]

335. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health the reason patients with a medical card that pay to attend a particular general practitioner out of choice are not entitled to have prescribed medicines covered by the medical card. [9774/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 334 and 335 together.

The Irish Public Health System provides for two categories of eligibility for persons ordinarily resident in the country, i.e. full eligibility (medical cards) and limited eligibility. Full eligibility is determined primarily by reference to income limits. Determination of an individual's eligibility status is the responsibility of the HSE.

Individuals with full eligibility can access a range of services including General Practitioner services, prescribed drugs and medicines, all in-patient public hospital services in public wards, including consultant services, all out-patient public hospital services including consultant services, dental, ophthalmic and aural services and appliances and a maternity and infant care service. Individuals with limited eligibility are eligible for in-patient and outpatient public hospital services including consultant services, subject to certain charges. Other services such as allied healthcare professional services may also be made available to persons with limited eligibility.

A General Practitioner (GP) Visit Card provides for eligible individuals to visit a participating GP service without fees and also covers visits to GP out-of-hours service. GP's are independent practitioners, many of whom hold contracts with the HSE for the provision of services to medical card and GP visit card holders. It should be noted that all individuals over the age of 70 are automatically eligible for a GP visit card.

Individuals with full eligibility who access services from a GP who holds a GMS Contract with the HSE are eligible to have their prescribed medicines provided free subject to the application of the prescription charge. Persons who elect to attend a GP that does not hold a contract with the HSE may apply to avail of the Drugs Payment Scheme which provides for a maximum payment of €124 per month for approved prescribed drugs, medicines and certain appliances for themselves and/or their family. This scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals with ongoing expenditure on medicines.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

336. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the impact analysis carried out before the decision on a two week quarantine was taken; if consideration was given to the im-

pact this will have on those commuting to work, for example, in the UK on a weekly basis, to persons that may travel home for occasional weekends with families and to persons that may have to travel home for a family emergency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9776/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The measures taken are underpinned by a clear public health rationale.

As the number of indigenous cases here declines and Ireland eases some restrictions, the relative importance of the risk of importation of cases from overseas increases. Ultimately, the progress towards suppression of community transmission which has been achieved and which should allow for greater resumption of social and economic life in Ireland could be endangered.

The public health advice for passengers arriving into the State from overseas is to self-isolate for 14 days.

By contrast, since 28 May, it is a legal requirement for passengers arriving from overseas to complete a COVID-19 Passenger Locator Form. The information on the form may be used to assist our contact tracing teams.

The issue of imposing mandatory self-isolation for a 14-day period, to be considered as the situation evolves, was mentioned in the Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business. My Department, in consultation with other relevant Departments including the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, is developing proposals to strengthen the 14-day self-isolation arrangements for travellers from overseas. Careful consideration is being given to exemptions to any mandatory regime of quarantine.

Any mandatory arrangements would be kept under regular review.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

337. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to allowing persons with holiday homes outside the 20 km zone to be given permission to travel to them to carry out essential maintenance and upkeep on these homes earlier than the anticipated date in the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9777/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business, published on 1 May 2020, sets out an indicative path to the easing of COVID 19 restrictions and other actions in order to facilitate the reopening of Ireland's society and economy in a phased manner. Phase 1 was introduced on 18 May 2020 and, as the Deputy is aware, the Government confirmed the move to Phase 2 of Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business from Monday, 8 June 2020. Information and advice about the restrictions that have been eased as part of Phase 2 and the measures that are now in place are available on the Government website at <http://www.gov.ie/phase2>.

The Roadmap specifies that decisions in relation to which actions will be taken and which public health measures might be lifted will be made in accordance with the Framework for Future Decision-Making which is as follows:

1. Before each Government consideration of the easing of restrictions, the Department of Health will provide a report to the Government regarding the following on/off trigger criteria:
  - a. The latest data regarding the progression of the disease,

- b. The capacity and resilience of the health service in terms of hospital and ICU occupancy,
  - c. The capacity of the programme of sampling, testing and contact tracing,
  - d. The ability to shield and care for at risk groups,
  - e. An assessment of the risk of secondary morbidity and mortality as a consequence of the restrictions.
2. It will also provide risk-based public health advice on what measures could be modified in the next period.
  3. The Government would then consider what restrictions could be lifted, having regard to the advice of the Department of Health as well as other social and economic considerations, e.g. the potential for increased employment, relative benefits for citizens and businesses, improving national morale and wellbeing etc.
  4. It is acknowledged that there is also an ongoing possibility that restrictions could be re-imposed and this process will be carried out on an ongoing basis once every 3 weeks.

As is clear from the framework described above, it is the Government rather than I or my Department that will decide on any modifications to the current public health measures in place and those decisions will be informed by the status of the on/off trigger criteria and the public health advice received at the time that a decision is being made.

The current public health advice regarding travel is that people are asked to stay local.

People may travel within their own county, or 20 kilometres from home if crossing county boundaries, to visit local venues or amenities such as parks and shops that have reopened as part of the Government's Roadmap. The regulatory framework underpinning this public health advice is Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (COVID-19) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 (SI No. 206 of 2020). Travel for essential purposes is permitted under the regulations.

### **Hospital Services**

338. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when outpatient appointments will recommence in view of the cancellation and postponement of many due to the Covid-19 crisis. [9794/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to defer all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity, including outpatient clinics. This was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for Covid-19 related activity and time-critical essential work. This decision was in line with the advice issued by the World Health Organisation, and the National Action Plan published on 16 March. The trajectory of the disease means there is now an opportunity for increasing the provision of non-covid care including more routine care.

The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) has approved a number of recommendations relating to protecting and maximising the delivery of essential time-critical non-Covid-19 care alongside Covid-19 care. On 5 May, NPHE agreed that its recommendation of 27 March, in regard to the pausing of all non-essential health services should be replaced, in relation to acute care, with a recommendation that delivery of acute care be determined by appropriate clinical and operational decision making. Application of the essential risk mitigating steps set out in the guidance developed under the auspices of the NPHE Expert Advisory group will have operational implications, which will impact on throughput.

Where possible, hospitals are working to find innovative ways to enable service provision, which include virtual clinics for some outpatient department appointments. The HSE website provides details on services currently available and operational in each hospital on its website. This information is reviewed frequently and provides up-to-date announcements on services

available at each site (<https://www2.hse.ie/services/hospital-service-disruptions/hospital-service-disruptions-covid19.html>).

### **Paediatric Services**

339. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health when paediatric occupational therapists and speech and language therapists can reopen their centres and begin operations again; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9804/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Hospital Services**

340. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health when he expects to allow gynaecologists to return to operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9805/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy may be aware, in late March, the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) recommended that all non-essential health services should be paused to protect and maximise the delivery of essential time-critical care during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, on 5 May last the NPHE replaced its previous recommendation with a new recommendation that, going forward, the delivery of acute care should be determined by appropriate clinical and operational decision making.

I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy on the specific question relating to the resumption of gynaecology services.

### **General Practitioner Services**

341. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health when he expects to allow general practitioners to return to operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9806/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I wish to assure the Deputy that general practice is has continued to operate during the public health emergency and GPs are still seeing patients where necessary, albeit with infection-control measures in place.

However, the exceptional circumstances faced by medical practitioners during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a change in how GP services are delivered. At this time, walk-in clinics are not generally being provided and patients are asked to phone their GP initially to discuss their medical problem. GPs are performing assessments over the phone to determine if a patient needs to attend the surgery. Many problems can be resolved over the phone or by video consultation, some can be helped by the secure transfer of a prescription to the pharmacist while others may need referral to other services. Where clinically indicated, the GP will arrange an appointment to see the patient in the surgery. These measures are necessary to ensure the safety of patients, GPs, and practice staff.

### **Health Insurance**

342. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his plans in relation to persons

that have private health insurance but are unable to access same due to the State contract with private hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9821/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A major part of the Government's Action Plan in response to Covid-19 was to substantially increase the capacity of public healthcare facilities to cope with the anticipated additional demand. In order to urgently ramp up capacity for acute care facilities, an arrangement was agreed with the private hospitals to use their facilities as part of the public system on a temporary basis, to provide essential services. A Heads of Terms of Agreement between the HSE and the Private Hospitals was agreed at the end of March 2020 and all 18 of the acute private hospitals signed up to it. Under the arrangement, all patients in the private hospitals are treated as public patients and their treatment is prioritised based on clinical need. Provision was made under the agreement to allow for continuity of care for patients who were in a private hospital or attending for treatment at the time the Heads of Terms of Agreement were agreed, on the grounds that these patients would be treated as public patients.

Department officials engaged with the insurers at the outset of the private hospitals agreement. In order to assist health insurance customers impacted by the Covid-19 national response, each of the insurers have announced a range of supportive measures for their customers.

The agreement was reviewed at the end of May and the Government decided that the existing arrangement should not be extended beyond the end of June. It has however mandated the HSE to negotiate a new arrangement with private hospitals which would provide the HSE with full access to private hospital capacity in the event of a surge of Covid-19 and separately with ongoing agreed access, to enable the HSE to meet essential and elective care needs

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to defer all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity, including outpatient clinics. This was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for COVID-19 related activity and time-critical essential work. This decision was in line with the advice issued by the World Health Organisation, the measures set out in the Action Plan in Response to Covid-19 and the recommendation of NPHE. The NPHE has now recommended that steps be taken to resume non-urgent scheduled care in the context of the safe care guidelines set out by its Expert Advisory Group.

### **Health Screening Programmes**

343. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if a risk assessment was carried out in relation to the cessation and or pause of routine cancer screening services; if he has developed a roadmap to the commencement of these screening services; if so, if he will publish it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9822/20]

**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.

### **Primary Care Centres**

344. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of a primary care centre at a location (details supplied); when construction can begin on the site; and the facilities which will be available to the public therein. [9823/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsi-

ble for the delivery of public healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

345. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that have died from Covid-19 by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9827/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Data is collected on COVID-19 related mortality for both lab confirmed and probable cases, in line with recommendations from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control in both hospitals and the community. We committed from the outset to collect the most extensive data possible in order that the information could inform and guide the public health actions necessary to respond to the very serious threat posed by COVID-19. The Deputy might note that the collection of mortality data in Ireland exceeds that of many other countries in the world.

My Department was notified that up to 6 June 2020, sadly a total of 1,679 people have died. For reasons of patient confidentiality, and to protect the identity of those who have died, my Department does not provide a breakdown of this information by county.

### **Medicinal Products**

346. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the consultation he or his officials have had with an organisation (details supplied) in relation to medicines supply in the context of Covid-19; the steps that were taken to ensure that vital medical supplies were protected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9861/20]

347. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the steps he took during the response to Covid-19 to protect patients from medicines shortages; the engagement he has had on the matter with an organisation (details supplied) and other organisations; the engagement he has had at European level on the subject; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9862/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 346 and 347 together.

The Department of Health, the HSE and the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), together with the manufacturers of medicines, wholesalers and pharmacists, are continually working to review the supply of medicines to Ireland to anticipate and respond to, in so far as is possible, any potential vulnerabilities in medicines supply as a consequence of the outbreak of Covid-19. As part of this coordinated response, all stakeholders have committed to developing approaches and implementing contingencies to address any identified concerns.

Arising from this detailed and ongoing engagement, there is no evidence to suggest that Ireland is likely to face general medicines supply issues, now or in the near future, as a result of any potential delays in the supply chain caused by Covid-19 related issues. Supply chains remain strong, however, these remain under ongoing review and international authorities, including the European Medicines Agency, remain vigilant to any potential risk. The Department of Health and the HPRA are also working as part of this wider EU response to Covid-19. In addition to direct and specific engagement with the marketing authorisation holders of medicines the Department has hosted a number of multi-stakeholder conference calls with the pharmaceu-

tical industry, including Medicines for Ireland, and other actors in the pharmaceutical supply chain, such as wholesalers and community pharmacists. The most recent of these events took place yesterday, 8th June.

I am grateful for the continuous engagement of all stakeholders in this process. I recognise and value the work which gone into contingency planning, and other measures to mitigate the risks to medicines supplies at this time. Through this continued engagement and open communication with all stakeholders, a unified approach has been taken to mitigate the risks to the supply of medicines to treat Covid-19 patients and to maintain continuity of treatment for all other patients.

*Question No. 348 answered with Question No. 308.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

349. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Health the stage of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business the seaweed baths businesses individually and separate from spa treatments and associated services can begin to reopen their facilities to the public in a safe manner and in line with health and safety guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9864/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business, published on 1 May 2020, sets out an indicative path to the easing of COVID 19 restrictions and other actions in order to facilitate the reopening of Ireland's society and economy in a phased manner. Phase 1 was introduced on 18 May 2020 and, as the Deputy is aware, the Government confirmed the move to Phase 2 of Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business from Monday, 8 June 2020. Information and advice about the restrictions that have been eased as part of Phase 2 and the measures that are now in place are available on the Government website at <http://www.gov.ie/phase2>.

The Roadmap specifies that decisions in relation to which actions will be taken and which public health measures might be lifted will be made in accordance with the Framework for Future Decision-Making which is as follows:

1. Before each Government consideration of the easing of restrictions, the Department of Health will provide a report to the Government regarding the following on/off trigger criteria:

- a. The latest data regarding the progression of the disease,
- b. The capacity and resilience of the health service in terms of hospital and ICU occupancy,
- c. The capacity of the programme of sampling, testing and contact tracing,
- d. The ability to shield and care for at risk groups,
- e. An assessment of the risk of secondary morbidity and mortality as a consequence of the restrictions.

2. It will also provide risk-based public health advice on what measures could be modified in the next period.

3. The Government would then consider what restrictions could be lifted, having regard to the advice of the Department of Health as well as other social and economic considerations, e.g. the potential for increased employment, relative benefits for citizens and businesses, improving

national morale and wellbeing etc.

4. It is acknowledged that there is also an ongoing possibility that restrictions could be re-imposed and this process will be carried out on an ongoing basis once every 3 weeks.

As is clear from the framework described above, it is the Government rather than I or my Department that will decide on any modifications to the current public health measures in place and those decisions will be informed by the status of the on/off trigger criteria and the public health advice received at the time that a decision is being made.

The services described in the Deputy's questions are not matters within the remit of my Department. Guidance in relation to specific sectors of the economy should in the first instance be sought from the Government Department with responsibility for that sector.

### Health Screening Programmes

350. **Deputy Hildegard Naughton** asked the Minister for Health if his Department or the HSE has conducted a risk assessment in relation to the indefinite postponement of breast and cervical screening due to Covid-19; if such an assessment has been conducted; if so, if it will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9882/20]

**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.

### Cancer Services

351. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of increasing funding for the National Cancer Control Programme by 5%, 7.5% and 10%, respectively. [9902/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Cancer Control Programme has a budget of €97.6m for 2020. The cost of increasing this by 5%, 7.5% and 10% is set out in the following table.:

	€
2020 Opening Budget	€97.6m
5% increase	€4.88m
7.5% increase	€7.32m
10% increase	€9.76m

### Dental Services

352. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if a reply will issue to a query (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9904/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have been engaging with the dental profession in recent weeks on the concerns raised in the correspondence - details attached.

Legislative amendments have been made and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) has worked with the dental profession and in particular the Dental Council, to provide revised guidance for the profession to allow for the resumption of the safe provision of routine

care. This was in line with Phase 1 of the Government's plan for the easing of COVID-19 restrictions which commenced on 18th May.

The Government has put in place a suite of measures to support small, medium and larger businesses that are negatively impacted by COVID-19 including a Restart grant for which application can be made on line to local authorities. The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation has published a Return to Work Safely Protocol, which is designed to support employers and workers to put measures in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. The Health and Safety Authority also provides information and advice for employers and employees in this regard.

The HPSC supports the use of the normal Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) used in routine dentistry. The Dental Council has indicated that dentists should take a case by case assessment when deciding if additional PPE is warranted. I am following up with the HSE on the issue of supply of PPE for dentists.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

353. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Health if a person in the business of furniture repair, who works alone, which entails calling to persons' homes, is permitted to recommence this work on 8 June 2020 under phase 2 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business; the type of PPE required for this type of business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9905/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business, published on 1 May 2020, sets out an indicative path to the easing of COVID 19 restrictions and other actions in order to facilitate the reopening of Ireland's society and economy in a phased manner. Phase 1 was introduced on 18 May 2020 and, as the Deputy is aware, the Government confirmed the move to Phase 2 of Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business from Monday, 8 June 2020. Information and advice about the restrictions that have been eased as part of Phase 2 and the measures that are now in place are available on the Government website at <http://www.gov.ie/phase2>.

The Roadmap specifies that decisions in relation to which actions will be taken and which public health measures might be lifted will be made in accordance with the Framework for Future Decision-Making which is as follows:

1. Before each Government consideration of the easing of restrictions, the Department of Health will provide a report to the Government regarding the following on/off trigger criteria:
  - a. The latest data regarding the progression of the disease,
  - b. The capacity and resilience of the health service in terms of hospital and ICU occupancy,
  - c. The capacity of the programme of sampling, testing and contact tracing,
  - d. The ability to shield and care for at risk groups,
  - e. An assessment of the risk of secondary morbidity and mortality as a consequence of the restrictions.
2. It will also provide risk-based public health advice on what measures could be modified in the next period.

3. The Government would then consider what restrictions could be lifted, having regard to the advice of the Department of Health as well as other social and economic considerations, e.g. the potential for increased employment, relative benefits for citizens and businesses, improving national morale and wellbeing etc.

4. It is acknowledged that there is also an ongoing possibility that restrictions could be re-imposed and this process will be carried out on an ongoing basis once every 3 weeks.

As is clear from the framework described above, it is the Government rather than I or my Department that will decide on any modifications to the current public health measures in place and those decisions will be informed by the status of the on/off trigger criteria and the public health advice received at the time that a decision is being made.

On 8 June 2020, new regulations signed by the Minister for Health came into operation. These Regulations, the Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (COVID-19) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 (SI No. 206 of 2020), apply from 8 June 2020 until 29 June 2020 and set out the particular services which may resume at the present time.

The services described in the Deputy's questions are not matters within the remit of my Department. Guidance in relation to specific sectors of the economy should in the first instance be sought from the Government Department with responsibility for that sector.

### **Bituminous Fuel Ban**

354. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the status of work to secure the implementation of a nationwide smoky coal ban; if he has engaged with officials from the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment since January 2020 on the matter; his views from a health perspective regarding ongoing delays in implementing a nationwide smoky coal ban; if he has studied the report on the health consequences from poor air quality by the Environmental Protection Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9906/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Policy responsibility regarding the implementation of a nationwide smoky coal ban is a matter for the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment but this has been the subject of cross-Departmental engagement.

I welcome and fully support the extension of the smoky coal ban announced by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment in December 2019. I am fully aware of the impact poor air quality can have on human health. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report *Air Quality in Ireland 2018*, which was published in September 2019, estimated that poor air quality causes up to 1,180 premature deaths per annum in Ireland. I understand that my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, is continuing to work on this issue including consultation with relevant Local Authorities and drafting the necessary secondary legislation.

### **National Public Health Emergency Team**

355. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health when NPHE's vulnerable people subgroup was established; the details of its meetings to date; the details of its members and their roles; and if the minutes of their meetings will be published. [9908/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As part of the national response to COVID-19, the NPHEP Subgroup on Vulnerable People was established by my Department to provide oversight and assurance with regard to the specific preparedness, measures and actions that need to be taken to protect vulnerable groups and individuals in society. An integrated cross government approach is being taken by the Subgroup.

The Subgroup met on 6th March 2020 for the first time and has held 9 meetings to date. The Terms of Reference, membership of the subgroup and all minutes of meetings (once finalised) are published online at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/301f5e-the-national-public-health-emergency-team-nphet-subgroup-vulnerable/>

### **Hospital Consultant Contracts**

356. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant ENT surgeons in each of the RCSI hospitals in 2018, 2019 and to date in 2020; and the number of consultant ENT surgeon hours provided in each hospital under current contracts. [9909/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service delivery matter, I have referred the question to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Hospital Services**

357. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health when adult day services will resume. [9930/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As part of the overall effort to contain the spread of COVID-19 and in line with public health advice, day service locations have been closed since March. However priority service users have been identified in each CHO, and individualised supports continue to be provided to many people in alternative models particularly for these individuals with higher support needs, through alternative means such as via online support and/or regular telephone contact with families. Health and social care responses to the current public health emergency are under continuing review, including specific measures such as these to support vulnerable people.

The resumption of adult day services is currently being considered by my Department and the HSE as part of broader planning to prepare for the resumption of non-COVID-19 community and social care services in the current environment, and in line with public health guidance. My Department and the HSE has established a Joint Working Group to develop a plan for Community Capacity.

The HSE is finalising plans to re-establish vital non-covid supports and services. This includes very careful and detailed work on the part of the Disability Sector with national guidance and will result in directing how all funded agencies can deliver services on a medium to long-term basis. Community Healthcare Organisations and Section 38/39 agencies continue to work together at a regional level in order to plan and co-ordinate efforts. Considering the very serious nature of this pandemic and the vulnerability of people with disabilities as a care group, any plans to safely commence all disability services and supports must comply with guidance developed by the National Public Surveillance Centre in the HSE.

The HSE has now developed a number of important guidance documents to assist disability services: the Framework for Resumption of Adult Day Services and Reshaping Disability Ser-

vices From 2020 & Beyond. It is important to note that this guidance is interim and subject to change in line with the overall management of the Covid-19 pandemic and in accordance with contemporary Public Health Guidance.

These documents are now also available on the following website:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

### **Dental Services**

358. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when personal protective equipment will be provided to dentists (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9938/20]

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

### **Disability Support Services**

359. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if a reply will issue to correspondence from a person (details supplied) in relation to disability services and the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9947/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

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

360. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Health the number of young persons on a waiting list for CAMHS; the number of young persons that have contacted CAMHS for support since March 2020; if additional staffing supports or resources have been introduced since March 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9948/20]

**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**

361. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Health his plans to enhance schemes such as a programme (details supplied). [9949/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Medicinal Products**

362. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health the penetration rate of generic medicines in 2010 and in the most recent year for which figures are available; the penetration rate of biosimilar medicines; the amount which would be saved if the penetration rate of biosimilar medicines matched that of generic medicines; his plans to increase the penetration rate of biosimilar medicines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9951/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Generic medicines and biosimilar medicines are not comparable categories of medicine and therefore not comparable in terms of policy design or implementation. The differences between simpler chemically synthesised medicines and far more complex medicines produced from cell cultures of living organisms are such that they necessitate a difference in policy approach to these categories of medicine. The HSE and my Department are actively engaged in implementing domestic policies to maximise efficiency in our medicines usage.

In terms of biosimilar medicines for example, the HSE's Acute Hospitals Drugs Management Programme (AHDMP) has a biosimilar strategy in place since 2017. This is making considerable progress using a collaborative to bring about changes in prescribing practice.

In addition, the HSE Medicines Management Programme completed an evaluation process in 2019 for the identification of the best-value biological (BVB) medicines for TNF- inhibitors under the High-Tech Drug arrangements.

In June 2019, the HSE introduced a system of gain-share to encourage the prescribing of the BVB medicines which has been largely successful in increasing uptake of these medicines.

To the end of April, the HSE has estimated savings of €14.5m in 2020 from biosimilar switching initiatives. Should this trend continue to year end, savings of approximately €30m have been forecast for 2020.

In relation to your specific data requests, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly as they have responsibility for this area.

### **Hospital Services**

363. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when he will allow private hospitals resume their normal activities and deal with operations and surgeries that were scheduled to happen before the agreement between the State and the hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9959/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A major part of the Government's Action Plan in response to Covid-19 was to substantially increase the capacity of public healthcare facilities to cope with the anticipated additional demand. In order to urgently ramp up capacity for acute care facilities, an arrangement was agreed with the private hospitals to use their facilities as part of the public system on a temporary basis, to provide essential services. A Heads of Terms of Agreement between the HSE and the Private Hospitals was agreed at the end of March 2020 and all 18 of the acute private hospitals signed up to it. Under the arrangement, all patients in the private hospitals are treated as public patients and their treatment is prioritised based on clinical need. Provision was made under the agreement to allow for continuity of care for patients who were in a private hospital or attending for treatment at the time the Heads of Terms of Agreement were agreed, on the grounds that these patients would be treated as public patients.

The agreement was reviewed at the end of May and the Government decided that the existing arrangement should not be extended beyond the end of June. It has however mandated the

HSE to negotiate a new arrangement with private hospitals which would provide the HSE with full access to private hospital capacity in the event of a surge of Covid-19 and separately with ongoing agreed access, to enable the HSE to meet essential and elective care needs.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to defer all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity, including outpatient clinics. This was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for COVID-19 related activity and time-critical essential work. This decision was in line with the advice issued by the World Health Organisation, the measures set out in the Action Plan in Response to Covid-19 and the recommendation of NPHE. The NPHE has now recommended that steps be taken to resume non-urgent scheduled care in the context of the safe care guidelines set out by its Expert Advisory Group.

### Covid-19 Pandemic

364. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if the possibility will be explored of allowing families to visit their loved ones that are end-of-life in hospices but that are not actively dying (details supplied); if a range of options that would allow same including the wearing of appropriate PPE and or outdoor visits with social distancing will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9960/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy will be aware, during these exceptional times, some of the normal aspirations of people at end of life and of their families have had to be curtailed in the interests of containing the spread of the coronavirus. In particular, restrictions have been placed on visiting hospitals and residential care settings, and the numbers attending funerals have been severely reduced, while the social distancing measures have meant that normal tactile expressions of support and comfort have not been possible. While visiting restrictions are required in a pandemic, local risk assessment and practical management must be considered, ensuring the response is both pragmatic and proportionate. Specific scenarios where a compassionate and practical approach is required include care of the dying. Regarding the specific case mentioned by the Deputy, the person concerned is being cared for in a residential care setting. Interim Public Health and Infection Prevention Control Guidelines on the Prevention and Management of COVID-19 Cases and Outbreaks in Residential Care Facilities published by the HSE on 4 May 2020 state that all but essential visiting by family and friends is suspended in the interests of protecting residents at this time. However, the Guidelines also acknowledge that a compassionate, pragmatic and proportionate approach is required in the care of those who are dying. The presence of a person close to the resident should be facilitated in so far as it is possible, and they should be aware of the potential infection risk. All Covid-19 guidance documents note the need for hand and respiratory hygiene and for the wearing of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when required and that relatives are informed of the potential risk of infection to both the patient/resident and visitors. Most hospices have all single room accommodation and are therefore in a better position to facilitate visits to patients at end of life; however, most residential care settings have multi-bedded rooms and need to be particularly cautious in balancing the needs of patients and their families with the protection of the health of visitors, other residents and the staff working in the unit. It is acknowledged by all services that restricted visiting causes significant stress and concern for individuals and families, as well as for the staff who are caring for them. From 15 June, in accordance with guidance published by the Health Protection and Surveillance Centre (HSPSC), there will be a phased commencement of visiting at hospitals, residential healthcare centres and other residential settings where there is no ongoing Covid-19 outbreak, subject to limits on the number of visitors and the length of their visits. Visitors are asked to bear in mind the particular

features of types of settings and each individual centre, also considering PPE availability and other protections. It is hoped that the easing of visiting restrictions will be able to facilitate the much needed closer contact between family members and loved ones. In the meantime, as the specific details referred to in the Deputy's question refer to a service matter, this matter has been referred to the HSE for reply.

### General Practitioner Services

365. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health when SouthDoc Blackpool in Cork will reopen. [9961/20]

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

### Cycle to Work Scheme

366. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by his Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9985/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the staff of my Department who have availed of the cycle to work scheme since 2013 is set out in the following table.

Cycle to Work Scheme - Amounts by Year

	Year	No. of Applications	Total Cost
Department of Health	2013	5	€4,470
	2014	20	€16,314
	2015	21	€15,803
	2016	6	€6,029
	2017	13	€10,831
	2018	16	€14,126
	2019	16	€16,975
	2020	11	€9,277
Grand Total		108	€93,825

### Covid-19 Pandemic

367. **Deputy Roderic O'Gorman** asked the Minister for Health if advice is being provided regarding isolating within households in which one member has returned from travel abroad and other members have not; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10009/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The public health advice for people arriving into the State from overseas is to self-isolate for 14 days. Self-isolation means staying indoors and completely avoiding contact with other people.

Information for those who are self-isolating and for people living with those who are self-isolating is published by the HSE on [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie). Information resources on self-isolation are also available on the website of the HSPC, and these have been translated into a number of languages.

### **Direct Provision System**

368. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of Covid-19 cases in direct provision centres and a centre (details supplied); and if the centre is included in the overall figures for direct provision centres. [9155/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Both my Department and the HSE are committed to protecting the identity and medical confidentiality of direct provision residents, as required by law, and therefore do not give specific information about individuals or locations. Information on cases or outbreaks of any illness (COVID-19 or otherwise) is provided only if there is a public health reason to do so.

However, I have asked the Health Service Executive to provide an update directly to the Deputy in relation to direct provision centres as soon as possible.

*Question No. 369 answered with Question No. 329.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

370. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the location a drive-in cinema in which patrons are isolated in their cars and staff are safely socially distanced may reopen under the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. [10013/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business, published on 1 May 2020, sets out an indicative path to the easing of COVID 19 restrictions and other actions in order to facilitate the reopening of Ireland's society and economy in a phased manner. Phase 1 was introduced on 18 May 2020 and, as the Deputy is aware, the Government confirmed the move to Phase 2 of Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business from Monday, 8 June 2020. Information and advice about the restrictions that have been eased as part of Phase 2 and the measures that are now in place are available on the Government website at <http://www.gov.ie/phase2>.

The Roadmap specifies that decisions in relation to which actions will be taken and which public health measures might be lifted will be made in accordance with the Framework for Future Decision-Making which is as follows:

1. Before each Government consideration of the easing of restrictions, the Department of Health will provide a report to the Government regarding the following on/off trigger criteria:
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  - b. The capacity and resilience of the health service in terms of hospital and ICU occupancy,
  - c. The capacity of the programme of sampling, testing and contact tracing,
  - d. The ability to shield and care for at risk groups,
  - e. An assessment of the risk of secondary morbidity and mortality as a consequence of the

restrictions.

2. It will also provide risk-based public health advice on what measures could be modified in the next period.

3. The Government would then consider what restrictions could be lifted, having regard to the advice of the Department of Health as well as other social and economic considerations, e.g. the potential for increased employment, relative benefits for citizens and businesses, improving national morale and wellbeing etc.

4. It is acknowledged that there is also an ongoing possibility that restrictions could be re-imposed and this process will be carried out on an ongoing basis once every 3 weeks.

As is clear from the framework described above, it is the Government rather than I or my Department that will decide on any modifications to the current public health measures in place and those decisions will be informed by the status of the on/off trigger criteria and the public health advice received at the time that a decision is being made.

The services described in the Deputy's questions are not matters within the remit of my Department. Guidance in relation to specific sectors of the economy should in the first instance be sought from the Government Department with responsibility for that sector. However, the Deputy may wish to note that the newly introduced Health Act 1947 (Section 31 A - Temporary Restrictions) (Covid-19) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 identify in Schedule 2 that "outdoor cinemas at which persons attending a screening do so in motor vehicles and remain in the vehicles without exiting the motor vehicles for the duration of such attendance" do not have to remain closed.

### **Physiotherapy Services**

371. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if physiotherapists and reflexologists can reopen as part of phase 2 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business; if so, the restrictions under which they will operate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10014/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (COVID-19) Regulations 2020 (SI No. 121 of 2020) and subsequent amendments were in effect until 8 June 2020.

Physiotherapists are members of a designated profession within the meaning of section 3 of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (No. 27 of 2005) and have been and continue to be permitted to operate.

On 8 June 2020, new regulations signed by the Minister for Health came into operation. These Regulations, the Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (COVID-19) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 (SI No. 206 of 2020), apply from 8 June 2020 until 29 June 2020.

The Regulations provide that the occupier, the manager, or any other person in charge, shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that members of the public are not permitted, or otherwise granted, access to a premises or to a part of such premises, where a relevant business or service is carried on or otherwise provided. "Relevant business or service" is defined in Schedule 2 to the S.I. and includes services provided on a commercial basis, other than where such services are provided by a physiotherapist or by a registered medical practitioner, including massage services. Such services are, therefore, not permitted at this time.

It should also be noted that reflexologists are not registered health professionals within the meaning of section 3 of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (No. 27 of 2005).

### **Drugs Payment Scheme**

372. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the drug sativex will be included in the drug payment scheme for a person (details supplied). [10017/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In line with the 2013 Act and the national framework agreed with industry, a company must submit an application to the HSE to have a new medicine added to the reimbursement list.

Reimbursement is for licenced indications which have been granted market authorisation by the European Medicines Agency or the Health Products Regulatory Authority.

In making a relevant reimbursement decision, the HSE is required under the Act to have regard to a number of criteria including the health needs of the public, cost effectiveness, potential or actual budget impact and efficacy.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

I am advised by the HSE that it has received an application for reimbursement of Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol/Cannabidiol, THC/CBD (Sativex) in February 2018. A rapid review by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE) was completed on 3 April 2018 and a full pharmacoeconomic assessment was recommended to assess the clinical and cost effectiveness of this medicine compared with the current standard of care.

The HSE commissioned a full health technology assessment with respect to this indication in April 2018. On 12 August 2019, the NCPE received the applicant's submission. On 10 February 2020, the NCPE sent a preliminary review to the applicant and are currently awaiting their response.

Until such time as a decision has been made in relation to the reimbursement of Sativex by the HSE, this product will not be available under the community drug schemes.

### **A Vision for Change**

373. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he will publicise the revised A Vision for Change document with immediate effect. [10021/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** Ireland's new mental health policy *Sharing the Vision – a Mental Health Policy for Everyone 2020-2030* has been approved by Government and is scheduled to be published in the coming week. This policy was developed following a process of research into international innovation and best practice in mental health and an extensive national consultation of over 1,000 service users, family members, friends and carers and other stakeholders. *Sharing the Vision* comes at a time when Covid-19 has impacted so negatively on the nation's mental health. It advocates protecting

health and wellbeing, getting appropriate care quickly and seeks that services provided are quality assured and safe.

### **Health Screening Programmes**

374. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider expanding the number of rare health conditions which are tested for under the heel prick screening process for newborn babies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10023/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Currently all newborn babies (between 3 and 5 days old) are offered newborn bloodspot screening (generally known as the ‘heel prick’) through their parents/guardians for eight very rare conditions that are treatable if detected early in life.

A National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC) was established in 2019 and has held two meetings to date. The Committee’s role is to undertake an independent assessment of the evidence for screening for a particular condition against internationally accepted criteria and make recommendations accordingly.

I appointed Professor Niall O’Higgins as Chair of this Committee in 2019 and asked that, as part of its initial body of work, the Committee prioritise a review of the national newborn blood-spot screening programme and look specifically at how Ireland should best proceed with an expansion in line with international best practice. Any future potential changes to the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme will be incorporated as part of the Committee’s work programme.

Ireland, has always evaluated the case for commencing a national screening programme against international accepted criteria – collectively known as the Wilson Jungner criteria. The evidence bar for commencing a screening programme should and must remain high. This ensures that we can be confident that the programme is effective, quality assured and operating to safe standards. There is no doubt that newborn screening programmes have the potential to be rapidly transformed by new technologies and new therapies but this highlights the need to continue with a robust, methodologically sound and detailed analysis of the evidence in each and every case against internationally accepted screening criteria.

However, it is most likely that over the course of the next 5 years we are likely to see an incremental expansion of the bloodspot programme that will screen for new conditions.

Updates in relation to screening will be posted on the NSAC website (<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/nsac/>).

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

375. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he will continue the two-metre physical distancing as advised by NPHET; and if at any stage the advice changes to one-metre, if the wearing of cloth face masks will become mandatory. [10024/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** While the evidence relating to the SARS-CoV-2 virus is evolving, it is clear now that the risks of transmission of any respiratory pathogens such as the type that causes Covid-19 are lessened when greater distance is maintained between people. The current advice is that you should follow social distancing guidance everywhere outside the home, including keeping a physical distance of 2 metres apart. It is also

recommended that face coverings be worn in situations where social distancing is difficult to maintain, such as shops, and on public transport, or when meeting someone who is vulnerable to the virus, for example people who are cocooning. The recommendation applies to those people aged over 13 who can tolerate them.

This advice is kept under review by the National Public Health Emergency Team on a continuing basis. Arising from their meeting of 4 June, 2020, the National Public Health Emergency Team has requested that the Health Protection Surveillance Centre develop guidance on the application of existing social distancing requirements in specific, defined and controlled environments in the hospitality industry during periods of low incidence of the disease. This guidance will then be considered by the National Public Health Emergency Team on completion.

The Deputy may also wish to note that on 9 May the “Return to Work Safely Protocol - COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers” was published. It provides clear guidance to employers and to workers on the measures that must be taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. The Protocol was developed through the cooperation of the Health and Safety Authority, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the HSE and my Department. It is designed to be used by all workplaces to adapt their procedures and practices to provide protection against the threat of COVID-19.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

376. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if he has reviewed protocols laid down by the European Union Aviation Safety Agency in relaxing restrictions affecting air travel during this phase of the Covid-19 pandemic; if he has consulted with his EU counterparts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10029/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I and my Ministerial colleagues engage regularly with our EU counterparts; in my case this is done at the EPSCO (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs) Council meeting of Health Ministers and through bilateral contacts. Since 15 April there have been five Informal Video Conferences of Health Ministers where a wide range of Covid-19 related issues were discussed. This followed on from two extraordinary EPSCO meetings in Brussels in February and March to discuss the Covid-19 response.

There is also ongoing, close engagement with the Northern Ireland authorities in a variety of forums, at both political and official level, both on a North-South basis and as part of broader engagement with the United Kingdom, including in relation to international travel.

Ireland pays close attention to all guidance from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). The guidelines developed by ECDC and the European Aviation Safety Authority (EASA) are welcome in providing clarity to carriers and passengers about how to minimise the risk of transmission during a flight. However, even with the recommendations of the ECDC/EASA report fully implemented, air travel should not be viewed as risk free. The guidelines do not address the broader risks that increased non-essential international travel will present, including the possible importation of cases.

In the absence of a test that definitively shows that a passenger arriving from overseas neither has nor is incubating the virus, the public health advice for passengers is to self-isolate during the 14 days – the duration of possible incubation - after they arrive into the State from overseas.

## **Mental Health Services**

377. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the need to facilitate parental visits to children currently receiving inpatient mental healthcare here; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that these visits can take place in adherence to public health guidance in outdoor gardens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10034/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is an operational issue taking into account Covid requirements and that the Deputy has asked this PQ, he will get a response from the HSE at an early date. .

## **Covid-19 Pandemic**

378. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Health if rural hotels will be allowed open a takeaway food service in phase 2 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business in circumstances (details supplied). [10039/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business, published on 1 May 2020, sets out an indicative path to the easing of COVID 19 restrictions and other actions in order to facilitate the reopening of Ireland's society and economy in a phased manner. Phase 1 was introduced on 18 May 2020 and, as the Deputy is aware, the Government confirmed the move to Phase 2 of Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business from Monday, 8 June 2020. Information and advice about the restrictions that have been eased as part of Phase 2 and the measures that are now in place are available on the Government website at <http://www.gov.ie/phase2>.

The Roadmap specifies that decisions in relation to which actions will be taken and which public health measures might be lifted will be made in accordance with the Framework for Future Decision-Making which is as follows:

1. Before each Government consideration of the easing of restrictions, the Department of Health will provide a report to the Government regarding the following on/off trigger criteria:

- a. The latest data regarding the progression of the disease,
- b. The capacity and resilience of the health service in terms of hospital and ICU occupancy,
- c. The capacity of the programme of sampling, testing and contact tracing,
- d. The ability to shield and care for at risk groups,
- e. An assessment of the risk of secondary morbidity and mortality as a consequence of the restrictions.

2. It will also provide risk-based public health advice on what measures could be modified in the next period.

3. The Government would then consider what restrictions could be lifted, having regard to the advice of the Department of Health as well as other social and economic considerations, e.g. the potential for increased employment, relative benefits for citizens and businesses, improving national morale and wellbeing etc.

4. It is acknowledged that there is also an ongoing possibility that restrictions could be re-imposed and this process will be carried out on an ongoing basis once every 3 weeks.

As is clear from the framework described above, it is the Government rather than I or my Department that will decide on any modifications to the current public health measures in place and those decisions will be informed by the status of the on/off trigger criteria and the public health advice received at the time that a decision is being made.

The Regulations which currently apply, and are in operation until 29 June 2020, are the Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (COVID-19) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 (SI No. 206 of 2020).

The Regulations provide that outlets selling food or beverages on a takeaway basis are permitted outlets at this time.

However, the Deputy may wish to note that the Regulations provide that the occupier, the manager, or any other person in charge, shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that members of the public are not permitted, or otherwise granted, access to a premises or to a part of such premises, where a business or service of a type such as an outlet selling food or beverages whether on a retail or wholesale basis and whether in a non-specialised or specialised outlet, is carried on or otherwise provided other than insofar as they sell food or beverages on a takeaway basis or for consumption off the premises. This includes outlets in relation to which an on-licence (within the meaning of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 (No. 24 of 2018) applies.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

379. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health when day-care centres for persons with Alzheimer's disease will reopen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10042/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Day care services play an important role in enabling people with dementia to continue living in their communities, and the Government appreciates the work of these services. The Department of Health and the HSE are undertaking work to determine the current level of service delivery in the community and to set out plans, including associated required capacity, to resume services, including day services, in line with the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. This process will take on board the learning of the current period, including the possibility of delivering services in a new way, and the requirement to adhere to public health guidance. This means that services, whilst being delivered in new ways, will gradually be restored to older people, including people with dementia.

### **Primary Care Centres**

380. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the progress made to date in the provision of primary care centre in counties Laois and Offaly; and his plans to provide them in each municipal district of the two counties. [10045/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

### **Health Services Provision**

381. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his views on the future provision

of healthcare during the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he has considered specialist Covid-19 units in order that other hospitals could operate as normal carrying out non-essential procedures. [10069/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I take the Deputy's question to relate to provision of non-Covid acute services specifically. In line with the National Action Plan for Covid-19, delivery of essential non-Covid acute care has continued to date, albeit at lower volumes than previously, often in alternative locations and using innovative methods of care delivery. Where possible, hospitals are working to provide services in a different way, which includes virtual clinics for some out-patient department appointments. The potential for certain hospitals, including private hospitals, to provide non-Covid care has been recognised as part of the solution for ensuring continuation of time-critical care, including cancer surgery, during the first phase of the pandemic.

My Department, the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund are currently working together to estimate the impact of Covid 19 on scheduled care waiting lists, with a view to informing activity going forward. As the system continues to deliver Covid-19 and non-Covid 19 care side-by-side over a more prolonged period, my Department and the HSE will continue to work closely together to protect essential non-Covid 19 acute care and progress the provision of more routine non Covid-19 care.

The HSE has advised that it is working to develop a strategic framework for service continuity, as part of re-establishing services across all settings, including acute settings. I expect that consideration of how and where Covid and non-Covid acute services will be delivered in the next phase of the pandemic will be informed by that work.

### **Environmental Schemes**

382. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Health the action he will take to set up a special unit in the environmental health department to help tackle a rat infestation in an area (details supplied); and if he will work with the unit to resolve this issue. [10074/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am advised that responsibility for keeping land or property rodent free under the Rats and Mice (Destruction) Act 1919 lies with the owner/occupier of the land/property in question. As the properties referred to by the Deputy are owned by Dublin City Council, it is a matter for the Council to ensure they are kept rodent free.

I have no plans to set up a special unit in my Department to tackle this issue given that responsibility lies with Dublin City Council.

### **Hospital Services**

383. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if persons under 18 years of age that are admitted to the adult section of Tallaght Hospital will be permitted to have a parent or guardian stay with them overnight. [10075/20]

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

### **Hospital Data**

384. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons cared for in Clane General Hospital under the agreement between an association (details supplied) and the HSE. [10078/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A major part of the Government's Action Plan in response to Covid-19 was to substantially increase the capacity of public healthcare facilities to cope with the anticipated additional demand. In order to urgently ramp up capacity for acute care facilities, an arrangement was agreed with the private hospitals to use their facilities as part of the public system on a temporary basis, to provide essential services. A Heads of Terms of Agreement between the HSE and the Private Hospitals was agreed at the end of March 2020 and all 18 of the acute private hospitals signed up to it. Under the arrangement, all patients in the private hospitals are treated as public patients and their treatment is prioritised based on clinical need. Provision was made under the agreement to allow for continuity of care for patients who were in a private hospital or attending for treatment at the time the Heads of Terms of Agreement were agreed, on the grounds that these patients would be treated as public patients.

The agreement was reviewed at the end of May and the Government decided that the existing arrangement should not be extended beyond the end of June. It has however mandated the HSE to negotiate a new arrangement with private hospitals which would provide the HSE with full access to private hospital capacity in the event of a surge of Covid-19 and separately with ongoing agreed access, to enable the HSE to meet essential and elective care needs.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to defer all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity, including outpatient clinics. This was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for COVID-19 related activity and time-critical essential work. This decision was in line with the advice issued by the World Health Organisation, the measures set out in the Action Plan in Response to Covid-19 and the recommendation of NPHE. The NPHE has now recommended that steps be taken to resume non-urgent scheduled care in the context of the safe care guidelines set out by its Expert Advisory Group.

The HSE has been working with National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) to establish a mechanism to allow for return of electronic data from Private Hospitals. This system went live the week ending the 18th May with guidance issued to private hospitals around the process for submission of data. In order to ensure early reporting of activity the HSE has put a manual data reporting system in place with private hospitals. This supports the return of a limited dataset which remains subject to validation based on electronic data returns through the NTPF.

My Department has been advised of the following preliminary activity figures for Clane Hospital (UPMC Kildare) from the start of the arrangement until 28 May 2020 - 118 inpatient/daycase/ diagnostics and 390 outpatient appointments.

### **Hospital Staff**

385. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of full-time consultants working in Wexford General Hospital; the number of vacancies that exist at consultant level; the number of permanent and temporary consultants; the number not on the specialist register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10091/20]

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

## **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

386. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken by the HSE to inform retailers of wigs and hairpieces of the additional headwear grant available to medical card holders that cannot attend wig fittings during the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10102/20]

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

## **Hospital Services**

387. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the scheduling of operations in private hospitals (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10103/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A major part of the Government's Action Plan in response to Covid-19 was to substantially increase the capacity of public healthcare facilities to cope with the anticipated additional demand. In order to urgently ramp up capacity for acute care facilities, an arrangement was agreed with the private hospitals to use their facilities as part of the public system on a temporary basis, to provide essential services. A Heads of Terms of Agreement between the HSE and the Private Hospitals was agreed at the end of March 2020 and all 18 of the acute private hospitals signed up to it. Under the arrangement, all patients in the private hospitals are treated as public patients and their treatment is prioritised based on clinical need. Provision was made under the agreement to allow for continuity of care for patients who were in a private hospital or attending for treatment at the time the Heads of Terms of Agreement were agreed, on the grounds that these patients would be treated as public patients.

The agreement was reviewed at the end of May and the Government decided that the existing arrangement should not be extended beyond the end of June. It has however mandated the HSE to negotiate a new arrangement with private hospitals which would provide the HSE with full access to private hospital capacity in the event of a surge of Covid-19 and separately with ongoing agreed access, to enable the HSE to meet essential and elective care needs

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to defer all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity, including outpatient clinics. This was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for COVID-19 related activity and time-critical essential work. This decision was in line with the advice issued by the World Health Organisation, the measures set out in the Action Plan in Response to Covid-19 and the recommendation of NPHE. The NPHE has now recommended that steps be taken to resume non-urgent scheduled care in the context of the safe care guidelines set out by its Expert Advisory Group.

## **Covid-19 Pandemic**

388. **Deputy Malcolm Noonan** asked the Minister for Health if the NPHE will allow the resumption of video fluoroscopy procedures at CHI at Temple Street as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10104/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Action Plan for Covid-19, published on 16 March 2020, included a wide range of action areas as part of the response to

Covid-19. In regard to acute hospital care, action areas related to maintaining critical and ongoing services for essential patient care, as well as related to maximising patient flow, including restriction of elective and outpatient care. On 27 March, in the context of national data showing increased spread of Covid-19, and of an updated European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control risk assessment, NPHEt made a number of recommendations aimed at interrupting transmission of Covid-19, and related steps. These included that non-essential surgery, health procedures and other services should be postponed.

On 5 May, NPHEt agreed that this recommendation should be replaced, from now on, in regard to acute care, with a recommendation that delivery of acute care be determined by appropriate clinical and operational decision making.

Accordingly, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly as soon as possible in relation to the service matter raised.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

389. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding music schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10108/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business, published on 1 May 2020, sets out an indicative path to the easing of COVID 19 restrictions and other actions in order to facilitate the reopening of Ireland's society and economy in a phased manner. Phase 1 was introduced on 18 May 2020 and, as the Deputy is aware, the Government confirmed the move to Phase 2 of Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business from Monday, 8 June 2020. Information and advice about the restrictions that have been eased as part of Phase 2 and the measures that are now in place are available on the Government website at <http://www.gov.ie/phase2>.

The Roadmap specifies that decisions in relation to which actions will be taken and which public health measures might be lifted will be made in accordance with the Framework for Future Decision-Making which is as follows:

1. Before each Government consideration of the easing of restrictions, the Department of Health will provide a report to the Government regarding the following on/off trigger criteria:

- a. The latest data regarding the progression of the disease,
- b. The capacity and resilience of the health service in terms of hospital and ICU occupancy,
- c. The capacity of the programme of sampling, testing and contact tracing,
- d. The ability to shield and care for at risk groups,
- e. An assessment of the risk of secondary morbidity and mortality as a consequence of the restrictions.

2. It will also provide risk-based public health advice on what measures could be modified in the next period.

3. The Government would then consider what restrictions could be lifted, having regard to the advice of the Department of Health as well as other social and economic considerations, e.g. the potential for increased employment, relative benefits for citizens and businesses, improving

national morale and wellbeing etc.

4. It is acknowledged that there is also an ongoing possibility that restrictions could be re-imposed and this process will be carried out on an ongoing basis once every 3 weeks.

As is clear from the framework described above, it is the Government rather than I or my Department that will decide on any modifications to the current public health measures in place and those decisions will be informed by the status of the on/off trigger criteria and the public health advice received at the time that a decision is being made.

On 9 May the “Return to Work Safely Protocol - COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers” was published. It provides clear guidance to employers and to workers on the measures that must be taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. The Protocol was developed through the cooperation of the Health and Safety Authority, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the HSE and my Department. It is designed to be used by all workplaces to adapt their procedures and practices to provide protection against the threat of COVID-19.

The services described in the Deputy’s question are not matters within the remit of my Department. Guidance in relation to specific sectors of the economy should in the first instance be sought from the Government Department with responsibility for that sector.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

390. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health the length of time the mandatory quarantine period of 14 days for international arrivals is expected to last; and when it will be reviewed. [10123/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The issue of imposing mandatory self-isolation for a 14-day period, to be considered as the situation evolves, was mentioned in the Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business.

My Department, in consultation with other relevant Departments is developing proposals to strengthen the 14-day arrangements for travellers from overseas.

Previous general regulations restricting movement and travel, and separate regulations covering the Passenger Locator Form for incoming international travel, were timebound and sunset or due for review within a few short weeks. It is intended that a similar approach would be adopted in relation to the possible introduction of mandatory quarantine.

### **Disability Support Services**

391. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Health the plans in place for the re-opening of day services for persons with a disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10131/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As part of the overall effort to contain the spread of COVID-19 and in line with public health advice, day service locations have been closed since March. However priority service users have been identified in each CHO, and individualised supports continue to be provided to many people in alternative models particularly for these individuals with higher support needs, through alternative means such as via online support and/or regular telephone contact with families. Health

and social care responses to the current public health emergency are under continuing review, including specific measures such as these to support vulnerable people.

The resumption of adult day services is currently being considered by my Department and the HSE as part of broader planning to prepare for the resumption of non-COVID-19 community and social care services in the current environment, and in line with public health guidance. My Department and the HSE has established a Joint Working Group to develop a plan for Community Capacity.

The HSE is finalising plans to re-establish vital non-covid supports and services. This includes very careful and detailed work on the part of the Disability Sector with national guidance and will result in directing how all funded agencies can deliver services on a medium to long-term basis. Community Healthcare Organisations and Section 38/39 agencies continue to work together at a regional level in order to plan and co-ordinate efforts. Considering the very serious nature of this pandemic and the vulnerability of people with disabilities as a care group, any plans to safely commence all disability services and supports must comply with guidance developed by the National Public Surveillance Centre in the HSE.

The HSE has now developed a number of important guidance documents to assist disability services: the Framework for Resumption of Adult Day Services and Reshaping Disability Services From 2020 & Beyond. It is important to note that this guidance is interim and subject to change in line with the overall management of the Covid-19 pandemic and in accordance with contemporary Public Health Guidance.

These documents are now also available on the following website:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

### **Air Ambulance Service**

392. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Health if establishing a helicopter pad for the safe landing of the air ambulance in Castlerea, County Roscommon will be considered; the estimated associated costs to provide such a service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10132/20]

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

### **Mental Health Services**

393. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Health if using the unspent money in the mental health budget to assist and support an organisation (details supplied) to ensure its services can continue will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10133/20]

**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 as soon as possible.

### **Nursing Home Accommodation**

394. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health if the list of high-risk nursing homes drafted by HIQA and sent to the HSE at the end of February or early March 2020 will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10134/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** On 13th March HIQA provided the Department with a list of 19 HSE/HSE funded nursing homes identifying that as these had multi-occupancy rooms this created infection prevention risk. This information was sent by the Department to the HSE on the same day for their attention and the HSE has confirmed on-going risk management of these centres.

On 29th and 30th of March key officials from the Department, HIQA, HPSC and HSE met to discuss nursing homes. It was agreed that representatives from the Department, HIQA, HSE and HSPC would collaborate to prepare a paper, encompassing a framework of necessary information, for consideration by the NPHEH at its meeting of 31st March on the specific issues and risks relating to COVID-19 infections in residential healthcare facilities. To inform the development of the paper, HIQA provided an information framework document to the team on March 30th. A variety of potential risks were identified. These included the risk of small providers, access to infection prevention and control (IPC) advice, access to PPE and timely access to testing. Following consideration of the paper referred to at the above NPHEH meeting of 31st March, NPHEH requested HIQA to risk assess all nursing homes and liaise with relevant national and regional governance structures as necessary in light of mitigating actions. This was part of an overall package of public health measures recommended following this meeting.

At the NPHEH meeting 17th April an action was agreed that ‘HIQA publishes and assesses a COVID-19 Quality Assurance Regulatory Framework’. This Framework has been designed to ensure that providers are prepared for, and have contingency plans in place for, an outbreak of COVID-19. As part of the programme HIQA has developed a self-assessment tool for nursing home providers. This self-assessment tool sets out the minimum standard required to effectively respond to an outbreak of COVID-19 in a designated centre. This involves a self-assessment by the registered provider and an onsite assessment by inspectors of social services to verify the provider’s compliance against specified regulations.

If further action is required by the registered provider to ensure compliance with the specified regulations, a compliance plan will be issued to the registered provider by the inspector of social services following the in-site assessment.

I note that during the Oireachtas Special Committee on Covid-19 Response debate on the 26th May 2020, in discussion on this particular matter, HIQA was requested by the Chairperson of the Committee that institutions not be named. HIQA is engaging with all providers in the context of the regulatory framework and as noted, compliance plans are issued by HIQA, as appropriate.

### **Patient Transfers**

395. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health the nursing homes to which the 45 patients were transferred to from Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda, County Louth from 1 March to 6 May 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10135/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service delivery matter, I have referred the question to the HSE for direct reply.

## **Nursing Home Accommodation**

396. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health the nursing homes whose operational control was taken over by a hospital group; the nature and extent of the assistance provided by the hospital group; the time frame of the intervention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10136/20]

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

## **Hospital Groups**

397. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health the way in which CHO8 made a determination to contact the RCSI hospital group and for the group to take over operational control at a nursing home (details supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10137/20]

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

## **National Public Health Emergency Team**

398. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the dates for which he approved of and appointed each member of NPHEM in tabular form. [10144/20]

399. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if persons were appointed to NPHEM without his knowledge or prior approval; and if so, the way in which and when the appointments occurred. [10145/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 398 and 399 together.

The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHEM) structure is a long-standing mechanism utilised over many years to steer health service responses to public health emergencies as required by Ireland's obligations under the World Health Organization's International Health Regulations.

These Regulations require State parties to establish multidisciplinary/multisectoral teams to respond to events that may constitute a public health emergency of international concern. This necessitates flexibility in the composition of these national teams in order that they can appropriately respond to major public health emergencies.

As the Deputy is aware, the NPHEM for COVID-19 is accountable to me as Minister for Health and is made up of senior public officials of the Department of Health and a number of relevant State Agencies, in addition to highly qualified subject matter experts from disciplines such as virology, infectious diseases, intensive care etc. who are among the leading practitioners in their fields in this country.

The NPHEM can add to its membership on the basis of the additional expertise or support it identifies as being required so as to ensure that it is in the best possible position to provide the

advice and recommendations for consideration by the Minister for Health and the Government. These are the criteria on which the NPHEP identifies the requirement for particular expertise. This flexibility in approach to selection is necessary for a group such as this in the context of an international public health crisis of the kind we are currently experiencing due to the pandemic, and give effect to Ireland's obligations to the WHO.

A wide range of documentation related to NPHEP, including as regards the governance process under which operates, has been published to date and it is intended to continue this process to ensure that the process by which the NPHEP's recommendations have been reached is as transparent as possible.

*Question No. 400 answered with Question No. 312.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

401. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that applied to be part of the Be on Call for Ireland initiative; the number that were subsequently recruited into the health service via the scheme; the amount paid to agency companies in respect of the scheme by company and amount in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10168/20]

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

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

402. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if the 5km to 20km outlined in phase 3 of Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business could be extended from 5km to 50km for rural areas in view of the fact distances to travel to essential services are further to reach than in urban areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10189/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business, published on 1 May 2020, sets out an indicative path to the easing of COVID 19 restrictions and other actions in order to facilitate the reopening of Ireland's society and economy in a phased manner.

Phase 1 was introduced on 18 May 2020 and, as the Deputy is aware, the Government confirmed the move to Phase 2 of Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business from Monday, 8 June 2020. Information and advice about the restrictions that have been eased as part of Phase 2 and the measures that are now in place are available on the Government website at <http://www.gov.ie/phase2> .

The Roadmap specifies that decisions in relation to which actions will be taken and which public health measures might be lifted will be made in accordance with the Framework for Future Decision-Making which is as follows:

1. Before each Government consideration of the easing of restrictions, the Department of Health will provide a report to the Government regarding the following on/off trigger criteria:

- a. The latest data regarding the progression of the disease,
- b. The capacity and resilience of the health service in terms of hospital and ICU occupancy,

- c. The capacity of the programme of sampling, testing and contact tracing,
- d. The ability to shield and care for at risk groups,
- e. An assessment of the risk of secondary morbidity and mortality as a consequence of the restrictions.

2. It will also provide risk-based public health advice on what measures could be modified in the next period.

3. The Government would then consider what restrictions could be lifted, having regard to the advice of the Department of Health as well as other social and economic considerations, e.g. the potential for increased employment, relative benefits for citizens and businesses, improving national morale and wellbeing etc.

4. It is acknowledged that there is also an ongoing possibility that restrictions could be re-imposed and this process will be carried out on an ongoing basis once every 3 weeks.

As is clear from the framework described above, it is the Government rather than I or my Department that will decide on any modifications to the current public health measures in place and those decisions will be informed by the status of the on/off trigger criteria and the public health advice received at the time that a decision is being made.

As the Deputy may be aware, from the start of Phase 2 (8 June, 2020) you may travel within your own county, or 20 kilometres from your home if you are crossing county boundaries, to visit local venues or amenities such as parks and shops that have reopened as part of the Government's roadmap.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

403. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health when cocooning groups will be able to shop for essential items in view of the fact it is not listed in the Roadmap of Reopening Society and Business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10190/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business, published on 1 May 2020, sets out an indicative path to the easing of COVID 19 restrictions and other actions in order to facilitate the reopening of Ireland's society and economy in a phased manner. Phase 1 was introduced on 18 May 2020 and, as the Deputy is aware, the Government confirmed the move to Phase 2 of Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business from Monday, 8 June 2020. Information and advice about the restrictions that have been eased as part of Phase 2 and the measures that are now in place are available on the Government website at <http://www.gov.ie/phase2>.

The Roadmap specifies that decisions in relation to which actions will be taken and which public health measures might be lifted will be made in accordance with the Framework for Future Decision-Making which is as follows:

1. Before each Government consideration of the easing of restrictions, the Department of Health will provide a report to the Government regarding the following on/off trigger criteria:
  - a. The latest data regarding the progression of the disease,
  - b. The capacity and resilience of the health service in terms of hospital and ICU occupancy,

- c. The capacity of the programme of sampling, testing and contact tracing,
  - d. The ability to shield and care for at risk groups,
  - e. An assessment of the risk of secondary morbidity and mortality as a consequence of the restrictions.
2. It will also provide risk-based public health advice on what measures could be modified in the next period.
3. The Government would then consider what restrictions could be lifted, having regard to the advice of the Department of Health as well as other social and economic considerations, e.g. the potential for increased employment, relative benefits for citizens and businesses, improving national morale and wellbeing etc.
4. It is acknowledged that there is also an ongoing possibility that restrictions could be re-imposed and this process will be carried out on an ongoing basis once every 3 weeks.

As is clear from the framework described above, it is the Government rather than I or my Department that will decide on any modifications to the current public health measures in place and those decisions will be informed by the status of the on/off trigger criteria and the public health advice received at the time that a decision is being made.

As we move on to Phase 2 of the Government's roadmap to ease COVID-19 restrictions, retail and other sectors which will reopen under this phase, are encouraged to designate specific retail hours for over 70s and medically vulnerable.

The HSE's Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) 'Guidance on cocooning to protect people over 70 years and those extremely medically vulnerable from COVID-19' offers practical assistance as we move into a new phase of the roadmap and advises that people who are at very high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 should continue to protect themselves and stay at home as much as possible to minimise all nonessential contact with people who are not cocooning themselves.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

404. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if businesses not listed in phases 2 and 3 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business could be considered for reopening if a satisfactory plan for these businesses to adhere to social distancing guidelines can be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10191/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business, published on 1 May 2020, sets out an indicative path to the easing of COVID 19 restrictions and other actions in order to facilitate the reopening of Ireland's society and economy in a phased manner. Phase 1 was introduced on 18 May 2020 and, as the Deputy is aware, the Government confirmed the move to Phase 2 of Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business from Monday, 8 June 2020. Information and advice about the restrictions that have been eased as part of Phase 2 and the measures that are now in place are available on the Government website at <http://www.gov.ie/phase2>.

The Roadmap specifies that decisions in relation to which actions will be taken and which public health measures might be lifted will be made in accordance with the Framework for Future Decision-Making which is as follows:

1. Before each Government consideration of the easing of restrictions, the Department of Health will provide a report to the Government regarding the following on/off trigger criteria:

- a. The latest data regarding the progression of the disease,
- b. The capacity and resilience of the health service in terms of hospital and ICU occupancy,
- c. The capacity of the programme of sampling, testing and contact tracing,
- d. The ability to shield and care for at risk groups,
- e. An assessment of the risk of secondary morbidity and mortality as a consequence of the restrictions.

2. It will also provide risk-based public health advice on what measures could be modified in the next period.

3. The Government would then consider what restrictions could be lifted, having regard to the advice of the Department of Health as well as other social and economic considerations, e.g. the potential for increased employment, relative benefits for citizens and businesses, improving national morale and wellbeing etc.

4. It is acknowledged that there is also an ongoing possibility that restrictions could be re-imposed and this process will be carried out on an ongoing basis once every 3 weeks.

As is clear from the framework described above, it is the Government rather than I or my Department that will decide on any modifications to the current public health measures in place and those decisions will be informed by the status of the on/off trigger criteria and the public health advice received at the time that a decision is being made.

On 9 May the “Return to Work Safely Protocol - COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers” was published. It provides clear guidance to employers and to workers on the measures that must be taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. The Protocol was developed through the cooperation of the Health and Safety Authority, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the HSE and my Department. It is designed to be used by all workplaces to adapt their procedures and practices to provide protection against the threat of COVID-19.

It should also be noted that guidance in relation to specific sectors of the economy should in the first instance be sought from the Government Department with responsibility for that sector.

### **Hospital Staff**

405. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons employed at the cardiology and the orthopaedic departments at Letterkenny University Hospital; the number of vacancies; the estimated full year cost of filling each of the vacant posts by job title in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10239/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service delivery matter, I have referred the question to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Drug Treatment Programmes**

406. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health when he will reinstate the Keltoi rehabilitation unit, St. Mary's Hospital, Phoenix Park, Dublin 20; and the number of service users that have been adversely affected by its closure, including loss of life. [10244/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Housing Adaptation Grant**

407. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Health the grants available for housing adaption for persons with a disability apart from the grant available through local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10256/20]

**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. My colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, has policy remit for Housing Adaption Grants, which as I understand are administered by the Local Authorities.

However, as part of the range of supports provided to the 29 Irish survivors of thalidomide, my Department provides ex-gratia grants towards the cost of health and personal social services and to support independent living, including ex-gratia grants towards the cost of housing adaptations.

These supports are provided directly from a dedicated Department of Health subhead '*Payments in respect of disablement caused by Thalidomide*'. It is important to note that it is open to any Irish person to apply to the Contergan Foundation for assessment of their injury as being attributable to thalidomide. Any Irish person who establishes that their injury acquired in Ireland is attributable to thalidomide will be offered appropriate supports by the Irish Government, commensurate with those currently provided to Irish thalidomide survivors.

### **General Practitioner Services**

408. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health when the contingency plans and protocols in place since 14 March 2020 to allow SouthDoc services respond to the challenges posed by Covid-19 will be reviewed with consideration for resumption of normal service for counties Cork and Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10264/20]

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

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

409. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine open-

ing up physiotherapy for those with severe conditions and those with a disability that rely on a physiotherapist to administer treatment for managing painful conditions and to mitigate against worsening health in the case, for example, of those with paralysis or degenerative diseases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10266/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (COVID-19) Regulations 2020 (SI No. 121 of 2020) were signed by the Minister for Health on 7 April 2020.

Schedule 2 of the Regulations sets out essential services that are exempted from the restrictions and therefore can continue to be provided. This includes (at 15(b)) physiotherapy and podiatry services as these services are provided by a member of a designated profession within the meaning of section 3 of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (No. 27 of 2005).

### Covid-19 Pandemic

410. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health when family visits to patients receiving end-of-life care will recommence (details supplied); and if plans are being considered to facilitate this safely. [10270/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy will be aware, during these exceptional times, some of the normal aspirations of people at end of life and of their families have had to be curtailed in the interests of containing the spread of the coronavirus. In particular, restrictions have been placed on visiting hospitals and residential care settings, and the numbers attending funerals have been severely reduced, while the social distancing measures have meant that normal tactile expressions of support and comfort have not been possible. While visiting restrictions are required in a pandemic, local risk assessment and practical management must be considered, ensuring the response is both pragmatic and proportionate. Specific scenarios where a compassionate and practical approach is required include care of the dying. Regarding the specific case mentioned by the Deputy, the person concerned is being cared for in a residential care setting. Interim Public Health and Infection Prevention Control Guidelines on the Prevention and Management of COVID-19 Cases and Outbreaks in Residential Care Facilities published by the HSE on 4 May 2020 state that all but essential visiting by family and friends is suspended in the interests of protecting residents at this time. However, the Guidelines also acknowledge that a compassionate, pragmatic and proportionate approach is required in the care of those who are dying. The presence of a person close to the resident should be facilitated in so far as it is possible, and they should be aware of the potential infection risk. All Covid-19 guidance documents note the need for hand and respiratory hygiene and for the wearing of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when required and that relatives are informed of the potential risk of infection to both the patient/resident and visitors. Most hospices have all single room accommodation and are therefore in a better position to facilitate visits to patients at end of life; however, most residential care settings have multi-bedded rooms and need to be particularly cautious in balancing the needs of patients and their families with the protection of the health of visitors, other residents and the staff working in the unit. It is acknowledged by all services that restricted visiting causes significant stress and concern for individuals and families, as well as for the staff who are caring for them. From 15 June, in accordance with guidance published by the Health Protection and Surveillance Centre (HSPSC), there will be a phased commencement of visiting at hospitals, residential healthcare centres and other residential settings where there is no ongoing Covid-19 outbreak, subject to limits on the number of visitors and the length of their visits. Visitors are asked to bear in mind the particular features of types of settings and each individual centre, also considering PPE availability and

other protections. It is hoped that the easing of visiting restrictions will be able to facilitate the much needed closer contact between family members and loved ones. In the meantime, as the specific details referred to in the Deputy's question refer to a service matter, this matter has been referred to the HSE for reply.

### Health Screening Programmes

411. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his plans to continue providing free HIV screening services for high-risk groups; if consideration has been given to distributing rapid HIV test kits to high-risk groups free of charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10274/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** Sexual health, and in particular tackling the challenge of HIV, is a priority for my Department, as evidenced by the introduction of a national HIV PrEP prevention programme in November 2019, with funding of €5.4 million allocated to the HSE in Budget 2020 for full national roll-out this year. In addition, last year, Ireland joined the Fast Track Cities Initiative, a global partnership project to drive the response to HIV/AIDS, including action on awareness, outreach and community HIV testing, and stigma reduction.

Last year also saw the expansion of the National Condom Distribution Service with the commencement of condom dispenser services in third level colleges and universities. to provide wider sexual health supports to young people.

Comprehensive and up to date information regarding STIs (including HIV), accessing STI and HIV testing, sex and coronavirus, safer sex, contraception and consent messaging is accessible online via the HSE website [www.sexualwellbeing.ie](http://www.sexualwellbeing.ie)

With regard to the specific matter raised by the Deputy, I have forwarded her question to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply.

### Departmental Projects

412. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the details of the projects that have received State funding to date under the Sláintecare integration fund; the amount of funding already provided to each project in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10275/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The following table details the Organisations and Projects that have received funding from the Sláintecare Integration Fund. The payment amounts reflect the funding released to each project as of end-May 2020.

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
2	Donore (Community Drugs Team) Co Ltd	Sustain and expand TRY	NGO	€35,000.00
8	HSE	HSE - Child Digital Health	HSE	€536,193.00

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
9	HSE	HSE - Digital information, signposting and support for people with chronic conditions	HSE	€352,959.30
15	Fatima Groups United FRC	Dublin 8 Social Prescribing Project	NGO	€26,251.05
18	Irish Men's Sheds Association	Sheds for Life	NGO	€42,903.70
21	Laois Sports Partnership CLG	Primetime for Older Adults	Sport Ptn	€24,500.00
23	HAIL Housing Association for Integrated Living	Community Living Mental Health Recovery Co-Ordinator	NGO	€20,594.00
24	RCSI	Linkworkers to support the coordination of health and social care for patients living in disadvantaged communities	NGO	€132,730.85
29	Mercy University Hospital Cork Company Limited by Guarantee	Introduction of Molecular Laboratory in Microbiology	Section 38	€43,495.90
31	Sacred Heart Community & Childcare Project CLG	Expansion of Social Prescribing service in Waterford and mainstreaming of pilot service in Waterford Metropolitan area	NGO	€41,955.90

Questions - Written Answers

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
38	HSE CHO Dublin North City & County (CHO 9)	Consolidating the Implementation of the Stanford Chronic Disease Self-Management Programme in CHO Dublin North City & County	HSE	€52,098.20
40	Athlone Institute of Technology	Student Sexual Health Service (Athlone Institute of Technology)	NGO	€18,394.60
41	HSE Community Health Organisation Dublin North City & County (CHO 9)	Develop a Respiratory Integrated Care Programme for COPD in CHO/DNCC Beaumont Hospital (Level 4)	HSE	€91,236.25
48	LGBT Support and Advocacy Network Ireland Company Limited By Guarantee	LGBT Champions Programme	NGO	€16,982.35
56	Our Lady's Hospital, Navan	Arthritis Rehabilitation through the Management of Exercise and Diet (ARMED)	HSE	€18,281.55
57	HSE Sexual Health & Crisis Pregnancy Programme	Integrating online STI testing with public STI services: A pilot to assess feasibility and impact.	HSE	€105,000.00
61	Clinical Design & Innovation – Health Service Executive	Towards Self-care in Headache	HSE	€206,581.90

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
73	CHO DNCC (CHO 9)	Individual Placement and Support Adult Community mental health teams	HSE	€78,673.00
78	HSE South East Community Healthcare (SECH)(CHO5)	Delivery of the Stanford Chronic Disease Self Management across SECH	HSE	€71,745.45
79	Clinical Strategy & Programmes HSE & Irish College of Ophthalmologists Community Healthcare Dublin South, Kildare & West Wicklow (CHO7)	Implementation of Integrated Eye Care	HSE	€123,260.55
84	Mater Misericordiae University Hospital	North Dublin Integrated Community STI Service	Section 38	€71,379.35
94	HSE/Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	Trauma Assessment Clinic	HSE	€70,000.00
98	Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP)	Patient Self-Management of Chronic Disease	NGO	€47,862.50
100	Asthma Society of Ireland	Beating Breathlessness Asthma Society	NGO	€37,215.50
105	HSE Community Healthcare East	Community based Pulmonary Rehab Programme	HSE	€37,481.85
111	Saolta University Healthcare Group	Telemedicine for CF	HSE	€25,200.00
115	Age and Opportunity	Changing Gears	NGO	€23,213.75

Questions - Written Answers

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
121	Croí, the West of Ireland Cardiac Foundation	My Slainte Community Lifestyle Programme	NGO	€65,246.30
123	HSE	Online Citizen Health Guides	HSE	€35,000.00
132	HSE CHO 1	Establishment of Oxygen assessment clinics in Primary Care Donegal	HSE	€27,305.25
133	HSE CHO 1	Development of a Respiratory Team for Co Monaghan	HSE	€62,995.10
134	National Centre for Youth Mental Health (company limited by guarantee t/a Jigsaw)	Jigsaw Online	NGO	€250,040.00
135	The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland	promoting physical activity programmes for people with neurological conditions in the community	NGO	€23,800.00
137	Caredoc CLG	SMILE Supporting Multimorbidity selfcare	NGO	€59,511.90
140	Cork Sports Partnership	WellComm Active Well Communities Connect Project 2	Sport Ptn	€61,336.10
152	Chronic Disease Commissioning Team Primary Care Strategy and Planning	National Diabetes Registry	HSE	€196,838.60

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
153	HSE(Chronic Disease Commissioning Team)	End to end implementation of the Model of Integrated Care for Type 2 diabetes within 2 CHOs	HSE	€179,550.00
154	HSE(Chronic Disease Commissioning Team)	Development and Implementation of a Digitally Enhanced HSE Type 2 Diabetes Self Management Education Programme	HSE	€71,132.60
155	HSE(Chronic Disease Commissioning Team)	National Self Management Education IT System Implementation and Expansion	HSE	€75,249.65
156	HSE(Chronic Disease Commissioning Team)	Development and Implementation of a National Diabetes Prevention Self-Management Education Programme by 2021	HSE	€97,911.80
159	HSE(Chronic Disease Commissioning Team)	End to End Respiratory Model at 2 Sites	HSE	€251,939.80
161	Central Remedial Clinic	Assistive Technology Mobile Community Service	Section 38	€23,298.45
162	Bray Area Partnership	Adult Social Prescribing for Individual Resilience and Empowerment	NGO	€23,032.10
164	University Hospital Waterford	COPD Integrated Care Project	HSE	€98,617.05

Questions - Written Answers

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
165	University Hospital Waterford	Integrated Ambulatory Care Heart Failure Project	HSE	€101,215.45
167	University Hospital Waterford	Waterford Thrive with Diabetes Project	HSE	€55,886.25
169	Mid West Community Healthcare	Individual Placement and Support	HSE	€59,962.35
171	HSE Community Healthcare West Mental Health	My Home MH-CIS	HSE	€57,309.70
173	Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO)Area 1	Integrated Care for Older People Model for falls prevention and management	HSE	€91,000.00
175	HSE CHO 1	Expansion of the Model of Diabetes Integrated Care throughout SligoLeitrimWest Cavan	HSE	€27,242.25
177	CHO 1	Selective Laser Trabeculoplasty for Community Ophthalmic Service Donegal	HSE	€18,401.25
180	Turn2Me eMental Health	Turn2me 360 Online Stepped Care Mental Health Pilot for Young People and Their Families	NGO	€55,356.00
181	St James Hospital and Mater Misericordiae University Hospital	Inclusion Health Specialist Outreach Team	Section 38	€36,393.00

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
183	HSE CHO 1	Post Diagnostic Support worker for people with dementia In-ishowen	HSE	€37,300.99
184	HSE CHO 1	Improving Access to Healthcare : Spread and Scale-up of a HSE Health Passport for individuals with an Intellectual Disability in acute hospital and primary care settings	HSE	€54,744.55
185	HSE Community Healthcare Organisation Area 1	Extension of Stanford Chronic Disease self-mgt to all of CHO 1	HSE	€39,897.38
186	HSE Community Healthcare Organisation Area 1	Donegal Primary Care Optometrist	HSE	€22,131.90
190	Community Healthcare East	Integrated Foot Protection Service for residents of Community Healthcare East	HSE	€170,331.35
199	CHO 1, Primary Care Division Donegal	Initiate Specialist Medical Retina services and intravitreal injections in Community Ophthalmics Service, Co Donegal	HSE	€51,066.40

Questions - Written Answers

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
202	South East Community Healthcare (HSE CHO 5)	Supporting Pregnant Women to Quit and Stay Quit - A Co-design Community Based Integrated Approach	HSE	€56,103.25
203	Saolta University Health Care Group	Urology Pathway- Proof of Concept Project	HSE	€82,337.50
205	West of Ireland Alzheimer Foundation	Western Alzheimers Befriending Service	NGO	€21,508.55
216	Community Health Care West Mayo University Hospital	Development of the physiotherapy led Pulmonary Rehab services in primary care Co Mayo	HSE	€42,984.20
219	HSE Community Healthcare West (CHO2)	Stanford Chronic Disease Self-Management Programme in CHO 2	HSE	€44,962.05
220	Community Healthcare West (Saolta Hospital Group)	Implement a structured exercise programme for people with Diabetes	HSE	€25,909.10
221	Mayo University Hospital CHO West	Integrated Population based Falls Model for Mayo	HSE	€46,933.95
222	CH02 Saolta Hospital Group	Osteoarthritis Knee Pathway	HSE	€37,840.95
223	HSE Health & Wellbeing Strategy & Planning	Smoke Free Start	HSE	€48,717.90

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
233	Sports Active Wexford	The Exercise Effect - Integrating Exercise Practitioners into the Irish Mental Health Service	Sport Ptn	€35,265.10
237	Chronic Disease Commissioning Team Primary Care Strategy and Planning	Heart Failure Virtual Consultation Service with clinical nurse specialist support in the community	HSE	€314,376.30
247	HSE CHO Dublin North City and County (CHO 9)	CIT Dublin North City and County Community Oncology Service	HSE	€91,900.55
248	Beaumont Hospital	Development of Community based Integrated Diagnostic and Care Initiative Cardiology	Section 38	€21,652.75
251	Epilepsy Ireland	Developing a Pathway of Community Care Supports for People with Epilepsy in Ireland	NGO	€32,824.75
252	Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	HealthEIR: A Journey to Improving Health and Wellbeing Through Community-Based Social Self-Care	NGO	€115,103.80
253	National Forum of Family Resource Centres	Cork Kerry Health & Wellbeing Community Referral	NGO	€48,663.30
255	Cork Kerry Community Healthcare	Urgent Ambulatory Care and Virtual Ward for the Older Person	HSE	€69,329.05

Questions - Written Answers

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
263	Third Age Foundation CLG	AgeWell Programme	NGO	€23,837.22
267	Mater Misericordiae & St Francis Hospice	Rehabilitative Palliative Care	Section 38	€41,018.95
269	Ireland East Hospital Group (Regional Hospital Mullingar) in partnership with MLM CHO 8 (Longford/Westmeath)	Mullingar Frailty Intervention Team (MFIT)	HSE	€87,500.00
277A	ALONE	ALONE BConnect; linking healthcare, social care and community care together using technology and services	NGO	€87,500.00
277B	ALONE	ALONE A Coordinated Response, helpline for older persons	NGO	€253,659.70
278	Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	Facilitating Integration of Childhood Obesity Services in Primary Care Through Education	NGO	€52,500.00
280	National Cancer Control Programme	Skin Cancer Prevention	HSE	€20,362.30
284	CHO 1	Social Prescribing for improved Health and Wellbeing	HSE	€43,302.35
286	Midlands Louth Meath CHO	Integrated psychological care for the older adult in Longford Westmeath	HSE	€32,981.55

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
287	Midlands Louth Meath CHO	Empowering Communities to support language Development in young children	HSE	€39,878.30
305	Health Service Executive Corporate	Community Based Integrated Respiratory Service	HSE	€79,644.95
308	SMARTlab Creative Technology Innovation Company Limited by Guarantee	HealthSENSE-app	NGO	€19,367.60
311	South Tipperary General Hospital	Integrated Pulmonary Outreach in South Tipperary	HSE	€71,962.45
320	Mental Health Reform	Promoting cultural sensitivity in community mental health services in Ireland	NGO	€19,848.50
322	CHO 7	Inclusion Health Primary Care: Demonstration of an Integrated Care approach into a scalable model	HSE	€23,187.50
323	University Hospital Waterford	Mobile Telemedicine for Rapid GP Access to Specialist Opinion: A “Virtual” elective orthopaedic clinic	HSE	€31,870.30

Questions - Written Answers

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
324	University Hospital Waterford	The Establishment of Novel Clinical Pathways for Orthopaedic Outpatient Referrals, integration of local community services and multidisciplinary triage	HSE	€66,231.20
328	OLH Navan & Primary Care CHO8 (Meath Occupational Therapy Service)	Therapy Led Primary Care Hand Therapy Clinic	HSE	€36,132.60
334	Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	Stool Bank Ireland	NGO	€119,525.00
338	National College of Ireland	Prevention is better than cure - Community Mothers Programme	NGO	€25,492.25
340 A	Health Service Executive (HSE)	Accelerating Integrated Care for Older Persons	HSE	€127,400.00
340 B	Health Service Executive (HSE)	Accelerating Integrated Care for Older Persons	HSE	€117,033.35
343	HSE	A Podiatry led pathway for timely provision of footwear and orthotics in the community	HSE	€60,253.20
352	Mater Misericordiae University Hospital	StrokeLINK Innovating Stroke Support	Section 38	€63,000.00

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
364	Naas General Hospital/Dublin South, Kildare & West Wicklow Community Healthcare	Integrated Respiratory Rapid Response Team	HSE	€102,925.20
366	St James Hospital	Keeping people with severe epilepsy independent	Section 38	€52,090.50
370	St James Hospital	The LAMP Project - Social Prescribing Integration in the Acute Care Sector	Section 38	€38,141.25
371	St James Hospital	A pathway to empower patients to engage with antimicrobial stewardship	Section 38	€16,348.85
375	Tallaght University Hospital	Integrated care for patients presenting with leg ulcers in Dublin South, Kildare and West Wicklow	Section 38	€81,449.55
376	Tallaght University Hospital	ANP for development of male LUTs and benign urology	Section 38	€35,675.85
377	Tallaght University Hospital	Heart Failure Service Integrated Care Project	Section 38	€90,988.80
378	Tallaght University Hospital	Integrated Community Chest pain clinic TUH	Section 38	€41,559.00
382	Wexford General Hospital and CHO5	Frailty Programme	HSE	€125,655.95

Questions - Written Answers

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
383	Wexford General Hospital	Development of Respiratory Services for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) patients in Co. Wexford	HSE	€64,360.10
388	St. Vincent's University Hospital	Wicklow Frailty First Response Team	Section 38	€64,442.70
392	Beaumont Hospital	Beaumont Hospital/National Ambulance Alternative Care Pathways Project	Section 38	€216,850.20
407	Beaumont Hospital	Smart triage of kidney and lung transplant patients	Section 38	€156,312.10
413	HSE Community Healthcare East	Stanford Chronic Disease Self-Management Programme in Community Healthcare East	HSE	€28,677.25
416	Portiuncula University Hospital/ Primary Care Galway	Heart Failure Improving Patient Outcomes and Health Service Efficiency by Comprehensive and Innovative Integration of Care Across the Continuum of Healthcare Settings	HSE	€115,942.40
418	Midlands Louth Meath CHO	The roll out Chronic Disease Self Management Programme	HSE	€40,792.85
427	Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore	Advanced Nurse Practitioner in Tissue Viability	HSE	€33,286.05

Project ID	Organisation Name	Project Title	Org Type	Payment amounts (at end-May 2020)
430	Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise	Cardiology Advance Nurse Practitioner Heart Failure	HSE	€41,949.25
435	Midlands Regional Hospital Portlaoise	COPD Outreach Service	HSE	€64,841.00
463	Sligo University Hospital	Pain management education programme	HSE	€96,322.45
468	Saolta University Health Care Group	Electronic ordering for GP lab tests	HSE	€43,733.90
469	Galway University Hospital	Galway University Hospital Community Cardiac Diagnostics	HSE	€51,412.20
Total				€9,115,893.74

### Covid-19 Pandemic

413. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Health the definition of small, medium and large-sized gatherings in view of the fact this information is vital to those in the process of planning weddings and other events. [10277/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business, published on 1 May 2020, sets out an indicative path to the easing of COVID 19 restrictions and other actions in order to facilitate the reopening of Ireland's society and economy in a phased manner. Phase 1 was introduced on 18 May 2020 and, as the Deputy is aware, the Government confirmed the move to Phase 2 of Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business from Monday, 8 June 2020. Information and advice about the restrictions that have been eased as part of Phase 2 and the measures that are now in place are available on the Government website at <http://www.gov.ie/phase2>.

The Roadmap specifies that decisions in relation to which actions will be taken and which public health measures might be lifted will be made in accordance with the Framework for Future Decision-Making which is as follows:

1. Before each Government consideration of the easing of restrictions, the Department of Health will provide a report to the Government regarding the following on/off trigger criteria:

- a. The latest data regarding the progression of the disease,
- b. The capacity and resilience of the health service in terms of hospital and ICU occupancy,
- c. The capacity of the programme of sampling, testing and contact tracing,
- d. The ability to shield and care for at risk groups,

e. An assessment of the risk of secondary morbidity and mortality as a consequence of the restrictions.

2. It will also provide risk-based public health advice on what measures could be modified in the next period.

3. The Government would then consider what restrictions could be lifted, having regard to the advice of the Department of Health as well as other social and economic considerations, e.g. the potential for increased employment, relative benefits for citizens and businesses, improving national morale and wellbeing etc.

4. It is acknowledged that there is also an ongoing possibility that restrictions could be re-imposed and this process will be carried out on an ongoing basis once every 3 weeks.

As is clear from the framework described above, it is the Government rather than I or my Department that will decide on any modifications to the current public health measures in place and those decisions will be informed by the status of the on/off trigger criteria and the public health advice received at the time that a decision is being made.

The exact numbers of person which can attend events in future phases have not been determined in advance. As with all other decisions under the Roadmap, these will be informed, at the time that the decision is made, by the status of the on/off trigger criteria and the public health advice received.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

414. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider increasing the number of persons permitted to attend a funeral mass in view of the fact the current small numbers are adding to the stress and trauma of an already difficult situation for families. [10278/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business, published on 1 May 2020, sets out an indicative path to the easing of COVID 19 restrictions and other actions in order to facilitate the reopening of Ireland's society and economy in a phased manner.

Phase 1 was introduced on 18 May 2020 and, as the Deputy is aware, the Government confirmed the move to Phase 2 of Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business from Monday, 8 June 2020. Information and advice about the restrictions that have been eased as part of Phase 2 and the measures that are now in place are available on the Government website at <http://www.gov.ie/phase2>.

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- b. The capacity and resilience of the health service in terms of hospital and ICU occupancy,
- c. The capacity of the programme of sampling, testing and contact tracing,

d. The ability to shield and care for at risk groups,

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4. It is acknowledged that there is also an ongoing possibility that restrictions could be re-imposed and this process will be carried out on an ongoing basis once every 3 weeks.

As is clear from the framework described above, it is the Government rather than I or my Department that will decide on any modifications to the current public health measures in place and those decisions will be informed by the status of the on/off trigger criteria and the public health advice received at the time that a decision is being made.

As the Deputy quite rightly points out bereavement is a difficult time for every family. Adhering to the public health advice makes it even more difficult, but these precautions are in place to protect everyone. From the start of Phase 2 (8 June, 2020) up to 25 people can be in attendance at a funeral service and burial / cremation ceremonies while observing strict social distancing guidance such as keeping 2 metres apart, maintaining hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, as well as the wearing of face coverings.

Funeral Directors and officiators are requested to remind and encourage mourners to comply with public health guidance for the safety of all attending a funeral.

It is also important to note that any indoor events after a funeral must comply with the public health guidance applicable to indoor visits, that is limited to a maximum of 6 persons indoors.

### **Covid-19 Tests**

415. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the measures being put in place to address waiting lists in the health service for non-Covid-19 related appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10293/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to defer all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity, including outpatient clinics. This was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for Covid-19 related activity and time-critical essential work. This decision was in line with the advice issued by the World Health Organisation, and the National Action Plan published on 16 March. The trajectory of the disease means there is now an opportunity for increasing the provision of non-covid care including more routine care.

The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) has approved a number of recommendations relating to protecting and maximising the delivery of essential time-critical non-Covid-19 care alongside Covid-19 care. On 5 May, NPHE agreed that its recommendation of 27 March, in regard to the pausing of all non-essential health services should be replaced, in relation to acute care, with a recommendation that delivery of acute care be determined by

appropriate clinical and operational decision making. Application of the essential risk mitigating steps set out in the guidance developed under the auspices of the NPHET Expert Advisory group will have operational implications, which will impact on throughput. The HSE is currently working to assess the impact of these guidelines on activity.

My Department, the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund are currently working together to estimate the impact of Covid 19 on Scheduled Care waiting lists, with a view to informing activity going forward. As the system continues to deliver Covid-19 and non-Covid 19 care side-by-side over a more prolonged period, my Department and the HSE will continue to work closely together to protect essential non-Covid 19 acute care and progress the provision of more routine non Covid-19 care.

Where possible, hospitals are working to find innovative ways to enable service provision, which include virtual clinics for some out-patient department appointments. The HSE website provides details on services currently available and operational in each hospital on its website. This information is reviewed frequently and provides up-to-date announcements on services available at each site (<https://www2.hse.ie/services/hospital-service-disruptions/hospital-service-disruptions-covid19.html>).

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

416. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the monthly expected capacity of public hospitals across waiting lists for inpatient, outpatient and endoscopy appointments. [10294/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to defer all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity, including outpatient clinics. This was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for Covid-19 related activity and time-critical essential work. This decision was in line with the advice issued by the World Health Organisation, and the National Action Plan published on 16 March. The trajectory of the disease means there is now an opportunity for increasing the provision of non-covid care including more routine care.

The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) has approved a number of recommendations relating to protecting and maximising the delivery of essential time-critical non-Covid-19 care alongside Covid-19 care. On 5 May, NPHET agreed that its recommendation of 27 March, in regard to the pausing of all non-essential health services should be replaced, in relation to acute care, with a recommendation that delivery of acute care be determined by appropriate clinical and operational decision making.

Guidance on patient pathways to mitigate the risks associated with the delivery of non-covid care, for patients and healthcare workers, and support safe delivery of care has been developed under the auspices of the Expert Advisory Subgroup of NPHET (EAG) and approved in principle by NPHET. It is recommended that in-patient occupancy levels are maintained at 80% to facilitate the requirement to address surge safely. The measures approved by NPHET will impact a number of areas such as workflow, patient pathways, patient engagement and communication, infrastructure, physical distancing, capacity and resources. The HSE advise that the capacity that will be available under these measures will vary from one site to the next and from one service to the next; currently new patient pathways are being established and tested however full year capacity has not been fully established at this point. Additionally, in order to continue to provide access for patients there has been a considerable growth and investment in virtual outpatient consultations for many specialties across the system. The HSE advise that

based on submissions from 36 sites, a total of 80,730 virtual outpatient consultations took place in April. This represents approximately 50% of the overall OPD activity for April. Of the patients seen, 10,379 were new patients and the Did Not Attend (DNA) rates recorded for virtual activity is reported at less than 3%.

My Department, the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund are currently working together to estimate the impact of Covid-19 on Scheduled Care waiting lists with a view to informing activity going forward. As the system continues to deliver Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 care side-by-side over a more prolonged period, my Department and the HSE will continue to work closely together to protect essential non-Covid-19 acute care and progress the provision of more routine non-Covid-19 care.

### **Health Screening Programmes**

417. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health when the cervical smear test screening programme will be resumed; his views on whether other life-saving elements of the health service cannot be neglected during the crisis (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10300/20]

**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.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

418. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position in relation to the reopening of adult day services; the arrangements being put in place in relation to transport services for persons travelling to and from services during the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10339/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As part of the overall effort to contain the spread of COVID-19 and in line with public health advice, day service locations have been closed since March. However priority service users have been identified in each CHO, and individualised supports continue to be provided to many people in alternative models particularly for these individuals with higher support needs, through alternative means such as via online support and/or regular telephone contact with families. Health and social care responses to the current public health emergency are under continuing review, including specific measures such as these to support vulnerable people.

The resumption of adult day services is currently being considered by my Department and the HSE as part of broader planning to prepare for the resumption of non-COVID-19 community and social care services in the current environment, and in line with public health guidance. My Department and the HSE has established a Joint Working Group to develop a plan for Community Capacity.

The HSE is finalising plans to re-establish vital non-covid supports and services. This includes very careful and detailed work on the part of the Disability Sector with national guidance and will result in directing how all funded agencies can deliver services on a medium to long-term basis. Community Healthcare Organisations and Section 38/39 agencies continue to work together at a regional level in order to plan and co-ordinate efforts. Considering the very serious nature of this pandemic and the vulnerability of people with disabilities as a care group, any plans to safely commence all disability services and supports must comply with guidance

developed by the National Public Surveillance Centre in the HSE.

The HSE has now developed a number of important guidance documents to assist disability services: the Framework for Resumption of Adult Day Services and Reshaping Disability Services From 2020 & Beyond. It is important to note that this guidance is interim and subject to change in line with the overall management of the Covid-19 pandemic and in accordance with contemporary Public Health Guidance.

These documents are now also available on the following website:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

In relation to transport services for people travelling to disability services, COVID guidance on social distancing and infection control presents many challenges for the provision of transport to and from day service locations. The HSE is currently in the process of developing protocols for the provision of transport in this regard.

### **Home Help Service**

419. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase home supports for 2020 in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10342/20]

**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.

### **Drug and Alcohol Task Forces**

420. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase funding for programmes in 2020 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10343/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** 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 Department of Health provide total annual funding of €28m to task forces for local initiatives to tackle drug and alcohol use and misuse, in accordance with the National Drugs Strategy.

The Department of Health provided a total of €927,813 to the North East Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force (NERDATF) in 2019, via the HSE. From this allocation, the task force funded various community drug projects in Cavan, Monaghan, Meath and Louth. These projects provide a range of valuable services to individuals and families affected by drug and alcohol use and misuse in the region.

The Department of Health is providing an additional €190,000 over a three year period for Young People's Substance Use Support Services in Cavan & Monaghan. This initiative was prioritised by NERDATF to improve access to health services for young people whose lives are affected by problematic alcohol and substance use in the two counties.

In 2019, an additional €20,000 was provided to NERDATF, with €10,000 recurring on a permanent annual basis.

I am committed to working in partnership with NERDATF and the Midlands community healthcare organisation to implement an integrated public health response to substance misuse. I believe that resources should be directed towards interventions and strategies which are most likely to lead to a reduction in problem substance use and an improvement in public health, safety and well-being.

The provision of additional funding for drug and alcohol services is a matter for consideration in the context of the 2021 Budget.

### **Nursing Staff**

421. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend nurse prescribing to include opioid substitution therapies such as methadone in order to alleviate pressure on services arising from Covid-19; if the issue is being examined as part of the 2021 review of the National Nurse and Midwife Medicinal Product Prescribing Policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10348/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** During the COVID-19 crisis, the HSE prioritised the delivery of Opioid Substitution Therapies (OST) so that everybody on the waiting list could commence appropriate treatment. The Executive developed guidance on the commencement and maintenance of treatment and on the safe supply of medicines during COVID-19. This included the delivery of OST to individuals who were in self-isolation or cocooning. In April 2020, an additional 514 people were in receipt of OST compared with January 2020.

In the last quarter of 2019, my Department commenced an evaluation process of the benefits or otherwise of introducing nurse prescribing of OST. A number of stakeholder consultations have taken place. This work was suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic and will be resumed as soon as possible.

Any extension of nurse prescribing to include opioid substitutes would require changes to Schedule 8 of The Misuse of Drugs Regulations, 2017 and this process would have to be completed before this extended scope could be considered as part of a review of The National Nurse and Midwife Medicinal Product Prescribing Policy by the HSE.

### **National Maternity Hospital**

422. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 486, 502 and 519 of 27 May 2020, the action the State plans to take when the 99-year lease for the land on which the new national maternity hospital will be built expires; the plans in place for the continuity of public maternity care at the site after the 99 years have expired; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10350/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** It would be inappropriate for me to comment on the specific provisions of the Lease, which has yet to be finalised; however, the position regarding the continuity of maternity care at the site, after the 99 year term of the Lease has expired, has been considered in full.

## **Health Screening Programmes**

423. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Health when cancer screenings will resume. [10360/20]

**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.

## **Memoranda of Understanding**

424. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the measures being implemented on an all-island basis following the agreement on a memorandum of understanding between his Department and the Department of Health in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10393/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy will know, a Memorandum of Understanding was formally agreed by the Chief Medical Officers of the Department of Health and the Department of Health in Northern Ireland on Tuesday 7 April. The MOU was entered into on my behalf as Minister for Health and on behalf of the Minister of Health in Northern Ireland to strengthen North South co-operation on the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The MOU focuses on facilitating greater co-operation and consistency of approach wherever possible on areas such as public health messaging, programmes of behavioural change, evidence base/ modelling and contact tracing.

I have been in ongoing contact with the Minister of Health in Northern Ireland throughout this pandemic in relation to how each health system is implementing various public health responses. In addition, there has been significant engagement between the CMOs, and officials in both jurisdictions.

Calls are held regularly including at a technical level to facilitate information sharing on topics such as modelling, testing and contact tracing approaches, tracing apps and travel measures.

The administrations are seeking to adopt similar approaches, where it is appropriate to do so on the advice of respective Chief Medical Officers. Discussions have and will continue to take place on respective plans for the gradual and controlled easing of restrictions, given the importance of implementing consistent approaches wherever possible. All parties recognise that in terms of public health measures in both jurisdictions, that it will be important to maintain strong North/South collaborative arrangements.

## **Covid-19 Tests**

425. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the capacity for testing for Covid-19; the average turnaround time for test results; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10394/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A robust and real-time process of testing, isolation and contact tracing is central to our public health strategy for containing and slowing the spread of COVID-19, as advocated by WHO, EC and ECDC.

There is now capacity in place to test 15,000 people a day on a seven day basis. As of mid-night Monday 1 June, 348,416 tests have been carried out with an 8% positivity rate overall.

The target turnaround time from referral to completion of contact tracing is 3 days or less in 90% of cases, while the target turnaround time for negative results is less than 2 days.

Turnaround times are improving rapidly thanks to process improvements and automation. In over 80% of cases, the turnaround time from referral to completion of contact tracing is now 3 days or less. Over the last week, the median turnaround time has been 2 days. The HSE publishes updates on testing and contact tracing including activity levels and turnaround times on a daily basis. These can be accessed here - <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates>

It is important to recognise that this capacity was developed from a standing start and that huge work has gone in to getting us to the point we are right now. I am confident that the HSE is putting in place the measures to further reduce turnaround times and we are seeing continuing improvement and greater consistency. The HSE continues to streamline the process and to automate where possible.

### **Primary Care Centres**

426. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health the status of the Finglas primary care centre. [10398/20]

**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.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

427. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if there will be an investigation into high levels of Covid-19 infection among healthcare workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10401/20]

430. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a detailed report on Covid-19 infections amongst health workers; his views on the request by an organisation (details supplied) for an inquiry into these infection levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10422/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 427 and 430 together.

Gathering and reporting on demographic details of confirmed cases of COVID-19, such as healthcare worker status, is a complex and technical process involving multiple steps of data collection, processing and analysis. I have agreed with the HSE that such information would be made available on a weekly basis.

The HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) has prepared a summary of confirmed cases in healthcare workers (HCWs). As of the 30th May at midnight, the HPSC has advised that 8,018 cases of COVID-19 are in HCWs. This is 32% of all confirmed cases. This does not mean that 32% of all HCWs have COVID-19, as has been mis-reported, but rather that 32% of all cases in Ireland have occurred in someone who has reported being a HCW.

The HPSC advises that the number of HCW cases has been declining week on week since mid-April. In the week 22 (24-30 May), there were 103 new COVID-19 confirmed cases in HCWs. This compares to 145 in week 21 and 470 in week 20.

My Department is advised that the transmission route for HCWs is sought through the contact tracing process. A broad approach is taken when determining if a HCW confirmed case acquired it in a healthcare setting. This broad approach may lead to an overestimation of healthcare setting transmission. The HPSC advises that if a HCW is noted as a confirmed case and has one of the following, their mode of transmission is recorded as “healthcare setting acquired”:

Confirmed mode of transmission is healthcare setting acquired or

Close contact with another confirmed case of COVID-19 in a healthcare or workplace setting or

Linked to an outbreak in a healthcare setting.

The HPSC advises that 60% of cases in healthcare workers have “healthcare setting acquired” recorded as the likely source of transmission.

My Department and I are having a further meeting with the trade unions today.

### **Home Help Service**

428. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health if further home help hours will be offered to a person (details supplied). [10407/20]

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

### **Medicinal Products**

429. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take in relation to the need to access a drug by a person (details supplied). [10413/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In line with the 2013 Act and the national framework agreed with industry, a company must submit an application to the HSE to have a new medicine added to the reimbursement list.

Reimbursement is for licenced indications which have been granted market authorisation by the European Medicines Agency or the Health Products Regulatory Authority.

In making a relevant reimbursement decision, the HSE is required under the Act to have regard to a number of criteria including the health needs of the public, cost effectiveness, potential or actual budget impact and efficacy.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

The HSE has received an application for pricing and reimbursement of pembrolizumab (Keytruda) indicated as monotherapy or in combination with platinum and 5-fluorouracil, for the first-line treatment of metastatic or unresectable recurrent head and neck squamous cell carcinoma (HNSCC) in adults whose tumours express PD-L1 with a combined positive score.

In November 2019, the HSE commissioned an NCPE rapid review with respect to this indication. On 2 January 2020, the NCPE completed this rapid review and recommended that a full HTA be undertaken in order to assess the clinical effectiveness and cost effectiveness of pembrolizumab compared with the current standard of care. In January 2020, a full pharmacoeconomic assessment was commissioned by the HSE and this assessment is now underway.

*Question No. 430 answered with Question No. 427.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

431. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the details of the guidance the Health Protection Surveillance Centre wrote for the nursing home and homecare sector on Covid-19 infection and transmission prevention; the way in which this guidance issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10423/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE through the Health Protective Surveillance Centre has developed an extensive body of guidance and support tools to assist in the management of COVID-19 cases, including in relation to nursing homes and homecare. This guidance is reviewed and updated regularly as necessary. The current relevant guidelines are the: “Interim Public Health and Infection Prevention Control Guidelines on the Prevention and Management of COVID-19 Cases and Outbreaks in Residential Care.

On 10 March 2020, the HSE issued Interim Guidance on Transfer between Care Facilities, which included preliminary guidance on the transfer of hospitalised patients from an acute hospital to a residential care facility in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance based on the best available information at the time set out the various procedures to be followed, including:

- Patients with COVID-19 should not be transferred to a LTRC until they had two consecutive tests indicating virus not detected.
- Patients who were symptomatic and were contacts of a confirmed COVID-19 case should only transfer if the persons had a test indicating virus not detected and it was possible for that person to be isolated for the relevant incubation period;
- Patients who were asymptomatic and were contacts of a confirmed COVID-19 case should only transfer if it was possible for that person to be isolated for the relevant incubation period;
- Transfers from hospitals with no evidence of spread of COVID-19 should proceed as normal, except patients with respiratory tract infection meeting the then criteria for COVID-19 testing – in those cases testing should be carried out and the result should be virus not-detected before transfer.

As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Covid-19 Tests**

432. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the details of the programme to test and keep testing homecare workers that work with the most vulnerable of persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10424/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A robust and real-time process of testing, isolation and contact tracing is central to our public health strategy for containing and slowing the spread of COVID-19, as advocated by the WHO and ECDC.

All healthcare workers meeting the current case definition for COVID-19 are referred for testing in line with current testing criteria. There is extensive guidance in place for healthcare workers and this can be found on the HPSC website: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/guidanceforhealthcareworkers/>. There is also clear guidance in place for the assessment, testing and return to work of healthcare workers. <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/algorithms/Algorithm%20for%20Testing%20and%20Return%20to%20Work%20of%20Symptomatic%20HCWs.pdf>

The HSE has advised that where healthcare workers, including home support workers, require a test, they are prioritised and there is no delay in scheduling a test appointment. Where a person in receipt of home support requires a test, this is also the case.

In addition, current guidance requires the testing of all staff and residents when a new case emerges in a long term residential care facility (including mental health facilities) that have not yet had a case.

It is important to note that testing is only one element of a comprehensive strategic response to COVID-19. Testing for COVID-19 only provides a point-in-time result. It confers no guarantee that the individual with a ‘not detected’ result is not incubating the infection or the level of virus is below detectable levels at the time of the test.

Targeted, risk-based testing can yield important data to inform control measures, but does not constitute a control measure in and of itself. Testing should only be undertaken based on a public health risk assessment. A comprehensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic must include a strong focus on infection prevention and control and additional measures such as prompt identification and exclusion from work of symptomatic healthcare workers for example.

### **Alcohol Treatment Services**

433. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the considerations that have been given to alcohol delivery services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10431/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Alcohol delivery services are governed by the Intoxicating Liquor Acts and as such are not within the remit of my Department.

### **Health Screening Programmes**

434. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when cancer screening services such as CervicalCheck which were postponed due to Covid-19 will resume; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10435/20]

**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.

## Legislative Measures

435. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when the Regulated Professions (Health and Social Care) (Amendment) Bill 2019 is likely to be restored to the Houses of the Oireachtas with a view to early passage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10436/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I would hope to have the Regulated Professions (Health and Social Care) (Amendment) Bill 2019 Bill restored to the Seanad Order Paper as soon as possible, noting that this will require a resolution of the House.

## Hospital Services

436. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when St. Brigid's Hospital, Carrick-on-Suir, County Tipperary will be returned to its normal operations; the reason the hospital has been kept idle when the numbers of cases in County Tipperary no longer justify this approach; if he will give a written commitment regarding the future of the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10451/20]

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

## Medicinal Products

437. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to problems in procuring epanutin 50mg infatabs for patients prescribed same; if his attention has further been drawn to conflicting information regarding the shortage from industry and the Health Products Regulatory Authority; his plans to rectify the situation in order to minimise harm to patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10455/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Marketing Authorisation Holder (MAH) for the anti-epileptic medicine Epanutin confirmed a shortage of its Epanutin Infatabs 50mg Chewable Tablets presentation, which contains the active ingredient phenytoin, commencing November 2019. The shortage is due to a manufacturing site change and other changes to the manufacturing process of this particular product and the resulting shortage is not confined to the Irish market. The company is taking all possible steps to ensure that normal supply resumes as soon as possible.

However, in order to mitigate any impact of the shortage to patients, the company is supplying the product it places on the Australian market under a different brand name, Dilantin Infatabs 50mg Chewable Tablets, to meet the needs of Irish patients. This product contains the same active ingredient, phenytoin, and is owned by the same company.

On the 9th of October 2019, healthcare professionals were alerted in advance of the shortage, advising that pharmacy staff and patients should be made aware of the issue and of the replacement product that would be made available. A copy of this letter is available on the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) website. Ireland has a multi-stakeholder medicine shortage framework in place, coordinated by the HPRA, in order to prevent, wherever possible, and manage medicine shortages when they occur. The HPRA remains in regular contact with the MAH regarding the interruption in supply of Epanutin 50mg Infatabs.

Patients or their carers who have any questions or concerns in relation to the temporary alternative presentation of phenytoin are advised to speak with their pharmacist or other health-care professional responsible for their epilepsy care.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

438. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his Department is working with health facilities to deliver measures to allow for some level of visitation by family members; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10456/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** While visiting restrictions are required in the context of a pandemic situation, national guidance issued by the Health Service Executive (HSE) and available on the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) website advocates a compassionate and practical approach in relation to visiting by friends and family.

A updated guidance document on Infection Prevention and Control Precautions for Possible or Confirmed COVID-19 in a Pandemic Setting was published on 3 June 2020. It notes that while visiting restrictions will be required in a pandemic, local risk assessment and practical management must be considered, ensuring the response is both pragmatic and proportionate. Specific scenarios where a compassionate and practical approach is required include care of the dying.

Updated COVID-19 guidance on visitations to Residential Care Facilities was published by the HSE on 5 June 2020 and comes into effect from 15 June next. It sets out the criteria for visiting residential care facilities with no ongoing COVID-19 outbreak and for visiting residential care facilities during an outbreak of COVID-19. Indoor visiting in residential care facilities where there is no ongoing COVID-19 outbreak will be permissible from 15 June in circumstances where certain criteria are followed. During an ongoing outbreak of COVID-19 within a residential care facility, the guidance advises that all but essential visiting is suspended in the interests of protecting residents, visitors and staff.

### **Health Services Staff**

439. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if all healthcare workers on a temporary contract will be offered a permanent job. [10457/20]

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

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

440. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the current average end-to-end time for testing and contact tracing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10458/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A robust and real-time process of testing, isolation and contact tracing is central to our public health strategy for containing and slowing the spread of COVID-19, as advocated by the WHO and ECDC.

I am confident that the HSE is putting in place the measures to further reduce turnaround times and we are seeing continuing improvement. The HSE continues to streamline the pro-

cess and to automate where possible. A range of process optimisation measures are being put in place, including automated swab appointments; offering the option to receive positive test results by text and enabling out of hours referrals. These are in addition to measures already in place including IT improvement, automation processes, and streamlined transportation logistics.

Regarding current average end-to-end time for testing and contact tracing, as this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Defibrillators Provision**

441. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of requests made to the HSE in each of the past five years and to date in 2020 for funding for automated external defibrillators by families with inherited heart conditions; the number of these that have been approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10459/20]

**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.

### **Emergency Departments**

442. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the emergency department charge will be waived for the provision of post-exposure prophylaxis through emergency departments in view of the fact that in many areas of the country there is no alternative service through which to access it. [10460/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health (Out-Patient Charges) Regulations 2013, provide that, subject to specified exemptions, a charge shall be made for out-patient services provided at an emergency department, or any other facility providing similar services, in respect of the first occasion the service is provided in relation to each episode of care.

The Regulations sets out a number of categories of persons who are exempt from this charge including: a person with full eligibility; a child up to the age of 6 weeks; a child in respect of prescribed diseases of a permanent or long term nature; a person who has a letter of referral from a registered general practitioner, and a person whose attendance results in admission as an in-patient.

I have no plans to amend the provisions in relation to the application of this charge.

### **Health Screening Programmes**

443. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when screening for cervical cancer, particularly for those with a history of cervical cell changes, will recommence; if a risk assessment has been carried out in relation to delaying these tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10466/20]

**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.

### **Cancer Services**

444. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when BreastCheck will recommence, particularly for those in the higher-risk category; if a risk assessment has been carried out in relation to delaying these tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10467/20]

**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.

### **Disabilities Assessments**

445. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) will now be assessed under the schools list; the arrangements in place to provide these assessments as a priority for children that lost out in such circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10468/20]

**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.

### **Maternity Services**

446. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the steps taken throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to facilitate the safe face-to-face attendance when appropriate by women that are pregnant for regular check-ups and if necessary, treatment with their general practitioner and also with relevant consultants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10469/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply to you directly.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

447. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health his plans to appoint a person to conduct an independent inquiry as to the way in which the issue of protecting patients in nursing homes from Covid-19 was handled from a date (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10470/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** On foot of a National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) recommendation, on 23 May a COVID-19 Expert Panel on Nursing Homes was established, to examine the complex issues surrounding the management of COVID-19 among this particularly vulnerable cohort.

The purpose of the Panel is to examine the national and international responses to the CO-

VID-19 crisis, and to examine the emerging best practice. The main objective of the Panel is to provide immediate real-time learnings and recommendations in light of the expected ongoing impact of COVID-19 over the next 12-18 months. COVID-19 is a new disease, which can present atypically in the frail elderly, and new evidence and best practice in its management are constantly emerging.

The Terms of Reference of the Expert Panel are:

1. Provide assurance that the national protective public health and other measures adopted to safeguard residents in nursing homes, in light of COVID-19, are appropriate, comprehensive and in line with international guidelines and any lessons learned from Ireland's response to COVID-19 in nursing homes to date;

2. Provide an overview of the international response to COVID-19 in nursing homes utilising a systematic research process;

3. Report to the Minister for Health by end June 2020 in order to provide immediate real-time learnings and recommendations in light of the expected ongoing impact of COVID-19 over the next 12-18 months.

This independent Panel is chaired by Professor Cecily Kelleher, Principal of the College of Health and Agricultural Sciences, UCD. Professor Kelleher will be joined by Professor Cillian Twomey (Retired Geriatrician), Petrina Donnelly, Group Director of Nursing, RCSI Hospital Group, and Bridget Doherty, representing the public interest.

### **Health Services Funding**

448. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Health the additional financial support provided to section 39 organisations from March to May 2020; the measures he is taking to ensure the future viability of such organisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10474/20]

**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.

### **Horse and Greyhound Fund**

449. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the planned funding for the horse and greyhound fund in 2020; and the amount contributed to horse and greyhound racing in each of the years 2010 to 2019. [9700/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) is a commercial state body established under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001, and is responsible for the overall administration, promotion and development of the horse racing industry. Similarly, Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Both bodies are corporate and separate legal entities to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Under Section 12 of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001 (No.20 of 2001), the horse and greyhound racing industries receive financial support from the State through the Horse and

Greyhound Racing Fund (the Fund).

Monies are paid out of the fund in the ratio of 80% to HRI and 20% to Bord na gCon as specified in Section 12 (6) of the Act.

The Fund allocation from 2010 to 2020 is as set out below.

2020 - €84 million

2019 - €84 million

2018 - €80 million

2017 - €80 million

2016 - €74 million

2015 - €68 million

2014 - €54.22 million

2013 - €55.02 million

2012 - €56.29 million

2011 - €57.29 million

2010 - €59.264 million

### **Organic Farming Scheme**

450. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the increase in funding planned for 2021 for the organic farmers scheme; if changes are planned to the minimum qualifying score which would bring more organic farmers into the scheme; the reason for the changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9657/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Organic Farming Scheme has been one of the most successful schemes under the current Rural Development Plan (2014 - 2020). It will fully consume the budget of €56m that was allocated to it for the period 2014 to 2020.

The Scheme has more than achieved its targets in terms of new land converted and the maintenance of organic land. Latest figures indicate that there are now some 74,000 hectares under organic production, an increase of nearly 50% on the position at the start of the Programme in 2014.

As there has been a delay in agreeing the EU budget and the new CAP reform regulations, transitional arrangements will be made to provide legal and financial certainty for RDP schemes for 2021. The European Commission has therefore introduced draft transitional Regulations to cover the period between the current RDP which expires this year and the commencement of the next. These transitional regulations which will govern the position of schemes in 2021 have not yet been finalised.

### **Meat Processing Plants**

451. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of suspected Covid-19 cases at a meat plant (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9667/20]

452. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in meat plant factories nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9668/20]

453. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of the confirmed cases of Covid-19 at a meat plant (details supplied) which led to hospitalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9669/20]

454. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of confirmed cases of Covid -19 in meat plant factories nationally that led to hospitalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9670/20]

455. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he could not share the specific details of each meat plant and their individual exposure to Covid-19 in Dáil Éireann on 20 May 2020 for legal reasons; if so, if the legal opinion in relation to same will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9671/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 451 to 455, inclusive, together.

The information with regard to the numbers of workers tested or positive in meat plants is a matter for the personnel involved, the Food Businesses and the Health Service Executive

A national Outbreak Control team has been established by the HSE to deal with all issues relating to Covid 19 in meat plants. My Department is represented on this committee and it is expected that recommendations, including any in relation to testing, will issue from this group in due course. Any clusters of cases in individual meat plants, in common with clusters in other workplaces, are dealt with by local HSE-led outbreak control teams.

### **Greyhound Industry**

456. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason greyhound tracks here were denied the opportunity to stage greyhound race meetings nationally from the same date as horse racing meetings in view of the importance of the greyhound industry nationally and the number in employment in the industry; and if an assurance will be given of equal treatment in the future in this regard. [9703/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) is a commercial state body established under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001, and is responsible for the overall administration, promotion and development of the horse racing industry. Similarly, Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

On the 1st May 2020, the Taoiseach set out a roadmap for easing the Covid -19 restrictions, which began on Monday 18th May. The Government plans to reopen the economy and society in a slow and phased manner. The roadmap sets out five stages for unlocking restrictions, at three-week intervals.

On publishing the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, the Government expressed a willingness to engage and consult with sectors on possible changes to the timings set out in the plan.

Through my Department, both HRI and Bord na gCon engaged in this consultation process and I was fully supportive of this engagement.

Following a meeting of Government on Friday 5th June 2020, it was confirmed that greyhound racing could resume behind closed doors from Monday 8th June 2020, subject to strict protocols, in line with the resumption of thoroughbred horse racing.

I have been assured that Bord na gCon will continue to put public health considerations at the forefront of its activities, and detailed protocols have been prepared by the body for operating in the current environment.

### **Pesticide Use**

457. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position in relation to the use of an active substance (details supplied) used in essential herbicide crop protection products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9751/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Diquat is has been widely used as a crop desiccant, including for the desiccation of haulm in potato crops. Following an EU review process, which concluded in 2018, the active substance approval was withdrawn. This decision was implemented through Commission Regulation (EU) 2018/1532.

Withdrawal of approval was due to risks identified by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in relation to the areas of human health and the environment. Various risk mitigation options were evaluated by Member State technical experts following the EFSA review but could not be shown to allow safe use. Product authorisations were withdrawn by 4 May 2019 and the last allowed date of use was 4 February 2020.

It is within the competence of individual Member States in certain circumstances to issue emergency approvals, for a short period, under Article 53 of Regulation EC No 1107/2009. However, when deciding in respect of any emergency authorisation, my Department carefully considers the specific reasons why use of a product may be sought and potential impacts on human and environmental health that could arise from its use. Due to the risks identified during the recent assessment process, it is not proposed to issue emergency approval at this time.

I understand that both Teagasc and the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board in the UK have carried out trials with alternative products and also physical removal of haulm by flailing.

### **Meat Processing Plants**

458. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether all further inspections of meat plants should be carried out unannounced; and if not, the reason for having announced inspections. [9765/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** All meat processing and slaughter plants whose meat is destined for human consumption must meet the requirements set out in detailed EU regulations relating to food safety, animal health and welfare.

Large scale slaughter plants operate under the supervision of my Department, while smaller scale abattoirs are supervised by the Local Authority Veterinary Service.

In accordance with EU Regulation No. 625 of 2017, food processing plants and cold stores under the supervision of my Department are subject to a risk-based official control strategy which is determined by DAFM, based on the activity of Food Business in question.

All Food Businesses are subject to unannounced official controls, but there is provision for notice to be given to the Food Business Operators in advance of undertaking official controls at a Food Business premises. My Department undertakes the required number of unannounced inspections as envisaged by the relevant Regulations.

### Hen Harriers

459. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the payments made to landowners in counties Limerick, Cork, Kerry and Tipperary by county in circumstances in which land has been designated for the hen harrier in each of the years 2015 to 2019 and to date in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9770/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department makes payment to landowners through the Hen Harrier Programme and through the Conservation of Farm Birds (Hen Harrier) option in GLAS.

The Hen Harrier Project is operationally independent of my Department and is run by a Hen Harrier Project Team. The information below is sourced from the Project Team. The Hen Harrier Programme has 1,524 participating farmers.

	2015	2016	2017	2018€	2019€	2020€	Totals €
Cork	0	0	0	205,068.07	46,1736.2	0	66,6804.28
Kerry	0	0	0	256,961.32	52,1113	4,720.6	78,2794.92
Limerick	0	0	0	302,350.64	57,8325.7	2,303.5	88,2979.8
Tipperary	0	0	0	227,900.03	34,4997.7	0	57,2897.7

Under GLAS, farmers with hen harrier habitat qualify for a payment of €370 per hectare per year. The table below gives a breakdown of payments made under GLAS in respect of the Hen Harrier action to participating farmers in Limerick, Cork, Kerry and Tipperary for scheme years 2015-2019:

County	2015 €	2016 €	2017 €	2018 €	2019 €	County Totals €
Cork	208,811.38	1,353,357.33	1,643,434.69	1,649,143.77	1,616,215.64	6,470,962.81
Kerry	199,680.09	1,170,258.96	1,399,544.16	1,392,157.93	1,361,439.73	5,523,080.87
Limerick	341,757.54	1,781,551.76	2,075,389.10	2,066,725.23	2,053,555.39	8,318,979.02
Tipperary	116,273.77	743,305.02	907,885.37	904,951.19	899,053.58	3,571,468.93

### Food Quality Assurance Scheme

460. **Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there will be a review of quality assurance payments in view of the fact that they are perceived as unfair to farmers that sell via the mart system. [9851/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I assume that the Deputy is referring to bonus payments paid by beef processors on cattle which meet certain

criteria.

These bonuses are entirely commercial arrangements between suppliers of cattle and their processors and are not a matter for my Department.

### **Beef Industry**

461. **Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason factory fit cattle pricing fell approximately €150 a head to €3.53 per kilogram and the price drop was not passed on to the supermarket customer and the farmer suffered the price loss not the supermarket or the processor. [9852/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy will be aware, prices for beef and other commodities is a commercial matter which I, as Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine nor my Department, have any role in determining.

I am acutely aware of the issues presented to the agri-food sector in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and I am aware that the beef sector is particularly exposed given its reliance on external trade and the food service and hospitality markets.

My officials and I have ongoing contact with all the key stakeholders across both the beef and dairy sectors. More than ever in the ongoing response to the Covid-19 pandemic, I am aware of this need for ongoing contact as the situation has evolved. My Department and I are working to ensure that business and services to farmers can continue, keeping food and other processing facilities operational, ensuring that payments and commercial activities that are necessary to protect farm incomes can continue.

There are likely to be significant economic impacts for the agri-food sector, arising from reduced demand in key markets around the world. The loss of high value food service customers is already of significant immediate concern.

The response to the economic impacts on the sector should include a strong, shared EU response, using the instruments available in the Common Agricultural Policy. I have already highlighted to Commissioner Wojciechowski the serious consequences for farmers and the food industry and the need to ensure that the full range of market supports available under the Common Market Organisation Regulation are made available. These supports include Aids to Private Storage and Exceptional Aid measures, flexibilities when it comes to on-farm inspections and early payment of the Basic Payment Scheme.

Following Ireland's efforts in leading an agreed EU-27 statement on the need for further supports, the Commission have introduced Aids to Private Storage for Dairy (SMP, Butter, Cheese), Beef and Sheepmeat. Private Storage Aid (PSA) is a risk management tool/safety net available to EU producers of certain agricultural products under the CMO regulation (1308/2013). The aim is to facilitate producers to store the product for a stipulated temporary storage period.

I am also working with my colleagues in Government to ensure that all businesses, including those in the agri-food sector, get access to suitable supports, and the measures in place are being kept under review.

My Department and agencies will continue to monitor the impacts on the agri-food sector as the situation evolves, and to provide appropriate supports to the sector. My Department remains in constant contact with stakeholders right across the meat and dairy sectors to share informa-

tion on emerging issues and contingency planning, and we will continue to develop appropriate supports as the situation evolves.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

462. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the introduction of a subsidy scheme for farmers will be considered to encourage them to spread ground limestone on their land holdings to promote the natural growth of grass and to reduce the need for fertiliser; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9855/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The maintenance of soil pH is critical for agronomic performance and environmental sustainability due to its direct effect on nutrient availability. Nutrient management planning is therefore an integral part of the nutrient use efficiency on farm.

The application of lime is a key component of nutrient management planning. The usage of lime has declined in recent decades although sales have stabilised in recent years. There is ongoing research, advisory emphasis and industry promotion on the importance and benefits of lime application to our soils and this has helped to raise awareness and promote usage amongst farmers.

An interim review of the Nitrates Derogation was carried out in 2019, following which farmers in derogation must now put in place a farm scale liming programme from 2020, which provides an opportunity for these farmers to improve efficiencies and to reduce their environmental footprint. A review of Ireland Nitrates Action will be conducted this year whereby nutrient management planning will be reviewed.

In many instances, the improvements in fertiliser efficiency resulting from the judicious application of lime may reduce input costs on farms and improve profitability.

### **Forestry Sector**

463. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding forestry groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9873/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The aim of the Forestry Knowledge Transfer Group (KTG) Schemes is to provide participating private forest owners with the knowledge they require to actively manage their own forest, mobilise their timber resource, and secure a valuable income from the crop in the market. All private forest owners are eligible to participate, irrespective of their forest currently being grant funded under the Forestry Programmes or not. Participants set their own learning agenda, led by a facilitator who is a professional forester. All private forest owners are eligible to participate in groups, irrespective of whether their forest is grant funded.

I am pleased to confirm that I opened this year's Forestry KTG Scheme on 27th May 2020 following the successful implementation of the scheme in 2018 and 2019. Applications to establish and run a national network of Knowledge Transfer Groups are now invited from forestry groups, forestry companies and individual forestry professionals. Once approval has issued by the Department, successful applicants will then invite forest owners to take part in the group they are running.

In accordance with the Scheme's Terms and Conditions, each Knowledge Transfer Group can have a maximum of 20 participants. The minimum number of participants per KTG is 10. This means that an Organiser can apply for 2 KTGs with 10 participants each. Organisers should bear in mind that the average attendance over the seven meetings/events must be 10 or more in order to qualify for the full organiser payment where one or two KTGs are being organised as part of a KTG Application.

Approved KTG Organisers can receive a payment of up to €6,500 for each group they facilitate. Participants are eligible to receive €70 per meeting attended, provided they have participated in at least 4 of the 7 KTG meetings and events.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Government currently has measures in place which will be subject to updates and modifications over the coming months. The purpose of launching the scheme now is to allow time for organisers to recruit members to their groups, with a view to commencing meetings later in the year in line with the public health guidelines. The scheme will, of course, be kept under review in light of those guidelines.

### **Basic Payment Scheme**

464. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the basic payment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9884/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The new legislative proposals for the Common Agricultural Policy 2021 - 2027 were launched in June 2018 by Commissioner Hogan. The proposals outline a greater environmental ambition post-2020 and recognise the role the agriculture sector has to play in helping Member States achieve their environmental and climate change targets.

Negotiations on the CAP proposals are ongoing and, while significant progress has been made, decisions on a number of key issues have still to be agreed upon. These include the proposed new green architecture, which is aimed at achieving a higher level of climate ambition.

The CAP Strategic Plan Regulation introduces GAEC II in Annex III with a view to protecting wetland and peatland ecosystems. This text is still subject to change as negotiations are ongoing. Ireland has requested clarification of the meaning of "protection" from the Commission, and this will help to inform the implementation of measures at farm level.

I can assure the Deputy that I will continue to actively participate in the negotiation process and work with my European counterparts to secure the best possible outcome for the Irish agri-food sector.

### **Departmental Functions**

465. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the work of a cross-Departmental group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9911/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Deputy will be aware that the management of aquaculture and associated foreshore licensing functions in Lough Foyle gives rise to legal and jurisdictional complexities. Negotiations regarding the jurisdiction of the Lough Foyle area are, in the first instance, a matter for the Department of

Foreign Affairs and Trade.

My Department organises and participates in an inter-departmental working group which is pursuing a way forward in terms of the future management of aquaculture and associated fore-shore activities in Lough Foyle.

My Department will prepare and forward a briefing note on the matter to the Deputy within 10 days.

### **Greyhound Industry**

466. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a resolution will be found to a situation (details supplied) regarding the greyhound industry in County Tipperary; if an independent mediator will be appointed to review the historic debt and find a resolution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9932/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The question raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for Bord na gCon and therefore the question has been referred to the body for direct reply.

### **Felling Licences**

467. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will be made on an application for a felling licence by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9937/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An application for a tree felling licence was received from the person named in June, 2019. Every application for a forestry licence must undergo careful assessment for the potential effects the proposed operations may have on their own or in combination with other plans or projects in the area.

The Deputy will be aware that my Department made changes to the assessment procedures used when examining all forestry licence applications. These changes were introduced in response to important Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) decisions and their subsequent interpretation by the Forestry Appeals Committee (FAC). These findings meant that, in order to grant licences which fully meet environmental requirements, fundamental changes to the licensing system were unavoidable. These changes, which are substantial, have led to delays in processing applications. My Department has devoted considerable time and energy to introducing a robust and workable system and is now recruiting significant extra resources, both ecologists and forestry inspectors, to address the backlog.

On initial examination of this particular application, it was determined that 15 designated sites were proximate to the tree felling site. The possibility that the proposed tree felling may have an impact on any one of these sites cannot yet be excluded. Therefore, officials of my Department will complete the Appropriate Assessment report and determination. It is also open to the the person named to have a Natura Impact Statement completed by a suitably qualified person at their own expense and submit it for review by my Department's Ecology Unit which

can considerably speed up consideration of the file.

Once the assessment of the application is complete, the forestry inspector will make their recommendations, which will form the decision on the application. The decision will be issued to the person named and any person who made a submission on the application. The decision may be appealed to the Forestry Appeals Committee within 28 days.

### **Greyhound Industry**

468. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of runners, greyhounds injured, greyhounds that died or were put to sleep and the causes of the injuries and deaths in each greyhound track, from 1 January 2019 to date by month in tabular form. [9943/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The question raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for Bord na gCon and therefore the question has been referred to the body for direct reply.

### **Departmental Reports**

469. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the breakdown of the €3.6 billion of imports of prepared consumer foods referred to in the trade factsheet on page 11 of the 2018 annual report of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9944/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Data on agri-food sector trade is broken down into 26 categories identified and agreed by my Department and the Central Statistics Office (CSO). Products and Raw Goods are categorised using combined nomenclature (CN) codes, a European harmonised system used to classify goods for customs and trade reasons. These categories include non-edible agri-food items such as Forestry and Animal Hides and Skins, along with traditional food and beverage products.

Prepared Consumer Foods (PCF), a subset of agri-food, are value-added food and beverage products, excluding alcohol beverages, which sell both domestically and internationally to retail, food service or other food companies. These goods are categorised into 15 areas identified and agreed by industry stakeholders, my Department and the CSO.

The PCF sector accounted for over €2.6 billion in agri-food sector exports in 2018, and €3.6 billion in imports. PCF exports in 2019 were €2.7 billion, while imports totalled nearly €3.8 billion.

The table attached below gives a breakdown of PCF exports and imports for 2018 and 2019. The figures have been updated in line with the latest available datasets.

Chapter 6 of my Department's Annual Review and Outlook for Agriculture, Food and the Marine 2019 (<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/agri-foodindustry/agri-foodandtheeconomy/economicpublications/aro2019/>) provides more detailed data on Ireland's agri-food and PCF trade.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2020-06-09\_pq469-09-06-20\_en.xlsx ">PCF</a>]

## Horse Racing Industry

470. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason trotting racing will not resume on the same day as thoroughbred racing behind closed doors (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9954/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** On the 1st May 2020, the Taoiseach set out a roadmap for easing the Covid-19 restrictions, which began on Monday 18th May. The Government plans to reopen the economy and society in a slow and phased manner. The roadmap was updated on 5th June, and now sets out the four stages for unlocking restrictions.

When announcing the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, the Government expressed a willingness to engage and consult with sectors on possible changes to the timings. A limited number of alterations to the plan have been made for specific sectors such as thoroughbred horse racing and greyhound racing based on detailed protocols put forward and agreed to by the relevant authorities.

I can confirm that Harness Racing is scheduled to recommence in Phase 3 of the Government's plan, on the 29th June 2020. This is in line with other sports that can operate "behind closed doors", where arrangements can be put in place to maintain social distancing. This decision has been taken bearing in mind at all times the pre-eminence of the protection of public health.

## Sports Events

471. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if assurances will be provided to the organisers of pigeon racing that birds from Northern Ireland can be transported here for the purposes of racing; and the point of contact in his Department for queries on this matter. [9966/20]

473. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if pigeon racing can resume in phase 2 under the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business; and if trainers from Northern Ireland can transport pigeons here to be released in races. [10012/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 471 and 473 together.

Government advice for Phase 2 of the Covid-19 Roadmap for reopening is that people may travel within their own county, or up to 20km from their homes if crossing county boundaries. Organised outdoor exercise, and sporting, culture or social activities of up to 15 people may take place.

In relation to the transport of homing pigeons from Northern Ireland, if the transport relates to an economic activity (i.e. sale or change of ownership of the pigeons), the transporter must abide by the requirements set out in Council Regulation 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport. Regulation 1/2005 do not apply if the transport is connected to participation in shows etc.

Further information is available on my Department's website: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animaltransport/>.

There are no health certification requirements in relation to movement of pigeons within the EU for racing purposes. However, a consignment must be accompanied by an owner declaration confirming the pigeons are free from paramyxovirus.

If you require further information on the movement of pigeons, please contact my Department at [livetrade@agriculture.gov.ie](mailto:livetrade@agriculture.gov.ie).

### Cycle to Work Scheme

472. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by his Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9975/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Cycle to Work Scheme is a tax incentive scheme to encourage employees to cycle to their place of employment. Under the scheme, an employer can pay for a new bicycle (including bicycle accessories) and the employee then repays the cost in regular instalments from their gross salary.

As such, there are no costs to my Department, as the monies are fully recouped from the employee over a 12-month period.

The table below shows the number of staff, by year, from my Department who have availed of the scheme:

Year	Number of Staff
2009	79
2010	140
2011	207
2012	219
2013	95
2014	105
2015	95
2016	118
2017	103
2018	76
2019	81
2020 (to date)	25

*Question No. 473 answered with Question No. 471.*

### Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

474. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ensure that projects that have commenced and are continuing to progress will be given a deadline extension for a reasonable amount of time further to the changes made in relation to

TAMS projects deadlines on 1 April 2020 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10041/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Flexibility has been provided by my Department on completion deadlines for the suite of TAMS II measures. On 1 April 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a three month extension on all projects due to completed (or approvals due to expire) between 1 March and 1 July 2020.

As the situation evolves, my Department is continuing to monitor the situation and will implement further changes if and when they are needed.

### Fire Service

475. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a series of matters in relation to recent gorse fires during the June 2020 bank holiday weekend (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10058/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department issued a Condition Red Forest Fire Danger Notice on 28 May ahead of the extreme fire weather risk phase that occurred between 29 May 29 and 1 June. The issue of a Condition Red Notice is a comparatively rare occurrence and outlines the level of risk involved and specifies measures that may need to be taken in response to this. A high state of readiness existed following the issue of this warning, which was widely reported in the media.

The fire Danger Notice contained a reminder to the public to remain within 5km of their homes when exercising and to adhere to the regulations introduced to limit the spread of Covid-19. The notice also contained a request for forest visitors to park considerably near site entrances so as not to impede emergency service access to forest roads.

The parking of vehicles or obstruction of public roads are matters for An Garda Síochána and the relevant Local Authority. Neither my Department nor Coillte have enforcement powers in relation to this. However, Coillte works closely with An Garda Síochána to ensure that vital access routes remain clear.

My Department is aware of the recent fires during the period of the June Bank Holiday weekend and has been monitoring the situation with regard to impacts on forest lands. There were a number of fires on Coillte lands in Laois, Galway, Mayo and Leitrim with significant outbreaks occurring in Kildare and Louth. In all cases, Coillte staff and its contractors worked with emergency services – particularly Fire Services – Local Authorities and local people to contain dangerous forest fires, to protect our forest estate and to prevent the spread of fire from the forest to nearby residences and businesses.

Coillte takes fire management on its forest estate extremely seriously. Coillte has 85 dedicated and fully trained fire management staff who are available continuously, 24 hours a day, seven days a week during the fire season to coordinate and fight forest fires. Coillte also has a full range of fire-fighting equipment constantly prepared for fire outbreak. In addition, Coillte has two helicopters on contract, fully equipped with fire-fighting equipment, available for use at all times. Coillte has been very active on national media, local media and on social media, promoting the message of fire awareness and prevention including the need to keep forest entrances clear and not to block access roads to our forests. The last point applies at all times, not just during periods of high fire risk.

In view of the present prolonged period of dry weather, high temperatures and strong winds,

the risk of further fire outbreaks remains across the country. Coillte will continue to promote fire awareness and prevention and my Department will continue to issue forest fire warnings where appropriate.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the various Fire Service, Coillte workers and Defence Forces personnel who have been involved in the sustained response to these fires in recent weeks. These fires present an enormous and additional challenge at a time when services and communities are already under serious pressure, and I commend the work of all those who have been involved in the response.

My Department does not operate a compensation scheme for landowners affected by fire. Insurance against fire damage is readily available in the marketplace and it is incumbent on all landowners and property owners living in rural areas to be aware of fire risk on their lands at all times and to take steps to reduce fire risks to property, habitats and other assets.

### **Coillte Teoranta**

476. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to planned construction at a Coillte site (details supplied); and if his attention has been further drawn to the impact such construction will cause. [10109/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The management of the Coillte forest estate and operational matters such as the issue raised by the Deputy are a matter for, and the responsibility of, Coillte as a commercial State Body.

I can confirm that an application for a forest road works licence, which if granted, facilitates the construction of a forest road, was accepted on 27th May, 2020. The application is currently within the 30-day public consultation period.

All applications for forestry licences are assessed and the proposed operations are considered carefully. Every application is examined for its potential impact on the surrounding countryside on its own and in combination with other plans or projects in the area. The application is currently with the forestry district inspector, who will make recommendations on the application. These recommendations will form part of the decision, which will be issued to the applicant and any person who made a submission on the application. All decisions are published on my Department's website.

### **Horticulture Sector**

477. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider a scheme (details supplied) to deal with the surplus of potatoes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10127/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I am very aware of the challenges to some food suppliers posed by reduced activity in the food services sector during this period. However, there has been a particularly strong demand for potatoes at retail level in recent months and the majority of the potatoes grown in Ireland are produced for supply to the fresh retail market. It is expected that, in line with the Government's Roadmap for "*Reopening Society and Business*", demand will increase for potatoes in the catering and processing sectors also, and there is some evidence of this already.

With regard to processing potatoes in particular, the industry has invested significantly over

the years in storage facilities and other equipment that allowed for diversification into different markets. This investment was supported by grant aid from my Department. This capacity and diversity of markets allows for orderly processing and market access throughout the year.

The Deputy will be aware that, to address the particular challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government, in conjunction with relevant state agencies, has introduced a range of measures to aid businesses that may be suffering short term financial problems. Bord Bia has also introduced a range of options to aid the horticulture sector. These range from financial support in the form of grants, to training and advice on how best to sustain businesses during this pandemic.

### Coillte Teoranta

478. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the cost of the Coillte contract for the private hire and use of helicopters for firefighting on Coillte land; the amount spent on the use of helicopters for firefighting purposes by Coillte in each of the years 2017, 2018 and 2019; the amount budgeted for same by Coillte for 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10139/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Coillte is operationally independent of my Department and matters such as the management of their forest estate, are the responsibility of the company.

I have therefore passed the question raised to Coillte for response and direct reply to the Deputy.

### Forestry Sector

479. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the Growing for the Future document is still the strategic plan for the development of the forestry sector here. [10151/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** ‘*Growing for the Future- A Strategic Plan for the Development of the Forestry Sector in Ireland*’ was published in 1996. It was replaced in 2014 by ‘*Forests, products and people: Ireland’s forest policy – a renewed vision*’. The strategic goal for the forestry sector in Ireland as described in “*Forest products and people*” is as follows;

*“To develop an internationally competitive and sustainable forest sector that provides a full range of economic, environmental and social benefits to society and which accords with the Forest Europe definition of sustainable forest management”*

This policy document was a key driver in the development of the measures contained in the Forestry Programme 2014 -2020. Since the commencement of the Programme to end 2019, a total of 26,000 hectares of new forests have been funded. In addition, some 383,000m of forest road have been supported and constructed.

In order to further respond to the policy direction in “*Forest products and people*”, a Mid-Term Review of the Forestry Programme was completed in 2018. The Department introduced innovations, including increased rates, to address reduced planting levels and to introduce greater diversity in terms of the species being planted. These have had a positive effect with, for example, broadleaf planting rising from 21% of all trees planted in 2017 to 36% to

date this year.

Other new measures in terms of sustainable forest management and to support the delivery of public goods such as biodiversity were also introduced by the Department in 2019, on foot of the Mid-Term Review. These were:

- The introduction of tree guards and deer fencing grants as part of a new “Forest Fencing and Tree Shelter Scheme” to reduce the risk of deer damage for existing broadleaf forests;

- Inclusion of a new Continuous Cover Forestry measure as part of the Woodland Improvement Scheme which will generate more diverse habitats for wildlife by creating forests with a more varied age structure. The objectives of the measures are *inter alia* to enhance environmental benefits of existing coniferous forests by opening up the canopy and creating new habitats for wildlife, to create an uneven canopy structure with the aim of producing high quality, high value logs and to promote a more suitable management option in sensitive sites; and

- A Woodland Improvement Scheme which supports thinning interventions for broadleaf forests and is designed to stimulate investment in the improvement, protection and development of young broadleaf forests. This activity fulfils a range of functions, including the improvement in the quality of hardwoods being produced thereby increasing the value of the broadleaf forest for the owner. Thinning also delivers ecosystem services such as increased biodiversity and climate adaption as a result of healthier trees which will have greater resilience to pest and disease outbreaks.

The MacKinnon review of my Department’s procedures for licencing of forestry has recommended the development of a new national Forest Strategy as part of the preparation of a new National Forestry Programme. This will be a matter for consideration by the next Government.

### Agriculture Schemes

480. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an appraisal has been carried out of the outworking of the mandatory reduction obligation contained within the BEAM scheme; if he will remove the criteria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10156/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The objective of the Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM) was to provide temporary exceptional adjustment aid to farmers in the beef sector in Ireland subject to the conditions set out in EU Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1132. This aid was granted to provide temporary market adjustment support in response to a specific market disturbance as outlined in Ireland’s notification to the EU Commission. As part of the notification and approval process for the measure, the 5% reduction was part of the conditionality sought by the EU.

Approved BEAM participants have given a commitment to reduce the production of bovine livestock manure nitrogen on the holding by 5% for the period 01 July 2020 to 30 June 2021 as compared with the period 01 July 2018 to 30 June 2019 as recorded on Department systems. Given that this requirement only begins from July 2020 and is reviewed across the duration of a year, it is not intended to amend this requirement. In addition, it is also relevant that the most recent analysis of Nitrates trends in participating herds indicates that two thirds have already started to make adjustments to reduce their nitrates with almost half the participants meeting the 5% reduction already.

Participants who need advice on how to manage this reduction can contact the Department

or consult an agricultural advisor to work out which changes will make most sense on their farm.

### **Horse Racing Industry**

481. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason trotting racing is operating to a different reopening schedule than that of thoroughbred racing in respect of the easing of Covid-19 restrictions; if the matter will be reviewed in order to ensure equality across the codes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10157/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** On the 1st May 2020, the Taoiseach set out a roadmap for easing the Covid-19 restrictions, which began on Monday 18th May. The Government plans to reopen the economy and society in a slow and phased manner. The roadmap was updated on 5th June, and now sets out the four stages for unlocking restrictions.

When announcing the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, the Government expressed a willingness to engage and consult with sectors on possible changes to the timings. A limited number of alterations to the plan have been made for specific sectors such as thoroughbred horse racing and greyhound racing based on detailed protocols put forward and agreed to by the relevant authorities.

I can confirm that Harness Racing is scheduled to recommence in Phase 3 of the Government's plan, on the 29th June 2020. This is in line with other sports that can operate "behind closed doors", where arrangements can be put in place to maintain social distancing. This decision has been taken bearing in mind at all times the pre-eminence of the protection of public health.

### **Beef Imports**

482. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the implications of the Chinese suspension of beef imports from Ireland following confirmation of an atypical case of BSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10158/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** On 14 May 2020, my Department identified a suspected case of 'Atypical BSE' in a 14-year old cow as a result of its surveillance of 'fallen' animals – these are on-farm deaths which are sent to a collection centre (knackery) for sampling and destruction. On 22 May, confirmatory tests carried out at my Department's Central Veterinary Research Laboratory verified the suspect case as Atypical BSE. Atypical BSE is believed to occur spontaneously in all cattle populations at a very low rate and has only been identified in older cattle. There are no public health risks associated with this occurrence.

My Department promptly notified relevant competent authorities in importing countries, the EU Commission and the OIE (World Animal Health Organisation) of the test findings. Ireland is designated by the OIE as a country with a 'controlled' risk status since 2008; this classification recognises that Ireland's BSE controls are effective and that, under OIE rules, Irish beef can be safely traded internationally. The discovery of a rare Atypical case does not affect Ireland's 'controlled risk' status.

Nevertheless, on an interim basis and in line with the specific protocol agreed with the

Chinese authorities, Ireland has voluntarily suspended beef exports to China, as and from 22 May, until an epidemiological report by DAFM on the occurrence is considered by the Chinese authorities. This report, which concludes that this case is consistent with the epidemiology of Atypical BSE and underlines the efficacy of our BSE surveillance system, has now submitted to the General Administration of Customs in China (GACC).

Beef exports to China have grown significantly in the short time that the market has been open. According to the latest data from the CSO, almost 8,200 tonnes of Irish beef worth approximately €40m were shipped in 2019, the first full year the market was open. Shipments in the first quarter of 2020 amounted to some 2,200 tonnes and were worth approximately €11m.

My officials are engaging intensively with the Chinese authorities with a view to seeking an early resumption of the beef trade to China. The decision to resume trade is a matter for the Chinese authorities.

### **Beef Industry**

483. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for developing PGI status for grass-fed beef here; if this will result in clear labelling to distinguish grass-fed beef from other product; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10159/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department is currently working with Bord Bia on a PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) application for “Irish Grass Fed Beef”, in consultation with the European Commission.

An application for PGI status can only be submitted by, or on behalf of, a group of producers. In this case, the application will be made by Bord Bia.

Once the application fulfils all the requirements of the regulations governing PGIs, a formal national opposition procedure must take place. Following satisfactory completion of this, the application will be formally lodged with the EU Commission for scrutiny and a further opposition procedure will follow.

Once registered, EU Regulations require the Union symbol for PGI to appear on the labelling of the product. This symbol is intended to help consumers distinguish the labelled product from otherwise similar products and enable choices to be better in line with preferences.

In addition, a label bearing the registered name of the product must appear in the same field of vision on the product as the PGI certification logo. A PGI certification logo on a product passes a message of quality and authenticity to consumers.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

484. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the EU emergency measure will be implemented that will allow payments of €5,000 to be paid to farmers experiencing cash flow difficulties arising from the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10160/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The proposal to which the deputy refers seeks to introduce a new exceptional and temporary measure under the Rural Development Programme to address the liquidity problems for farming activities and

of small businesses active in processing, marketing and/or development of agricultural products resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specifically, the proposal provides for once-off lump sum payments for farmers of €5,000, and an amount of €50,000 for SMEs. The funding is limited to 1% of the RDP budget.

The proposal is still under negotiation in Brussels, and the agreement on the final legal text is still to be reached between the Council, European Commission and the European Parliament. It provides only a very limited opportunity for Member States that are well advanced in their drawdown of Rural Development funding to avail of these measures. Ireland is in the top two Member States in terms of execution of the Rural Development Programme, with over 84% of funding drawdown (EU average 60%), and the balance of the funding is either already committed or will be committed in 2020. Therefore, it is not proposed to utilise this measure, as to do so would involve a reallocation of funding from current schemes (ANC, GLAS, Organics, etc.) within the existing Rural Development Programme. This would have a further negative impact on those farms that may already be experiencing cashflow difficulties.

I continue, of course, to press at a national and EU level to ensure that sufficient supports are put in place for primary producers and for the wider agri-food sector. Most recently, I have brought forward payments on some RDP schemes, including €26m in GLAS payments and balancing payments under the Organic Farming scheme. I have also increased funding in my Department's Calf Welfare Investment Scheme from €1.5 million to €4 million, to assist farmers with extra calves.

### **Beef Industry**

485. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of suckler calves born in each of the past ten years by county; and the number of farmers in the sector by county in the same period in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10161/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The information requested by the Deputy is provided in the following table. It should be noted that:

- Beef calves are defined by breed of dam.

- Farm numbers are defined as any herd that contained at least one suckler cow in the defined period, therefore this data is not confined to specialist beef farms.

Calf births by county as well as a host of information on the profile of the national herd are available on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealthwelfare/animalidentificationmovement/cattle/>

[[https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2020-06-09\\_pq485-09-06-20\\_en.xlsx](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2020-06-09_pq485-09-06-20_en.xlsx) "National Herd"]

### **Common Agricultural Policy**

486. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers in each county that received 2019 CAP payments by amounts (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10162/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The number of beneficiaries of CAP payments in each county broken down by size of payments in respect of the CAP financial year 2019 (16th October 2018 to 5th October 2019) is provided in the attached document.

The information was compiled from the 2019 CAP beneficiaries database which was published on the Department's website on 29th May 2020, in accordance with Article 111 of Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 which requires Member States to ensure the annual ex-post publication of all beneficiaries of CAP funding.

The information therefore includes the beneficiaries of all CAP payments so a small number of beneficiaries are not farmers as the CAP also funds programmes such as LEADER and schemes open to other bodies including food companies.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2020-06-09\_pq486-09-06-20\_en.xlsx">Cap Payments</a>]

### **Horse Racing Industry**

487. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason horse trotting racing, that is, harness racing behind closed doors is not being permitted to start at the same time as horse racing due to Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10199/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** On the 1st May 2020, the Taoiseach set out a roadmap for easing the Covid-19 restrictions, which began on Monday 18th May. The Government plans to reopen the economy and society in a slow and phased manner. The roadmap was updated on 5th June, and now sets out the four stages for unlocking restrictions.

When announcing the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, the Government expressed a willingness to engage and consult with sectors on possible changes to the timings. A limited number of alterations to the plan have been made for specific sectors such as thoroughbred horse racing and greyhound racing based on detailed protocols put forward and agreed to by the relevant authorities.

I can confirm that Harness Racing is scheduled to recommence in Phase 3 of the Government's plan, on the 29th June 2020. This is in line with other sports that can operate "behind closed doors", where arrangements can be put in place to maintain social distancing. This decision has been taken bearing in mind at all times the pre-eminence of the protection of public health.

### **Common Agricultural Policy**

488. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of funding allocated to Ireland under the present Common Agricultural Policy; the estimated amount of funding that will be allocated to Ireland out of the total fund of €391 billion recently announced for the CAP 2010-2027; if under the forthcoming CAP, there will be further increased allocations to the countries in the east of the European Union; the effect this will have on Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10200/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The amount

allocated to CAP under the Multi Annual Financial Framework in the period 2014 – 2020 was €403 billion. The amount allocated to Ireland in that period was €10.680 billion in current terms.

In May 2018, the EU Commission proposed an allocation of €365 billion for CAP in the period 2021 – 2027. The most recent proposal for the CAP in that period brings funding levels to some €375 billion (current prices), with a further special injection of rural development funds – of some €16.5 billion - from the new Next Generation EU fund, bringing the total allocation to €391 billion for the period 2021-2027. The budgetary proposals have been set out at overall EU-27 level. The breakdown for Member States is not yet clear.

The new MFF proposals will play an important role in supporting the economic recovery of Member States. In addition, they provide the much needed additional funding into the CAP budget that I and my European colleagues have fought very hard to maintain, since the original proposals were published in May 2018.

As regards allocations to eastern Member States, my understanding is that the latest proposals do not differ from the original MFF proposal with regard to how external convergence will work in the next period. The concept of external convergence is not new, and is continuing on from previous proposals. The original Commission proposals of May 2018 propose that all Member States whose Direct Payments are below 90% of the EU average will see the process of external convergence continuing from the 2014 – 2020 period.

For those Member States with direct payments levels per hectare below 90% of the EU average, the process of external convergence will close the gap between their current level and 90% of the EU average by 50%. All Member States are contributing to the financial cost of external convergence of Direct Payments, and this is taken into account in Member States direct payments allocations in the draft regulation (COM (2018) 392) which are calculated on this basis.

The new proposal contains a number of new elements including a new Next Generation EU Recovery Fund. Precise details are awaited on the latest proposals as to how all the elements will interact together and work in practice. My Department is in the process of thoroughly analysing the proposals, so that we can fully understand the precise implications for our agri-food sector.

### **Agriculture Scheme Data**

489. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of participants in the AEOS and GLAS schemes in each year to date since AEOS was introduced; his plans to open a new environmental scheme in 2020 to replace GLAS or allowing those that have left GLAS and AEOS to re-join GLAS while the new CAP is being decided on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10215/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** It is not possible, at present, to make decisions in relation to schemes implemented under the Rural Development Programme, including GLAS, until confirmation is available at EU level on the budget and timeframe for a transitional period. Ireland has pressed for the earliest possible adoption of these regulations, so that my Department may plan for the transitional period with legal and financial certainty and consequently provide clarity to farmers and rural communities as soon as possible.

Any extension to or replacement of schemes would be dependent on the appropriate budget being available, as well as sufficient time being available from the adoption of the legal frame-

work to allow administrative provisions to be put in place. The Department is currently considering these matters in the context of giving effect in due course to the transitional arrangements should they be adopted.

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

Scheme	Year	Number of Active participants at Calendar Year End or YTD
AEOS	2010	9,991
	2011	15,850
	2012	15,568
	2013	21,327
	2014	21,036
	2015	20,762
	2016	11,334
	2017	4,589
	2018	4,546
	GLAS	2015/2016
2017		49,872
2018		49,119
2019		48,619
2020 (to date)		48,468

### Rural Development Programme

490. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount provided for in the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 for GLAS and TAMS respectively; the amount expended to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10216/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

	RDP 2014-2020 €000	Expenditure to Date(31st May 2020) €000
GLAS	932,451	792,770
TAMS	395,000	208,096

While the majority of the expenditure on 2014-2020 RDP measures will take place by the end of 2020, expenditure on some schemes will take place in the following years. Under EU regulations governing the 2014-2020 RDP, funds may be expended up to the end of 2023.

### Common Agricultural Policy

491. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of the proposals he put to the EU Commission in relation to the need to increase the proposed budget for CAP post-2020; if he has outlined to the EU Agriculture Commissioner that the most recent budget proposals are not adequate; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [10252/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I have long been opposed to the original Commission proposals for the CAP budget, announced back in May 2018, which proposed a 5% cut to the CAP budget post-2020. I have worked tirelessly with my European colleagues to successfully build a broad alliance to support the maintenance of the CAP budget for the next programming period.

Much of this has focused on the increased environmental ambition being asked of farmers as part of the CAP post-2020 proposals. We cannot ask our farmers to do more for less. The European Green Deal initiative and the recently published Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies set further climate and environmental targets that all sectors, including the agriculture sector, will have to achieve. The CAP post-2020 will be the mechanism that the agriculture sector will use to deliver on these targets.

In this context, I welcome the latest proposals from the European Commission of an increased CAP budget for the period 2021-2027 in the revised European Multiannual Financial Framework accompanying the new European Recovery Programme.

The new proposals represent a significant advance on the original Commission MFF proposal of May 2018. The revised proposal for the CAP sees additional funding being added to bring funding levels to some €375 billion (current prices), with a further special injection of rural development funds – of some €16.5 billion - from the new Next Generation EU fund, bringing the total allocation to €391 billion for the period 2021-2027.

The new MFF proposals will play an important role in supporting the economic recovery of Member States. However, these latest proposals are complex and my Department is examining them in detail so that we can fully understand the precise implications for our agri-food sector.

### GLAS Issues

492. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the GLAS scheme will reopen for applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10253/20]

493. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to extend GLAS pending the introduction of a new scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10254/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 492 and 493 together.

It is not possible, at present, to make decisions in relation to schemes implemented under the Rural Development Programme, including GLAS, until confirmation is available at EU level on the available budget and the timeframe for a transitional period. Ireland has pressed for the earliest possible adoption of these regulations, so that my Department may plan for the transitional period with legal and financial certainty and, consequently, provide clarity to farmers and rural communities as soon as possible.

Any extension to or replacement of schemes would be dependent on the appropriate budget being available, as well as sufficient time being available from the adoption of the legal framework to allow administrative provisions to be put in place. The Department is currently considering these matters in the context of giving effect in due course to the transitional arrangements

should they be adopted.

As GLAS is a voluntary scheme, farmers will not be obliged to participate in any transitional arrangements which are put in place, once they have completed their existing five year contract.

### **Agriculture Industry**

494. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for reviewing the licence for the use of a wood preservative (details supplied) for agricultural activities; the factors that will influence a decision in relation to the product; the stakeholder engagement that will be involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10255/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The approval and use of wood preservative products, including creosote products, is regulated under the EU Biocidal Products Regulation (BPR - Regulation (EU) 528/2012).

Creosote is currently an approved active substance for use in wood preservative products. The current expiry date of the approval is 31st October 2020. It meets the exclusion criteria for the approval of active substances specified in the regulation but was approved on the basis of a socio-economic derogation provided for in the legislation. Products containing creosote can only be authorised by Member States for use where it is concluded on the basis of a socio-economic analysis that no appropriate alternatives are available. A comparative assessment report of the uses authorised in Member States, including Ireland, was prepared in 2016 and was last updated in 2019. This report was prepared on the basis of extensive feedback from relevant stakeholders regarding the feasibility of using potential alternative products.

Ireland has authorised creosote products for a small number of necessary uses, including the treatment of agricultural fencing by professional users. Current alternatives are not viable replacements and have to be re-applied after a much shorter interval compared to creosote treatments. The suitability of any new alternative products currently in development will be considered in due course.

The EU process for consideration of renewal of approval of creosote for use in wood preservative products is currently ongoing. The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) launched a public consultation on creosote in 2019. This consultation was closed in December 2019 and over 80 submissions were received. These comments are available for viewing on the ECHA website. The EU Commission have proposed to extend the expiry date for the current approval of creosote until the 31 October 2021 in order to allow sufficient time for the examination of all relevant information by the evaluating competent authority and ECHA.

Ireland will fully comply with any new product authorisation conditions that may be specified following this consultation process.

### **Beef Exports**

495. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when beef exports to China will resume; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10334/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** On 14 May 2020, my Department identified a suspected case of 'Atypical BSE' in a 14-year old cow as a result of its surveillance of 'fallen' animals – these are on-farm deaths which are sent to a col-

lection centre (knackery) for sampling and destruction. On 22 May, confirmatory tests carried out at my Department's Central Veterinary Research Laboratory verified the suspect case as Atypical BSE. Atypical BSE is believed to occur spontaneously in all cattle populations at a very low rate and has only been identified in older cattle. There are no public health risks associated with this occurrence.

My Department promptly notified relevant competent authorities in importing countries, the EU Commission and the OIE (World Animal Health Organisation) of the test findings. Ireland is designated by the OIE as a country with a 'controlled' risk status since 2008; this classification recognises that Ireland's BSE controls are effective and that, under OIE rules, Irish beef can be safely traded internationally. The discovery of a rare Atypical BSE case does not affect Ireland's 'controlled risk' status.

Nevertheless, on an interim basis and in line with the specific protocol agreed with the Chinese authorities, Ireland has voluntarily suspended beef exports to China as and from 22 May, until an epidemiological report by DAFM on the occurrence is considered by the Chinese authorities. This report, which concludes that this case is consistent with the epidemiology of Atypical BSE and underlines the efficacy of our BSE surveillance system, has now submitted to the General Administration of Customs in China.

Beef exports to China have grown significantly in the short time that the market has been open. According to the latest data from the CSO, almost 8,200 tonnes of Irish beef worth approximately €40m were shipped in 2019, the first full year the market was open. Shipments in the first quarter of 2020 amounted to some 2,200 tonnes and were worth approximately €11m.

My officials are engaging intensively with the Chinese authorities with a view to seeking an early resumption of the beef trade to China. The decision to resume trade is a matter for the Chinese authorities.

### **Departmental Reviews**

496. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress made to implement the recommendations within the Review of Approval Processes for Afforestation in Ireland commissioned by his Department in 2019; when it will become fully operational; if a person has been identified or appointed to carry out the task of implementing the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10400/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Mr. Jim Mackinnon, CBE was engaged by my colleague Minister of State, Andrew Doyle, TD in July 2019 to review the forestry licensing approval process. Mr. Mackinnon, a former Chief Planner with the Scottish Government, had completed a similar report for Scottish Forestry.

The review was informed by, among other things, discussions with a range of stakeholders including the forestry sector, farming organisations, the environmental pillar, State Bodies, Teagasc and the Forestry Appeals Committee. In addition, written submissions were received.

Mr. Mackinnon presented his final report to the Forestry Programme Implementation Group (FPIG) on 16 January, 2020 at which the Department also presented a draft implementation plan in response to the 'Ways Forward' recommended. The members of the FPIG were asked to provide their feedback on the draft implementation plan, which has been received by officials of my Department.

The finalisation of the Implementation Plan, in order to ensure the successful delivery of the

‘Ways Forward’ recommended, is currently under consideration.

## **EU Funding**

497. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the latest EU Commission MFF budget and CAP funding proposals; if he will provide a breakdown of total EU funding proposed under Pillars 1 and 2 at EU and member state level. [10433/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I welcome the latest proposals from the European Commission for an increased CAP budget for the period 2021-2027 in the revised European Multiannual Financial Framework accompanying the new European Recovery Programme.

I have long been opposed to the original Commission proposals for the CAP budget, announced back in May 2018, which proposed a 5% cut to the CAP budget post-2020. I have worked tirelessly with my European colleagues to successfully build a broad alliance to support the maintenance of the CAP budget for the next programming period.

The new proposals represent a significant advance on the original Commission MFF proposal of May 2018. The revised proposal for the CAP sees additional funding being added to bring funding levels to some €375 billion (current prices), with a further special injection of rural development funds – of some €16.5 billion - from the new Next Generation EU fund, bringing the total allocation to €391 billion for the period 2021-2027, with some €290 billion in Pillar I and €101 billion in Pillar II. The budgetary proposals have been set out at overall EU-27 level.

The new MFF proposals will play an important role in supporting the economic recovery of Member States. However, these proposals are complex and my Department is examining them in detail so that we can fully understand the precise implications for our agri-food sector.

## **Energy Infrastructure**

498. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the detail of the commitment to the establishment of the proposed gas import facility at Ballylongford, Tarbert, County Kerry; and if his attention has been drawn to the vital importance of the erection of the facility both nationally and its creation of employment in the rural areas of northern County Kerry and western County Limerick. [9699/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The project to which to Deputy refers, the Shannon LNG project, is a commercial project and the location, development and final investment decision for this project is the responsibility of the project promoters. It is the responsibility of the project promoters to comply with all legal, planning and regulatory requirements. My Department is carrying out a review of the security of energy supply of Ireland’s electricity and natural gas systems which is focusing on the period to 2030 in the context of ensuring a sustainable pathway to 2050. The review will include a full updated technical analysis of the security of supply challenges and a public consultation. The outcome of the review will inform future policy. I expect the formal procurement process for the technical analysis to commence in the coming weeks.

## **Energy Data**

499. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of residential holdings in each local authority area; and the estimated number of residential properties, industrial and office buildings in each local authority area dependent on oil fired and gas fired heating systems. [9704/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment(Deputy Richard Bruton):** The data requested by the Deputy is not compiled by the Department. The information set out in this response has, therefore, been prepared using Central Statistics Office (CSO) data.

Part One: Number of Residential Holdings in each Local Authority Area and Number of Residential Holdings with Oil Fired and Gas Fired Heating Systems

The data is found in Table E1053: Private Households in Permanent Housing Units 2011 to 2016 by Type of Central Heating, Aggregate Town or Rural Area, County and City and Census Year at the CSO StatBank website at the following link:

<https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?MainTable=E1053&TabStrip=Select&PLanguage=0&FF=1>

The data is drawn from the census of 2016; the data was published on 20 April 2017.

Table 1: Number of Private Households in Permanent Housing Units 2016 and Number using Oil and Gas Heating according to Local Authority Areas.

	Households	Oil	Natural Gas	Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG)
State	1697665	686004	569166	9990
Carlow	20465	11121	4838	102
Dublin City	211591	12243	134096	248
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	78568	9541	58280	131
Fingal	96607	16831	67456	267
South Dublin	92393	14089	66948	141
Kildare	73348	30246	28311	364
Kilkenny	34743	19193	7679	242
Laois	28997	12292	7250	145
Longford	15092	8346	288	128
Louth	45363	20916	18345	246
Meath	63861	31112	21783	351
Offaly	27184	11153	2073	112
Westmeath	31685	15798	3206	304
Wexford	54006	36098	550	444
Wicklow	49005	21531	17255	308
Clare	43348	25640	5229	425
Cork City	49370	5959	31869	51
Cork County	146052	73879	38721	1880
Kerry	54288	33883	1097	630
Limerick City and County	71022	32463	20297	398
Tipperary	59071	35443	7045	323

	Households	Oil	Natural Gas	Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG)
Waterford City and County	43455	19321	12913	263
Galway City	28827	14510	4410	227
Galway County	62729	36459	2522	637
Leitrim	12404	8030	201	98
Mayo	48745	29250	999	401
Roscommon	23962	13082	914	175
Sligo	24761	14987	680	270
Cavan	26806	18698	2000	269
Donegal	58305	37409	624	232
Monaghan	21612	16481	1287	178

Part Two: Number of Industrial and Office Buildings in each Local Authority Area dependent on Oil Fired and Gas Fired Heating Systems

Table 2 below covers the heating systems of non-domestic buildings according to County. County data is the closest approximate data available for Local Authority Areas. The data has been compiled from the CSO statistical release. The data is found at the following link under the table title: Table 7 Main Space Heating System Fuel by County (Non-Domestic) 2009-2020.

<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/ndber/non-domesticbuildingenergyratingsq12020/>

The data was collected from non-domestic BER audits conducted in the period 2009 to 2020. The data was published on 16 April 2020.

Table 2 Main Space Heating System Fuel by County (Non-Domestic) 2009-2020

					% of row	
					Heating System Fuel	
County	Mains Gas	Heating Oil	Electricity	LPG	Other	Total
Carlow	27	10	59	2	1	763
Dublin 01-24	39	4	56	0	1	16,122
Dublin County	37	5	58	0	1	4,209
Kildare	27	8	63	1	1	2,379
Kilkenny	26	14	55	3	2	905
Laois	24	15	58	1	2	706
Longford	12	21	61	5	1	450
Louth	30	8	61	1	1	1,639
Meath	30	11	57	1	1	1,979

					% of row	
					Heating System Fuel	
County	Mains Gas	Heating Oil	Electricity	LPG	Other	Total
Offaly	17	18	60	2	2	713
Westmeath	19	16	60	4	1	1,274
Wexford	11	15	67	5	2	1,621
Wicklow	27	9	62	1	1	1,729
Clare	21	18	58	2	1	1,609
Cork City	31	3	64	–	1	535
Cork County	25	8	64	2	1	5,240
Kerry	9	16	67	6	2	1,464
Limerick City	26	2	71	0	–	484
Limerick County	25	10	63	1	1	2,097
Tipperary	19	19	59	2	1	1,636
Waterford City	31	5	62	2	2	699
Waterford County	24	10	62	3	2	897
Galway City	11	7	81	1	0	653
Galway County	12	14	70	3	1	2,977
Leitrim	7	26	62	4	1	292
Mayo	9	20	67	4	1	1,536
Roscommon	12	23	59	4	2	612
Sligo	9	19	66	5	1	903
Cavan	14	20	57	8	2	714
Donegal	12	27	53	6	2	1,531
Monaghan	16	20	57	4	3	572
Total	27	10	60	2	1	58,940

– No non-domestic unit indicated the usage of this main space heating fuel type for this county

Further data on “Non-Domestic Building Type” is available on the CSO website under the title Table 8 Main Space Heating System Fuel by Type of Building (Non-Domestic) 2009-2020 at the following link:

<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/ndber/non-domesticbuildingenergyratingsq12020/>

500. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and En-

vironment if his Department has estimated the probable cost of replacing oil fired and gas fired heating systems nationwide over specified periods. [9705/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Government's Climate Action Plan has set an ambitious target to retrofit 500,000 homes to a Building Energy Rating of B2 (or cost optimal equivalent), and to install 400,000 heat pumps to replace existing heating systems by 2030. Achievement of these targets will be supported by the financial allocation under Project Ireland 2040 of EUR 3.7 billion, and a range of other measures identified in the Climate Action Plan. A cross-Departmental Retrofit Taskforce has been established to develop a new retrofit delivery model capable of achieving the above mentioned targets. Upgrading oil-fired and gas-fired heating systems to more efficient heat pumps is a core component of this new approach. The new retrofit delivery model will address barriers to energy efficiency investments in four key areas: customer proposition and demand generation, financing and affordability, supplier capacity and delivery structure. The Taskforce is also working to determine the estimated cost of achieving our retrofit targets.

The Retrofit Taskforce report, which will include an estimate of the retrofit programme, is to be published in Q3 2020.

### **Trading Online Voucher Scheme**

501. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason accommodation businesses are excluded from applying for the trading online voucher scheme in view of the damage caused to the industry by Covid-19; if he will investigate the concerns raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9903/20]

503. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the local enterprise office trading online voucher scheme will be reviewed to include restaurants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10173/20]

504. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the trading online scheme under South Dublin LEO is oversubscribed; if his attention has further been drawn to the fact that the scheme is currently paused; if this is the case in other LEO areas; his views on whether the projected funding allocated is insufficient; and his plans to increase funding and meet the demand from businesses impacted by the fallout from the lockdown and other responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. [10305/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Question Nos. 501, 503 and 504 together.

The Trading Online Voucher Scheme is funded by my Department and delivered nationwide in partnership with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Enterprise Ireland and the 31 Local Enterprise Offices. The Scheme offers skills training, mentoring and a grant of up to €2,500 to help small and micro-businesses to develop their ecommerce capability.

New flexibilities to the Scheme were introduced in April 2020 including reducing the requirement for co-funding from 50% to 10% and allowing businesses to apply for a second voucher of up to €2,500 where they have successfully utilised their first one. In addition funding for the scheme was increased from €2.3m to €5.6m.

There has been a positive response to these changes and significant uptake of the Scheme. On 8 June the Government announced additional funding of €14.2m for the Scheme, bringing the total funding allocation in 2020 to €19.8m. This additional funding will allow LEOs and Údarás na Gaeltachta to approve additional vouchers to successful applicants.

Following advice from the LEOs a decision has been made to include the restaurant and accommodation sectors as eligible sectors under the Scheme. The original decision to exclude these sectors was based on the assumption that businesses in these sectors were already digitally engaged or by their nature required physical attendance for the final payment. In the light of the Covid-19 pandemic these sectors have had to adopt new business strategies to continue trading and to address customer needs which involve the development of their ecommerce capability.

### **Trading Online Voucher Scheme**

502. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason for the exclusion of credit unions from accessing the trading online voucher scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10125/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Trading Online Voucher Scheme is funded by my department and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and delivered nationwide in partnership with Enterprise Ireland and the 31 LEOs. The Scheme offers skills training, mentoring and a grant of up to €2,500 to help small and micro-businesses (10 or less employees, turnover of less than €2m and which have been registered and trading for at least 6 months) to develop their ecommerce capability. With up to 70% of Ireland's annual online spend historically going overseas, targeting Irish small and micro-businesses for trading online is a key jobs and economic imperative, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Scheme aims to encourage and support such businesses in developing their online trading presence so that they can reach new markets, sustain and grow their business, retain and employ more people and export more.

Credit Unions do not fall within this enterprise ambit and as such are ineligible to apply under the Scheme.

Questions Nos. 503 and 504 answered with Question No. 501.

### **Better Energy Homes Scheme**

505. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the review on the SEAI scheme to consider revisits for additional works under the scheme will be completed; when urgent consideration for applications will be reopened for homeowners that are seeking to avail of free upgrades under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10346/20]

**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 (SEAI). The scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty. To date over 140,000 homes have received free upgrades under the scheme, leaving the occupants better able to afford to heat their homes to an adequate level. The Warmer Homes Scheme budget allocation for 2020 is €52.8 million - a record level of funding for this scheme. The Climate Action Plan includes a commitment to review ways to improve how current en-

ergy poverty schemes target those most in need. Recommendations on issues including repeat upgrade visits and how to best target those in need will be made shortly.

Although retrofit work under the scheme has been postponed in recent months due to COVID-19 related restrictions, the SEAI has continued to accept new applications and process payments for works completed. SEAI will now engage directly with its panel of retrofit contractors providing services under the Warmer Homes Scheme, to agree a timeline, protocols and processes for resumption of works on homes which can be categorised as lower risk. The SEAI hopes to conclude this process very speedily and recommence works within Phase 2 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. Notices on this scheme and other schemes administered by the SEAI can be found on their website ([www.seai.ie/covid-19-notice](http://www.seai.ie/covid-19-notice)).

### Trading Online Voucher Scheme

506. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if each application to the trading online voucher scheme for businesses impacted by Covid-19 will be fully honoured; the amount granted under the scheme to date against original allocation; the number of applications to date by county; the number approved and not approved, respectively by county; the value of approved applications by county; the number of applicants that have received and not received, respectively funding to date; and if additional funding will be required to meet the demand for the scheme. [10463/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Trading Online Voucher Scheme is funded by my Department and delivered nationwide in partnership with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Enterprise Ireland, the 31 Local Enterprise Offices and Údarás na Gaeltachta. The Scheme offers skills training, mentoring and a grant of up to €2,500 to help small and micro-businesses to develop their ecommerce capability. New flexibilities to the Scheme were introduced in April 2020 including reducing the requirement for co-funding from 50% to 10% and allowing businesses to apply for a second voucher of up to €2,500 where they have successfully utilised their first one. In addition funding for the Scheme was increased from €2.3m to €5.6m. There has been a positive response to these changes and significant uptake of the Scheme.

On 8 June the Government announced additional funding of €14.2m for the Scheme, bringing the total funding allocation in 2020 to €19.8m. This additional funding will allow LEOs and Údarás na Gaeltachta to approve additional vouchers to successful applicants.

The table below sets out the current position and is informed by the most up to date information received by my Department from the individual LEOs

LEO	Allocation for 2020 as of January 2020	Allocation for 2020 as of 8 June 2020	Vouchers approved to 29 May 2020*	Completed applications not yet approved
Carlow	13	98	38	40
Cavan	18	73	33	6
Clare	30	170	35	44
Cork City	32	367	52	154
Cork N&W	40	340	78	52
Cork South	30	345	47	110
Donegal	40	255	65	101

LEO	Allocation for 2020 as of January 2020	Allocation for 2020 as of 8 June 2020	Vouchers approved to 29 May 2020*	Completed applications not yet approved
Dublin City	90	335	88	113
Dublin DLR	50	430	55	160
Dublin Fingal	50	615	107	260
Dublin South	50	540	60	250
Galway	45	215	95	90
Kerry	44	354	31	140
Kildare	30	160	113	7
Kilkenny	29	279	44	50
Laois	25	70	30	8
Leitrim	10	70	10	28
Limerick	30	290	59	153
Longford	15	75	26	10
Louth	35	235	50	42
Mayo	35	110	35	32
Meath	35	390	67	112
Monaghan	15	60	25	12
Offaly	20	80	21	12
Roscommon	22	67	32	22
Sligo	19	109	24	35
Tipperary	30	235	60	122
Waterford	23	148	70	45
Westmeath	25	150	50	17
Wexford	30	205	65	92
Wicklow	40	170	70	32
Údarás na Gaeltachta	n/a	160	n/a	n/a
Total	1000	7200	1635	2351

Based on information received from the LEOs covering the period 16 March to 2 June the average value of vouchers approved is €2,355

### National Broadband Plan

507. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the National Broadband Plan; when the roll out will commence in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9661/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The government is committed to delivering high speed broadband to every home, farm, business and school in the country. The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie), shows the areas in Sligo which will be included in the National Broadband Plan (NBP) State led intervention as well as areas targeted by commercial operators. The Map is colour coded and searchable by address and Eircode.

Premises in the AMBER area of Sligo will be provided with high speed broadband through

the State led Intervention, the contract for which was signed in November last with National Broadband Ireland (NBI). The BLUE area represents those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services. The LIGHT BLUE area represents eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises, including in Sligo, as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017.

County	AMBER Premises within the NBP State Intervention Area	BLUE Premises within Commercial Operator's Area	LIGHT BLUE Premises within eir's commercial rural deployment
Sligo	37% (14,809)	63% (25,143)	>1% (187)

The NBP network will offer users a high speed broadband service with a minimum download speed of 150Mbps from the outset. By the end of next year, NBI plans to pass in the region of 115,000 premises, with 70,000 - 100,000 passed each year thereafter until rollout is completed. 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. My Department continues to engage with NBI to explore the feasibility of accelerating aspects of this rollout.

Further information on deployment activities associated with the rollout can be found on the NBI website <http://www.nbi.ie>

To support remote working and connected communities, approximately 300 Broadband Connections Points (BCPs) were identified by Local Authorities to be connected to high speed broadband this year. This will assist communities to quickly get free public access to high speed broadband in advance of the main NBP deployment. There are 13 BCP's planned for Co. Sligo. Proposed BCP locations including schools, library hubs, local sports facilities and other public places are available to view on the High Speed Broadband Map ([www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie)). The BCP delivery project is well underway and surveying of the BCP locations is progressing which will facilitate detailed design and installation. BCP locations are subject to change and a number of the premises initially identified are in the process of being replaced with alternative locations. The remaining BCPs remain on track for delivery by the end of 2020.

The BCPs in identified public places will leverage the high speed broadband connection through a range of measures and initiatives, for example providing free public Wi-Fi, 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.

### National Broadband Plan

508. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if high speed broadband will be made available to persons working from home due to Covid-19 restrictions at a location (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9720/20]

515. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when residents of an area (details supplied) will be able to avail of fibre broadband. [10086/20]

517. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if high speed broadband can be made available to persons working from home (details supplied) due to Covid-19 restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[10096/20]

518. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if high speed broadband can be made available to persons working from home (details supplied) due to Covid-19 restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10097/20]

520. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a person can anticipate the availability of fibre broadband near their home (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10193/20]

524. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if provisions are being put in place for residents of a direct provision centre (details supplied) in County Clare to have access to the internet in their rooms in view of the fact that children of school-going age reside in the centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10410/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 508, 515, 517, 518, 520 and 524 together.

The Government is committed to delivering high speed broadband to every home, farm, business and school in the country.

The Questions refer to premises which are located in the AMBER area on the NBP High Speed Broadband Map which is available on my Department's website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The AMBER area represents the area to be served by the network to be deployed under the NBP State led Intervention, the contract for which was signed in November last with National Broadband Ireland (NBI).

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. The NBP network will offer users a high speed broadband service with a minimum download speed of 150Mbps from the outset. By the end of next year, NBI plans to pass in the region of 115,000 premises, with 70,000 - 100,000 passed each year thereafter until rollout is completed. Further details are available at the NBI website [www.nbi.ie](http://www.nbi.ie)

To support remote working and connected communities, approximately 300 Broadband Connections Points (BCPs) were identified by Local Authorities to be connected to high speed broadband this year. This will assist communities to quickly get free public access to high speed broadband in advance of the main NBP deployment. The planned BCP locations, including schools, library hubs, local sports facilities and other public places are available to view on the High Speed Broadband Map on the Department's website [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The BCP delivery project is well underway and surveying of the BCP locations is progressing which will facilitate detailed design and installation. BCP locations are subject to change and a number of the premises initially identified are in the process of being replaced with alternative locations. The remaining BCPs remain on track for delivery by the end of 2020.

The BCPs in identified public places will leverage the high speed broadband connection through a range of measures and initiatives, for example providing free public Wi-Fi, 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.

509. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position in relation to persons whose houses are in the amber area under the national broadband plan; the options they have to obtain high speed broadband and or fibre broadband in a quick period of time; if other providers are free to provide a service in this area; if the company with the National Broadband Plan contract has to be compensated in these situations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9760/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Broadband Plan (NBP) contract was signed with National Broadband Ireland (NBI) in November 2019, to roll out a high speed and future proofed broadband network for the 1.1 million people living and working in the nearly 540,000 premises, 100,000 businesses and farms and 695 schools within the Intervention Area. Premises within this intervention area will be served by the network to be deployed by NBI, as within this area commercial operators have advised my Department that they have no plans to deliver high speed broadband service.

There is no prohibition on commercial serving these premises. The Department has engaged extensively with industry since 2013 through multiple public consultations to determine as accurately as possible where commercial operators have existing High speed broadband networks and where they have plans over the next 7 years to deploy high speed broadband networks. The Department's High Speed Broadband Map ( available at [broadband.gov.ie](http://broadband.gov.ie)) shows the extent of the State Intervention area and also the areas targeted for commercial services as notified to the Department through these consultations by industry.

The NBP contract provides a mechanism for National Broadband Ireland (NBI) to apply for compensation for encroachment in the event that other commercial operators have deployed a future proofed high speed broadband service, of a fibre or equivalent high speed broadband technology, in advance of NBI's own deployment in the intervention area. This contingent subsidy can only be applied for in specific circumstances and is subject to robust governance mechanisms. The encroachment element of the contingency subsidy is capped at €100m and can only be applied for where the Department determines a commercial deployment of high speed broadband meets the requirements set out in the NBP contract, specifically a deployment of a fibre or equivalent high speed broadband technology, and that this deployment has had a negative impact on NBI's business case. The consultation on the NBP map that was carried out in the second half of 2019 in advance of contract award, which established industry's up to date infrastructure and future plans, has significantly reduced the likelihood of the encroachment element of the contingency subsidy being sought.

### **Litter Pollution**

510. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will consider introducing a refund charge on bottles due to the ever-increasing littering issue (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9849/20]

**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 certain single use plastics has been banned throughout the public service. We are committed to increase recycling rates of plastics from 34% now to 50% by 2025 and 55% by 2030, along with other EU member states, and 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 2019 I commis-

sioned a study to examine how Ireland can deliver a 90% collection target for single use beverage containers, including plastic bottles, as required under the Single Use Plastics Directive. This study examines 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 carefully considered in the context of potential benefits, expected costs and impacts identified to enable evidence-based decision making in this matter and having regard to other potential measures that would facilitate the 90% collection rate. The study into how Ireland can achieve the 90% collection target has been received and is currently being reviewed in the context of developing a new Waste Action Plan.

The introduction of a Deposit and Return Scheme was also considered by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment in 2018. The estimated set up and running costs were identified as between €76m to €116m net cost, without consideration of the impacts on the existing kerbside collection and existing household subsidy.

### **Bituminous Fuel Ban**

511. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of work to implement a nationwide smoky coal ban; if he has reviewed the recent report from the Environmental Protection Agency on the need for a nationwide smoky coal ban; the status of the threatened legal challenge by a number of coal suppliers to the smoky coal ban; if he has met with officials from the Department of Health on the implementation of a smoky coal ban; if he has provided additional resources to local authorities to carry out enforcement of the existing smoky coal ban in their respective areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9907/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** 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 other major cities and towns with populations in excess of 15,000 people, such that it now applies in 26 urban areas nationwide. The ban has proven very effective in reducing particulate matter and sulphur dioxide levels 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.

I announced in December 2019 that the ban will be extended to 13 further urban centres with populations in excess of 10,000 people with effect from September 2020 onwards. Consultation continues with the relevant Local Authorities in order to define the exact geographical areas in which the ban will apply, and my Department is currently drafting the necessary secondary legislation.

The decision to make only a partial extension to the existing ban at this time was made in the context where a number of coal firms had indicated that they would challenge the proposal of two former Ministers to expand the smoky coal ban nationwide.

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 relating to bituminous coal. The legal threat remains though no legal proceedings have been initiated since my announcement in December 2019. The Attorney General has provided legal advice on this matter, and my officials are continuing to engage with his office to finalise a legally robust plan, which will improve air quality by reducing air

pollution, without jeopardising the existing ban.

I am already on record as welcoming the EPA report “Air Quality in Ireland 2018”, published late last year, which sets out the current position as regards our air quality and illustrates certain challenges in this regard. It is important to note that the report indicates that air quality levels at monitoring sites in Ireland were below the current EU legislative limit values in 2018.

The principal responsibility for enforcing the ban rests with individual Local Authorities. Therefore, I have not met with, the Department of Health in relation to this matter.

Local Authorities are responsible for carrying out of their statutory functions, including enforcement., and the deployment of resources to meet priorities locally. It at the discretion each Local Authority, where necessary, to seek additional resources for particular priorities through the normal estimates negotiations process.

### Covid-19 Pandemic

512. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when deep sea angling can commence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9933/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney):** Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) issued angling guidelines in relation to Covid-19 to facilitate anglers to fish while complying with prevailing Covid-19 social distancing, exercise and travel distance limitations. These guidelines are available on the IFI website [www.fisheriesireland.ie](http://www.fisheriesireland.ie) The guidelines, which also apply to sea angling, follow the advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) and the Government’s Roadmap for Reopening of Society and Business. The guidelines will be updated based on further NPHE advice, including advice relating to social distancing, exercise and travel distance limitations.

However, as the Deputy will know the activity of deep sea angling encompasses the use of sea-going vessels and important additional advice has also issued from Marine Emergency Services, including the Irish Coastguard, on the use of sea-going vessels in the light of potential marine emergency response. My Department or IFI has no function in this matter.

Similarly, I am not in a position to comment on the specific suggestion in the Deputy’s question as to the number of persons in a vessel, having regard to social distancing requirements.

### Cycle to Work Scheme

513. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by his Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9978/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the following table.

Year	No of applications
2015	11

2016	9
2017	17
2018	17
2019	18
2020	6

There is no cost to the Department as this is paid for by the relevant employee through salary deduction as per the terms of the Cycle to Work Scheme.

### Inland Fisheries

514. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for Inland Fisheries Ireland to ensure safe passage for salmon at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10035/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney):** I am advised by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) that the question of fish passage at Clohamon on the river Slaney relates to the abstraction of water for use in a private hydro-electric plant. IFI's powers in this matter, under section 123 of the Fisheries Consolidation Act 1959, relate to the legal requirements for gratings in watercourses diverted from rivers which are intended to prevent entry therein of salmon or trout. There are no powers under the 1959 Act directly related to water abstraction activity.

The fishing rights on the Slaney are privately owned and my Department and IFI have worked closely with the Slaney River Trust, the group representing the owners, and have supported the Trust on a project to improve tailrace screening at the Clohamon site to assist in mitigating impacts on fish passage. This support has included the provision of funding to assist the project.

*Question No. 515 answered with Question No. 508.*

### National Broadband Plan

516. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the analysis conducted on broadband capacity for addresses (details supplied) which resulted in them being transferred from the blue commercial zone to the NBI amber zone; the basis of the decision; when the decision was made; the person or body that took part in the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10095/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The government is committed to delivering high speed broadband to every home, farm, business and school in the country. High speed broadband will be delivered to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland, through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated.

The High Speed Broadband Map which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie) shows the extent of the State Intervention area and also the areas targeted for commercial services:

- The BLUE areas represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The AMBER areas on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention by the National Broadband Plan.

- THE LIGHT BLUE - the areas covered by the eir Commitment Agreement.

My Department has consulted with commercial operators extensively to ensure the High Speed Broadband Map provides as accurate a representation as possible of where high speed broadband will be provided by commercial operators and where it will not.

These particular five premises were identified in 2017 as premises where a commercial operator was no longer planning to provide a high speed broadband service. This typically occurs where a commercial deployment does not materialise as originally envisaged by the commercial operator. As a result the premises were re categorised at that time, as AMBER premises under the high speed broadband Map, so that they could be addressed through the State's NBP intervention.

The Department has subsequently reconfirmed with the market, through further consultations held in 2018 and 2019, that no commercial operator is currently serving these premises or has any plans to serve them within the next 7 years with high speed broadband. Including these premises in the NBP intervention area will ensure that these premises will be served by a high speed broadband network, initially with a minimum download speed of 150Mbps, which will be future proofed for the next 25 years.

*Questions Nos. 517 and 518 answered with Question No. 508.*

### **Bord na Móna**

519. **Deputy Joe Flaherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if confirmation has been received from Bord na Móna that its health and safety plans and procedures have been updated to provide sufficient support to deal with bog fires in the absence of the recently laid-off 200 plus staff (details supplied). [10141/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Bord na Móna is a commercial State company operating under the Turf Development Acts 1946 to 1998. Health and Safety matters such as those raised by the Deputy are operational in nature and not ones in which I, as Minister, have any role or function. However Bord na Móna have informed me that there has been no requirement to modify or adapt existing procedures as there has been no reduction in their capability to manage fires on its estate. Experienced and trained staff and equipment have been available and have responded promptly whenever required.

*Question No. 520 answered with Question No. 508.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

521. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to make assistance available to voluntary community radio stations to support them during the Covid-19 pandemic in view of the vital information role they play in their communities keeping persons in touch in this time of social isolation; the reason they were not included in the previous announcement in relation to commercial and national radio broadcasters on 9 April 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10208/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** It is vital that the Irish public have a readily available, reliable source of information on COVID 19 and the measures being put in place to tackle the crisis, and the radio sector has played a valuable role in this regard. At my request, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) agreed to waive levy payments for the independent radio sector in quarters 1 and 2 2020, which will save the sector €1m. This waiver covers all independent radio at national, regional and local level including community radio. The BAI are reporting to me on the impact of these measures and the financial state of the commercial radio sector.

I welcome last week's announcement by the BAI of the awarding of Sound and Vision funding to 32 independent commercial radio stations. This €2.5m round of funding recognises the financial pressures that commercial radio stations are facing as a result of falling advertising revenue. They play a key role in sharing reliable information on Covid 19 and bringing local communities together as we continue to manage the pandemic. The funding will enable the stations to continue their valuable role in raising awareness and supporting the communities they serve.

I have also requested a separate funding round of €750,000 for community radio stations which will be progressed by the BAI over the summer with another round in the autumn for commercial television and public service broadcasters including public service radio.

### Telecommunications Services

522. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the fact that Eir remains under the universal service obligation (details supplied); and if the terms and conditions of the obligation will be reviewed before June 2021 in view of the fact some conditions such as minimum data speed are outdated. [10306/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The EU and national regulatory framework for telecommunications allows for the application of a Universal Service Obligation in respect of certain basic telecoms services. The current regime ensures that reasonable access requests for a home fixed line phone service and other basic communications services, such as payphones, are available to all consumers throughout the State. ComReg is charged with designating operators to deliver these services, as appropriate, and also with ensuring compliance with relevant obligations. ComReg is statutorily independent in the exercise of its functions. ComReg's current designation of eir as the universal service provider for access at a fixed location is for the period July 2016 – June 2021. I understand that ComReg plans to commence a review of voice access at a fixed location, and what if any obligation will be applicable in this regard post 21 June 2021.

### Climate Change Policy

523. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress to date on the draft national energy and climate plan; when Ireland will be submitting the national long-term strategy, which was due to be submitted in January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10372/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2018/1999), sets out the process for the preparation of the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP). Ireland's draft NECP was approved by Government in late 2018 and submitted to

the European Commission by the deadline of 31 December 2018. The European Commission then engaged in an iterative process with Member States and issued recommendations to each Member State on 18 June 2019. Since the submission of the draft NECP in December 2018, considerable work has been undertaken in the development of Ireland's final NECP, which fully incorporates the significantly raised ambition and additional policies under the Climate Action Plan. Together with the Commission recommendations and the responses to our two public consultations, these have informed the final draft NECP which better reflects our new, increased levels of energy efficiency, higher renewable energy ambitions and maps out a clear path to delivering on Ireland's carbon reduction targets for 2030 and beyond. My Department has kept the European Commission informed on progress on an on-going basis and is working towards submitting the final NECP to the Commission at the earliest opportunity.

Substantial work has been undertaken on developing Ireland's Long-Term Climate Strategy (LTS) to 2050. The LTS will be sent to the European Commission once it has been submitted to Government for consideration and approval. The LTS will identify additional measures and pathways beyond 2030, towards decarbonisation to 2050 underpinned by analysis of transition options across all key sectors of the economy, to inform future policy making, business investment decisions and household, community and citizen action. It will build on the decarbonisation pathways to 2030 that are detailed in the Climate Action Plan 2019 and reflected in the National Energy and Climate Plan.

*Question No. 524 answered with Question No. 508.*

### **Aviation Industry**

525. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will take steps to help safeguard jobs at a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9736/20]

526. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a company (details supplied) is under examinership here and has announced 280 redundancies and is enforcing statutory redundancy payments against precedent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9780/20]

540. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a matter raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) in relation to job losses at a company will receive a response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9717/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 525, 526 and 540 together.

The aviation industry is one of the most affected by the global pandemic. All airlines have seen severe depletion of revenue and are facing various degrees of financial challenge.

The Government has brought forward a series of measures to support all businesses impacted by COVID-19. These include the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme, the Pandemic Unemployment Benefit, and the ISIF Pandemic Stabilisation and Recovery Fund for medium and large enterprises.

I understand that these scheme are open to Cityjet during this difficult time. However, it would not be appropriate for my Department to intervene in the ongoing examinership process. Industrial relations are a matter for the airline and its employees and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has no role in relation to such matters.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

527. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to support the aviation industry here following the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10028/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The unprecedented challenges arising from Covid-19 require special attention, and for that reason I am establishing a Taskforce for Aviation Recovery, which will be charged with developing and advising on a framework for restarting aviation. I am in the process of appointing people to this Taskforce, which will convene quickly and report back to me within within a short timeframe with a plan.

The overall challenge is to develop a safe and sustainable pathway to reopening and to put in place measures that will help us rebuild a robust and competitive industry that is a key driver of economic growth.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

528. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the supports in place for hotels that have more than 50 employees; if there will be a restart grant introduced for hotels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10107/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** My Department has liaised with other Government departments and industry representative bodies, to align the economy wide COVID-19 supports and initiatives with tourism and hospitality needs.

The measures put in place by the Government to support businesses initially focused on supporting those who have lost their jobs and in supporting businesses to remain viable during this difficult time with specifically targeted supports to assist companies to stay operational and retain their staff.

As a result, many tourism businesses are now availing the various cross-sectoral economic supports that the Government has already put in place such as; the wage subsidy scheme, increased unemployment benefits, the state credit guarantee scheme, working capital loan schemes, enterprise support schemes and deferrals of tax liabilities, VAT, social contributions and local authority rates.

Government will continue to explore funding potential for all enterprises including tourism businesses as they work through the challenges facing them, including through any mechanisms allowable through the EU's state aid framework.

Fáilte Ireland has set up a COVID-19 Industry Advisory Group which meets weekly. The purpose of this group is to provide support to the tourism industry and to facilitate the timely sharing of information and insights to help improve the sector's understanding and response to the crisis. Fáilte Ireland has also developed a COVID-19 Business Support Hub which offers a suite of targeted supports for tourism businesses including a series of webinars from experts in each field, as well as advice guides with detailed FAQs and templates where necessary.

To assist tourism businesses reopening in line with the Government's *Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business*, Fáilte Ireland has today [Tuesday 9 June 2020] published guidelines for the tourism sector, prepared in consultation with the tourism industry and relevant authorities. These guidelines are intended to assist tourism businesses meet requirements in line with

the *Return to Work Safely* protocol and based on the latest health advice.

Minister Ross and I have appointed a Tourism Recovery Taskforce to prepare a Tourism Recovery Plan which will include a set of recommendations on how best the Irish tourism sector can adapt and recover in the changed tourism environment as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. The plan will identify priority aims, key enablers and market opportunities for the sector for the period 2020-2023.

It is envisaged that the Taskforce will establish working groups to carry out specific tasks and that the Taskforce will undertake a widespread stakeholder consultation process whereby all sectors and interested parties will have an opportunity to provide constructive inputs and innovative ideas on how this vital sector to our economy can adapt and recover in a meaningful and sustainable way. The Taskforce will report back later this year.

### Travel Trade Sector

529. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to help and compensate those that have paid for holidays that they cannot now take; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10295/20]

569. **Deputy Roderic O’Gorman** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the legal position for customers that booked and paid deposits for foreign holidays through travel agents licensed here in circumstances in which that holiday cannot now be availed of due to Covid-19 restrictions; if there is an obligation on the travel agents to repay deposits in these circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10005/20]

582. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of assistance offered to families that may have booked foreign travel packages for later in the summer period. [10188/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 529, 569 and 582 together.

Consumer protections for holiday-makers who book packages through travel agents and tour operators are enshrined in EU law. EU Directive 2302/2015 on Package Travel requires travel agents and tour operators to provide a full cash refund within 14 days in the event that a package holiday is cancelled, by either the customer or the holiday provider, in the case of unavoidable or extraordinary circumstances such as those related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport have issued the following updated guidance on the right of travellers to terminate package travel into the summer months: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/40f0d7-guidance-on-the-right-of-travellers-to-terminate-package-travel-cont/>

Where customers of travel agents and/or tour operators are not receiving requested refunds, they have recourse to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, the State’s consumer watchdog, for advice.

I am conscious that meeting the refund obligations of the EU Package Travel Directive is putting incredible financial strain on travel agents and tour operators. For that reason, the Government has approved special support measures in the form of a State-guaranteed Refund Credit Note, which can be offered instead of cash refunds in the secure knowledge that their value is underwritten by the State. The idea behind the Refund Credit Note is that the tour

operators/travel agents may offer customers the option of the Note, which can then be used to book a future holiday or redeemed for cash at a later date. Importantly the customer may still opt for a cash refund.

### Proposed Legislation

530. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department is examining or proposing new legislation in the area of the use of scramblers, mopeds and quads in parks and greens. [10301/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** My Department has engaged with other stakeholders, including the Department of Justice and Equality and the Garda Síochána, on the issue of possible legislation to address the problem of scramblers and quads in public parks.

Following from these discussions, my officials are currently exploring a possible approach in the legislation, which could, if agreed, be introduced as an amendment to the forthcoming Road Traffic (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. The passage of primary legislation through the Houses is dependent on the formation of a new Government.

Consideration of the possible approach has inevitably been delayed by the need to focus staff resources on the response to the Covid-19 outbreak.

### Taxi Licences

531. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the exemption will be extended for taxis whose licence runs out after 13 June 2020 when the first extension expires; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9644/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including vehicle licencing arrangements during the present COVID-19 pandemic, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the *Taxi Regulation Act 2013*.

Given the role of the NTA as regulator, I have referred your question to the Authority for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

### Job Losses

532. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on potential job losses in a company (details supplied). [9656/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** My Department has maintained regular contact with key aviation stakeholders, including Aer Lingus, since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. The aviation industry is one of the most affected by the global pandemic. All airlines have seen severe depletion of revenue and are facing various degrees of financial challenge.

The Government has brought forward a series of measures to support all businesses im-

pacted by COVID-19. These include the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme, the Pandemic Unemployment Benefit, and the ISIF Pandemic Stabilisation and Recovery Fund for medium and large enterprises.

I understand that Aer Lingus is engaging with their employees and representative bodies regarding the urgent requirement to reduce costs across its business, given the dramatic decline in demand for travel in the immediate term and the uncertainty regarding future travel demand.

Industrial relations are a matter for the airline and its employees and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has no role in relation to such matters. The industrial relations machinery of the State would be available to assist all parties to reach agreement, should the need arise.

### **Bus Services**

533. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration will be given to extending the bus service in Grenagh, County Cork in view of the fact the service is perceived as inadequate (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9673/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport in Ireland. I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Aviation Industry**

534. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that an airline announced a significant number of redundancies here and across Europe; if he has engaged with the company in respect of the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9678/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** My Department has maintained regular contact with key aviation stakeholders since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. The aviation industry is one of the most affected by the global pandemic. All airlines have seen severe depletion of revenue and are facing various degrees of financial challenge.

The Government has brought forward a series of measures to support all businesses impacted by COVID-19. These include the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme, the Pandemic Unemployment Benefit, and the ISIF Pandemic Stabilisation and Recovery Fund for medium and large enterprises.

Industrial relations are a matter for the airlines and their employees and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has no role in relation to such matters. The industrial relations machinery of the State would be available to assist all parties to reach agreement, should the need arise.

### **Departmental Funding**

535. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the introduction of a turnover-linked direct grant will be considered to assist with liquidity for the tourism and transport sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9686/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** My Department has liaised with other Government departments and industry representative bodies, to align the economy wide COVID-19 supports and initiatives with transport, tourism and hospitality needs.

The measures put in place by the Government to support businesses initially focused on supporting those who have lost their jobs and in supporting businesses to remain viable during this difficult time with specifically targeted supports to assist companies to stay operational and retain their staff.

As a result, many transport and tourism businesses are now availing the various cross-sectoral economic supports that the Government has already put in place such as; the wage subsidy scheme, increased unemployment benefits, the state credit guarantee scheme, working capital loan schemes, enterprise support schemes and deferrals of tax liabilities, VAT, social contributions and local authority rates.

Government will continue to explore potential funding for all enterprises including transport and tourism businesses as they work through the challenges facing them, including through any mechanisms allowable through the EU's state aid framework.

Minister Griffin and I have appointed a Tourism Recovery Taskforce to prepare a Tourism Recovery Plan which will include a set of recommendations on how best the Irish tourism sector can adapt and recover in the changed tourism environment as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. The plan will identify priority aims, key enablers and market opportunities for the sector for the period 2020-2023.

It is envisaged that the Taskforce will establish working groups to carry out specific tasks and that the Taskforce will undertake a widespread stakeholder consultation process whereby all sectors and interested parties will have an opportunity to provide constructive inputs and innovative ideas on how this vital sector to our economy can adapt and recover in a meaningful and sustainable way. The Taskforce will report back later this year.

As regards public transport, the Government has been clear that continued operation of the public transport sector is important and designated public transport as an "essential service" during the Covid-19 emergency, recognising the importance of keeping the system running especially for carrying essential workers and other passengers making necessary journeys throughout the crisis period.

Public transport has served, and will continue to serve, a vital role in transporting essential workers and in supporting the Government's Roadmap in the weeks and months ahead.

While the majority of public transport in Ireland is provided by the publicly-subsided bus and rail services funded through National Transport Authority's (NTA) public service obligation (PSO) programme, the public transport system also includes non-subsided bus services provided on a commercial basis by bus and coach businesses of varying size. I understand that about 90% of the commercial bus operators have suspended their services or are providing significantly reduced services at present.

I understand the very difficult business environment that the commercial bus operators are now dealing with. Indeed, across Government we are acutely aware that the Covid-19 situation presents huge challenges for many business sectors. That is why the Government worked to introduce supports for impacted businesses.

## **Bus Services**

536. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider increasing direct support to scheduled bus services to ensure that social distancing can be properly observed while safeguarding the viability of these operations in the short to medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9689/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Since the beginning of the Covid-19 health emergency, the Government has been clear that continued operation of the public transport sector is important and designated public transport as an “essential service” during the Covid-19 emergency, recognising the importance of keeping the system running especially for carrying essential workers and other passengers making necessary journeys throughout the crisis period.

Public transport has served, and will continue to serve, a vital role in transporting essential workers and in supporting Government’s Roadmap to Reopening Society and Business in the weeks and months ahead.

Public health advices on social distancing are relevant across the public transport sector, and operators are implementing measures to facilitate adequate social distancing measures onboard; this significantly reduces the carrying capacity of public transport services.

While the majority of public transport in Ireland is provided by the publicly-subvented bus and rail services funded through National Transport Authority’s (NTA) public service obligation (PSO) programme, the public transport system also includes non-subvented bus services provided on a commercial basis by bus and coach businesses of varying size. I understand that about 90% of the commercial bus operators have suspended their services or are providing significantly reduced services at present.

From my Department’s engagement with their representatives, and indeed from the NTA’s regular engagement with them throughout the crisis, I understand the very difficult business environment that the commercial bus operators are now dealing with. Indeed, across Government we are acutely aware that the Covid-19 situation presents huge challenges for many business sectors.

That is why we have worked to introduce a wide programme of Government supports for impacted businesses. The range of supports available includes new schemes of wage subsidies, rates waivers, re-start grants, lending facilities, equity injection, and business advisory supports for example.

I am engaging with my colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation about these matters and am raising with her the concerns and situation of the commercial operators. The ‘Return to Work Safely Protocol’ was published by the Minister Humphreys on 9 May 2020 and sets out the steps and processes employers and workers must take to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace. The Protocol is a living document which will evolve with changing Public Health advice.

## **Public Transport**

537. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the establishment of a public transport recovery task force will be considered to be independently chaired and include all key stakeholders and organisations involved in public transport (details

supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9691/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. Ensuring the provision of integrated public transport services (bus, rail, light-rail and taxi) by public and private operators throughout the State is the statutory responsibility of the National Transport Authority.

The Government has been clear that continued operation of the public transport sector is important, and it has been designated among the essential services that are to carry on. I would like to thank operators and staff for their continued dedication to providing this vital service in such challenging times.

Over the course of the COVID-19 crisis, my Department has been working closely with the National Transport Authority (NTA) to ensure public transport services continue and to plan for the provision of enhanced public transport services in line with the Government Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. In this context, the NTA is engaging directly with both PSO and commercial transport operators. In relation to active travel the NTA has offered financial and technical support to all local authorities in order to deliver improved walking and cycling infrastructure across the country. The NTA's technical and financial support will be funded by my Department's sustainable mobility investment programme and will support delivery of measures such as:

- widening of footpaths to facilitate queuing outside shops and enable social distancing
- potential pedestrianisation of some streets where necessary and feasible to accommodate social distancing, particularly where this supports business activities
- potential one-way systems to create space for footpath widening
- altering traffic signal times to reduce pedestrian waiting/crowding plus the automatic activation of some pedestrian phases in order to aid pedestrian movement and to minimise contact with signal push buttons
- providing additional temporary facilities for cyclists
- provision of some external space where appropriate to support business activities

My Department is also engaging directly with PSO and commercial operators to help inform policy decisions in relation to the public transport sector as we progress through the various phases of the Roadmap. My Department is also engaged intensively across Government in relation to progressing relevant issues. In view of these necessary approaches and engagements to address what is already a complex and difficult set of issues, I have no plans, at this time, to establish an additional administrative structure.

### **Bus Services**

538. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the installation of a bus shelter at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9713/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the plan-

ning and development of public transport infrastructure, including the provision of bus shelters.

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

### **Electric Vehicles**

539. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to review the legality of electric scooters and bikes here in view of the fact many are seeking alternative transport during the Covid-19 crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9716/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Road Traffic Act 1961 defines a mechanically propelled vehicle as a vehicle intended or adapted for propulsion by mechanical means, including a bicycle or tricycle with an attachment for propelling it by mechanical power, whether or not the attachment is being used. It also includes a vehicle the means of propulsion of which is electrical, or partly electrical and partly mechanical.

Escooters and powered skateboards fall into this category, and are therefore considered to be mechanically propelled vehicles. Any users of such vehicles in a public place (as defined in the Road Traffic Act 1961) must have insurance, road tax and a driving licence, with penalties under road traffic laws (including fixed charge notices, penalty points, fines and possible seizure of the vehicle) for not being in compliance with these requirements.

As it is currently not possible to tax or insure escooters or electric skateboards, they are not considered suitable for use in a public place.

Electric bicycles are in a different category to eScooters. Where a bicycle has an electric motor attached which may be used as an alternate means of propulsion, the vehicle is defined as a mechanically propelled vehicle under the Road Traffic Acts whether or not the motor is being used. However, under Article 1 (h) of EU Directive 2002/24/EC E-bikes are defined as "cycles with pedal assistance which are equipped with an auxiliary electric motor having a maximum continuous rated power of 0.25 kW, of which the output is progressively reduced and finally cut off as the vehicle reaches a speed of 25 km/h, or sooner, if the cyclist stops pedalling". As bikes of this type require continuous effort on the part of the cyclist, they are considered to be pedal cycles – in other words, the engine is not the means of propulsion, but an aid to the user.

Pedal assisted cycles with a maximum continuous rated power of more than 0.25 kW and E-bikes that can be exclusively propelled by the motor are classified in the Directive as low-performance mopeds, i.e. vehicles with pedals, with an auxiliary engine of power not exceeding 1 kW and a maximum design speed not exceeding 25 km/h. Such vehicles are subject to Road Traffic legislation as outlined above, with the user obliged to have tax, insurance and an appropriate driving licence where the vehicle is to be used in a public place.

In the current context, in several jurisdictions it has been noted that there were significant increases in demand on accident and emergency medical facilities due to the use of other Powered Personal Transporters (PPTs), such as electric scooters. This would not be advisable here given the ongoing demands on our health service due to the Covid 19 pandemic and so any change that may create such additional demands would also have to be subject to consideration from that wider public health viewpoint.

*Question No. 540 answered with Question No. 525.*

## Covid-19 Pandemic

541. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when all public tennis courts will reopen (details supplied). [9725/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Outdoor tennis is among the sports that may be played since the 18th of May, 2020, the commencement of phase one of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. Indoor tennis cannot currently be played.

I have no function in relation to reopening decisions for individual public tennis courts. This is a matter for the owners and operators concerned.

## Road Improvement Schemes

542. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will approve funding for proposals for a low-cost safety scheme at Killard, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9735/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads (RLR) is the statutory responsibility of each local authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the councils' own resources supplemented by State road grants.

My Department sought applications in September 2019 for funding of safety improvement works on regional and local roads to be carried out by local authorities during 2020. The schemes for inclusion in the application are decided by the local authorities. Allocations are made by the Department taking into account the terms applying to the scheme and the available budget for the grant programme.

Cork County Council submitted 24 projects for funding under the Safety Improvement Scheme in 2020 and 24 were approved for funding. A total grant of €900,000 was allocated for these Safety Improvement Schemes on 21st January 2020. My Department did not receive an application for a scheme in Killard.

It is also open to local authorities to fund Safety Improvement Schemes from the Discretionary Grant or from their own resources.

## Motor Tax

543. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review motor tax policy by which the car of a person is outside their parent's house since lockdown and they are 180km away and unable to access the car due to restrictions of non-essential travel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9752/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the current tax status of the vehicle in question has not been indicated, I wish to set out the position in relation to refunds (where a vehicle is currently in tax) and in relation to the making of a declaration of non-use of a vehicle.

In relation to refunds, the legislation which sets out the circumstances for refunds of motor tax provides for a refund in certain limited circumstances, where:

- a vehicle has been scrapped or destroyed;
- a vehicle has been permanently exported;
- a vehicle has been stolen and has not been recovered by the owner;
- a vehicle in respect of which a tax disc has been taken out has not been used in a public place at any time since the issue of the disc;
- the owner of a vehicle has ceased, because of illness, injury or other physical disability, to use the vehicle;
- the owner of a vehicle has ceased, because of absence from the state for business or educational purposes, to use the vehicle; or
- the owner of a vehicle has ceased, because of service overseas with the Defence Forces, to use the vehicle.

In order to obtain a refund, there must also be a minimum of three months remaining on a disc at the time of surrender of the disc to the licensing authority.

I wish to advise that there is a facility in place to declare a vehicle off the road. The Non-Use of Motor Vehicles Act 2013, as amended, provides for a system of declaring vehicles off the road in advance for motor tax purposes. The declaration must be made in the last month of an existing motor tax disc or renewed in the last month of a previously made declaration of non-use. The declaration can be made online or in a motor tax office.

The declaration can be made for any number of calendar months between 3 and 12 months i.e. it cannot be made for a period of 1 or 2 months. If a vehicle is subsequently required to be put back on the road, the declaration can be broken at any time simply by taxing the vehicle.

Where a declaration is not made in advance, arrears of motor tax must be paid in full and motor tax paid for a minimum of 3 months before a declaration of non-use can then be made in the final month of the tax disc.

There are no plans currently to amend the legislation to extend the grounds for the granting of a refund or to amend the provisions for declaring a vehicle off the road.

### **Driver Test**

544. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has spoken with the Minister for Health regarding healthcare workers impacted by the suspension of driver tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9754/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The suspension of services provided by the Road Safety Authority (RSA), including the driving test, has had an inevitable impact on many people. The services are suspended in the interests of public health and safety, which must always be our highest priorities.

During the period of the viral outbreak, the RSA has provided limited tests, on an emergency basis, in the C and D licence categories, that is buses and trucks. The Authority explored the possibility of providing emergency category B - car - driving tests, but found that this would be impossible in light of the current health-based restrictions.

Neither my colleague the Minister for Health nor the Health Services Executive have raised

any issues with me regarding healthcare workers and the suspension of driving tests by the RSA. In the event that such issues were to be identified as of concern to those responsible for the health services, I would of course engage with the responsible authorities. It would have been an inappropriate imposition on the Minister for Health's time - in the midst of the first global pandemic in the history of the State - for me to seek to discuss with him matters which had not been identified as impacting on health services, such as the suspension of a service based on unambiguous health advice.

The RSA is currently working, in consultation with my Department, on plans for the resumption of the range of services and functions for which it is responsible, following the publication of the Government roadmap and, more recently, the National Return to Work Safety Protocol as agreed by employer and trade union representatives.

The resumption of driver testing raises particular problems in terms of compliance with the Protocol and in particular social distancing rules, as it requires the driver tester and the candidate to be within a two metre distance continuously for a period in excess of 20 minutes, in a very confined space which is not in itself a workplace under the control of the RSA.

I appreciate that the inability to carry out driving tests is among the many difficulties that we all are having to endure at this time, for those awaiting such tests. On a very preliminary appraisal of the Protocol, car driving tests may have to be the last of the statutory functions, for which the RSA is responsible, to recommence in or after Phase 5 of the Government's roadmap.

The RSA has always reserved a number of appointments for those needing a driving test urgently, and will continue to do so following the resumption of the testing service.

Dates for the resumption of the RSA's services, and any special arrangements which will need to be put into place to allow for the provision of these services, will be determined in consultation with the relevant health authorities.

The safety of the public is of paramount importance at this time, whether from infection or from deaths and injuries on the road, and in this as in all aspects of the Covid-19 crisis, my Department will be guided by NPHET and national experts.

### **Sports Organisations**

545. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether it is appropriate that an organisation (details supplied) does not operate on an all-island basis. [9766/20]

546. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the 1999 agreement between organisations (details supplied); and his further views on whether in the context of this agreement that an organisation should operate on an all-island basis. [9767/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 545 and 546 together.

The organisation and delivery of sport in Ireland is mainly a matter for the National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs). NGBs, including the one mentioned by the Deputy, are independent, autonomous bodies and are responsible for their own governance procedures and competition rules for their sports.

I understand that the organisation mentioned by the Deputy operates on an all-island basis in relation to the development of the sport and that under the statutes of its international federation the organisation's jurisdiction at international events covers the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland.

I also understand that there is a Memorandum of Understanding in place which reflects the shared goals of the relevant bodies.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

547. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 765 of 27 May 2020, the way in which he plans to address the situation of a front-line health worker unable to reach their place of work by public transport, unable to have a qualified driver with them to accompany them to work and back each day and unable to sit a driver test due to Covid-19 restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9790/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I outlined in my answer, to which the Deputy refers, why it is not safe to allow unqualified drivers to drive unaccompanied. Public safety in all its aspects, including on our roads, has to be the highest priority of any responsible Minister.

I appreciate that this creates difficulties for many people at this time, including some health workers. However, I am not prepared to risk the safety of the learner drivers themselves, or of other road users. To do so would be an irresponsible response to a temporary inconvenience, and I am disappointed that the Deputy would imply that laws intended to keep people on our roads safe might be worked around at the present time.

I would add that the health service is focused on addressing the viral outbreak and increasingly the needs of those whose care was interrupted by the emergency response to COVID19, and it would be doubly irresponsible to burden it with the added pressure of further road casualties.

Individuals facing difficulties in this respect should bring them to the attention of local health service management in the first instance, given their responsibilities in relation staffing and also health and safety. I am confident that they will be able to advise on appropriate safe alternatives. The Deputy will be aware that temporary accommodation can also be made available to healthcare workers where necessary and I understand that, where transport is required, local arrangements may be made and managed at Area Crisis Management Team (ACMT) level. I refer the Deputy to <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/coronavirus/policies-procedures-guidelines/temporary-accommodation-for-healthcare-workers.html>.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

548. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the efforts being made to facilitate the return to work of driving instructors; the timeframe for same; and if he will work with his counterpart in the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure the return to work for the sector is at the same time across the island of Ireland in order to not disenfranchise driving instructors based in Border counties. [9791/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Driving lessons are

provided privately and are not a State service. As a private company, a driving school must ensure that they can comply with the necessary public health requirements before they can reopen their businesses. The National Return to Work Safely Protocol was developed by NPHE in consultation with national experts.

Driver instruction is likely to resume in line with driver testing, however, and I expect a driving school to encounter the same difficulties as the Road Safety Authority (RSA) in terms of complying with the requirements of this Protocol. The resumption of both driver testing and driver instruction raise particular problems in terms of compliance with the Protocol and in particular social distancing rules, as both scenarios require the learner and either the tester or instructor to be within a two metre distance continuously for a period in excess of 20 minutes. To put this in perspective, on a very preliminary appraisal of the Protocol, car driving tests may have to be the last of the statutory functions, for which the RSA is responsible, to recommence in or after Phase 5 of the Government's roadmap.

I understand that any company which reopens is subject to inspection by Health and Safety Authority, and may face serious sanctions, including closure, if found to be not in compliance with Covid-19 requirements.

The Deputy will be aware that driving tests in Northern Ireland operates under UK law. As such, it differs from that in this jurisdiction, and as a consequence so does driving instruction. Approved Driving Instructors are only registered by the Road Safety Authority in respect of Ireland. To that extent, driving instructors would not normally work in both jurisdictions.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Northern Ireland Executive published last month its own Approach to Decision-Making with its own five steps, which may apply at different times across different sectors. I understand that it states that decisions on the future approach to the restrictions are for the Executive to take based on the best analysis of the situation there and internationally. It is anticipated that the approach to be taken as the restrictions are relaxed will continue to be based on common principles across these islands, although there may be times when there are nuanced differences of approach as a result of the circumstances in differing jurisdictions or of the timing of decision-making.

The safety of the public is of paramount importance at this time, whether from infection or from deaths and injuries on the road, and in this as in all aspects of the Covid-19 crisis, my Department will be guided by NPHE and national experts.

### **Driver Test**

549. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeframe for the recommencement of the driver test system nationwide. [9792/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The RSA is currently working, in consultation with my Department, on plans for the resumption of the range of services and functions for which it is responsible, following the publication of the Government roadmap and, more recently, the National Return to Work Safety Protocol as agreed by employer and trade union representatives.

The resumption of driver testing raises particular problems in terms of compliance with the Protocol and in particular social distancing rules, as it requires the driver tester and the candidate to be within a two metre distance continuously for a period in excess of 20 minutes, in a very confined space which is not in itself a workplace under the control of the RSA.

I appreciate that the inability to carry out driving tests is among the many difficulties that we all are having to endure at this time, for those awaiting such tests. On a very preliminary appraisal of the Protocol, car driving tests may have to be the last of the statutory functions, for which the RSA is responsible, to recommence in or after Phase 4 of the Government's roadmap.

The RSA has always reserved a number of appointments for those needing a driving test urgently, and will continue to do so following the resumption of the testing service.

Dates for the resumption of the RSA's services, and any special arrangements which will need to be put into place to allow for the provision of these services, will be determined in consultation with the relevant health authorities.

The safety of the public is of paramount importance at this time, whether from infection or from deaths and injuries on the road, and in this as in all aspects of the Covid-19 crisis, my Department will be guided by NPHE and national experts.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

550. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a policy will be supported to provide more space on roads and footpaths for pedestrians and cyclists in the suburbs of Dublin during the Covid-19 pandemic and in the longer term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9795/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I can advise the Deputy that the National Transport Authority (NTA) is engaging with local authorities to support them in the development of Covid-19 Mobility plans and importantly to also support the local authorities in their delivery of required infrastructure improvements. As we move through the phases of Government's "Roadmap to Reopening Society and Business", improvements introduced under these plans will play an important role in providing additional transport capacity and also facilitating social distancing in urban areas.

I can confirm that the NTA has written to all 31 local authorities to offer its financial and technical support and this support will be funded through my Department's sustainable mobility investment programme.

The NTA envisages a range of measures may be required in our cities and towns, such as:

- Widening of footpaths to facilitate queuing outside shops and enable social distancing;
- Potential pedestrianisation of some streets where necessary and feasible to accommodate social distancing, particularly where this supports business activities;
- Potential one-way systems to create space for footpath widening;
- Altering traffic signal times to reduce pedestrian waiting/crowding plus the automatic activation of some pedestrian phases in order to aid pedestrian movement and to minimise contact with signal push buttons;
- Providing additional temporary facilities for cyclists; and
- Provision of some external space where appropriate to support business activities.

The Deputy will be aware that some local authorities have already put in place improvements to facilitate increased active travel and I expect these improvements will continue in the

coming weeks and months.

In relation to the longer term, my Department is currently undertaking a review of sustainable mobility policy and a public consultation process concluded at the end of February. “Sustainable mobility” refers to both active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport. The longer term impacts of COVID-19 on sustainable mobility policy will be considered within that policy review framework.

### **Road Safety Authority**

551. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons awaiting theory test appointments in each administrative area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9811/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

### **Road Safety Authority**

552. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the policy for the restarting of driver theory tests and driver tests. [9812/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The RSA is currently working, in consultation with my Department, on plans for the resumption of the range of services and functions for which it is responsible, following the publication of the Government roadmap and, more recently, the National Return to Work Safety Protocol as agreed by employer and trade union representatives.

I am pleased to confirm the resumption of driver theory tests since Monday 8 June in line with Phase 2 the Government Roadmap for the easing of Covid 19 restrictions. Further information is available at [www.dtt.ie](http://www.dtt.ie) and on the RSA website [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)

The resumption of driver testing raises particular problems in terms of compliance with the Protocol and in particular social distancing rules, as it requires the driver tester and the candidate to be within a two metre distance continuously for a period in excess of 20 minutes, in a very confined space which is not in itself a workplace under the control of the RSA.

I appreciate that the inability to carry out driving tests at this time is among the many difficulties that we all are having to endure at this time, for those awaiting such tests. On a very preliminary appraisal of the Protocol, car driving tests may have to be the last of the statutory functions, for which the RSA is responsible, to recommence in or after Phase 5 of the Government’s roadmap.

The RSA has always reserved a number of appointments for those needing a driving test urgently, and will continue to do so following the resumption of the testing service.

Dates for the resumption of the RSA’s services, and any special arrangements which will need to be put into place to allow for the provision of these services, will be determined in consultation with the relevant health authorities.

The safety of the public is of paramount importance at this time, whether from infection

or from deaths and injuries on the road, and in this as in all aspects of the Covid-19 crisis, my Department will be guided by NPHET and national experts.

### **National Driver Licensing Service**

553. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when persons will be able to apply again to the NDLS for a learner permit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9826/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The RSA has been working, in consultation with my Department, on plans for the resumption of the range of services and functions for which it is responsible, following the publication of the Government roadmap and, more recently, the National Return to Work Safety Protocol as agreed by employer and trade union representatives.

I am pleased to confirm the phased re-opening of the NDLS service from Monday 8 June in line with Phase 2 of the Government Roadmap for the easing Covid 19 restrictions. Further information is available on the relevant websites [www.ndls.ie](http://www.ndls.ie) and [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)

### **Brexit Issues**

554. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures his Department and agencies under his remit are taking to minimise the impact of Brexit on the transportation of medicines here; the engagement he and or his officials have had on the matter with the European Union; the details of discussions he is having on the matter with ministerial colleagues in the UK Government; the measures he plans to put in place to help protect the transportation and logistics elements of the medicines and pharmaceutical export sector in the event of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9828/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** On the specific issue of the transportation of medicines, this is primarily a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Health. The Department of Health, the HSE and the HPRA have been working closely on mitigating risks to the supply of medicines and medical devices in various scenarios including Brexit and Covid-19. In that regard, I was happy to assist by meeting all the shipping companies in October 2019 and putting in place with them an arrangement that the transportation of key time-sensitive medicines and medical items as required by the HSE in a Brexit context would be prioritised by them. I had this arrangement extended by my Department in consultation with the shipping companies to cover the Covid-19 situation in March 2020.

Regardless of the outcome of the current EU –UK negotiations, the end of the UK’s transition period, currently due on 31 December 2020, will see the UK no longer applying the rules of the EU’s Single Market and Customs Union. This will bring substantial challenges for supply chains and trade flows and will require checks and controls in both directions on EU-UK trade. These additional requirements are expected to have an impact on the UK landbridge which is a strategically important route to market for many sectors including for medicines and medical supplies.

In relation to the UK landbridge, my Department and the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO) have had ongoing liaisons with the ferry companies in planning for the implications of Brexit last year and earlier this year. The ferry companies were confident that they could respond to increased capacity demands on direct services to continental EU ports should

the demand arise. This was of considerable assurance to my Department at that time.

COVID 19 has delivered an unprecedented shock to the whole of the Irish economy and to the shipping sector with a significant decline in passenger numbers travelling by sea. Freight has also been affected with substantial declines on some routes. My Department has been working through various channels to assist ports and shipping companies to keep the supply chains operating during this crisis. In particular, the Department has prioritised the issues of maritime connectivity at all stages to assist shipping with a range of practical supports. I am confident that these measures will support these vital transportation services during COVID 19 leaving the industry well placed to provide sufficient freight and passenger capacity, including for the medicines and pharmaceutical export sector, when the UK's transitional period ends.

### **Departmental Correspondence**

**555. Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if correspondence from a person (details supplied) in relation to the bus and coach sector here will receive a response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9857/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Since the beginning of the Covid-19 health emergency, the Government has been clear that continued operation of the public transport sector is important and designated public transport as an “essential service” during the Covid-19 emergency, recognising the importance of keeping the system running especially for carrying essential workers and other passengers making necessary journeys throughout the crisis period.

The introduction of restrictions on public movement and the temporary closure of many workplaces, education centres and leisure and social activities across the country has led to an unprecedented fall in demand for public transport. Nonetheless, public transport has served, and will continue to serve, a vital role in transporting essential workers and in supporting Government's Roadmap to Reopening Society and Business in the weeks and months ahead.

Public health advices on social distancing are relevant across the public transport sector, and operators are implementing measures to facilitate adequate social distancing measures on-board; this significantly reduces the carrying capacity of public transport services.

While the majority of public transport in Ireland is provided by the publicly-subvented bus and rail services funded through National Transport Authority's (NTA) public service obligation (PSO) programme, the public transport system also includes non-subvented bus services provided on a commercial basis by bus and coach businesses of varying size. I understand that about 90% of the commercial bus operators have suspended their services or are providing significantly reduced services at present.

From my Department's engagement with their representatives, and indeed from the NTA's regular engagement with them throughout the crisis, I understand the very difficult business environment that the commercial bus operators are now dealing with. Indeed, across Government we are acutely aware that the Covid-19 situation presents huge challenges for many business sectors.

That is why we have worked to introduce a wide programme of Government supports for impacted businesses. The range of supports available includes new schemes of wage subsidies, rates waivers, re-start grants, lending facilities, equity injection, and business advisory supports for example. I am engaging with my colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation about these matters and am raising with her the concerns and situation of the commercial

operators.

Officials in my Department continue to engage with the Coach Tourism & Transport Council of Ireland on a regular basis. Furthermore, a reply has issued directly to the Coach Tourism & Transport Council of Ireland in respect of the correspondence referred to by the Deputy.

### **National Car Test**

556. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for the reopening of national car test centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9880/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The safety of the public is of paramount importance at this time and as in all aspects of the Covid-19 crisis my Department continues to be guided by National Public Health Emergency Team and the relevant national experts in relation to the resumption of services.

I am pleased to confirm the phased re-opening of National Car Testing (NCT) centres from Monday 8 June in line with Phase 2 of the Government Roadmap for easing Covid 19 restrictions and the National Return to Work Safely Protocol published by Government, as agreed by employers and workers.

Initially, centres will open on a limited basis and testing will be by appointment only. Further information is available on the relevant websites [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie) and [www.ncts.ie](http://www.ncts.ie).

### **Marine Casualty Investigations Board**

557. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the mechanism that exists to ensure that in circumstances in which the Marine Casualty Investigation Board makes a recommendation, they are implemented by either him or his Department as appropriate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9887/20]

558. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if, in circumstances in which the safety recommendations of a Marine Casualty Investigation Board report suggest remedial action to be taken by a private party, the mechanisms which exist to ensure that same are implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9888/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 557 and 558 together.

Maritime Safety is a key priority for the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS).

The Marine Casualty Investigation Board (MCIB) was established on 5 June 2002 under section 7(1) of the Merchant Shipping (Investigation of Marine Casualties) Act, 2000 (the "Act"). It is an independent statutory body, funded through the Vote of the DTTAS.

The function of the MCIB, per section 7 of the Act, is to carry out investigations and publish reports into marine casualties that take place in connection with the operation of a vessel in Irish waters or involve Irish registered vessels anywhere in the world.

The purpose of the MCIB's investigations is to establish the cause or causes of a marine ca-

sualty with a view to making recommendations for the avoidance of similar marine casualties. It is not the purpose of an investigation to attribute blame or fault, per Section 25(2) of the Act.

All investigations of casualties are carried out by the MCIB's panel of external investigators. The panel consists of personnel holding technical qualifications as naval architects, marine engineers or deck officers. The panel reflects broad based maritime competence and experience which are of relevance in undertaking independent investigations.

Safety investigations are conducted with the sole objective of preventing marine incidents in the future and they are not designed to determine liability or to apportion blame. Where appropriate the MCIB suggests safety recommendations (i.e. proposals for remedial actions to prevent future marine casualties and incidents). These recommendations may be directed to my Department or to any other parties that might be best placed to implement such measures (e.g. a Port or Harbour Authority, a vessel owner or ship management company, etc.).

Some safety recommendations lend themselves to early implementation upon consultation with the Marine Survey Office, which is based in my Department and has primary responsibility for the regulation and enforcement of the maritime safety sector, including ship and port security. For example, my Department may issue Marine Notices in order to bring particular safety information or advice to the attention of the maritime sector and the wider sea-going public. In other cases, recommendations are complex and require detailed assessment, consultation with interested parties and, in some instances, the introduction of new or amending legislation.

Other safety recommendations may also suggest amendments to DTTAS safety publications, such as the Code of Practice for Fishing Vessels less than 15 metres in length overall, the Code of Practice for the Safe Operation of Recreational Craft or implementation of an action under the Maritime Safety Strategy. Such recommendations are recorded in my Department and the amendments are taken under consideration by officials for inclusion during the next revision of the documents.

Additionally, my Department maintains a database of MCIB Reports, the safety recommendations contained in those reports and any follow up required.

Finally, where the MCIB makes a safety recommendation to a private party, it is a matter for that entity to review the recommendation(s) and take the necessary follow up actions.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

559. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects restrictions on airlines providing services for passengers that are to commence regular non-essential work here will be lifted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9895/20]

570. **Deputy Roderic O'Gorman** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the assessment he has made of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control guidelines on flight safety during the Covid-19 outbreak; the applicability of same in assessing the appropriateness of generalised quarantine measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10006/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 559 and 570 together.

The Department of Health, as the lead Government Department in relation to Ireland's response to the COVID 19 pandemic, established the National Public Health Emergency Team

(NPHET) on 27 January 2020, chaired by the Chief Medical Officer. The NPHET oversees and provides national direction on the development and implementation of the strategy to contain COVID-19 in Ireland and the measures to protect public health. The Department of Health is responsible for the development of the policy proposal concerning possible restriction measures, following the recently implemented passenger location card requirement for the voluntary self-isolation of incoming travellers to Ireland.

At present, airports are following public health measures as advised, such as, social distancing, disinfection procedures, passenger announcements and airport notices on hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Guidance has also been provided concerning alternative measures for aviation security screening of passengers which ensure that both health safety and aviation security standards are maintained during this time.

On 20 May the European Union Aviation Safety Agency and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control jointly published guidance on measures to assure the health safety of air travellers and aviation personnel once airlines resume regular flight schedules. My Department, through the National Facilitation Committee is coordinating the implementation of these measures by industry, aimed at promoting health safety and virus control throughout the aviation journey, with due regard to the maintenance of aviation safety and security standards. I expect that a National Code of Practice in this regard will be finalised in the coming weeks.

The European guidance for safe passenger management in air transport represents merely one element within a broader EU proposal for a common approach to future lifting of border restrictions published by the European Commission on the 13 May 2020, which is subject to the epidemiological circumstances and the response of the Public Health Authorities in each individual Member State.

### **Public Transport**

560. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the budgeted spend in each of the next three years to make public transport wheelchair accessible including vehicles, stations and so on. [9897/20]

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

Under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network.

Accessibility features, such as wheelchair access and audio/visual aids, are built into all new public transport infrastructure from the design stage. Newer systems such as LUAS are fully accessible.

However, there are legacy issues in relation to older infrastructure and facilities, for example our Victorian era railway stations. To address these infrastructural legacy issues, my Department funds the Accessibility Retro-fit Programme which is managed by the NTA. The four year capital envelope for public transport announced in Budget 2018 includes a multi-annual allocation of almost €28m for the Accessibility Retro-fit Programme for the period 2018 to 2021. The allocations for 2020 and 2021 are €7 million and €9.8 million respectively. The €28 million in funding is a trebling of the previous allocation for accessibility under the Capital Plan.

This funding facilitates the continued roll-out of the programmes to progressively make public transport accessible, including the installation of accessible bus stops, the upgrading of train stations to make them accessible to wheelchair users and the provision of grant support for the introduction of more wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) into the taxi fleet.

I would also like to advise the Deputy that the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027, sets out the national vision and ambition for the delivery of key infrastructure over the lifetime of the Plan, including in relation to public transport infrastructure. Investment in public transport will be accelerated under the NDP to support the development of an integrated and sustainable national public transport system. A number of key new major public transport programmes are due to be delivered under the NDP over the period to 2027.

As I explained above, these programmes, as with all new and recently developed public transport projects, will be fully accessible as part of the normal design. There will also be a continued investment programme under the NDP to fund the retro-fitting of older public transport facilities to enhance accessibility.

### **National Car Test**

561. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if national car test centres will open again on 12 June 2020; the position regarding vehicles requiring a taxi vehicle licence test in the subsequent days after 12 June 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9918/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The safety of the public is of paramount importance at this time and as in all aspects of the Covid-19 crisis my Department continues to be guided by National Public Health Emergency Team and the relevant national experts in relation to the resumption of services.

I am pleased to confirm a phased re-opening of NCT centres commencing on Monday 8 June in line with Phase 2 of the Government roadmap for easing Covid 19 restrictions. Initially, testing will be by appointment only. Further information is available at [www.ncts.ie](http://www.ncts.ie) and [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)

The operation of the National Car Test (NCT) service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, I have therefore referred the question regarding small public service vehicle testing to the Authority for direct reply.

I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

### **Sports Capital Programme**

562. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a sports capital grant will be reviewed and released (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9935/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the primary vehicle for Government support for the development of sports and physical recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment throughout the country.

The organisation referred to by the Deputy applied for a grant under the 2017 round of the SCP but the application was deemed invalid. Along with other invalid 2017 applicants, the organisation was given a chance to submit corrected documentation under the 2018 round of the SCP. On foot of this corrected application, a provisional allocation was made to the organisation in January 2019 and formal approval issued on 26 May, 2020.

It is a long standing condition of the SCP that grants cannot be provided for work that is either completed or partially completed prior to the issuing of a provisional allocation. This condition is highlighted at all stages of the process.

The organisation recently submitted documentation to receive the funding allocated but this material related to work undertaken prior to the date of provisional allocation. My Department has been in contact with the organisation to reiterate that payment cannot be made on foot of this as it would be contrary to the terms and conditions of the SCP.

While the grant allocation is still available to the organisation, it can only be used for work that accords with the terms and conditions of the SCP and was undertaken after the date of provisional allocation. My Department is happy to engage with the organisation to agree a possible “change of purpose” to the original grant and it is recommended that the organisation contacts the Sports Capital Programme Division in this regard.

### **Shannon Airport Facilities**

563. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the activities that have been underway at Shannon Airport during the course of the lockdown; the airlines that have been using the facility during the lockdown; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9958/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I would like to thank the Deputy for her question in relation to Shannon Airport. I am aware that Covid-19 has led to significant challenges for Shannon Airport which has been severely impacted by the imposition of travel restrictions and the cancellation of flights. Despite these challenges the airport remains open with restricted hours to facilitate cargo operations, essential passenger travel, emergency flights, reparations and diversions. I understand that the Irish Coast Guard Search and Rescue helicopter based in Shannon Airport is unaffected by the restricted hours. Indeed I would like to acknowledge and thank the Airport for its commitment to keeping the airport open and for keeping passengers and staff safe during this difficult time.

However, in relation to what airlines are using the Airport, this is an operational matter for Shannon Airport Authority which has statutory responsibility for the management, operation and development of Shannon Airport. In these circumstances I have forwarded your question to Shannon Airport Authority for direct reply. If the Deputy does not receive a reply from the Company within ten working days, please advise my Private Office.

### **National Car Test**

564. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons awaiting the national car test since the closure of centres; the location of those waiting by county in tabular form; and his plans for the resumption of the national car test. [9964/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The safety of the public is of paramount importance at this time and as in all aspects of the Covid-19 crisis my Department continues to be guided by National Public Health Emergency Team and the relevant national experts in relation to the resumption of services.

I am pleased to confirm the phased re-opening on NCT centres from Monday 8 June in line with Phase 2 of the of the Government roadmap for easing Covid 19 restrictions and the national return to work safety protocol. Further information is availalbe at [www.ncts.ie](http://www.ncts.ie) and [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)

The operation of the National Car Test service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, I have therefore referred the question regarding individual test statistics to the Authority for direct reply.

I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

### **National Car Test**

565. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will open temporary national car test and driver test centres to deal with waiting lists in relation to both matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9967/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The safety of the public is of paramount importance at this time and as in all aspects of the Covid-19 crisis my Department continues to be guided by National Public Health Emergency Team and the relevant national experts in relation to the resumption of services.

I am pleased to confirm the phased re-opening of the National Car Test centres from Monday 8 June, in line with Phase 2 of the Government roadmap for the easing of Covid 19 restrictions and the national return to work safety protocol. Further information is availalbe at [www.ncts.ie](http://www.ncts.ie) and [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)

A date for the resumption of driver testing services is currently being examined. However, the resumption of driver tests raises particular difficulties due to the need to have two people in close proximity in a confined space, for a considerable periond of time. I anticipate for this reason that the driving test may be one of the last of the RSA services to resume, most likely in Phase 5 of the Government roadmap.

### **Cycle to Work Scheme**

566. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by his Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9991/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Cycle To Work Scheme provides for purchase of a bicycle/associated safety accessories to be exempt from income tax, the benefit-in-kind arising from the provision of a bicycle/bicycle safety equipment by an employer to an employee or director, where the bicycle/associated safety equipment is used by the employee or director mainly for qualifying journeys (i.e. travelling to and from work or between work places).

The Scheme is administered by the National Shared Services Office (NSSO) in respect of employees in my Department. Employees can only make one claim every 5 years. The Department pays the upfront cost of the bicycle/associated safety accessories up to a maximum value of €1,000. Employees must source the bicycle/associated safety accessories from an approved supplier. The employee repays the value (up to €1,000) through a salary deduction over a maximum 12 month period. No costs arise to the Department from the Scheme as it is essentially a tax exemption scheme and the up-front cost is recouped through salary deductions.

The Department has requested a report from the NSSO on the number of employees who have availed of the Scheme and will provide the information to the Deputy when it is made available.

### **State Bodies**

567. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the vacancies on the board of the Shannon Foynes Port Company; if these have been advertised to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9994/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** There is currently one vacancy on the Board of Shannon Foynes Port Company.

Officials from my Department are engaging with both Shannon Foynes Port Company and the Public Appointments Service in preparing the relevant information booklet necessary for advertising this vacancy. Once this is finalised the vacancy will be advertised by the the Public Appointments Service on [www.stateboards.ie](http://www.stateboards.ie).

### **Travel Trade Sector**

568. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if airlines will be instructed to refund families their tickets already bought for travel ahead of the pandemic in which families cannot travel even if the flight is operating. [9997/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As things stand in law, air passenger rights are protected by Regulation (EC) No. 261/2004, which covers the rights of passenger in instances of cancellations and other scenarios, including long delays. However, if a flight goes ahead and a customer either cancels or does not use their ticket, they are not entitled to a refund under EU law. I understand, however, that the current practice of the two main Irish airlines serving the Irish market in instances where flights are not cancelled, and having regard to the Covid-19 travel restrictions, is to offer their customers the opportunity to rebook a flight for later in the year or to receive a voucher. In some instances airlines are waiving charges on rebooking and offering additional incentives such as extra value on vouchers.

Clearly the existing consumer protections and legal obligations on airlines and the broader travel sector did not envisage the current circumstances of mass cancellations and stringent travel restrictions across the globe. That has, not surprisingly, put the entire system under immense pressure and it is causing real difficulties for people and businesses.

I am mindful that the options put forward by airlines may not be fair or workable for customers in all instances, and it is something that I have raised directly with the two main Irish airlines. I have asked that they take a fresh look at their current offerings to customers, that they bring more clarity to the messaging around entitlements and information on refund timeframes,

and that they show discretion in favour of customers whose circumstances clearly make it unreasonable to expect them to travel, even if flights go. In looking to the future recovery, seeking ways to rebuild consumer confidence will be integral to initiating and indeed sustaining any future recovery for all parts of the aviation sector including the airlines.

*Question No. 569 answered with Question No. 529.*

*Question No. 570 answered with Question No. 559.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

571. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the requirement for passengers flying here to quarantine for two weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10030/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Measures to protect public health are recommended by the National Emergency Public Health Team (NPHE) within the Department of Health, and my Department and its agencies follow their advice.

The Department of Health is the lead Government Department in relation to public health matters, including COVID-19 and also in relation to the request for passengers arriving in Ireland to self-isolate for 14 days.

While the measures adopted have had a significant impact on aviation movements, the Government's priority in response to the COVID crisis has been to save lives.

### **Public Service Obligation Services**

572. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the annual amount of subsidy paid to operators on PSO routes in each of the years 2017 to 2019 and to date in 2020; if he has projections of funding for 2021 to 2023, in tabular form; the breakdown by year, amount, route and operator; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10031/20]

573. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of funding provided to CIÉ, Irish Rail and Dublin Bus in the past five years to date in 2020; the expected amount of funding he plans to provide for the remaining months of 2020 and 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10032/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 572 and 573 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport in Ireland. The Exchequer allocates funding for the purposes of both capital and current expenditure from the Department's Vote to the National Transport Authority (NTA) for allocation to the transport operators for the provision of public transport services and infrastructure. In Budget 2020, I secured an overall allocation of €1 billion to fund public and sustainable transport projects this year.

Since 2010, the award of Public Service Obligation (PSO) funding falls under the independent statutory remit of the NTA. The allocations to the companies are decided by the NTA in exercise of its statutory mandate and in accordance with the various contract arrangements that

it has in place with PSO service providers.

It should be noted that the sharp decline in passenger numbers since mid-March this year as a result of the Covid-19 health emergency has caused an unprecedented fall in fare revenues, thus creating a wide gap between the operators' costs and actual revenues. This is putting acute pressure on the existing Public Service Obligation (PSO) budget. However, it is clear that public transport is an essential service and that it is an important facilitator of the Government's *Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business*. Therefore, I have been clear that we will ensure that this year's PSO is appropriately funded. To that end, my Department is working closely with the NTA to quantify the additional funding requirements for the coming months, and we had very positive engagement across Government about the matter.

In relation to the Deputy's query about the allocation for PSO public transport services for future years, that will be subject to the annual Budgetary process and therefore the allocations for 2021 and beyond are yet to be determined in the context of future Estimates processes.

In relation to infrastructure, as the Deputy is aware, the *Infrastructure Manager Multi-Annual Contract* (or IMMAC) provides the funding framework for the maintenance and renewal of our railway infrastructure and is a statutory contractual agreement between the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and Iarnród Éireann. The IMMAC allocations for 2020 and 2021 are €199.7m. and €202.5m. respectively, and the provisions for the past 5 years are set out in the following table.

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
€144m	€134m *	€159m	€160m	€197m

\*included extra €8m for storm damage under IMMAC.

Separately, Exchequer capital funding is also provided to Iarnród Éireann, Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann through the NTA. This programme supports projects such as the continued planning and design of the DART Expansion Programme, the City Centre (rail) Resignalling Project, the replacement of the roof at Pearse Station, the development of the new National Train Control Centre, bus fleet purchases and various other enhancement projects. This funding programme is managed by the NTA,

In view of the above I have referred the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please inform my private office if you do you receive a reply within 10 days.

### Driver Test

574. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to deal with the backlog of driver tests; and when instructors will resume lessons. [10036/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Dates for the resumption of Road Safety Authority (RSA) services, and any special arrangements which will need to be put into place to allow for the provision of these services, will be determined having regard to the guidance of the relevant public health authorities.

The RSA, in planning to reopen driver testing services, will consider all factors, including the backlog of people waiting for tests. I should emphasise that the reopening of the driving test will involve particular difficulties in complying with health guidelines. I therefore anticipate that the driving test will not resume until phase 4 of the Government's Roadmap for reopening the country.

Driving instruction is a private business and not a State service. It will be a matter for driving instructors to examine how they can operate in compliance with public health guidelines. As workplaces, they may be subject to inspection by the Health and Safety Authority.

### **Tourism Industry**

575. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if an organisation (details supplied) was considered for membership of the Tourism Recovery Task Force in view of its international experience which may prove beneficial. [10037/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Tourism Recovery Taskforce was established by Minister of State Brendan Griffin and I on 20 May 2020. The purpose of the Taskforce is to prepare a Tourism Recovery Plan which will include a set of recommendations on how best the Irish tourism sector can adapt and recover in the changed tourism environment as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. The plan will identify priority aims, key enablers and market opportunities for the sector for the period 2020-2023. The Taskforce may consult with stakeholders to inform its deliberations and will report back later this year.

The Taskforce is made up of an independent chairperson and 13 other members from a broad spectrum of backgrounds including tourism policy, tourism enterprise, international, private and public service. The Minister of State and I selected members on the basis of each person's capacity to bring his/her personal knowledge, skills, experience, competence, capability, strategic leadership and ideas to the work of the group. We have appointed individuals who, together, will work for the good of Irish Tourism as a whole. I can assure the Deputy that in the same manner that no sector was deliberately included, no sector was deliberately excluded.

It is envisaged that the Taskforce will establish working groups to carry out specific tasks and that the Taskforce will undertake a widespread stakeholder consultation process whereby all sectors and interested parties will have an opportunity to provide constructive inputs and innovative ideas on how this vital sector to our economy can adapt and recover in a meaningful and sustainable way. The Car Rental Council of Ireland will have an opportunity to contribute to the work of the Taskforce in this way.

### **Taxi Regulations**

576. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when protective plastic screens will become mandatory for taxis. [10120/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) sector, including vehicle standards for SPSVs, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have, therefore, forwarded your correspondence to the Authority for consideration and direct reply. Please advise this office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

### **Memoranda of Understanding**

577. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a memorandum of understanding signed between the Port of Cork and a company (details

supplied) to develop Cork LNG specifically; if the memorandum is still operating; if his Department has had communication from the Port of Cork on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10128/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** At the outset, I wish to point out that this is a commercial operational matter for the Port of Cork Company.

I understand from the Port of Cork Company that they signed a Memorandum of Understanding with NextDecade in 2017 to attract new LNG business into Ireland from the USA. Next Decade is a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) development company which is focused on LNG export projects.

Next Decade propose to import LNG through a FSRU (Floating Storage and Regasification Unit) which acts as a floating storage LNG terminal which will be moored permanently in the harbour. A new FRSU will most likely be commissioned and built for this purpose.

Next Decade and the POCC have had preliminary meetings with the relevant Departments and stakeholders. They have met with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) and Gas Networks Ireland (GNI). DCCAE and GNI indicated they are supportive of the project which will feed gas into the national pipeline located beside the proposed site of the new facility. This would give security of gas supply nationally into the long term and in the context of Brexit.

It is also planned that the FRSU facility would be able to provide an LNG refuelling and bunkering facility for ships at the Port of Cork, which would meet the requirement under the EC Alternative Fuels Directive for TEN-T ports. This facility would also be able to provide competitive bunkering to all Irish ports.

A feasibility study is currently being undertaken by Next Decade on where the vessel should be moored and environmental and regulatory matters are being examined. The site chosen will most likely be near the Whitegate refinery, with Bord Gais and the ESB facilities already located in the port. The development will be subject to all the normal planning requirements and compliance with all necessary consents. The proposed project falls under the remit of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

I understand that the project has not progressed at the pace the Port of Cork Company originally envisaged. One of the factors for the delay is the worldwide economic climate and in particular the drop in oil prices internationally. The Port of Cork Company advise that the project remains at a very preliminary stage and the Memorandum of Understanding expires at the end of this year.

### **Driver Test**

578. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects driver tests to resume; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10171/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The RSA is currently working, in consultation with my Department, on plans for the resumption of the range of services and functions for which it is responsible, following the publication of the Government roadmap and, more recently, the National Return to Work Safety Protocol as agreed by employer and trade union representatives.

The driving test raises particular difficulties, given the need for two people to be in close

proximity, in a confined space, for a significant period of time. For this reason, I expect the driving test to be the last of the RSA's services to reopen, and I anticipate that this will be in phase 4 of the Government's Roadmap for reopening the country.

Dates for the resumption of the RSA's services, and any special arrangements which will need to be put into place to allow for the provision of these services, will be determined in consultation with the relevant health authorities.

The safety of the public is of paramount importance at this time, whether from infection or from deaths and injuries on the road, and in this as in all aspects of the Covid-19 crisis, my Department will be guided by NPHET and national experts.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

579. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a bespoke support scheme will be provided for private bus and coach operators affected by the Covid-19 lockdown; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10172/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Since the beginning of the Covid-19 health emergency, the Government has been clear that continued operation of the public transport sector is important and designated public transport as an "essential service" during the Covid-19 emergency, recognising the importance of keeping the system running especially for carrying essential workers and other passengers making necessary journeys throughout the crisis period.

The introduction of restrictions on public movement and the temporary closure of many workplaces, education centres and leisure and social activities across the country has led to an unprecedented fall in demand for public transport. Nonetheless, public transport has served, and will continue to serve, a vital role in transporting essential workers and in supporting Government's Roadmap to Reopening Society and Business in the weeks and months ahead.

Public health advices on social distancing are relevant across the public transport sector, and operators are implementing measures to facilitate adequate social distancing measures on-board; this significantly reduces the carrying capacity of public transport services.

While the majority of public transport in Ireland is provided by the publicly-subvented bus and rail services funded through National Transport Authority's (NTA) public service obligation (PSO) programme, the public transport system also includes non-subvented bus services provided on a commercial basis by bus and coach businesses of varying size. I understand that about 90% of the commercial bus operators have suspended their services or are providing significantly reduced services at present.

From my Department's engagement with their representatives, and indeed from the NTA's regular engagement with them throughout the crisis, I understand the very difficult business environment that the commercial bus operators are now dealing with. Indeed, across Government we are acutely aware that the Covid-19 situation presents huge challenges for many business sectors.

That is why we have worked to introduce a wide programme of Government supports for impacted businesses. The range of supports available includes new schemes of wage subsidies, rates waivers, re-start grants, lending facilities, equity injection, and business advisory supports for example. I am engaging with my colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation about these matters and am raising with her the concerns and situation of the commercial

operators.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

580. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he is taking to address the impact of Covid-19 on the bus and coach sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10174/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Since the beginning of the Covid-19 health emergency, the Government has been clear that continued operation of the public transport sector is important and designated public transport as an “essential service” during the Covid-19 emergency, recognising the importance of keeping the system running especially for carrying essential workers and other passengers making necessary journeys throughout the crisis period.

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### **Sports Organisations**

581. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the steps he is taking to ensure that an organisation (details supplied) and its clubs are sustainable. [10187/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I am acutely aware

of the difficulties and challenges facing sporting organisations and clubs, including the League of Ireland. A COVID-19 Sports Monitoring Group, chaired at Ministerial level, has been established to engage directly with the sporting bodies. Four meetings of this Group have been held to date. The Football Association of Ireland has participated in all of these meetings. A further meeting is planned for today, the 9th of June. Sport Ireland is also directly engaging with the sporting bodies on an ongoing basis in relation to the development of protocols to facilitate a safe return to training and competition.

This extensive engagement with the sport sector has highlighted the significant, adverse impact of COVID-19 and the importance of implementing an appropriate and focused response to the challenges facing all strands of the sector, ranging from the local sporting organisations and clubs to the National Governing Bodies and national leagues and competitions such as those involving League of Ireland clubs. It is accordingly intended to develop a Sport Recovery Action Plan, in consultation with the sector, aimed at minimising the impacts and preparing the sector to restart activity, as part of the national recovery and renewal.

I was pleased to see the resumption of training by four League of Ireland clubs yesterday following the Government's decision last Friday to permit a limited return to training for elite athletes and teams. I understand it has been very difficult for all the players and coaching staff since the League of Ireland fixtures were suspended on 12 March. I am hopeful that we will see a return to competitive matches behind closed doors next month followed by the full resumption of the 2020 season later in the year.

*Question No. 582 answered with Question No. 529.*

### **Departmental Reports**

583. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he plans to publish the report on the western rail corridor from Athenry to Claremorris prepared by a company (details supplied); the reason for the delay in publishing the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10203/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy is aware, *Project Ireland 2040* committed to conducting an independent review toward evaluating a possible extension of the existing Western Rail Corridor northwards to Tuam (Phase 2) and/or Claremorris (Phase 3). *Project Ireland 2040* also states that if Government accepts a proposal to extend the route then that extension will be prioritised over the lifetime of the National Development Plan.

In line with this commitment, Iarnród Éireann commissioned a financial and economic appraisal of the proposal and, in late 2019, submitted a copy of that appraisal to my Department. As was signalled publicly at the time of the commissioning of the appraisal, and, as is required under the *Public Spending Code* (PSC), my Department is reviewing the documentation that has been received and is engaging with Iarnród Éireann and the consultants as required during this review.

Once that review is complete, the matter will then be brought to Government for its decision.

As the Deputy can see from the above, there has been no substantive delay to this process as first outlined in *Project Ireland 2040* and as is required under the Public Spending Code. While there have been some unanticipated external factors in recent months, such as the dissolution of the 32nd Dáil in January and the outbreak of the COVID-19 Emergency, I can assure

the Deputy that work is ongoing in order to finalise the review and bring the matter to Government.

### **Tourism Industry**

584. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the Tourism Recovery Task Force will issue its report and recommendations; when a package will be announced to assist this sector of the economy; the number of members on the task force representing the industry itself; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10207/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Tourism Recovery Taskforce was established by Minister of State Brendan Griffin and I on 20 May 2020. The Taskforce have met twice already and plan to meet again on 10 June. The purpose of the Taskforce is to prepare a Tourism Recovery Plan which will include a set of recommendations on how best the Irish tourism sector can adapt and recover in the changed tourism environment as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. The plan will identify priority aims, key enablers and market opportunities for the sector for the period 2020-2023. The Taskforce may consult with stakeholders to inform its deliberations and will report back later this year. Notwithstanding this, I am aware that the Taskforce has already made some suggestions for the re-opening of tourism and, along with my colleagues in Government, I have taken note of these and will consider any other interim recommendations as appropriate.

The Taskforce is made up of an independent chairperson and 13 other members from a broad spectrum of backgrounds including tourism policy, tourism enterprise, international, private and public service. The Minister of State and I selected members on the basis of each person's capacity to bring his/her personal knowledge, skills, experience, competence, capability, strategic leadership and ideas to the work of the group. We have appointed individuals who, together, will work for the good of Irish Tourism as a whole. The full list of membership is available on my Department's website.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

585. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the supports he plans for the restaurant sector, including reduced VAT, business interruption grants and so on in order to ensure the survival of the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10212/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** My Department has liaised with other Government departments and industry representative bodies, to align the economy wide COVID-19 supports and initiatives with tourism and hospitality needs.

The measures put in place by the Government to support businesses initially focused on supporting those who have lost their jobs and in supporting businesses to remain viable during this difficult time with specifically targeted supports to assist companies to stay operational and retain their staff.

As a result, many tourism businesses are now availing the various cross-sectoral economic supports that the Government has already put in place such as: the wage subsidy scheme, increased unemployment benefits, the state credit guarantee scheme, working capital loan schemes, enterprise support schemes and deferrals of tax liabilities, VAT, social contributions

and local authority rates.

Government will continue to explore funding potential for all enterprises including tourism businesses as they work through the challenges facing them, including through any mechanisms allowable through the EU's state aid framework.

Fáilte Ireland has set up a COVID-19 Industry Advisory Group which meets weekly. The purpose of this group is to provide support to the tourism industry and to facilitate the timely sharing of information and insights to help improve the sector's understanding and response to the crisis. Fáilte Ireland has also developed a COVID-19 Business Support Hub which offers a suite of targeted supports for tourism businesses including a series of webinars from experts in each field, as well as advice guides with detailed FAQs and templates where necessary.

In line with the sequence of actions detailed in the Government's *Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business*, restaurants are due to reopen for the provision of on-premises food and beverages in Phase 3. To assist tourism businesses meet requirements in line with the national *Return to Work Safely* protocol and based on the latest health advice, Fáilte Ireland has today [Tuesday 9 June 2020] published guidelines for the tourism sector. These guidelines, which were prepared in consultation with the tourism industry and relevant authorities, include practical guidance for specific tourism business sectors, including restaurants operating under the conditions outlined in the additional details supplied by the Deputy.

Minister Ross and I have appointed a Tourism Recovery Taskforce to prepare a Tourism Recovery Plan which will include a set of recommendations on how best the Irish tourism sector can adapt and recover in the changed tourism environment as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. The plan will identify priority aims, key enablers and market opportunities for the sector for the period 2020-2023.

It is envisaged that the Taskforce will establish working groups to carry out specific tasks and that the Taskforce will undertake a widespread stakeholder consultation process whereby all sectors and interested parties will have an opportunity to provide constructive inputs and innovative ideas on how this vital sector to our economy can adapt and recover in a meaningful and sustainable way. The Taskforce will report back later this year.

### **Departmental Projects**

586. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the projects his Department submitted for funding through the Connecting Europe Facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10225/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) is the EU's funding instrument for the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). Funding under CEF is delivered in the form of grants awarded following competitive calls for proposals. The amount of co-funding awarded varies depending on the criteria for each call, the type of project and the quality of applications. All applications will be assessed and evaluated by the European Commission in conjunction with independent external experts.

The most recent call for proposals was open for applications between 16 October 2019 and 26 February 2020. The call had an indicative budget of €1.4 billion, with €750 million available under the general financial envelope, which was open to all Member States. The balance of €650 million was only open to Member States eligible for Cohesion Fund support, which does not include Ireland.

- The call had various budget lines dedicated to the following funding priorities:
- Pre-identified projects on the Core Network;
- European Rail Traffic Management Systems (ERTMS): on-board deployment;
- Safe and secure infrastructure, including safe and secure parking on the road core network;
- Intelligent Transport Services for road (ITS);
- Single European Sky (SESAR);
- Actions implementing transport infrastructure in nodes of the core network, including urban nodes (passengers transport); and
- Motorways of the Sea.

There were 9 projects in total either submitted by or involving participating Irish applicants, all of which were endorsed and signed off by my Department.

3 of the applications under this call, relating to the rail sector, and details of which are set out below, were submitted directly by my Department. Two of these were prepared in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann.

1. DART Expansion Programme: Kildare Line Study My Department is seeking 50% CEF co-funding for an engineering design study as part of the DART Expansion Programme. This study concerns the development of the Kildare Line, one of seven Work Packages in the Programme, and consists of crucial steps necessary in advance of moving to the construction phase of this project.

2. Upgrade of the DART Passenger Information System A separate application concerns the upgrading of the Passenger Information System on the existing DART fleet. This upgrade is necessary in order to ensure that the latest technology, which will be part of all newly procured DART rolling stock, is experienced by passengers across the entire DART fleet. As this is classified under CEF as a works project, my Department is seeking the maximum co-funding rate available of 30%.

3. Higher Speed Rail Study The final application submitted by my Department, a rail study project seeking 50% co-funding, addresses a commitment in the National Development Plan to undertake an evaluation of the economic benefits of high-speed rail between Dublin-Belfast, Dublin-Limerick Junction, and Dublin-Cork against the improvements to existing line speeds. The purpose of this study is to develop a design concept for the inter-urban railway network over the period to 2040 that can inform future investment in infrastructure, railway operations and planning.

Aside from those submitted directly by my Department, a further 3 projects were submitted by Ireland's three core TEN-T maritime ports: Dublin, Cork, and Shannon-Foynes, while a further 2 projects involve the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO) and are study projects involving multiple Member States addressing alternative fuels, energy and technology funding objectives the Motorways of the Sea priority.

In addition to this, a number of Irish aviation bodies are involved, in an administrative capacity only, in a CEF application for funding under the EU'S SESAR (Single European Sky Air Traffic Management Research) collaborative project.

The selection decision of successful projects is expected to be finalised in July 2020. Based

on the quality of proposals made I am confident and hopeful that Irish applicants will draw down significant funds from this call. However, the oversubscription rate for funding under the general envelope of this call was approximately 2.4 : 1, highlighting the competitive nature of this funding opportunity.

Over the period 2014 to June 2019, Irish beneficiaries were participating in 24 projects involving €103 million in CEF Transport co-funding, and with overall investments in these projects of €403.7 million. My Department continues to actively encourage and engage with any potential CEF applicants to ensure a strong pipeline of Irish applications for future CEF funding opportunities. Further information about CEF, TEN-T and the application process are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/331b18-trans-european-network-for-transport-ten-t-and-connecting-europe-fac/>

### **Public Transport**

587. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the locations of wheelchair accessible and non-wheelchair accessible bus stops within County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10226/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure, including the provision of bus stops and shelters.

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

### **Tourism Promotion**

588. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has had conversations with Coillte regarding extending its recently announced makeover project in view of the benefit of such lands to attract and promote tourism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10291/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** I understand that the Deputy is referring to the recent announcement by Coillte that it will be embarking on a transformative "makeover" project involving nine of its forests in the Dublin mountains, which I understand is due to see these forests transition from commercial use to wholly-recreational purposes. This initiative should deliver multiple, wide-ranging benefits – including for nature, biodiversity, sport/recreation and health – which would also be attractive to visiting tourists.

Investigating, developing and promoting tourism experiences relating to our natural heritage and outdoor offering are operational matters for Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly, I have asked Fáilte Ireland to reply directly to the Deputy regarding its views on this specific initiative, including any related conversations with Coillte. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

## **National Driver Licensing Service**

589. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter regarding driver tests and the reopening of the NDLS (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10312/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The RSA is currently working, in consultation with my Department, on plans for the resumption of the range of services and functions for which it is responsible, following the publication of the Government roadmap and, more recently, the National Return to Work Safety Protocol as agreed by employer and trade union representatives.

I am pleased to confirm the phased re-opening of the NDLS service as part of Phase 2 under the Government Roadmap, from Monday 8 June. Further information is available on the relevant websites [www.ndls.ie](http://www.ndls.ie) and [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)

The resumption of driving tests raises particular difficulties, due to the need to have two people in close proximity and in a confined space for a significant period of time. I anticipate for this reason that the driving test will be the last of the RSA's services to reopen, most likely in phase 4 of the Government's Roadmap.

Further dates for the resumption of the RSA's services, and any special arrangements which will need to be put into place to allow for the provision of these services, will be determined in consultation with the relevant health authorities.

The safety of the public is of paramount importance at this time, whether from infection or from deaths and injuries on the road, and in this as in all aspects of the Covid-19 crisis, my Department will be guided by NPHEA and national experts.

## **Driver Licences**

590. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a person (details supplied) who recently returned from abroad will be assisted in obtaining a driver licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10344/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I am pleased to confirm the phased re-opening of the National Driver Licence Service centres from Monday 8 June, in line with Phase 2 of the Government roadmap for the easing of Covid 19 restrictions and the national return to work safety protocol.

The operation of the National Driver Licence Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. Further information is available at [www.ndls.ie](http://www.ndls.ie) and [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie) on how to arrange an appointment to apply for a driving licence renewal.

## **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

591. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he plans to publish guidelines for the tourism and hotelier sector; the supports being put in place specifically; when they will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10369/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Bren-**

**dan Griffin):** To assist tourism businesses reopening in line with the Government's *Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business*, Fáilte Ireland has today [Tuesday 9 June 2020] published guidelines for the tourism sector, prepared in consultation with the tourism industry and relevant authorities. These guidelines are intended to assist tourism businesses meet requirements in line with the *Return to Work Safely* protocol and based on the latest health advice.

With regard to the supports in place for the tourism and hospitality sector, my Department has liaised with other Government departments and industry representative bodies, to align the economy wide COVID-19 supports and initiatives with tourism and hospitality needs.

The measures put in place by the Government to support businesses initially focused on supporting those who have lost their jobs and in supporting businesses to remain viable during this difficult time with specifically targeted supports to assist companies to stay operational and retain their staff.

As a result, many tourism businesses are now availing the various cross-sectoral economic supports that the Government has already put in place such as; the wage subsidy scheme, increased unemployment benefits, the state credit guarantee scheme, working capital loan schemes, enterprise support schemes and deferrals of tax liabilities, VAT, social contributions and local authority rates.

Government will continue to explore funding potential for all enterprises including tourism businesses as they work through the challenges facing them, including through any mechanisms allowable through the EU's state aid framework.

Fáilte Ireland has set up a COVID-19 Industry Advisory Group which meets weekly. The purpose of this group is to provide support to the tourism industry and to facilitate the timely sharing of information and insights to help improve the sector's understanding and response to the crisis. Fáilte Ireland has also developed a COVID-19 Business Support Hub which offers a suite of targeted supports for tourism businesses including a series of webinars from experts in each field, as well as advice guides with detailed FAQs and templates where necessary.

Minister Ross and I have appointed a Tourism Recovery Taskforce to prepare a Tourism Recovery Plan which will include a set of recommendations on how best the Irish tourism sector can adapt and recover in the changed tourism environment as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. The plan will identify priority aims, key enablers and market opportunities for the sector for the period 2020-2023.

It is envisaged that the Taskforce will establish working groups to carry out specific tasks and that the Taskforce will undertake a widespread stakeholder consultation process whereby all sectors and interested parties will have an opportunity to provide constructive inputs and innovative ideas on how this vital sector to our economy can adapt and recover in a meaningful and sustainable way. The Taskforce will report back later this year.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

592. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the outcome of discussions he has had with representatives of the tourism and hospitality sector; the support programmes that will be put in place to assist the sector through the difficulties that have arisen due to the Covid-19 crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10408/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** Minister Ross and I have appointed a Tourism Recovery Taskforce to prepare

a Tourism Recovery Plan which will include a set of recommendations on how best the Irish tourism sector can adapt and recover in the changed tourism environment as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. The plan will identify priority aims, key enablers and market opportunities for the sector for the period 2020-2023.

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My Department has liaised with other Government departments and industry representative bodies, to align the economy wide COVID-19 supports and initiatives with tourism and hospitality needs. The measures put in place by the Government to support businesses initially focused on supporting those who have lost their jobs and in supporting businesses to remain viable during this difficult time with specifically targeted supports to assist companies to stay operational and retain their staff.

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Government will continue to explore funding potential for all enterprises including tourism businesses as they work through the challenges facing them, including through any mechanisms allowable through the EU's state aid framework.

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To assist tourism businesses reopening in line with the Government's *Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business*, Fáilte Ireland has today [Tuesday 9 June 2020] published guidelines for the tourism sector, prepared in consultation with the tourism industry and relevant authorities. These guidelines are intended to assist tourism businesses meet requirements in line with the *Return to Work Safely* protocol and based on the latest health advice.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

**593. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider recommendations (details supplied) to support taxi drivers that have lost income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10427/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including vehicle licencing arrangements during the present COVID-19 pandemic, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the *Taxi Regulation Act 2013*.

Given the role of the NTA as regulator, I have referred your question to the Authority for

direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

### **Taxi Licences**

594. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans in relation to licence renewal for taxi drivers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10428/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including vehicle licencing arrangements during the present COVID-19 pandemic, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the *Taxi Regulation Act 2013*.

Given the role of the NTA as regulator, I have referred your question to the Authority for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

### **Road Projects**

595. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the N25 Waterford to Glenmore scheme project; the Exchequer and EU funding allocated to the project; the total project cost; the time frame for each phase envisaged under the project from appraisal, design and construction stage; if funding is being drawn down under the EU TEN-T; and the changes in environmental legislation, design standards and requirements under the Public Spending Code that resulted in new route corridor options being developed for the project. [10430/20]

**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. Once funding arrangements have been put in place with TransportInfrastructure Ireland (TII), under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for TII in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. TII is, therefore, responsible for the distribution of funds under the Capital Programme for the implementation of the national roads programme in accordance with Project Ireland 2040, within the framework of the National Development Plan (NDP). Consequently, TII is best placed to advise on the current status and funding in respect of this scheme.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII to provide you with the information requested. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **National Driver Licensing Service**

596. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when NDLS centres nationwide are due to reopen to the public under the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10438/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The safety of the public is of paramount importance at this time and as in all aspects of the Covid-19 crisis my De-

partment continues to be guided by National Public Health Emergency Team and the relevant national experts in relation to the resumption of services.

I am pleased to confirm the phased re-opening of the National Driver Licence Service centres from Monday 8 June, in line with Phase 2 of the Government roadmap for the easing of Covid 19 restrictions and the national return to work safety protocol.

The operation of the National Driver Licence Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. Further information is available at [www.ndls.ie](http://www.ndls.ie) and [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

597. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the supports being made available by his Department to private bus and coach companies negatively affected by the Covid-19 crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10444/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Since the beginning of the Covid-19 health emergency, the Government has been clear that continued operation of the public transport sector is important and designated public transport as an “essential service” during the Covid-19 emergency, recognising the importance of keeping the system running especially for carrying essential workers and other passengers making necessary journeys throughout the crisis period.

The introduction of restrictions on public movement and the temporary closure of many workplaces, education centres and leisure and social activities across the country has led to an unprecedented fall in demand for public transport. Nonetheless, public transport has served, and will continue to serve, a vital role in transporting essential workers and in supporting Government’s Roadmap to Reopening Society and Business in the weeks and months ahead.

Public health advices on social distancing are relevant across the public transport sector, and operators are implementing measures to facilitate adequate social distancing measures on-board; this significantly reduces the carrying capacity of public transport services.

While the majority of public transport in Ireland is provided by the publicly-subvented bus and rail services funded through National Transport Authority’s (NTA) public service obligation (PSO) programme, the public transport system also includes non-subvented bus services provided on a commercial basis by bus and coach businesses of varying size. I understand that about 90% of the commercial bus operators have suspended their services or are providing significantly reduced services at present.

From my Department’s engagement with their representatives, and indeed from the NTA’s regular engagement with them throughout the crisis, I understand the very difficult business environment that the commercial bus operators are now dealing with. Indeed, across Government we are acutely aware that the Covid-19 situation presents huge challenges for many business sectors.

That is why we have worked to introduce a wide programme of Government supports for impacted businesses. The range of supports available includes new schemes of wage subsidies, rates waivers, re-start grants, lending facilities, equity injection, and business advisory supports for example. I am engaging with my colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation about these matters and am raising with her the concerns and situation of the commercial operators.

## **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

598. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures he is considering to support the bus and coach sector to ensure the survival of the industry in a post-Covid-19 environment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10450/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Since the beginning of the Covid-19 health emergency, the Government has been clear that continued operation of the public transport sector is important and designated public transport as an “essential service” during the Covid-19 emergency, recognising the importance of keeping the system running especially for carrying essential workers and other passengers making necessary journeys throughout the crisis period.

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## **Youth Services**

599. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if potential schemes are being examined to support local youth involvement in social and community affairs in view of the fact that students may not be able to source seasonal summer jobs due to Covid-19. [9659/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department’s Youth Affairs Unit provides funding to support youth groups and clubs around the coun-

try, the vast majority of which will continue to operate during the summer months to provide services to young people. In the present difficult circumstances, I have consistently made my position clear that this funding is both necessary and essential, and I am pleased that it has been maintained. I secured €61.79 million in current funding for my Department's youth funding, an increase of €1.4 million on 2019.

In addition, officials from my Department have been working with representatives from the youth sector to develop sector specific guidance consistent with the Government Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. This *Youth Sector Guidance for Youth Organisations on Resuming Full Services after COVID-19* was published on 2nd June 2020 and will support funded youth organisations to safely plan for the provision of youth services during the summer period and beyond.

My officials are in regular contact with national youth organisations and the Education and Training Boards in relation to impacts and responses to the current crisis. I applaud the many youth services that are delivering essential work in their communities and that have innovated and adapted to find new and different ways of engaging young persons.

Some organisations now find themselves in financial difficulty due to the ongoing crisis. My colleague the Minister for Rural and Community Development put in place a stability fund using Dormant Accounts funding. This comprises €35 million for a Covid-19 Stability Fund and €5 million as a commitment to a Philanthropy Fund, 'Innovate Together', to focus on projects that provide innovative and adaptive solutions to existing and emerging challenges. Applications to this scheme recently closed and are currently being assessed.

### Early Childhood Care and Education

600. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to introduce changes to the ECCE scheme to provide all year round funding for those involved in the provision of ECCE services rather than the 183 days funding as at present similar to that for teachers and other persons engaged in the education sector, particularly to ensure the viability of providing such services after the Covid-19 pandemic; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10204/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme is a universal programme available to all children within the eligible age range. It provides children with their first formal experience of early learning prior to commencing primary school. The programme is provided for three hours per day, five days per week over 38 weeks per year and the programme year runs from September to June.

While the ECCE Programme runs in parallel with the school year ECCE providers are private businesses or community organisations. My Department is not the employer of early years service providers or their staff and there are no plans to provide all year round funding to these services.

In addition to the 38 weeks funding provided by my Department in 2017 I introduced Programme Support Payments (PSPs). These payments recognise the additional time required of providers to complete the administrative work associated with DCYA-funded early learning and care and school age childcare programmes. The payment also recognises the time required to perform activities outside of contact time with children, such as preparing materials for early learning and care sessions and assisting parents.

ECCE providers who apply for PSP before the June 12 closing date will be paid equal to 7 days' (1.4 weeks') registrations at standard capitation.

### Childcare Services

601. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to recoup the 15% sustainability only being paid to childcare and early years providers. [9664/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented situation that has required a series of emergency responses from the Government.

I am acutely aware of the particular impact the pandemic and the emergency measures have had on childcare providers. I am also very conscious of the importance of childcare sector, particularly in the context of the current conditions and with a view to supporting the economy as we move beyond this crisis.

Recognising this, the Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme (TWSCS) was launched on April 15th.

The aim of the TWSCS is threefold:

- to support the sustainability of the Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare Sector so that it is in a position to reopen after COVID-19;

- to provide parents with a reassurance that they are not required to pay fees during this COVID-19 crisis, while providing them with reassurance that they will maintain places for their children;

- and to give Early Learning and Care Educators security and retain these vital Educators in the sector.

To achieve this, the Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme provides funding towards a portion of staff wages and services' overhead costs. Details of how to sign up have been made available through the Pobal programme platform used by childcare providers.

My Department recognises the importance of robust oversight of Exchequer funding. This includes ensuring that funds provided under the TWSCS are used for purposes intended: to meet employee pay costs in conjunction with the Revenue operated Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme and to meet ongoing overhead costs. Where the funding provided is not used for these purposes, it may be appropriate to recoup. Extensive information on the use of this funding has been provided to the sector, so that it can be used to meet services' costs effectively. My Department will take a reasonable and supportive approach to assessing the use of funding provided to services in this difficult time.

The TWSCS builds on the wider provisions by Government and also recognises the unique place and importance of the childcare sector. Further supports and funding are available from my Department including the Programme Support Payment, which will be paid to eligible services in June. Services may also be eligible for the Restart Grant for Small Business, administered by Local Authorities, and for other supports from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

I would also note there are supports available to improve the sustainability of services dur-

ing normal times, and these remain available to services which may still be facing regular challenges on top of the difficulties imposed by the pandemic.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

602. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that for many childminders reopening will not be feasible or sustainable if they can only provide care to parents that are essential workers; and if she has considered extending financial supports to these childminders. [9868/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Roadmap for the Reopening of Society and Business proposes that the reopening of crèches, childminders and preschools in a phased manner will begin in Phase 3, which is currently scheduled to begin on 29 June. On 29 May, in line with the Roadmap, I announced that in Phase 3 childminders will be allowed to work in their own homes. I also announced which children would be eligible to resume full or part-time childcare services from 29 June, both with childminders and in centre-based services. Whilst initially the Government Roadmap had indicated that services would resume only for the children of essential workers, this has now been widened.

The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) guidance developed by their Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control Division (AMRIC) on 'Infection Prevention and Control guidance for settings providing childcare during the COVID-19 Pandemic' was agreed by NPHE's Expert Advisory Group and has been published on the HPSC website and on my Department's website. The public health guidance will allow childminders to operate without any significant reductions in capacity. Working in collaboration with Childminding Ireland (the national childminding body funded by my Department), my Department will be publishing guidance specific to childminders in the coming days, based on the HPSC public health advice.

As services reopen, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs will keep the operation of the guidance under close review and take appropriate updated action as required.

I will be announcing the details of financial supports for early learning and care and school-age childcare providers, including childminders, in the coming days.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

603. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the expenditure of her Department on the overhead payment to childcare providers following the closure of crèches due to Covid-19 in tabular form. [9870/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented situation that has required a series of emergency responses from the Government.

I launched the Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme (TWSCS) on 15 April. The TWSCS provides substantial funding towards staff wages, and provides for a portion of services' non-deferrable overhead costs.

As of the 5th June 2020 TWSCS subsidies had been calculated in respect of 1,607 organisations, and totalled €23.3m. Of this, €10.4m related to the overhead contribution.

I note that 3,884 providers have signed a TWSCS funding agreement to-date. As of 5th

June 2020 a total of €49.3m has been disbursed under all elements of this scheme. This overall expenditure figure includes TWSCS pre-payments that were made to providers for an initial period following the launch of the scheme, until the information necessary to process overhead and employee-based payments had been collected. It is not possible to extrapolate the amount of these pre-payments that pertained specifically to the overhead contribution.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

604. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if additional funding will be provided to childminders and-or centre-based childcare settings to purchase additional PPE materials. [9871/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I will be announcing the details of financial supports for early learning and care and school-age childcare providers, including childminders, in the coming days.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

605. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she is seeking for childcare providers and staff to be deemed as essential workers in order that they can plan and prepare for the reopening of services on 29 June 2020; if she has raised this issue with her Ministerial colleagues; when she expects childcare workers to be included on the essential workers list; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9898/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** On 27th May, my Department contacted all early learning and care and school-age childcare service providers to inform them that both the Department of An Taoiseach and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs recognise and accept that essential preparations by service providers and their staff will include the necessity to travel to and enter childcare facilities in order to make the facilities ready for operation, and that this work may commence immediately at the discretion of providers.

Travel to and entering of childcare facilities for the preparations to reopen is considered essential work which will be a key part of the steps to achieve a phased reopening of the sector from 29 June.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

606. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans for services which normally open for term time once the 12 week wage support scheme ends; the way in which such services will be funded and supported; if staff will instead be placed on jobseeker's allowance or benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9899/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department is prioritising the actions necessary for the reopening of childcare services on 29 June and I am actively engaging with key stakeholders in the sector in this regard.

Every year 60% of early learning and care and school age childcare services close for the summer. This represents approximately 2500 of the 4500 services that exist.

Officials from my Department are currently finalising plans for a funding model to support the approximately 2000 services that normally open in July and August to do so. I will be making an announcement on the details of the funding shortly.

With regard to the Deputy's query on whether the staff of services which normally close during the summer months can continue on the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme or should transfer onto job seekers allowance and other State benefits, this query should be to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

As stated above, I hope to be making an announcement soon re a funding model for services opening on 29 June, and this will also include some supports for services opening in September. My Department will use the coming weeks to inform a more detailed plan for September onwards. My overall objective remains to retain necessary capacity in the system for when the ECCE ( free preschool) programme resumes in late August / September, and parental demand increases as economic recovery takes place.

### **Childcare Services**

607. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans for essential workers that do not use a centre-based setting and do not have access to a childminder on 29 June 2020; if such essential workers will be temporarily allowed use a crèche they previously had not used for the course of phase 3 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9900/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** On Friday 1 May the Government released its Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, which sets out Ireland's plan for lifting COVID-19 restrictions. The re-opening of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare (ELC and SAC) services will be guided by this framework and will be underpinned by the Return to Work Safely Protocol, expert advice, available evidence and consultation with ELC and SAC stakeholder representatives. Childminders may also resume caring for children in the childminder's home from 29 June.

The Roadmap proposes that the reopening of crèches, childminders and preschools in a phased manner will begin in Phase 3, which is currently scheduled to begin on 29 June. On 29 May, I announced which children would be eligible to resume full or part-time childcare services from 29 June. Whilst initially the Government Roadmap had indicated that services would resume only for the children of essential workers, this has now been widened.

It is important to note that, as these are private businesses, the allocation of places within the widened eligibility criteria is a matter for the individual service provider. My Department is providing guidance to help support providers in managing allocation of places when services reopen.

In the best interests of the child and parents, children should, as far as possible, be enabled to return to the childcare service they attended Pre-Covid19. It is also a contractual requirement of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme that services should retain places for children who used them pre-Covid 19.

If a service has additional capacity they may register new families who have not previously used the setting, either on a long-term or a short-term basis depending on the service's capacity.

Subject to local capacity, from 29 June services are encouraged to also support:

- children of health and social care workers, other frontline workers, childcare practitioners and parents who need access to childcare in order to return to work;

- vulnerable children sponsored under the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) (for example, children whose families are homeless and Tusla referrals) and children funded through legacy childcare schemes who are experiencing poverty, disadvantage or child welfare issues; and

- children with disabilities who previously attended part or full-time early learning and care, including those preparing to start school in September.

Service providers and parents are encouraged to make early contact with each other so that the level of demand and supply for places from 29 June can be known.

Childminders and nannies have been able to continue working in the homes of essential workers throughout the pandemic period. From 29 June, childminders will also be able to return to working in the childminder's home. There are an estimated 15,000 childminders.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

608. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the advice she has received from NPHE in relation to social distancing in centre-based settings; if NPHE has suggested that reduced capacity will be a requirement for services to reopen; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9901/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** On Friday 1 May, the Government released its Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, which sets out Ireland's plan for lifting COVID-19 restrictions. The re-opening of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare (ELC and SAC) services will be guided by this framework and will be underpinned by the Government's Return to Work Safely Protocol, expert advice, available evidence and consultation with ELC and SAC stakeholder representatives and providers themselves.

Expert guidance on the safe reopening of childcare services during the COVID-19 pandemic, approved by the Expert Advisory Group of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), was published by the HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) on Friday, 29 May. The guidance recommends use of a "play pod" model which restricts interactions between closed groups of children and adults as an alternative to social distancing, on the basis that social distancing is not possible between young children. Based on advice provided by the HPSC I do not propose to change Regulations in relation to either the adult-child ratios or the floor-space requirements for ELC or SAC services as such changes are unnecessary where "play pods" are in use.

Services are now being asked to apply the guidance to their setting and determine what capacity they may offer. It is expected that a significant amount of capacity will be available in individual services that reopen in the summer, subject to, for example, their space, room layout and staffing availability. Whilst there are 4,500 Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare services in the country, fewer than 2,000 of these normally remain open in July and August.

### **Cycle to Work Scheme**

609. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the

number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by her Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9977/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Cycle-to-Work scheme was launched by the Government in 2009 to encourage the use of bicycles to travel to and from work. The scheme allows for a civil or public service employer to incur the expense of providing an officer with a bicycle and bicycle safety equipment up to a limit of €1,000, without the officer being liable for benefit-in-kind taxation. Under a salary sacrifice arrangement, a staff member agrees to forego or sacrifice part of salary every pay period (weekly/ fortnightly), in order to cover the cost of the bike and equipment provided. The salary sacrifice arrangement must be completed within a maximum period of twelve months. The tax exemption can only be availed of once in any five year period.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department was established in 2011. The Cycle-to-Work scheme has operated there since 2013 and the information requested is provided as follows:

Year	No. of applications	Cost
2013	2	€1,999.00
2014	5	€3,842.99
2015	8	€5,520.69
2016	7	€6,341.51
2017	4	€3,403.95
2018	10	€8,075.03
2019	7	€5,293.00
2020	5	€4,924.48
Total	48	€39,400.65

### Covid-19 Pandemic

610. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to commit to a clear set of guidelines which will allow the childcare sector to return to work safely and as soon as possible. [10047/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** On Friday 1 May, the Government released its Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, which sets out Ireland’s plan for lifting COVID-19 restrictions. The re-opening of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare (ELC and SAC) services will be guided by this framework and will be underpinned by the Government’s Return to Work Safely Protocol, expert advice, available evidence and consultation with ELC and SAC stakeholder representatives and providers themselves.

In line with the Roadmap, ELC and SAC services are currently scheduled to reopen from 29 June.

Expert guidance on the safe reopening of childcare services during the COVID-19 pandemic was published by the HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) on Friday, 29 May. The guidance recommends use of a “play pod” model which restricts interactions between closed groups of children and adults as an alternative to social distancing, on the basis that social distancing is not possible between young children.

On Friday 5th June, I launched a range of online resources and guidance to support service

providers, practitioners and parents to prepare for the reopening of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare settings, including childminders. The Guidance for Reopening webpage is available on the First 5 website. This webpage will be updated over the coming weeks with more resources and practice examples.

### **Childcare Services**

611. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the criteria to become a member of the advisory group established for the childcare sector. [10046/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department and I are engaging extensively with stakeholders in the Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age (SAC) sector.

Consultation with stakeholders has always been central to the work of my Department, and the Early Years Forum (EY Forum) is a key part of this. The EY Forum meets several times a year and includes representatives of providers, parents and academics with an interest in the ELC and SAC sector. I established the 'EY Forum Plus' in March 2020 to widen representation by the sector, to aid my Department in developing a response to Covid-19. This group has met on a number of occasions over the past three months.

I recently established an Advisory Group and a Reference Group on the phased re-opening of ELC and SAC services on 29 June 2020. The Advisory Group had its first meeting on 13 May and has met 4 times since. A separate Reference Group representing other stakeholders had its first meeting on 28 May.

In establishing the Advisory Group on the phased reopening of the Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare sector, I provided six places for sectoral representatives, to be filled by members of the Forum Plus group. The sector itself decided on the nominees and these include representatives from the Association of Childhood Professionals, PLÉ, Seas Suas, Early Childhood Ireland, the National Childhood Network and the National Community Forum.

I added Childminding Ireland and SIPTU as members of the group, as they represent key parts of the early years sector not included in the list above, i.e. childcare staff and childminders. Pobal and Tusla are also members of the Advisory Group. I chair the meetings of the group and we have met on five occasions since 13 May 2020.

A number of additional provider representative groups contacted my Department seeking to be added to the membership of the Advisory Group. In response to such requests, I established a Reference Group, to supplement the work of the Advisory Group. The Reference Group includes representatives from the Federation of Early Childhood, the Association of Full-time Day Care Providers, St Nicholas Montessori and a number of service providers. I chaired the first meeting of the Reference Group on 28 May.

### **Departmental Funding**

612. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the continuity of funding for the access and inclusion model will be confirmed. [10049/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Access and Inclusion Model remains a significant policy initiative of my Department and since the launch of the scheme in 2016, over 12,500 children in over 3,300 services nationally have benefited

directly from targeted supports.

For the 2020 budget process, I succeeded in securing a further €10 million in funding for AIM supports bringing the total AIM budget to €43 million for 2020.

Following the closure of creches and pre-schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic, existing funding schemes including ECCE and AIM were paused. In addition to a range of financial supports that are available for businesses across the economy, I introduced the Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme to support early learning and care and school-age childcare settings to remain viable and continue to pay staff wages with a view to retaining their workforce and allowing for as smooth a transition as possible when reopening services from June 29th .

The ECCE programme, which the Access and Inclusion Model supports, will recommence from the end of August. Detailed planning for the reopening of ECCE and AIM will be finalised in the coming weeks. In the interim, early learning and care providers have already been invited to submit applications for AIM supports for the 2020-21 programme year, to enable supports to be available with the least possible delay when the ECCE scheme recommences.

### **Departmental Correspondence**

613. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if correspondence from Gaisce regarding a person (details supplied) has been considered; and if she will reject the recommendation to terminate employment and insist on a fair and just outcome. [10064/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I wish to advise the Deputy that as this matter is currently under review in accordance with Article 34 of the Articles of Association of Gaisce it would not be appropriate for me to comment at this time.

### **Youth Services**

614. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans for UBU youth service projects to ensure projects will not face funding cuts in 2021. [10079/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** While it would be my wish that funding for the youth sector will be maintained, if not increased, in future years, this is a matter for consideration by the incoming Government in the context of the annual Estimates process for 2021.

In respect of this year, and the present circumstances, I have said that the funding provided to youth services across the country is both necessary and essential, and funding levels have been maintained on that basis.

Officials from my Department have been working with representatives from funded youth organisations to develop sector-specific guidance for the resumption of services in light of Covid 19. This guidance was published on 2 June 2020.

### **Childcare Services**

615. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the measures she is taking to address the significant shortfall in childcare spaces in Maynooth, Celbridge and Kilcock, County Kildare. [10080/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Each year Pobal conducts research on behalf of my Department to examine a number of factors related to early learning and care and school age childcare services in Ireland, including the monitoring of capacity. The Early Years Sector Profile report for the 2018/2019 programme year, provides my Department with valuable information including issues of capacity. The report indicates that existing childcare provision nationally broadly meets current needs in terms of capacity, whilst recognising that small pockets of under supply exist within this.

Early learning and care and school age childcare providers (both community and private) operating in the Maynooth, Celbridge and Kilcock areas completed the survey which informs the sector profile. From their responses at the time of the survey there were 1,642 children enrolled, with 87 vacant places and 190 on the waiting lists to be reconciled. Pobal cautions that its data on waiting lists cannot by itself be used to inform capacity decisions as parents often place their children on more than one waiting list.

Under First 5, and also in preparation for planned investment under the National Development Plan, my Department will be undertaking research to consider in detail the capacity needs of each area across the country.

I recognise that capacity constraints remain in some areas and my Department is actively seeking to further increase capacity through a range of measures including opening up regulation and funding schemes to paid, non-relative childminders.

Finally, if the Deputy is aware of any specific cases of parents having difficulty accessing childcare places, they could make contact with their local City or County Childcare Committee who will be pleased to assist them.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

616. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated full year cost of recruiting 40 extra full-time educational welfare officer posts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10227/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) has statutory responsibility under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 for ensuring all children attend school regularly. Educational Welfare Officers (EWO's) work with families and children to overcome barriers to their school attendance, participation and retention.

TESS has advised the estimate cost of recruiting 40 extra full-time Educational Welfare Officers (EWO) for TESS would be in the region of €2,763,964.00. The overall cost may vary depending on what point of the Educational Welfare Officer salary scale each individual EWO starts on.

In recognition of the need for a strong policy platform for the services delivered by TESS, my Department established a Task Group to support the further development and integration of these services. The work of this group is near completion and a clear blueprint for the development of the three strands of the TESS, including the statutory Educational Welfare Service (EWS) is expected to be finalised shortly.

### **Early Years Sector**

617. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will address a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied) regarding the early years supports at present; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10267/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented situation that has required a series of emergency responses from the Government.

I am acutely aware of the particular impact the pandemic and the emergency measures have had on childcare providers. I am also very conscious of the importance of childcare sector, particularly in the context of the current conditions and with a view to supporting the economy as we move beyond this crisis.

Recognising this, I launched the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSCS) on 15 April. The aim of the TWSCS is threefold:

- to support the sustainability of the Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare Sector so that it is in a position to reopen after COVID-19;

- to provide parents with a reassurance that they are not required to pay fees during this COVID-19 crisis, while providing them with reassurance that they will maintain places for their children;

- and to give Early Learning and Care Educators security and retain these vital Educators in the sector.

To achieve this, the Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme provides funding towards a portion of staff wages and services' ongoing overhead costs for the period of the scheme.

My Department recognises the importance of robust oversight of Exchequer funding and ensuring that it is spent on the purposes it was intended for, and information has been provided to the sector on the appropriate use of this funding. My Department also recognises the need to be supportive of providers; hence, payments made by beneficiaries using the overhead funding within four weeks of the end of the scheme may also be deemed eligible alongside payments made during the period of the scheme.

The TWSCS is one of a range of supports available to the sector from my Department and from across Government. Further supports and funding are available from my Department including the Programme Support Payment for the 2019/20 Programme year which will issue in June this year, providing further income for services who apply. A new Capital Programme to support services to re-open will be available shortly. Services may also be eligible for the Restart Grant for Small Businesses, administered by Local Authorities, and other supports available from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

I would also note there are supports available to improve the sustainability of services during normal times, and these remain available to services which may still be facing regular challenges on top of the difficulties imposed by the pandemic.

### **Childcare Services**

618. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the

number of persons employed on each childcare committee; the role of each; the way in which their role is changing to reflect the demands of Covid-19; if she envisages them playing a supportive role in the reopening of crèches; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10364/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department funds 30 City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs) to act as its local agent in the delivery of the national early education and childcare programmes and the implementation of Government policy. The CCCs were assigned by the National Childcare Strategy (2000) as the key local component in the development of a co-ordinated approach to quality childcare and to advance the provision of childcare facilities in their local areas.

The role of the CCCs is to provide support and guidance to local service providers and parents in relation to the various childcare programmes, and support quality in keeping with national frameworks and policy objectives. My Department sets the key objectives and actions for the CCCs on an annual basis, and they are continuing to deliver on this plan of work within the current constraints of the public health emergency.

CCCs are fully engaged on issues arising within the sector, and are responsive in supporting services throughout these unprecedented times. The role of the CCCs during the Covid – 19 emergency is to continue to provide support and offer guidance and advice to services and parents in whatever way is necessary throughout this difficult period. CCCs will play a key role in providing a range of supports to the early learning and care (ELC) and school age childcare (SAC) sector. CCCs will play a critical role in supporting ELC and SAC services with their return to work preparations, specifically in acting as a local hub with a focus on supporting services to reopen safely. My Department will liaise closely with CCCs in respect of their role in this regard.

The following table shows the number of persons employed by each CCC and their roles as of the end 2019. There are a variety of roles within CCCs, including managers/coordinators/CEO, development officers, information officers, administrators, quality officers, and clerical officers. There are also a variety of working patterns across all staff.

CCC Name	Full Time Staff	Part Time Staff	Total Individuals	Roles
Carlow County Childcare Committee	3	1	4	1 Manager, 1 Information Officer, 2 Development Officers.
Cavan County Childcare Committee	3 (+ 1 Childminding Development Officer)	2	6	1 Coordinator, 3 Support and Development workers, 1 administrator, 1 Childminding Development Officer.

Questions - Written Answers

CCC Name	Full Time Staff	Part Time Staff	Total Individuals	Roles
Clare County Childcare Committee	2	4	6	1 Manager and 5 Development Officers, 2 of which include the role of Office Administrator.
Cork City Childcare Committee	6	1	7	1 Acting Coordinator, 1 Administrator, 1 Finance/ Development Officer, 3 Development Officers, 1 staff member on a temporary posting to DCYA
Cork County Childcare Committee	6	4	10	1 Coordinator, 1 Clerical Officer, 1 training Coordinator, 1 Financial Administrator and 6 Development Workers.
Donegal County Childcare Committee	2	6	8	1 Manager, 2 administration/ finance staff, 3-4 Development staff and 1 Communications Officer
Dublin City Childcare Committee	6	6	12	1 Manager, 5 Development Officers across business support and quality, 3 Development Officers, 1 Finance Officer, 1 office manager and 1 Information/Communication lead.

CCC Name	Full Time Staff	Part Time Staff	Total Individuals	Roles
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Child-care Committee	4	1	5	1 Manager, 3 Development Officers, 1 Office Manager and Office Administrator.
Fingal County Childcare Committee	6 (+ 1 Child-minding Development Officer)	2	9	1 Finance/Officer Manager, 1 Finance Officer, 1 Administration Clerk, 1 Operations Manager, 3 Development Officers, 1 Programmes Information Officer, 1 Child-minding Development Officer
Galway Child-care Committee	8	1	9	1 Manager, 2 Administration staff and 6 Development Officers.
Kerry County Childcare Committee	4	2	6	1 Acting Manager, 1 Project Administrator, 1 Quality Officer, 1 Support and Development Officer and 1 Development officer with primary responsibility for Child Minding. 1 staff member on a temporary posting to DCYA
Kildare County Childcare Committee	5	3	8	1 CEO, 2 Administration staff, 2 Development Officers, 2 Programme Administrators, 1 Communication Officer

Questions - Written Answers

CCC Name	Full Time Staff	Part Time Staff	Total Individuals	Roles
Kilkenny County Childcare Committee	4	0	4	1 Manager, 2 Development Officers and 1 Information Officer/Administrative staff member.
Laois County Childcare Committee	3	0	3	1 Manager, 1 Information Officer, 1 Support and Development worker and 1 Clerical Worker (position vacant)
Leitrim County Childcare Committee	3	1	4	1 Manager , 2 Development Officers and 1 Administrator
Limerick Childcare Committee	8	0	8	1 Coordinator, 3 Development Officers, 1 Administrative Support Worker, 1 Information Officer, and 2 Clerical Officers.
Longford County Childcare Committee	3	2	5	1 Acting Coordinator, 2 Development Officers and 1 Administrator. 1 staff member of a temporary posting to DCYA.
Louth County Childcare Committee	1	6	7	1 Manager, 4 Development Officers and 2 Clerical Officers

CCC Name	Full Time Staff	Part Time Staff	Total Individuals	Roles
Mayo County Childcare Committee	5	0	5	1 Acting Coordinator, 2 Development workers, 1 Administrator and 1 Clerical Officer.
Meath County Childcare Committee	1	9	10	1 Coordinator, 4 Development Officers, 2 Information Officers, 3 Administration staff
Monaghan County Childcare Committee	2	3	5	1 Manager, 1 S&D worker, and 3 Finance and Administration staff.
Offaly County Childcare Committee	0	6	6	1 Manager, 2 Development Officers, 1 Finance & Training and 2 Administration staff
Roscommon County Childcare Committee	2	3	5	1 Manager, and 4 Development Officers
Sligo County Childcare Committee	2	4(+3 P/T Tusla funded)	6	1 Manager, 2 Development Officers, 2 Administrators, 1 receptionist, and a further 3 p/t funded by Tusla.
South Dublin County Childcare Committee	7	1	8	1 Manager, 5 Development Officers, 1 Administrator, and 1 Information Officer
Tipperary Childcare Committee	7	0	7	1 CEO, 1 Deputy CEO, 4 Development Officers and 1 Administrator

CCC Name	Full Time Staff	Part Time Staff	Total Individuals	Roles
Coiste Curam Leanaí Phort Láirge	1	7	8	1 CEO, 5 Development Officers, 2 Administration/Information Officers.
Westmeath County Child-care Committee	4 (+1 Child-minding Development Officer)	1	6	1 Manager, 2 Development Officers, 1 Childminding Development Officer, 2 Administration staff
Wexford County Childcare Committee	6	0	6	1 CEO, 3 Development Officers and 2 Administrators
Wicklow County Childcare Committee	3	3	6	1 Manager, 3 Development Officers, 1 Programme and Finance Officer, and 1 Information Officer
Total			197	

### Childcare Services

619. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if new applicants are also eligible to receive funding in relation to the capital programme for the childcare sector; if funding is only for existing childcare providers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10365/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Since 2015 my Department has administered an annual capital funding programme, under which service providers are invited to apply for capital funding to increase the capacity of their services, and to maintain and improve their services. Providers can apply for funding if they are registered with Tusla. Services must register with Tusla before they can open and provide childcare services.

In 2020 I secured €7.2m in capital funding for early learning and care (ELC) and school age childcare (SAC). I launched the application programme for the 2020 Capital Programme on 28 February. I suspended the Capital Programme on 26 March, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

I am currently reviewing the allocation of the 2020 capital budget and I intend to launch a new capital grant programme in the coming days. Under this new capital grant programme, funds will be made available to enable existing Tusla registered childcare providers to carry out preparatory work in advance of opening. The application process, which will be administered by Pobal, will go live in the coming days. The application process will be user-friendly and simple to use. Providers will receive confirmation of the funding they are to receive before

they reopen.

### Childcare Services

620. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if areas in which childcare closures are occurring are being mapped; if areas of insufficient provision to meet demand are being tracked; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10366/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As the Deputy is aware childcare services were instructed to close on the 12th March and will remain closed until it is deemed safe to re-open by the National Public Health Emergency Team. Currently, the Government's Roadmap sees Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare (ELC and SAC) services, and childminders, opening in phase 3 (29 June).

During this time of extended closure, a small number of services that have indicated their intention to close permanently are being tracked by Pobal's Case Management team and forwarded to the relevant officials in the Department. In the majority of these cases, the decision to close is unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Pobal Case Management team are working with Local CCCs to support these services in exploring alternative solutions where possible. However, the final decision on whether a service will close lies with the owner/operator of the service. Where closure is unavoidable, Pobal and the local CCCs will support services with managing an orderly closure and offer assistance to parents with finding alternative ELC/SAC services.

The provision of places within an area is knowledge which is retained by the Local CCC. When a service enters a Case Management process, one of the first pieces of information the Local CCC will gather is an assessment of the available places within the area.

Any service that is considering closure should notify their Local CCC immediately so that support can be provided and local capacity for childcare places can be assessed.

A number of supports were available before COVID to improve the sustainability of services during normal times, and these remain available now. Financial supports are available for community services presenting with sustainability issues following a financial assessment by Pobal. My Department has begun to consider whether this sustainability funding can be extended to private services during the pandemic. Again, all services who require support should contact their local CCC.

### Covid-19 Pandemic

621. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the level of engagement there has been with the childminding sector; if she has considered the use of childminders in early phases for frontline workers; if guidance was sought from the NPHE in relation to childminders; if so, if she will publish the response received from the NPHE; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10367/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As per HSE guidance and in accordance with the regulations under the Health (Preservation and Protection and Other Emergency Measures in the Public Interest) Act 2000, childminders who care for the children of essential workers in the children's home were permitted to continue working after childcare facilities were closed on 12 March, and are themselves considered essential workers.

The Roadmap for the Reopening of Society and Business proposes that the reopening of crèches, childminders and preschools in a phased manner will begin in Phase 3, which is currently scheduled to begin on 29 June. On 29 May, in line with the Roadmap, I announced that in Phase 3 childminders will be allowed to work in their own homes. I also announced which children would be eligible to resume full or part-time childcare services from 29 June, both with childminders and in centre-based services. Whilst initially the Government Roadmap had indicated that services would resume only for the children of essential workers, this has now been widened.

I have established an Advisory Group to support preparations for reopening. Sectoral representatives were nominated by the Professionalisation Sub Group of the Early Years Forum. These include representatives from Association of Childhood Professionals (ACP), National Childhood Network (NCN), National Forum for Community Childcare Services, Seas Suas, Early Childhood Ireland (ECI), Childminding Ireland (CMI) and PLÉ. SIPTU is also a member of the group in accordance with the requirement of the Return to Work Safely Protocol issued by Government on 9th May to consult with Trade Unions. Childminders are represented by Childminding Ireland.

Childminding Ireland is the national childminding body funded by my Department to represent and support the child minding sector. They recently engaged in a survey with Childminders (834 respondents) and the findings of this survey will assist the Advisory Group with considerations for the childminding sector.

My Department appointed a National Childminding Coordinator in 2019, who supports my Department with matters relating to childminders. We also have in place a team of six Childminding Development Officers who are located in six City/County Childcare Committee's (CCC's), each of whom work with a cluster of CCC's. These supports have continued to be in place during COVID and will continue when all childminders are permitted to reopen on 29th June.

The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) guidance developed by their Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control Division (AMRIC) on 'Infection Prevention and Control guidance for settings providing childcare during the COVID-19 Pandemic' was agreed by NPHE's Expert Advisory Group and has been published on the HPSC website and on my Department's website. Working in collaboration with Childminding Ireland, my Department will be publishing guidance specific to childminders in the coming days, based on the HPSC public health advice.

As services reopen, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs will keep the operation of the guidance under close review and take appropriate updated action as required.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

**622. Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of persons in each county that have registered to volunteer through the I-VOL app, since the call for volunteers to support the community in response to Covid-19 went out in March 2020. [9658/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** In response to the Deputy, as of 29th May, 17,100 volunteers have signed up for Covid-19 volunteering with 47,270 hours being the number of hours volunteered.

The reports available at the following link provide the detailed breakdown in each county.

There are two reports:

- New volunteers who registered from 8th March (by county). That report picks those who picked Covid (15,025) and then the total volunteers (16,199). The difference between both is about 1,174 volunteers.

- The second column is all the Pre march 8th volunteers who came back to Opt in to COVID19 volunteering.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2020-06-09\_pq622-09-06-2020\_en.pdf ">I-VOL app</a>]

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

623. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the schemes or grants available for community and voluntary groups, for example, active retirement groups which have experienced a significant loss of income in view of the fact meetings can no longer take place due to the Covid-19 crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9793/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** My Department is committed to the successful delivery of a range of programmes and schemes which are benefiting rural and urban communities.

Programmes such as the Community Services Programme (CSP), which currently supports more than 400 community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. Funding is provided as a fixed annual contribution to the cost of a manager, and an agreed number of full-time equivalent positions. In addition, my Department also recently developed a 2020 Support Fund which provides an additional once off payment to CSP supported organisations to cover a 12-week period from 26 March 2020, ensuring that they can pay their full-time CSP supported employees a maximum of €350 net per week, with a proportionate amount for part-time CSP supported employees

My Department has made €35 million in Dormant Accounts Funding available in a whole of Government initiative to create a targeted, once-off cash injection for organisations and groups delivering critical front-line services to the most in need in our society, and for those organisations in danger of imminent closure due to lost fund-raising, or traded income, as a direct result of restrictions imposed to counter the spread of COVID-19.

In line with the ethos of the Dormant Accounts fund, the Stability Scheme for the Community and Voluntary sector will be focusing on organisations providing supports and services in the following sectors:

- Health and Social Care (including addiction, disability and mental health)
- Child and Family Services (including counselling/therapies)
- Domestic/Sexual/Gender based violence
- Housing/Homelessness
- Community Services (e.g. meals on wheels/befriending services/old age supports/vulnerable people's support groups etc.)

- Community Education Sector

The application portal opened on Monday 11 May 2020, given the high level of applications the deadline was extended to 8pm on Thursday 21 May 2020, in order to ensure that all those interested in applying for the scheme managed to do so. Over 1,000 applications have been received and as these applications are subject to a verification and assessment process, which is currently ongoing, the final number of eligible applications is yet to be determined. Organisations approved for funding from the Stability Fund will be informed in the coming weeks.

I am confident that the work of my Department is benefiting all communities and delivering on our mission statement. I am determined that this will continue to be the case, and that available funding and supports continues to deliver positive visible impacts for all of our communities.

Further information on all funding programmes and schemes is available on my Department's website on gov.ie

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

624. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding available to rural based community centres and community groups deemed ineligible for the Covid-19 stability fund which do not fall within the terms of 2020 CLÁR or the town and village renewal scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9853/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Government is aware of the challenges currently faced by community and voluntary organisations and is committed to working closely with the sector in managing through these.

Community facilities are funded from a range of different sources across different Government Departments and agencies. Supports provided by my Department help people to participate in the development of their communities and also provide funding to improve community facilities.

In addition to the supports referenced by the Deputy, my Department funds the **Community Services Programme (CSP)** which supports over 400 community organisations to provide local services. Funding is provided as a fixed annual contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent positions.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, my Department recently developed a Support Fund which provides an additional once off payment to CSP organisations to cover a 12 week period from 26th March 2020, ensuring that they can pay their full-time CSP supported employees up to €350 net per week, with a proportionate amount for part-time CSP supported employees.

My Department also funds the **Community Enhancement Programme**, which provides small capital grants for facilities in both rural and urban areas. The appropriate approach is being examined for programmes in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 Community Enhancement Programme is being considered in that context.

My Department also provides funding to rural community groups through the **LEADER Programme**. Details can be found at <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/216837-the-rural-development-and-regional-affairs-division/>

Officials within my Department continue to liaise with representatives of the sector and with Departments with relevant policy responsibility in relation to the challenges faced at this time.

### Cycle to Work Scheme

625. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by his Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9989/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Department of Rural and Community Development was established on 19th July 2017 to provide a renewed and consolidated focus on rural and community development in Ireland.

Please see the following table in relation to the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by my Department regarding the cycle to work scheme:

Year	No. of Applications	Total Cost
2017	1	€950.00
2018	4	€3,450.80
2019	6	€7,246.25
2020	2	€2,014.00
Grand Total	13	€13,661.05

### Covid-19 Pandemic

626. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of funding provided to volunteer centres in each local authority area to enable the community call scheme; and the amount returned by each volunteer centre in tabular form. [10153/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** In April 2020, my Department allocated funding of €267,960 to the 22 Volunteer Centres and 7 Volunteer Information Services to support their contribution to the Community Call response to the Covid-19 challenge. This funding was provided to Volunteer Ireland to distribute to each Volunteer Centre and Volunteer Information Service under a three month funding agreement. This is a once-off payment, in recognition of the difficulties that Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Information Services faced during this challenging time. The contract for this work is ongoing and the Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Information Services are continuing to use the funding provided to support those most vulnerable in our communities during the Covid-19 emergency.

The following table outlines the funding allocated to each Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Information Service.

County	Funding
Carlow	€9,240
Cavan	€9,240
Clare	€9,240
Cork	€9,240
Donegal	€9,240

Dublin City	€9,240
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	€9,240
Fingal	€9,240
Galway	€9,240
Kerry	€9,240
Kildare	€9,240
Kilkenny	€9,240
Laois	€9,240
Leitrim	€9,240
Limerick	€9,240
Longford	€9,240
Louth	€9,240
Mayo	€9,240
Meath	€9,240
Monaghan	€9,240
Offaly	€9,240
Roscommon	€9,240
Sligo	€9,240
South Dublin	€9,240
Tipperary	€9,240
Waterford	€9,240
Westmeath	€9,240
Wexford	€9,240
Wicklow	€9,240

### Local Improvement Scheme

627. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of county councils that have provided a list of roads for approval under the LIS allocation for 2020; the counties involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10217/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Local Improvement Scheme, or LIS, is a programme for improvement works on small private or non-public roads in rural areas which are not under the normal maintenance of the Local Authorities. The scheme is funded by my Department and is administered through the Local Authorities.

As the Deputy will be aware, there was no dedicated funding available for this scheme for a number of years until I re-launched it in 2017. Since then, over €48 million has been allocated to the Local Authorities to deliver the scheme.

In March this year, I confirmed that a further €10 million is being made available for the Local Improvement Scheme in 2020, with each Local Authority being provided with the same financial allocation as 2019. This funding can be drawn down by the Local Authorities as works are completed on the LIS roads.

A total of twenty Local Authorities have already determined the roads to be funded under the scheme this year. My Department has reviewed the information supplied and, so far, funding agreements have issued to sixteen Local Authorities so that the works can commence on the roads in question. The remainder will issue shortly as any outstanding matters are finalized.

Given the constraints imposed by COVID-19, the process of determining the roads to be funded is still under way in a number of other Local Authority areas. However, I understand that this process will be concluded in the coming weeks.

The twenty counties listed below have determined the roads to be funded and have advised my Department accordingly.

Counties who have provided lists

Carlow	Kildare	Monaghan
Cavan	Kilkenny	Offaly
Clare	Laois	Roscommon
Cork	Leitrim	Sligo
Donegal	Limerick	Wexford
Galway	Longford	Wicklow
Kerry	Meath	

### LEADER Programmes

628. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation by LAG for projects under the present Leader programme; the amount allocated to date by each; the amount spent to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10218/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** A total of €168.7 million has been allocated to the Local Action Groups (LAGs) around the country for core project funding under the 2014-2020 LEADER programme.

Table 1 below provides a breakdown of the amount allocated to projects for each LAG under the 2014-2020 LEADER programme, the value of projects approved to date, and the amount paid to date in respect of projects. The figures do not include expenditure or approvals under national-level thematic schemes which operate on a competitive bid basis.

The level of project activity under the LEADER programme continues to increase and, to date, almost 3,000 core projects have been approved for funding of over €116 million. A further 388 project applications, with a value greater than €29 million, are at various stages in the approval process.

Project payments are now in excess of €59 million and will continue to increase as approved works are completed and claims for payment are submitted. Payments can continue to be made beyond 2020 in respect of projects approved before the end of this year.

**Table 1: Total LEADER Project Allocations, Approvals and Payments by LAG as of 8th June 2020**

Local Action Group	Core Project Allocation	Value of Approved Projects	Project Payments to date
Carlow	€4,797,811	€3,658,435	€1,936,827
Cavan	€6,844,583	€4,760,190	€2,907,845

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Clare	€6,609,050	€5,025,259	€2,260,688
Cork North	€4,240,071	€2,872,793	€1,599,087
Cork South	€2,839,017	€1,463,442	€658,360
Cork West	€3,628,104	€1,866,322	€976,166
Donegal	€10,063,589	€7,380,216	€4,204,392
Dublin Rural	€4,728,612	€2,610,117	€1,129,677
Galway East	€5,728,456	€3,656,067	€1,666,071
Galway West	€3,406,692	€1,977,715	€740,780
Kerry	€8,083,558	€6,665,506	€3,906,156
Kildare	€3,899,564	€2,210,048	€960,515
Kilkenny	€5,791,285	€2,450,340	€1,183,466
Laois	€5,314,767	€3,223,058	€1,156,267
Leitrim	€4,933,167	€3,388,351	€2,029,634
Limerick	€7,377,584	€5,923,798	€3,024,019
Longford	€5,703,537	€3,515,405	€1,334,108
Louth	€4,551,902	€2,877,025	€1,702,343
Mayo	€8,683,645	€6,701,828	€3,558,128
Meath	€5,139,855	€4,160,036	€881,214
Monaghan	€5,708,155	€3,286,473	€2,064,909
Offaly	€6,436,669	€4,451,861	€3,193,437
Roscommon	€6,586,752	€5,158,610	€1,719,461
Sligo	€5,726,736	€4,387,400	€2,429,672
Tipperary	€7,999,073	€6,197,835	€3,466,713
Waterford	€6,001,670	€4,440,857	€3,140,004
Westmeath	€5,563,394	€4,278,222	€1,711,972
Wexford	€7,569,678	€4,903,454	€2,579,898
Wicklow	€4,743,790	€2,667,902	€1,099,453
Total	€168,700,764	€116,158,562	€59,221,261

### School Meals Programme

629. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the extension of the operation and funding for the school meals scheme will be considered beyond the end of June 2020 to assist families on low incomes particularly during the Covid-19 emergency period. [9674/20]

667. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the fact that schools may now be running out of budget for school meals for the final month of the primary school year; and if she will consider examining the extension of budgets for schools that are affected in this manner to ensure that no child loses out on nutrition that their families might also rely upon. [10178/20]

668. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider taking action to ensure that children receive adequate nutrition during the summer months; and if she will consider a holiday hunger scheme. [10179/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 629, 667 and 668 together.

The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to some 1,580

schools and organisations benefitting 250,000 children. The objective of the scheme is to provide regular, nutritious food to children who are unable, due to lack of good quality food, to take full advantage of the education provided to them. The programme is an important component of policies to encourage school attendance and extra educational achievement and coincides with the school year.

Following the announcement of the closure of schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic, by the Taoiseach on 12th March 2020, schools and organisations participating in the school meals programme expressed concerns about the impact of school closures on pupils who avail of school meals, and that the unavailability of school meals impacts in particular on the most disadvantaged in our society.

My Department confirmed that funding to schools would continue to enable schools provide food until the end of the current school year - the end of May for post-primary schools and the end of June for primary schools, in line with the parameters of the school meals scheme.

Any Primary School whose funding does not cover the provision of meals to the end of June should contact the school meals section at [school.meals@welfare.ie](mailto:school.meals@welfare.ie) and funding will be reviewed on a case by case basis.

Any proposals to consider a new scheme or extend funding for food provision beyond these dates would need to be considered in the overall budgetary context. Furthermore, it is important to take account of the logistical issues involved in delivering the programme during the school holidays.

I trust that this clarifies the position.

### **Civil Marriages**

630. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider amending the Covid-19 guidelines to permit small civil marriages on and after 8 June 2020 with restricted attendance of up to ten persons only including the persons getting married under the strict condition of social distancing and with the agreement of the registrar and celebrant in view of the fact up to ten persons are being permitted to attend a funeral while observing social distancing. [9865/20]

633. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when persons that wish to get married and have civil ceremonies in registry offices will be able to do so; and if there are planned measures to be introduced to ensure these offices can be opened in the coming weeks. [10269/20]

634. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will allow civil ceremonies to reassume in circumstances in which physical distancing allows; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that teleconferencing is used for civil ceremonies in other countries; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10376/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 630, 633 and 634 together.

Due to current restrictions to support public health initiatives, access to the Civil Registration Service offices is greatly restricted and civil marriage ceremonies cannot proceed, other than in exceptional circumstances such as those involving the risk of death to one of the parties to a marriage.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Civil Registration Service. The General Register Office, which falls under the aegis of my Department, is liaising with the HSE to put plans in place for the resumption of services, including the provision of civil marriage ceremonies in line with the Government's roadmap.

I understand that provisional plans involve the re-opening of local Civil Registration Offices from 29th June to facilitate the completion of the legal preliminaries for marriage. A further extension of services to conduct civil ceremonies from 20th July is also planned. This is subject to strict adherence to social distancing recommendations and each registration area will introduce safeguards, depending on each office's specific needs.

With regard to marriages taking place by teleconference, the Deputy should note that this would require changes to legislation. Currently, all parties to the marriage are required to be in attendance in the presence of the registered solemniser, who are each then required to sign the necessary paperwork immediately after the ceremony.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment**

631. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the pandemic unemployment payment of €350 will be suspended in view of the fact it was a 12-week temporary payment; and if not, the length of time it will be extended for. [10052/20]

645. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a submission by an organisation (details supplied) will be supported; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9816/20]

647. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will extend current support payments for photographers and videographers in view of the fact that due to the nature of their business they will be affected by business closure longer than other sectors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9866/20]

672. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the pandemic unemployment payment will continue as long as social distancing and other restrictions are in place for those employed in businesses impacted by these restrictions in order to ensure income stability; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10198/20]

674. **Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to ensure the pandemic unemployment payment end dates will be addressed on a sector by sector basis in acknowledgement that some sectors of the workforce will take longer to get back on their feet; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10248/20]

675. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she has considered the recovery plan of an organisation (details supplied); and if additional supports will be provided to sectors most impacted by Covid-19. [10271/20]

677. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the measures to be put in place to extend the Covid-19 reliefs duration to professions such as self-employed photographers and videographers and so on likely to be the in the last sections to return to normal employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10336/20]

687. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider providing sectors most impacted by the Covid-19 crisis with certainty in relation to the continuation of the pandemic unemployment payment, in particular photographers and videographers that are especially impacted by the pandemic and will be slower to recover; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10475/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 631, 645, 647, 672, 674, 675, 677 and 687 together.

The COVID-19 pandemic unemployment payment was introduced as a time limited emergency measure in response to the pandemic for an initial 12 week period. The Government has, as of last Friday, approved the extension of this payment until 10th August. Changes were also announced to the structure of this payment which means that it continues to be a strong support but is also fair and targeted.

The Government is mindful of the fact that there are certain professions and businesses which will be affected by business closures longer than other sectors, including self employed photographers and videographers, and the confirmation that this payment will be available until early August provides financial certainty to people in these sectors. My colleague, the Minister for the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation has introduced a range of supports and guidance to assist businesses with their recovery from the severe financial impacts of the pandemic and the details are available on that Department's website at [www.dbei.gov.ie](http://www.dbei.gov.ie).

I trust this clarifies the position at this time.

### **Employment Rights**

632. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the annual leave entitlements childcare professionals and workers are entitled to during the current Covid-19 pandemic period in which they are not working; if employers can insist such workers take annual leave during the period in which they are not working; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10087/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I am somewhat unclear as to the particulars of the case referred to by the Deputy, however, it is important to note a number of key points.

Firstly, let me set out the current legislation as it pertains to annual leave. The Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 sets out the key parameters for the taking of annual leave and payment for same. The times at which annual leave is granted is ultimately determined by the employer, having regard to work requirements and subject to the employer taking into account the need for the employee to reconcile work and family responsibilities, the need for rest and recreation, and the employer having consulted the employee or a trade union (if any), not later than one month before the day on which the annual leave is due to commence.

Section 19 of the Act provides that an employee shall be entitled to paid annual leave equal to:

As set out above, an entitlement to annual leave arises under the Act on the basis of hours worked, with the exception of sick leave. Therefore, by definition, a person must be in employment to accrue annual leave.

It should be noted that the Act further provides that nothing prevents employers and em-

ployees from entering into arrangements that are more favourable to the employee with regard to the times of, and the pay in respect of, his or her annual leave.

I note that the Deputy states that the employees in question are not working. While I am unsure of the details in this particular case, I am advised that it is only possible to negotiate annual leave arrangements, in accordance with the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 set out above, where an employment relationship has been maintained.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

*Questions Nos. 633 and 634 answered with Question No. 630.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

635. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if persons that are regarded as high-risk and unable to return to former employment due to cocooning can continue to avail of the Covid-19 enhanced payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10397/20]

669. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the supports that exist for persons whose jobs are reopening as their workplaces reopen but that are medically vulnerable or need to cocoon and as a result, do not feel able to retake these jobs; and the appropriate payment, that is, the pandemic unemployment payment, illness benefit or other payment available in such circumstances. [10180/20]

671. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the appropriate payment for persons that have been on the pandemic unemployment payment whose jobs are now available but in circumstances in which their medical consultant is recommending they cocoon for a further period due to an underlying health condition; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10194/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 635, 669 and 671 together.

The enhanced illness benefit payment is available where a registered medical practitioner or a HSE medical officer of health diagnoses a person with COVID 19 or identifies him or her as a probable source of infection. The payment is for a limited period and at a rate of €350 to ensure that the person can comply with medical advice to isolate.

Employees who cocoon without a medical certificate may approach their employer in relation to taking annual or other paid leave - this is at the discretion of the employer. Many employers can, and do, agree leave arrangements with staff who need to take short periods of time off. These include arrangements to enable employees to work remotely from home, to alter shift patterns, to work-up time taken, or to bring forward annual leave entitlements from future work periods. The government has encouraged employers to support workers with leave requests at this difficult time and those with underlying health conditions should be facilitated where possible.

Where an employee is unable to return to the workplace as they are medically vulnerable or they need to cocoon for longer on the advice of their medical practitioner as they may be more susceptible to contracting the COVID-19 virus they may apply for standard illness benefit which is paid at a maximum weekly personal rate of €203 and increases may also be paid for qualifying adults and children. Illness benefit claims require medical certification of illness that

a person is incapable of work.

Where it is not possible to make appropriate compassionate leave arrangements, employees can call on some statutory entitlements including supplementary welfare allowance.

I trust that this clarifies the position.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment**

636. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if points raised in correspondence (details supplied) will be examined; if a response will issue in relation to same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9660/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) was introduced by my Department in response to the Covid-19 pandemic emergency. As stipulated in the scheme guidelines both employees and self-employed people can apply for the payment if they satisfy a number of qualifying conditions as set out below.

In order to qualify for the payment, the applicant must:

- be aged between 18 and 66 years old and
- be currently living in the Republic of Ireland and
- have lost their job due to the COVID-19 pandemic or
- have been temporarily laid off due to the COVID-19 pandemic and
- have worked in the Republic of Ireland or were a cross border frontier worker and
- not be in receipt of any employment income.

In order to ensure business continuity across its schemes my Department gave a commitment to continue funding all Community Employment (CE) schemes throughout the emergency period, which included the continued funding of wages for CE participants. In this context, as CE participants are in receipt of an employment income, they do not meet the criteria for receipt of the Covid-19 PUP.

However, where a CE participant loses their employment outside of CE, their second employer can apply for the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) administered by the Revenue Commissioners to assist in the continuation of a wage payment, subject to certain conditions.

### **State Pension (Contributory)**

637. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the review into entitlement to the State pension (contributory); the number of cases reviewed to date; the number of cases that remain to be reviewed; the number that had their pension increased; the number whose pension remained the same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9709/20]

638. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion if a breakdown of the review of entitlement to the State pension (contributory) to date by county will be provided; the number of cases reviewed by county; the number in each county that were awarded increases in their pension; the number in each county whose pension stayed the same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9710/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 637 and 638 together.

In January 2018, I announced an interim total contributions approach (TCA) to the calculation of pension entitlement for those State pension (contributory) customers born on or after 1 September 1946 and in receipt of pension on post-2012 rates. This TCA provides for up to 20 years of HomeCaring Periods in the pension entitlement calculation for applicants who took time out of the workplace for parenting or caring duties.

All contributory pensioners born on or after 1st September 1946 who had a reduced contributory pension based on post budget 2012 rate bands have now been reviewed. The reviews provided for under the Social Welfare, Pension & Civil Registrations Act 2018 commenced from 13 February 2019, the day after I signed the necessary Regulations. From April 2019, all State pension (contributory) applications are being assessed under all relevant rate calculation methods, including the interim total contributions approach.

When the TCA reviews were concluded at end-October 2019, a total of 94,258 reviews were completed, of which 56% were women and 44% were men. As these reviews were processed, pensioners were notified and increases (where awarded) paid, together with arrears backdated to 30 March 2018, or the person's 66th birthday if later. Those who did not qualify for an increase in payment (59% of those reviewed) continue to receive their existing weekly rate.

An increase in pension entitlement was awarded to 54% of women and 24% of men. 20,129 pensioners increased their rate of payment to the maximum rate of pension (72% women; 28% men).

Please see below in tabular form details of claimants reviewed, according to their county address at the time of review. The figures represent 90% of total reviews, and include those who received an increase in their rate of payment and those who remained on their existing rate of payment.

County	Reviewed by County
Carlow	997
Cavan	1,347
Clare	2,510
Cork	9,305
Donegal	2,729
Dublin	22,091
Galway	4,761
Kerry	3,159
Kildare	3,672
Kilkenny	1,636
Laois	1,189
Leitrim	689
Limerick	3,632
Longford	752

Louth	2,046
Mayo	2,850
Meath	3,239
Monaghan	1,178
Offaly	1,299
Roscommon	1,344
Sligo	1,459
Tipperary	3,105
Waterford	2,052
Westmeath	1,672
Wexford	2,832
Wicklow	3,047

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### State Pension (Contributory)

639. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of plans to move to a total contributions approach for calculating entitlement to a State pension (contributory); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9711/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Total Contributions Approach (TCA), when it is introduced, is intended to be a fairer and more transparent system where the person's lifetime contribution will be more closely reflected in the benefit received.

Consultation is a very important part of the development and design of such a new approach. With this in mind, a public consultation on the design of the TCA was launched on the 28th May 2018. A wide variety of stakeholder groups were invited to this launch. In addition, the consultation involved a number of workshops with representative bodies, and a briefing and Question & Answer session for Oireachtas members by Department officials in Leinster House.

The online consultation lasted for over three months and the Department received nearly 300 responses from individuals and organisations. Those submissions outlined the views of respondents on a number of issues, including the number of years required for a full pension, provision for home caring periods and for the self-employed.

Having carefully examined the outputs of the TCA consultation process, officials in the Department are designing the scheme, with a view to including significant recognition for home caring periods in the new model. The final design of the model will need to be brought to Government for its consideration and approval.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Community Employment Schemes

640. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a contract will be extended for a person (details supplied). [9719/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):**

Firstly, I wish to acknowledge the valuable and dedicated service that the supervisor in question has provided throughout her tenure, and that of the CE sponsoring bodies in running CE schemes throughout the country along with the wide range of employment opportunities offered.

CE is an active labour market programme designed to provide eligible long-term unemployed people and others with an opportunity to engage in useful work within their communities on a temporary, fixed term basis. The programme is delivered through independent CE sponsoring bodies that receive state funding from the Department to cover the cost of CE employee remuneration.

Funding for CE supervisors is available until the person reaches the state pension age and they may remain on CE until the working day before they reach the state pension age as follows:

- 66 for those born before 1 January 1955;
- 67 for those born on or after 1 January 1955; and
- 68 for those born on or after 1 January 1961

CE supervisors may apply for a State Pension on retirement from CE.

I am advised that the recruitment process for a new CE supervisor with the CE sponsoring body in question is currently underway and officials from my Department are actively engaging with the CE sponsoring body to support this process.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment**

641. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position in relation to self-employed persons whose main or sole income relates to unearned rental income qualifying for the pandemic unemployment payment in circumstances in which they are no longer receiving that rental income; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9749/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The COVID 19 pandemic unemployment payment was introduced as an emergency measure to meet the surge in unemployment which resulted from the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. For self-employed people, they must have experienced a collapse of income and be available to take up other full-time work if it was available to them in order to qualify.

If the person's sole source of income came from rental income and it has now ceased completely, rather than being deferred, they may be eligible for the COVID 19 pandemic unemployment payment provided that they satisfy the other qualifying conditions. If they have other sources of income which they continue to receive they may not qualify. Each case would have to be considered on its own merit before a definite position could be provided.

If a person does not qualify for this payment and they are experiencing financial hardship, they may be eligible for other supports under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme.

I trust that this clarifies the matter.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

642. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the period of exclusion to claim redundancy due to temporary lay-off and or short time during Covid-19 is due to be extended beyond 31 May 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9769/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I can confirm that the Government has extended the suspension of redundancy provisions relating to temporary lay-off and short-time work which arose as a result of Covid-19 until 10th August 2020.

A temporary suspension of these provisions was introduced on 13th March under new emergency measures as the existing provisions were not considered adequate to deal with the Covid-19 crisis. The suspension was considered vital to ensure the future viability of businesses and to help prevent further permanent job losses.

In light of the on-going emergency situation serious risks to jobs and businesses remain and the Government decided to extend the end date of the emergency measure from 31st May 2020 to 10th August 2020. The Government has announced a roadmap for reopening society and businesses under which it is envisaged that most businesses should reopen by 10th August. For employees an extension is important to ensure that they have a continued link to their employment and a pathway to return. For employers, many still regard their businesses as being temporarily closed and plan to re-open as soon as is possible for them to do so.

If the end date was not extended further, a significant number redundancies could occur in the very near future which will burden employers with further debt and have a serious impact on the potential for a business to recover. This in turn increases the risk of insolvency and bankruptcy situations which will only exacerbate the risk of further permanent job losses.

It is important to note that the employee's right to claim redundancy has not been removed, but deferred for the emergency period in circumstances of temporary lay-off or short-time employment caused by the Covid-19 crisis. These arrangements have no effect on temporary lay-off and short-time work arising for reasons other than as a consequence Covid-19 where the rights of the employees remain unchanged.

### **Respite Care Grant**

643. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on a matter in relation to a respite care grant application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9789/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Carer's Support Grant is an annual payment made to carers by my Department.

I can confirm that my department received an application for the Carer's Support Grant (CSG) for 2018 from the person concerned on 13 March 2020.

It is a condition of the Carers Support Grant that a person may apply for the grant in any given year from 8 weeks before the date on which the grant is payable up to the 31 of December the following year. The person concerned was notified that their application for 2018 was disallowed on the grounds that it was a late claim.

I can confirm that an appeal has now been submitted to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

644. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 863 of 27 May 2020, if a reply will issue to correspondence from a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9815/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business sets out how COVID 19 restrictions will gradually be lifted. However, I am aware of the issues for workers with childcare responsibilities, particularly for those working on the front line.

The Government has requested employers to be as flexible as possible in allowing staff, which could include partners of frontline workers, time off to look after their children or other members of their families. Some of the flexible options include offering paid compassionate leave, allowing employees to work from home, altering shifts so that employees can coordinate caring between themselves and partners or another person, allowing employees to rearrange holidays and allowing employees to take paid time off that can be worked back at a later time.

Where it is not possible to make appropriate compassionate leave arrangements, employees may be able to call on some statutory entitlements including force majeure leave, parental leave together with parental benefit or carers leave together with carers benefit or carers allowance.

If a parent has left work to care for a child because of school or childcare closures and the employer is no longer paying the person's wages, they may qualify for the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment.

I hope that this clarifies the position at this time.

*Question No. 645 answered with Question No. 631.*

### **Carer's Allowance**

646. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if carer's allowance will be approved in the case of a person (details supplied); and if required, if an oral hearing will be arranged. [9859/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

An increased payment can be made where full-time care is being provided to two people.

Two applications for CA were received from the person concerned on 27 March 2019 in respect of two care recipients.

The application was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) on 11 July 2019 to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

It is a condition for receipt of CA that the person/s being cared for must have such a disability that as a result they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continual supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

It is a further condition that the carer must provide this level of care.

In addition, every applicant for a social welfare payment is required to furnish a deciding officer with such certificates, documents, information and evidence as may be required for the purpose of deciding a claim.

I am advised that the person concerned did not provide documents that were requested in relation to her means. In addition it was decided that she was not providing full-time care and attention and that the person's being cared for did not require full-time care attention. Therefore her applications for CA were disallowed.

The person concerned was notified on 21 November 2019 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned requested a review of this decision and submitted additional evidence in support of her application.

The outcome of this review was that the fulltime care and attention condition was not met. The person concerned was notified of the outcome on 17 February 2020 the reason for it and of her right of appeal.

Following this and subsequent reviews the decision remained unchanged.

The department was notified on 27 May 2020 that the person concerned had appealed this decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). A submission in support of the decision is being prepared and will shortly be forwarded along with the file to the SWAO for determination.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

*Question No. 647 answered with Question No. 631.*

### **Disability Allowance**

648. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision will be made on an appeal for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied). [9881/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 28 May 2020. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds

of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required and possible in the context of the Covid-19 restrictions, hold an oral appeal hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment**

649. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an alteration will be made to the pandemic unemployment payment conditions in order to allow a person in receipt of the payment to travel outside the State to attend a family funeral. [9886/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The COVID-19 unemployment payment was introduced as a time limited emergency measure to meet the surge in unemployment which resulted from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This payment was introduced at a time of limited travel restrictions in the interest of necessary public health measures.

The payment is payable to people while in the State and there is no provision to pay this emergency payment while a person is outside the State.

A person who leaves the State may be eligible to reapply for the pandemic payment once they return if they continue to meet the qualifying conditions for receipt of the payment.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Appeals**

650. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a reply will issue to correspondence she referred to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9914/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 12 May 2020. The Office is aware that the person concerned stated that she sent in her appeal at the end of February but, unfortunately, there is no record of the appeal being received at that time.

It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers were received from the Department the case in question was referred to an Appeals Officer on 25 May 2020.

The Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. Under social welfare legislation, the decision of an Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed

by an Appeals Officer in the light of new evidence or new facts.

I am advised that the person concerned has submitted additional evidence and that the Department has been requested to return the file to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. On receipt of this file, the case will be referred to the Appeals Officer for review under Section 317 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005. The person concerned will be contacted when the review of her appeal has been finalised.

I am also advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that the Deputy's representations (reference REPS-2020-20284) were replied to by that office on 12 May 2020, confirming that an appeal was now being registered in this case.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance**

651. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an appeal by a person (details supplied) will be expedited in view of the circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9915/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 13 May 2020. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required and possible in the context of the Covid-19 restrictions, hold an oral appeal hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes**

652. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider extending the contract of community employment supervisors that are obliged to retire at 66 years of age that wish to continue working by one year in view of the Covid-19 pandemic. [9952/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the valuable and dedicated service that CE sponsoring bodies provide in running CE schemes throughout the country. CE supervisors, as employees of those organisations, are an integral part of that good work.

CE is an active labour market programme designed to provide eligible long-term unem-

ployed people and others with an opportunity to engage in useful work within their communities on a temporary, fixed term basis. The programme is delivered through independent CE sponsoring bodies that receive state funding from the Department to cover the cost of CE employee remuneration.

Funding for CE supervisors is available until the person reaches the state pension age. CE supervisors may apply for a State Pension on retirement from CE.

CE is a working age activation scheme and CE supervisors who continue to be funded through CE must be of working age. As you will appreciate, if my Department continues to fund CE supervisors that have reached the state pension age it would significantly impact on the opportunities for those people who are still of working age and also, would undermine the reputation of CE as an active labour market programme.

A number of CE supervisors have retired over the course of the Covid-19 emergency and recruitment of new CE supervisors has been managed by CE sponsoring bodies using processes that are in line with existing national guidelines. The recruitment of new CE supervisors offers valuable employment opportunities to those of working age, including those who may be unemployed at present.

### **Public Services Card**

**653. Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which a person can obtain a public services card during the Covid-19 pandemic due to restrictions. [9969/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The SAFE registration process, which my Department uses to authenticate a person's identity, is a face-to-face process which results in the issuing of a Public Services Card (PSC).

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, my Department has temporarily suspended the SAFE registration process. This decision was taken in order to comply with HSE and WHO guidelines in respect of social distancing. As a result, it has not been possible for those who wish to obtain a Public Services Card (PSC) to get one.

My Department is moving towards a resumption of the SAFE registration process over the coming weeks on a phased basis and this will be done in accordance with all relevant HSE and Government guidelines to ensure the health and safety of the Department's customers and staff.

In the meantime, anyone who has lost their PSC can contact the Department and a replacement will be issued.

Where the Department has written to a person inviting them to renew their PSC, they can do so by post.

It should also be noted that the National Transport Authority has confirmed that expired Free Travel PSCs will be accepted on public transport for the time being.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance**

654. **Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason an 18-year-old person cannot sign on for jobseeker's until after they receive their leaving certificate results (details supplied). [9970/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Under Social Welfare legislation students are disqualified from receiving jobseekers allowance while attending a course of study, including school or college holiday periods and for the 3 month period after completing the Leaving Certificate or leaving second level education. Following the cancellation of this year's Leaving Certificate Examination, these students will be eligible to apply for jobseekers Allowance from 30 August 2020, which is 3 months after their end of term on 29th May.

Where a person, of any age, is experiencing financial hardship they can apply for assistance through the Department's means tested Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

### Cycle to Work Scheme

655. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by her Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9982/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The information required by the Deputy is provided in the table below.

#### Cycle to Work Amounts by Year for the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

Request Year	No. of Applications		Total Cost
2014	214		€164,441.95
2015	237		€185,129.54
2016	201		€159,405.52
2017	154		€126,088.57
2018	123		€105,101.62
2019	153		€124,571.86
2020 to-date	71		€68,188.00
Grand Total	1153		€932,927.06

### Rent Supplement Scheme

656. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of rent supplement applications received from 13 March 2020 to the most recent date for which figures are available; the number of claims in payment on the most recent date for which figures are available; and the breakdown of these Covid-19 rent supplement claims and average payment by county. [9998/20]

680. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons that have applied for rent supplement since the criteria was changed due to Covid-19; the number of these applications refused; the main reasons for re-

fusal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10386/20]

681. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on whether rent supplement is expected to be effective in reducing Covid-19 related rent arrears; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10387/20]

682. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to promote the availability of the rent supplement payment to those that previously did not require it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10388/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 656 and 680 to 682, inclusive, together.

Rent supplement continues to play a key role in supporting families and individuals in private rented accommodation, with the scheme currently supporting approximately 21,150 recipients.

The scheme provides short-term income support, to eligible people living in private rented accommodation whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. The scheme ensures that for those who were renting, and due to temporary loss of employment, can continue to meet their rental commitments.

Since the introduction of the Government’s Covid emergency response approximately 6,700 customers have been provided rent supplement support; in addition, there are currently, approximately, 1,600 pending applications awaiting a decision or in the process of providing the necessary documentation to the officer dealing with the claim. Statistics in relation to overall approval/refusal rates in relation to the Scheme are not currently available.

The Department’s response to this emergency, ensuring that the inherent flexibility of the rent supplement is available, has been extended to 19 June 2020 and is being reviewed in the context of the Government’s continued response to the Covid emergency. The Department has put in place specific measures to ensure that there are no undue delays in processing applications despite the large number of new cases received over a relatively short timeframe. This included a redesigned 5 page application form and ensuring resources were in place for areas with expected high levels of demand. The standard time for applications to be processed is 2/3 working days. The quick turnaround of applications received ensures customers do not experience arrears build ups, officers attempt to ensure that a person’s rental obligations are met in full.

The cases that are currently in payment and awarded from the 13 March 2020 by county, along with cases currently pending a decision (or documentation still outstanding) are provided in the attached tabular statement.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

**Table 1: Rent Supplement Awards Post 13th March & Pending Claims as at 2nd June 2020**

County	Awarded RS Cases Post 13th March	Pending Cases
CARLOW	101	19
CAVAN	110	15
CLARE	110	18

CORK	691	413
DONEGAL	120	8
DUBLIN	2,679	605
GALWAY	335	122
KERRY	265	58
KILDARE	328	44
KILKENNY	123	32
LAOIS	104	11
LEITRIM	33	2
LIMERICK	256	6
LONGFORD	39	18
LOUTH	117	34
MAYO	135	27
MEATH	207	31
MONAGHAN	50	7
OFFALY	48	6
ROSCOMMON	62	18
SLIGO	69	10
TIPPERARY	150	18
WATERFORD	37	16
WESTMEATH	129	7
WEXFORD	165	19
WICKLOW	278	24
Grand Total	6,741	1,588

### Child Benefit

657. **Deputy Roderic O’Gorman** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if consideration has been given to extending the period within which child benefit can be paid up until the end of full-time education even if this means paying it for a child over 18 years of age; the estimated number of children such a decision would benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10007/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Child benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children until their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability. Child benefit is currently paid, as of end-March 2020, to over 638,400 families in respect of over 1.2 million children with an estimated expenditure of more than €2 billion in 2019.

Enrolment data from the Department of Education and Skills and combined with data from my Department indicate that there were up to 25,901 students aged 17 and 18 in full-time secondary education at the start of the 2019/2020 academic year. Extending the payment in respect of full time students in second level education who are aged 18 and over would have significant cost implications and would have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

Families on low incomes may be able to avail of a number of social welfare schemes that support children in full-time education until the age of 22, including:

- Increase for a Qualified Child (IQCs) paid with primary social welfare payments;
- the Working Family Payment for low-paid employees with children;
- the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance.

These schemes provide targeted assistance that is directly linked to household income and thereby support low-income families with older children participating in full-time education.

Further information on these schemes and other supports for families and children are available in a recently published guide on schemes and services produced by my Department for families and children and which is available via [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) .

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment**

658. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when arrears of the Covid-19 pandemic unemployment payment will be issued. [10038/20]

676. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to accommodate the payment of arrears due to persons in receipt of the pandemic unemployment payment. [10279/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 658 and 676 together.

The emergency Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment has been introduced as a time-limited emergency measure so that payments can be made as quickly as possible to the large number of people who have become fully unemployed due to the pandemic.

During the month of March, my Department received and processed jobseeker claims equivalent in number to a three year claim-load. These applications were processed as quickly as possible, with almost 59,000 people paid in the first week of the scheme, 283,000 people paid in the following week, and over 507,000 people in the third week of the scheme. To date, almost 6 million payments have issued to just over 670,000 individuals at a cost of over €2 Billion.

Currently, the Department is focused on processing and managing payments to ensure that they continue to be made to all who qualify for them. The work involved in doing this is complex, with people joining and leaving the scheme each week, along with management of overlaps between the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment and the Revenue Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme.

The Department is aware that many people are due some arrears and that each person's case is unique. This means that each person's application may need to be individually reviewed.

It will take time to review all of the applications and assess for back payments. The Department is committed to reviewing cases as quickly as possible.

I can assure the Deputies that all cases will be examined and where arrears arise they will be processed and claimants will be notified.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

### **Civil Marriages**

659. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will permit civil marriage ceremonies to commence again particularly in certain circumstances (details supplied); if registry offices can be set up for social distancing; if teleconferences can be used for such ceremonies; if consideration will be given to providing protective plastic screens in registry offices; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10062/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Due to current restrictions to support of public health initiatives, access to the Civil Registration Service offices is greatly restricted and civil marriage ceremonies cannot proceed, other than in exceptional circumstances, involving the risk of death to one of the parties to a marriage.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Civil Registration Service. The General Register Office, which falls under the aegis of my Department, is liaising with the HSE to put plans in place for the resumption of services, including the provision of civil marriage ceremonies in line with the Government's roadmap.

I understand that provisional plans involve the re-opening of local Civil Registration Offices from 29th June to facilitate the completion of the legal preliminaries for marriage. A further extension of services to conduct civil ceremonies from 20th July is also planned. This is subject to strict adherence to social distancing recommendations and each registration area will introduce safeguards, depending on each office's specific needs.

With regard to marriages taking place by teleconference, the Deputy should note that this would require changes to legislation. Currently all parties to the marriage are required to be in attendance in the presence of the registered solemniser, who are each then required to sign the necessary paperwork immediately after the ceremony.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Working Family Payment**

660. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if family income supplement will be approved for persons (details supplied). [10065/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Working Family Payment (WFP) is an income tested, in-work, family payment which provides additional financial support to employees on low earnings with children. In order to qualify for WFP, an applicant or the applicant and a spouse, partner or cohabitant must be engaged in fulltime remunerative employment as an employee for not less than 38 hours per fortnight.

To date, I am advised that an application for WFP has not been received by the Department from the persons (family) concerned.

An application-form (WFP 1) has been issued to the family concerned for completion. Alternatively a WFP application-form can be accessed @ [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie).

On receipt of a completed WFP application from the person(s) concerned, their application will be processed accordingly.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

661. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if supports will be put in place for seasonal workers (details supplied) that are out of work as a direct result of Covid-19; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10076/20]

663. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding payments for seasonal workers and old age pensioners; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10106/20]

665. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to extend the pandemic unemployment payment to persons over 66 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10121/20]

670. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the situation many students face due to the lack of income and employment available to them over the summer months which may otherwise have been available; if she is considering income supports for such students; and if she has had discussions with the Minister for Education and Skills in connection with this issue. [10181/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 661, 663, 665 and 670 together.

The COVID 19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment was introduced as an emergency measure to meet the surge in unemployment which resulted from the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. The conditions for receipt of this payment are that a person must be of working age between 18 and up to 66 years old, have been in employment immediately before 13th March and have lost their income from employment.

The age range for entitlement to the pandemic unemployment payment is consistent with other Social Protection income supports paid to working age persons. The primary State income support paid by my Department in respect of people who are aged 66 years or over is the State Pension – either the Contributory State pension or the non-contributory (means-tested) pension.

A person in receipt of the State contributory pension, which is based on PRSI contributions, can retain all of their State pension as well as their employment income and retain that pension payment if they lose employment income. If a person is not in receipt of the maximum rate of State pension contributory, they may be eligible for an increased weekly rate of payment on the State non-contributory means tested pension depending on their circumstances.

Persons in receipt of the non-contributory means-tested pension who are also in receipt of an employment income may have their pension payment increased if they lose that employment income or if that employment income is reduced. Similarly if a person aged over 66 who did not previously qualify or make an application for a means-tested pension may qualify for a pension payment if their circumstances change – including if they lose any employment income or if that employment income is reduced.

If a person was in not in employment immediately prior to 13th March they are not eligible to receive the pandemic unemployment payment, which could include a seasonal worker who had not yet taken up employment. It would be impossible to construct a scheme based on claims of potential or prospective but unrealised employment, particularly where the economy was operating at full-employment with many unfilled vacancies prior to the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Any person, of any age, who are experiencing financial hardship may be eligible for other financial support under the supplementary welfare allowance.

The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Grant, payable by the Department of Education and Skills, represents the primary support for persons pursuing third level education. The matter of supports for students for the forthcoming academic year should be referred to the Minister for Education and Skills.

I trust that this clarifies the position at this time.

### **Public Services Card**

662. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to address the situation by which persons are unable to access services on the MyGovID.ie portal due to the fact they are unable to secure a public services card at this time; if consideration has been given to allow certain services such as access to their PRSI contributions history without a requirement to obtain a card can be availed of; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10088/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The SAFE registration process, which my Department uses to authenticate a person's identity, is a face-to-face process which results in the issuing of a Public Services Card (PSC). Once a person has authenticated their identity in this manner, they can set up a verified MyGovID account, which allows them access to high-value Government online services, including those delivered through the MyWelfare service.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, my Department has temporarily suspended the SAFE registration process. This decision was taken in order to comply with HSE and WHO guidelines in respect of social distancing and, as a result, it has not been possible for those who wish to obtain a PSC to obtain one.

In the meantime, and to ensure that people can access the services of my Department in a timely manner and at the same time ensure maximum social distancing, my Department introduced online services that can be accessed using a Basic MyGovID account to facilitate the acceptance of online applications.

The MyWelfare service to access contribution statement history is available as a Basic and Verified service to customers. The Basic service requires email and password details and requires the customer to answer some security questions. If successful, the statement can be posted to the customer's postal address.

My Department is moving towards a resumption of the SAFE registration process over the coming weeks on a phased basis and this will be done in accordance with all relevant HSE and Government guidelines to ensure the health and safety of the Department's customers and staff.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 663 answered with Question No. 661.*

### **Invalidity Pension**

664. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an invalidity allowance application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [10111/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 26 March 2020. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 18 June 2020. Any arrears due from 26 March 2020 to 17 June 2020 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue as soon as possible. The lady in question was notified of this decision on 03 June 2020.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 665 answered with Question No. 661.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment**

666. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if persons in receipt of the pandemic unemployment payment will not be subject to forms of clawback in the future. [10148/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Department, in line with the overall Government response to this public health emergency, moved swiftly to put in place enhanced and new supports for existing customers and new customers who, as a result of COVID-19, are working reduced hours or who have lost their employment entirely – even if on a temporary basis. A priority from the outset has been to ensure that income still flows into the households which need it most. For example, the Pandemic Unemployment Payment can be paid concurrently with key supports for low income and lone parent families such as the Working Family Payment, One-Parent Family Payment and Job-seeker's Transitional Payment.

As we gradually move through all the phases of reopening our society, we need to review the nature of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment - how it has been applied and how it fits into cross-Government plans to keep Ireland healthy and get the country working again. We are currently considering all of this but I would emphasise that any future decisions will be based on our commitment that everyone who needs help will get the most appropriate assistance.

*Questions Nos. 667 and 668 answered with Question No. 629.*

*Question No. 669 answered with Question No. 635.*

*Question No. 670 answered with Question No. 661.*

*Question No. 671 answered with Question No. 635.*

*Question No. 672 answered with Question No. 631.*

### **Illness Benefit**

673. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to extend the enhanced illness benefit for more than two weeks to those that cannot return to work due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the fact that they have a serious underlying condition that precludes them returning to work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10243/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):**

Under the Health (Preservation and Protection and other Emergency Measures in the Public Interest) Act 2020 (No. 1), and subsequent regulations, the Government, having regard to the manifest and grave risk to human life and public health posed by the spread of Covid-19, made exceptional provision in the public interest and to mitigate the effect of the spread of the disease to amend and extend the Social Welfare Acts to provide for entitlement to illness benefit for persons who have been diagnosed with, or are a probable source of infection with Covid-19.

The rate of payment of the enhanced Illness Benefit payment in respect of COVID-19 is higher than the normal maximum personal rate for a limited period. The measures were designed to ensure that where a registered medical practitioner or a HSE medical officer diagnoses a person with COVID-19 or identifies him or her as a probable source of infection of COVID-19, that the person can comply with medical advice to isolate, while having their income protected. This is essential to limit and slow down the spread of the virus, to keep the number of people affected to a minimum, and to reduce a peak of cases which would cause extreme pressure on the health system.

Medical practitioners are only authorised to submit medical certificates in respect of COVID-19 in respect of two very limited circumstances under the legislation. These are for a person:

- who is diagnosed with COVID-19, or
- who is a probable source of infection of COVID-19 and is self-isolating – such persons will have either been certified by their Doctor or will have received personal HSE notification (that is, where they are contact-traced or otherwise personally identified and advised by the HSE as being a probable source of infection).

The enhanced rate of Illness Benefit is payable for 2 weeks where a person is isolating as a probable source of infection of COVID-19 and up to 10 weeks where a person has been diagnosed with COVID-19. Any changes to the current temporary scheme would need to be considered in the overall budgetary context.

Where an employee is unable to return to the workplace because they are still ill with Covid-19 they may apply for standard illness benefit which is paid at a maximum weekly personal rate of €203. Increases may also be paid for qualifying adults and children. Illness benefit claims require medical certification of illness that a person is incapable of work.

Where a person is not eligible for the enhanced rate, standard Illness Benefit payment may be payable subject to normal certification and eligibility criteria to a person with a serious health condition, where a medical practitioner certifies that a person is incapable of work due to the medical condition. This may be paid for an extended period, depending on the person's continued eligibility.

Employees who cocoon without a medical certificate may approach their employer in relation to taking annual or other paid leave - this is at the discretion of the employer. Many employers can, and do, agree leave arrangements with staff who need to take short periods of time off. These include arrangements to enable employees to work remotely from home, to alter shift patterns, to work-up time taken, or to bring forward annual leave entitlements from future work periods. The government has encouraged employers to support workers with leave requests at this difficult time and those with underlying health conditions should be facilitated where possible.

Where it is not possible to make appropriate compassionate leave arrangements, employees can call on some statutory entitlements including supplementary welfare allowance.

I trust that this clarifies the position.

*Questions Nos. No. 674 and 675 answered with Question No. 631.*

*Question No. 676 answered with Question No. 658.*

*Question No. 677 answered with Question No. 631.*

### **Child Maintenance Payments**

678. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the progress of the judge-led group announced as part of Budget 2020 to examine and make recommendations in relation to child maintenance payments. [10347/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I established a Child Maintenance Review Group to examine a number of issues regarding child maintenance. Specifically, the group is tasked with examining whether there is a case for the establishment of a child maintenance agency in Ireland. It will be chaired by former Circuit Court Judge Catherine Murphy.

The purpose of the Child Maintenance Review Group is to consider and make recommendations on:

- The current treatment within the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection of child maintenance payments;
- The current provisions relating to the liable relatives regarding child maintenance; and
- The establishment of a State Child Maintenance Agency.

The Child Maintenance Review Group's work will get underway shortly.

A number of issues regarding child maintenance have arisen during the Covid-19 pandemic. Where a One Parent Family recipient is no longer receiving their usual maintenance payment, for example because the liable relative concerned has lost their job, they should contact their local Intreo Centre to provide a declaration to that effect. This will allow their means to be reassessed on that basis for a period of 12 weeks, following which the situation will be reviewed.

Given that the family courts are not hearing maintenance cases during the pandemic, this situation will be carefully monitored on an ongoing basis, to ensure that there are no difficulties or hardship for this group of customers.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment**

679. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the Covid-19 payment will be reinstated to asylum seekers in direct provision; if an increase to the rate of the daily expenses allowance will be reconsidered; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10359/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Applicants for International Protection accommodated under the system of Direct Provision operated by the International Protection Accommodation Services of the Department of Justice and Equality are provided with full board accommodation and other facilities and services.

People in direct provision receive a daily expenses allowance payment from my Department payable at the weekly rate of €38.80 for adults and €29.80 for children. In this situation, the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment is not payable where the person's needs are being met through the services provided by the accommodation centre and the daily expenses allowance payment.

Where applicants for International Protection live in the community outside the direct provision system, they are eligible for the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment if they meet the conditions for the payment.

Applicants for international protection may receive assistance under the Exceptional Needs Payment scheme to meet with any costs that cannot be met from their weekly allowance.

I trust that this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

*Question No. 680 answered with Question No. 656.*

*Questions Nos. 681 and 682 answered with Question No. 656.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment**

683. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of taxi drivers and PSV licence holders currently in receipt of the Covid-19 payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10425/20]

684. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will maintain the Covid-19 pandemic payment for taxi drivers until the industry recovers but allow drivers to top-up their income by doing some work without losing the payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10426/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 683 and 684 together.

The COVID 19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment was introduced as an emergency measure to meet the surge in unemployment which resulted from the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. Self-employed people must have experienced a collapse of income and be available to take up other full-time work if it was available to them in order to qualify. Government has announced the continuation of this payment until 10th August which provides financial certainty as we move further, and at a faster pace than expected, towards re-opening our society.

Where a self-employed person does not qualify for this emergency payment they can apply for a jobseekers payment. If a person's business has ceased trading they can avail of jobseekers benefit (self-employed) which I introduced in late 2019. If a person's business is operating at a reduced level they may be eligible to apply for support under the means tested jobseekers allowance scheme.

Where a person is experiencing financial hardship they can apply for other financial support through the means tested supplementary welfare allowance scheme.

I am advised that my Department does not have detailed industry breakdowns of the number of people in receipt of the COVID 19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment such as taxi drivers or PSV licence holders. However, recipients are categorized under a number of broader sectors. Taxi drivers are categorized as being in the Transportation and Storage sector and the number of people in this sector in receipt of the COVID 19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment since 2

June 2020 is 16,200.

I trust that this clarifies the situation.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment**

685. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 1287 of 20 May 2020, if she will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10437/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) was introduced by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is an income support payment for both employees and the self-employed who have become fully unemployed due to a downturn in economic activity related to Covid-19. The Covid-19 PUP is payable where a person meeting the qualifying criteria became unemployed on or after 6/3/2020.

A person is eligible to apply for the Covid-19 (PUP) if they:

- are aged between 18 and 66 years old and
- are currently living in the Republic of Ireland and
- have lost their job due to the COVID-19 pandemic or
- have been temporarily laid off due to the COVID-19 pandemic and
- worked in the Republic of Ireland or were a cross border frontier worker and
- are not in receipt of any employment income.

The PUP is not available to people who self-isolate due to an underlying medical condition.

In order to receive a Covid Illness Benefit (IB) payment a person must be diagnosed with Covid-19 or be medically certified as a probable source of infection in order to be eligible for Covid IB, in addition to having worked in the previous four weeks.

If medical certification is provided by a doctor of a non-Covid-19 illness and if a person is eligible, payment is awarded at normal rate of IB.

I am advised that the records of my Department reflect that the person concerned is currently in receipt of an Illness Benefit payment at the normal rate of IB. This payment has been certified up to 8/6/2020.

When the person concerned is certified medically fit to return to work and if he is concerned about returning to work due to Covid-19, he should contact his employer regarding this matter. There are a number of steps an employer can take in line with social distancing guidelines to facilitate employees during this period including, introducing/altering shift patterns, allow employees to take time worked up, work remotely from home or bring forward annual leave entitlements from future work periods. Many employers can and do agree to compassionate leave in certain circumstances.

If the person concerned is experiencing financial difficulties at present, it is open to him to contact his local Community Welfare Service in Maynooth where his circumstances will be

assessed. Under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme, my Department can make a single Exceptional Needs Payment to help meet essential, once-off expenditure, which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. There is no automatic entitlement to these payments which are payable at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme, taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case, in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance. The Community Welfare Service may be contacted by phone at 01 6016360.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

### **Personal Public Service Numbers**

686. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there are delays being experienced to the processing of PPS number applications as a result of Covid-19 compared to the pre-crisis period; the average processing time for an application to be processed compared to the pre-crisis period; if additional resources will be made available if there are delays being experienced; and the recourse available to applicants. [10462/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The SAFE registration process, which involves the authentication of a person's identity in a face-to-face interview, is the normal method of processing an application for a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN).

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, my Department has temporarily suspended the SAFE registration process. This decision was taken in order to comply with HSE and World Health Organisation guidelines in respect of social distancing.

My Department has introduced an email and a postal application service for people who require a PPSN. While I am advised that there are no significant delays in relation to this new application service, there can sometimes be delays where a person does not submit all of the required documentation.

The face-to-face process involved, in many locations, the person setting up an appointment for a date in the future. The current process does not involve appointments and this means that it is not possible to realistically compare the time taken to process application across each service.

With regard to the actual process of allocating a PPSN, once all of the relevant documentation is provided, the PPSN is allocated overnight and issued to the person concerned via post.

My Department is moving towards a resumption of the SAFE registration process over the coming weeks on a phased basis and this will be done in accordance with all relevant HSE and Government guidelines to ensure the health and safety of the Department's customers and staff.

In the meantime, any person who wishes to talk to someone about their application for a PPSN can call my Department on LoCall 1890 927 999.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 687 answered with Question No. 631.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

688. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the time frame for the commencement of the protection afforded under section 5(7)(c) of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9684/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The emergency period referenced in Part 2 of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 commenced on the date of enactment of the legislation, which was 27 March 2020.

I understand that the provision referred to commenced at the same time.

The text of the Act and the particular provisions queried is set out at the following link <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2020/act/2/enacted/en/html?q=emergency>.

The interpretation of the legislation and how it applies in particular situations, is a matter for the Courts.

### **Fire Stations**

689. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10022/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The provision of fire services in local authority areas, including the establishment and maintenance of fire brigades, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises, is a statutory function of the individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Acts, 1981 and 2003. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority projects.

In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on an annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised fire stations, an upgrade of the communications and mobilisation system, and improvements to training centres.

Macroom Fire Station is included in the programme of fire stations for construction within the five-year allocation announced in February 2016. Draft designs for the new station have been received and reviewed by my Department, and approval issued to Cork County Council on 19 February 2020 to proceed to seek tenders for the project.

On 26 May 2020 the Council submitted a tender proposal to my Department for approval prior to contract. This proposal is under review and a response will issue to the Council as soon as possible.

### **Property Registration**

690. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the Property Registration Authority and or Land Registry will be operational again (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9758/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I understand that the Property Registration Authority (PRA) is upscaling its operations in line with Covid-19 recovery planning. As part of a phased recovery plan, the PRA is implementing a graduated increase in the level of applications processed for registration. New work practices and projects are being successfully incorporated into this phased increase.

Applications are being dealt with in order of priority. However, urgent applications, such as cases in which a delay would hold up the sale of a property, are being processed expeditiously upon request on a case-by-case basis.

The upscaling of operations will continue to be reviewed and implemented in line with recovery planning, the Roadmap for Re-opening Society and Business, the Return to Work Safely Protocol and public health guidance.

In relation to any specific case, arrangements have been put in place by all State bodies under the aegis of my Department to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. Further information in relation to any specific case may be obtained by contacting the dedicated e-mail address in respect of the PRA at [reps@prai.ie](mailto:reps@prai.ie).

### **Road Safety**

691. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if local authorities will be encouraged to provide more space on roads and footpaths and in public open spaces in the suburbs of Dublin for pedestrians and cyclists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9796/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Responsibility for public roads is an independent function of the relevant road authority. Overall national policy in relation to roads and transportation is a matter for the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

### **Land Development Agency**

692. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if capital expenditure by the Land Development Agency is not subject to the Public Spending Code, Cost Effectiveness Analyses or his Department's four stage approval process; and if so, the reason all of these public spending control mechanisms apply to local authorities when developing social and affordable housing but not to the Land Development Agency. [9877/20]

693. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of and measures to be undertaken of the capital allocation to the Land Development Agency of €16,500,000 in 2019 and €13,500,000; the controls in place to ensure that this expenditure conforms with value for money and spending code rules; and the details of the spending made in 2019 and to date in 2020 of the funding drawdown of €467,000 and €2,500,000, respectively. [9891/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 692 and 693 together.

The day to day management of the Land Development Agency (LDA), including spending on capital projects, is a matter for the Chief Executive and his management team reporting to the LDA Interim Board. In line with all commercial and non-commercial State bodies, the LDA

is required to comply with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, including ensuring that robust and effective systems are in place to ensure compliance as appropriate with the Public Spending Code.

The LDA Board is required to ensure that it has regard to appropriate models for investment appraisal for the appraisal and management of all investment proposals, including the Project Lifecycle introduced in the new Public Spending Code. In addition under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, the Chairperson of each State body, including the LDA, should confirm in its annual report that the organisation is adhering to the relevant aspects of the Public Spending Code.

My Department has responsibility for the safeguarding of public funds expended from the Department's Vote and in accordance with the Code of Governance, is required to be satisfied that the requirements of the Code are being properly implemented and observed. It is intended that my Department will be assisted in this regard by the advice provided by NewERA in exercise of its statutory advisory role under the National Treasury Management Agency (Amendment) Act 2014. At present there is a Memorandum of Understanding between my Department and the LDA. Once the legislation to establish the LDA as a commercial state body is enacted, the LDA will be subject to the usual Departmental oversight arrangements for Commercial State Agencies as set out under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. In line with other commercial state bodies, when capital commitments are being entered into, the LDA will be required to seek Ministerial consent.

At present, funding is provided to the LDA through my Department's Vote to meet its operational costs as well as initial capital funding in relation to the development of its projects. Following enactment of the LDA's primary legislation, it will be capitalised through the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF). This ISIF financing will be used to progress the LDA's portfolio of projects and it is not envisaged that the LDA will receive funding allocations from my Department's Vote at that stage. In line with other State agencies, the LDA is responsible for ensuring it has its own systems in place in line with the Public Spending Code as set out above.

€13.5 million of the LDA's 2019 capital allocation of €16.5m was rolled over into 2020 as the LDA's projects were at initial pre-planning stages during 2019 and thus did not incur significant expenditure. The capital funding to date has been used by the LDA to undertake pre-construction works in relation to their sites, including feasibility appraisal and master-planning and the details of this expenditure is an operational matter for the LDA.

As with all State bodies operating under the aegis of my Department, arrangements have been put in place by the LDA through which Oireachtas members can request information directly from the Agency in relation to operational matters - in this regard, the LDA may be contacted directly at [oireachtas@lda.ie](mailto:oireachtas@lda.ie) for detailed information in relation to their expenditure.

### **Local Authority Leases**

694. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average length of time of the 733 Part V leases delivered in 2019; the average cost of the leases; the number of these leases in which the property will be owned by a local authority or approved housing body when the lease expires; and the number of these leases in which the ownership will remain in private hands when the lease expires. [9929/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Of the 733 Part V dwellings delivered in 2019 and supported under the Social Housing Current

Expenditure Programme (SHCEP), 719 were delivered under the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) Part V and are owned by the relevant Approved Housing Body. The remaining 14 dwellings were delivered under a Part V Lease and will revert to the private owner at the end of the lease term. The relevant local authority may seek to renew the lease or acquire the property at the end of the lease term.

The estimated average annual cost in 2020 and the duration of the agreements, for these 733 properties, are set out in the following table.

**Table: SHCEP Part V Delivery 2019 – Average Annual Cost and Duration**

Source	No. of Dwellings	Average Annual Cost	Average Agreement Length (years)
CALF Part V (AHB Ownership)	719	€15,273	26
Part V Lease (Private Ownership)	14	€23,239	20
Total	733	€15,425	26

### Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

695. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position in relation to the Sienna Valley urban regeneration development fund project submitted to appeal by Louth County Council; if a decision has been made; if not, when a decision will be made on this application for Drogheda, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9939/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** In July 2018 bids for URDF funding support were invited from public bodies, and as a result a total of 189 applications were received by my Department.

The application process was competitive and in the event, the call was oversubscribed in terms of potential value of proposals compared to the available annual URDF provisions. In this context all proposals went through a rigorous assessment including consideration by a Project Advisory Board (PAB), which consisted of representatives from my Department, other relevant Government Departments, agency representation and independent national and international expert representatives.

Following this process, on 26 November 2018, I announced initial URDF support of €100m for a total of 88 projects throughout the country.

All applicants both successful and unsuccessful received a detailed breakdown of the assessment of their proposal. Where the decision in respect of a proposal was unfavourable, applicants were offered the opportunity to request a review of the Departments decision.

As a result, requests for a review were submitted in respect of seven proposals. Each of the proposals involved was reviewed, having regard to the PAB’s original evaluation and scoring of the proposal against the URDF programme criteria.

In all cases, including the case of the Northern Cross Route, Drogheda it was found there was nothing to support an outcome that would be materially different from that arrived at through the PAB process.

Louth County Council recently submitted an application for funding support for this project

under Call 2 of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund. The final date for the submission of applications under Call 2 was Friday, the 29th May. The application in question will be considered in due course as part of a rigorous assessment process including consideration by a Project Advisory Board .

### **Property Registration**

696. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a Land Registry application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9955/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** In relation to any specific cases with the Property Registration Authority, arrangements have been put in place to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. Further information in relation to the specific case referred to may be obtained by contacting the dedicated e-mail address in respect of the PRA at [reps@prai.ie](mailto:reps@prai.ie).

### **Local Authority Housing**

697. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a person (details supplied) will be offered a home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9956/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Oversight and management of housing waiting lists is a matter for the relevant local authority in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, and associated regulations. Specifically, section 63(3) of the Local Government Act 2001 provides that, subject to law, a local authority is independent in the performance of its functions. Section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, requires all local authorities, as a reserved function, to make an allocation scheme determining the order of priority to be accorded in the allocation of dwellings to households qualified for social housing support, the allocation of which would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the accommodation needs and requirements of the households.

Decisions on the qualification of specific persons for social housing support and the allocation of that support are matters solely for the local authority concerned. As Minister, I am precluded by law from becoming involved in individual cases.

### **Planning Issues**

698. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is considering an exemption for self-catering holiday homes that have been inadvertently affected by planning rules introduced to reduce the impact of a company (details supplied) on the available housing stock in general; and his views on the position taken by an organisation which is seeking a fair exemption from these planning laws for those that have been legitimately operating in tourism accommodation for at least the past five years [9965/20]

706. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider amending the Planning and Development Act 2000 (Exempted Development) (No. 2.) Regulations 2019, SI No. 235 of 2019, to exempt from the requirement of getting a new planning permission all those properties that have been used for the purposes

of tourism accommodation for five years prior to 2019 and in circumstances (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10201/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 698 and 706 together.

The Planning And Development Act 2000 (Exempted Development) (No. 2) Regulations 2019 (S.I. No 235 of 2019) - otherwise referred to as the Short-Term Letting Regulations - came into effect on 1 July 2019 with the aim of addressing the longer term rental issues arising from the use of properties for short-term letting purposes in designated Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs), which are areas of high housing demand. These Regulations, which are operable until 31 December 2021, only apply within the designated RPZs and therefore do not apply to properties in other parts of the country.

Under the Regulations, the owner a property in a RPZ which is not their principal private residence and who lets it for short-term letting purposes can, in order to continue such use of the property, apply for planning permission under section 34 of the Planning And Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act), with a decision generally made by the planning authority within 8 weeks of receipt of the application. This applies to all short-term letting properties in RPZs which are not principal private residences.

Where the owner of a property is unsure whether planning permission is required for short-term letting in their property, they can seek a declaration from the planning authority under Section 5 of the Act as to what, in any particular case, is or is not development or is or is not exempted development.

Responsibility for making determinations in individual cases in this regard is an independent function of the relevant planning authority. Under Section 30 of the Act, I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case with which a planning authority or the Board is or may be concerned, save in specific circumstances which do not apply in this case.

I recognise the tourism benefits that the self-catering sector brings to many parts of the country, and am not opposed to the broader regulation of tourism activity, including the possible development of a new regulatory or licensing/registration system for commercial platforms and short-term letting agents which was recommended in the final Working Group report on the regulation of short-term lettings. However this is beyond the scope of the planning code and my remit. I corresponded with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport regarding the possible implementation of the recommendation which would fall to him to progress. I remain of the view that the possibility of developing a more nuanced approach to the regulation of short-term letting through regulation of online platforms rather than the regulation of properties in RPZs merits consideration, thereby enabling parts of the country that benefit from the tourism that comes from short-term letting to be able to continue to do so.

I have no plans to amend exempted development regulations with regard to short-term letting at this time.

### **Cycle to Work Scheme**

**699. Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by his Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9986/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department's Workplace Travel Plan encourages staff to use sustainable transport when:

- travelling to and from work, and
- conducting business on behalf of the Department

Participation by staff in the Cycle to Work scheme was facilitated initially under this Plan before the operation of the scheme transferred to Peoplepoint at the National Shared Service Office in 2016. The costs listed were upfront costs, subsequently recouped as provided for under the scheme.

Year	Staff Numbers	Total
2009	50	€37,153.31
2010	87	€65,017.57
2011	68	€51,398.52
2012	52	€41,853.08
2013	41	€29,278.08
2014	32	€26,126.12
2015	37	€29,031.80
2016	28	€22,191.46
2017	27	€22,388.45
2018	35	€28,212.53
2019	39	€31,493.89
2020	8	€ 7,007.98
Total	504	€391, 152.79

### Social and Affordable Housing

700. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the breakdown of the 6,074 social housing builds in 2019 by category (details supplied). [10000/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department publishes extensive data each quarter relating to the delivery of social homes across the country. Detailed information on the various components of the 6,074 social homes delivered through the Build stream in 2019 can be accessed at the following links:

LA and AHB Build, which can be disaggregated into Direct Build & Turnkeys: Open Data Portal (configurable files): <https://data.gov.ie/dataset/social-housing-construction-status-report-q4-2019>

Voids are detailed in the overall social housing delivery outputs: [https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/social\\_housing\\_delivery\\_by\\_local\\_authority\\_2019\\_2\\_0.xlsx](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/social_housing_delivery_by_local_authority_2019_2_0.xlsx)

Part V split between LA and Voluntary and Co-operative (AHB):

[https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/part\\_v\\_output\\_by\\_area\\_2014-2019\\_0.xlsx](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/part_v_output_by_area_2014-2019_0.xlsx)

701. **Deputy Francis Noel Duffy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 1301 of 13 May 2020, the discussions he has had with Irish Water regarding drought conditions; when these discussions took place; the contingency plans in place; and if he is drawing up plans and policies on water scarcity and drought. [10003/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My officials kept me informed since March in relation to the water supply situation arising from the current dry spell and the risks of encountering a situation much like the one faced in the summer of 2018. Officials from my Department are also maintaining ongoing close contact with Irish Water and the National Federation of Group Water Schemes throughout this period. With the impact of the drought conditions continuing, my Department has now reconvened the Water Quality Sub-Group that sat during the drought period in 2018.

Chaired by my Department, this multi-agency drought response coordination group considered the issues arising from the extended period of warm weather at its first meeting on Thursday, 4th June 2020. The group will meet again today (Tuesday, 9th June).

This group facilitates communication between relevant organisations and provides a means of coordinating the actions taken in response to the drought conditions.

The group consists of Irish Water, National Federation of Group Water Schemes, Inland Fisheries Ireland, the Health Service Executive, the Office of Public Works, the ESB, Met Éireann, and the EPA, and representatives from the local authority sector.

The National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management, under the remit of my Department, is also keeping the situation under review and can escalate the response as necessary. At present, issues will continue to be managed by the relevant sectors under the increased level of co-ordination referred to above, as is appropriate to the current situation.

As the body with statutory responsibility for all aspects of public water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels, Irish Water has a dedicated Drought Management Team which it activates during periods of shortages and droughts to assess and monitor demand on water supplies.

Following their recent public information campaign urging the public to conserve water, Irish Water has now issued a national Water Conservation Order (more commonly known as a hosepipe ban) with effect from Tuesday, 09 June 2020. The Order is being put in place following increased demand on water supplies and the deteriorating drought conditions. More information on what is being done and what the public can do to lessen the pressures on water supplies is available at [www.water.ie/water-supply/water-shortages/](http://www.water.ie/water-supply/water-shortages/).

Looking beyond the current dry period, the National Development Plan supports significant investment to deliver robust and reliable water supplies that are climate resilient and that meet both current and future demands. Under the Plan, the Government has committed €8.5 billion to improving the public water system. Of this €2.9bn is aimed at providing a safe and reliable water supply, which includes a national programme of investment to tackle leakage through the find and fix initiative (active leakage control). Over €500m is targeted at water mains rehabilitation.

## **Rent Pressure Zones**

702. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment his plans for rent pressure zones and the exemptions that exist enabling landlords to increase the rent by more than 4%; if improving the energy efficiency of a house is considered an acceptable reason for an exemption; his views on whether these exemptions need to be tightened to protect tenants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10054/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 Act provides a legal definition of ‘substantial change in the nature of rental accommodation’ to illustrate the type of works to be carried out to a rental property to qualify for an exemption from the annual rent increase restriction applicable in Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs).

Such works shall result in:

- a permanent extension increasing the floor area by 25%; or
- an improvement in the Building Energy Rating (BER) by at least 7 ratings; or
- at least 3 of the following:
  - a) a permanent alteration of the internal layout; b) adaptations for a person with a disability;
  - c) a permanent increase in the number of rooms; d) an improvement in the BER by 3 or more ratings where the original BER was D1 or lower; or e) an improvement in the BER by 2 or more ratings where the original BER was C3 or higher

and the aforementioned works do not solely consist of works carried out for the purposes of compliance with the minimum standards in rented accommodation, as prescribed in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2019.

The exemptions to the RPZ rent increase restriction were the subject of careful consideration and debate in the Houses of the Oireachtas during the passage of the 2019 Act .

The new legal definition has provided better tenancy protection and greater clarity for tenants, landlords, the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) and the courts. I have no plans at this time for any further changes to the exemptions to the RPZ annual rent increase restriction.

### **Local Authority Contracts**

703. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the tender process for local authorities for the hiring or purchasing of plant machinery; if contracts for plant machinery for local authorities have to be tendered on a yearly basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10138/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** I have no direct role in the procurement practices of individual local authorities. In accordance with section 149 of the Local Government Act 2001, the Chief Executive of a local authority is responsible for the executive functions of the authority, which includes procurement.

The Office of Government Procurement (OGP), an office within the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, was established for the purpose of centralising procurement arrangements for common goods and services across the public sector, including local authorities. The OGP has established a number of Framework Agreements and Contracts for goods and general services.

The Local Government Operational Procurement Centre (LGOPC) has responsibility for the operation of certain procurement categories. The LGOPC operates the SupplyGov frameworks website, acting as a central procurement authority for those categories.

My Department works closely with the Local Government Strategic Procurement Centre (LGSPC), which acts as a conduit between the Department, the local government sector and the OGP; my Department is represented on the LGSPC Programme Board. The LGSPC provides additional guidance to local authorities to support compliance with the use of all national frameworks and application of all relevant legislation and circulars relating to procurement.

### **Local Authority Funding**

704. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures he plans to implement to assist local authorities with their funding programmes due to the serious reduction that will occur in their income in 2020 due to the contraction in business activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10195/20]

705. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to increase the rates of reimbursement for local authorities at a higher rate than originally announced due to the closure of businesses caused by Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10196/20]

712. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if confirmation of funding for local authorities to compensate for additional expenditure or income losses other than rates losses due to Covid-19 will be given; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10368/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 704, 705 and 712 together.

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, my Department has taken a number of measures to assist local authorities with the financial difficulties they are experiencing.

At the outset and to minimise cash flow challenges, my Department arranged for the early payment of Local Property Tax (LPT) to all local authorities. As a short term measure, my Department made €136m available to local authorities as cash flow support in early April, in order to ensure that vital services that local authorities deliver can be maintained. This support was comprised of the early payment of the LPT allocation ordinarily paid from the Local Government Fund in May and July.

On 2 May 2020, the Government announced that a waiver of commercial rates will apply to all businesses that have been forced to close due to public health requirements, from 27 March 2020, for a three-month period. The costs involved will be met by the Exchequer. My Department is currently preparing further guidance for local authorities on this initiative.

In order to support the local government sector generally, my Department will continue to keep local authority income, expenditure and cash flow generally under review and will continue to work with all local authorities, both collectively and individually, on issues arising.

*Question No. 706 answered with Question No. 698.*

### **Local Authority Members**

707. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a report (details supplied) will be published; the reason for the delay in publishing the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10202/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** A Review of the Role and Remuneration of Local Authority Elected Members, led by Ms Sara Moorhead SC, was initiated by the Minister of State for Local Government and Electoral Reform, in conjunction with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, in June 2018. Ms Moorhead's final report was formally submitted to me for my consideration on 22 May 2020.

I am considering the Report, including in terms of submission to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for consideration in the context of public sector pay, and thereafter submission to Government.

### **Fire Stations**

708. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the fire stations within County Donegal that were refurbished or extended; the number of fire appliances supplied to Donegal County Council; if the vehicles were new or second-hand vehicles purchased; the cost of each item under the 2016-2021 €40 million Fire Service Capital Programme in each of the years 2016 to 2019 and to date 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10228/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs, the provision of fire station premises, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the Fire Service Acts, 1981 and 2003. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects and equipment.

My Department has channelled significant investment to fire authorities over the last number of years to improve the quality of Ireland's fire service infrastructure. Donegal County Council, in partnership with my Department, has made substantial progress in modernising fire stations in the county. They have replaced 12 of the 15 fire stations in the county from 1998 to 2009, with investment of some €11 million by my Department.

In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on an annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres.

My Department reviews the status of projects on the list on an annual basis, and adjustments, including some additions, are made to the published five-year programme. This includes consideration of additional fire station projects from fire authorities which fit the normal fire station project criteria and where an appropriate business case is presented. My Department has indicated to Donegal County Council that it will consider a proposal for advancing a fire station project in the south of the county as part of this Programme.

The investment by my Department in new vehicles and appliances for Donegal Fire and Rescue Service since 2016 is set out in table 1 below, and includes two new Class B fire appli-

ances as well as four new all-wheel drive (AWD) vehicles.

Table 1- New vehicles provided under Fire Services Capital Programme to Donegal Fire Service

Year	Vehicle type	Amount €
2016	Three AWD vehicles	104,278
2017	One AWD vehicle	75,353
	One 'Class B' fire appliance	398,686
2019	One 'Class B' fire appliance	452,294
Total		1,030,611

My Department has also approved funding for the purchase of previously owned vehicles/appliances and other capital items during the 2016-2019 period. Details of these are set out in table 2 below.

Table 2 Previously Owned etc. Vehicles/Appliances etc. provided under the Fire Services Capital Programme to Donegal Fire Service

Year	Capital Expenditure Type	Notes	Amount € (ex VAT)
2016	Two 'Class B' fire appliances	Previously Owned	90,000
2017	Emergency Vehicle	Previously Owned	50,000
	Two 'Class B' fire appliance	Previously Owned	90,000
2018	Two 'Class B' fire appliance	Previously Owned	95,000
2019	Water Tanker	New	130,000
	Incident Command Vehicle	Refurbished	52,000
Total			507,000

I understand that not all payments listed in table 2 have so far been claimed by the Council.

### Direct Provision System

709. **Deputy Roderic O'Gorman** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of community response forums which contain direct representation from persons living in direct provision including asylum seekers in temporary emergency accommodation by county; if they are not directly represented, if an assessment is being carried out in each county to ascertain if information is being adequately relayed from the forum to this cohort of persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10332/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Community Call initiative is a coming together of National Government with Local Government and the Community and Voluntary Sector, to put in place a safety net for people who are cocooning and need extra help at this time, particularly if their usual networks of support are unable to reach them. Forums were put in place in all 31 local authority areas over the weekend of 28/29 March.

Under the leadership of local authorities, each Fora includes public sector organisations,

such as the HSE, An Garda Síochána and Civil Defence, national organisations, like Alone and An Post and Community and Voluntary organisations. Membership of each Fora is managed locally, and based on local needs and capacities to respond.

The role of the Fora is ensure that everyone who needs support is identified, the support required is carefully assessed and the appropriate practical support is provided, by a trusted source. Such practical supports include the collection and delivery of food, meals, fuel, medication, pensions and other essential items, in strict accordance with public health advice.

To support the work of the Forums further, in early April, my colleague, Mr Michael Ring TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development launched an Emergency Fund fund to support the community response. This €2.5m fund was to provide immediate and urgently needed funding to community and voluntary groups participating in the “Community Call” initiative. Local Authorities are administering this fund.

At national level, an oversight group, chaired by my Department and comprising representatives from the Departments of Rural and Community Development, Health and An Taoiseach, as well as the County and City Management Association (CCMA) and Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), oversees the operation of the Community Call initiative.

The Oversight Group includes representation from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) COVID-19 Subgroup - Vulnerable People. Specific responsibility for people in direct provision rests with my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, and my Department has no role in that regard. I understand that Department is represented on the NPHE Vulnerable People Sub Group.

Where needs are identified in the community, practical supports can be and are being provided via Community Call Fora at a local level. The provision of such supports is for each Forum.

### **Building Regulations**

710. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the Building Control Act 2007 will be amended to include a grandfather clause for those with acquired rights to enable them to continue to certify as architects without being criminalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10338/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** Part 3 of the Building Control Act 2007 introduced a system of statutory registration for architects and restricted use of the title of “architect” to persons who are registered architects.

Section 22 of the Act makes specific provision for registration based on technical assessment of persons who had been independently performing duties commensurate with those of an architect for a period of 10 or more years in the State prior to the commencement of the Act. This is, in effect, what is often colloquially referred to as a grandfather clause.

In 2013, in response in particular to the lower than anticipated rate of applications for registration by technical assessment, an independent review of the arrangements in place for registration was undertaken by Mr Garret Fennell, Solicitor. Mr Fennell’s report on the matter is available on my Department’s website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/BuildingStandards/FileDownload%2C34097%2Cen.pdf>.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht also examined the matter and published its Report on the Title of Architect (July 2013) which is available at

[https://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/archivedcommittees/  
environmenttransportcultureandthegaeltacht/Report-on-the-Title-of-Architect.pdf](https://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/archivedcommittees/environmenttransportcultureandthegaeltacht/Report-on-the-Title-of-Architect.pdf)

Both reports, which were welcomed by my Department, made a number of recommendations intended to improve and streamline the arrangements for registration. Implementation of these recommendations, in consultation with the Architects Alliance of Ireland and others, has seen a number of reforms being implemented, which include the administration of the technical assessment process on a cyclical basis where briefing, guidance and support for candidates can be administered in a structured manner; mentoring and supporting applicants; facilitating assessment based on recent projects; facilitating applicants with reassessment/reapplication (i.e. ensuring that the technical assessment procedure is not seen as a one chance only route to registration); and reviewing and simplifying guidance materials with direct input from practice-trained persons. My Department and the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI), as registration body, are committed to continuing to work with the Architects Alliance of Ireland and others in this manner to achieve whatever further reasonable and practical improvements of registration arrangements can be made in the context of the Fennell report or otherwise.

In addition to the transitional “grandfather” provision set out above, section 14(2)(f) of the Act provides a permanent route to registration for practically trained persons who have 7 years appropriate practical experience and who have passed the prescribed register examination. In 2016, the Architects Alliance of Ireland proposed a special entry route to incorporate the proposed development of a second prescribed register admission examination as currently provided for under this section. Assessment for registration under section 14(2)(f) comes within the responsibility of the RIAI, who are designated as the registration body for the purposes of the 2007 Act, and as the competent authority for the purposes of the Directive on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications (as amended). For this reason, the Architects Alliance of Ireland were advised by my Department to discuss their proposal, in the first instance, with the RIAI as registration body and competent authority for the architectural profession in Ireland.

My Department and the RIAI, as registration body, are committed to continuing to work with the Architects Alliance of Ireland and all other stakeholders to achieve whatever further reasonable and practical improvements in registration arrangements can be made. I would encourage all practically trained persons to pursue the routes to registration which are open to them and to continue to engage constructively with my Department and the RIAI.

## Housing Data

711. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of public housing units built by local authorities and approved housing bodies since the foundation of the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10345/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** There is no single, comparable set of data pertaining to the output of public housing in the State which spans the near century covered by the Deputy’s query.

The Central Statistics Office does hold records pertaining to housing units ‘rented from Local Authority’, which span back to prior to the formation of the State but even in the early decades of the State some of these homes were supplied through the purchase of homes rather than new build so it is not possible to isolate the number built from the number delivered.

Some of this data from the early decades of the State may be accessed at the following link:

<https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?Maintable=E1018&Language=0>

Since the outset of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan we have sought to make an unprecedented volume of data publicly and transparently available. To this end, quarterly monitoring across the various output streams are published to the both my Department's website and to the Open Data Portal in searchable and configurable formats.

Furthermore, a quarterly Social Housing Construction Status Report outlines an Appendix of every scheme completed and in progress, broken down by both Local Authority Area and by funding programme.

Q4 Social Housing Construction Status Report:

<https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-for-q4-2019-2/>

Social Housing Delivery (c.2000 onwards)

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>

Open Data Portal (configurable files)

<https://data.gov.ie/dataset?organization=department-of-housing-planning-and-local-government&theme=Housing>

*Question No. 712 answered with Question No. 704.*

## **Housing Data**

713. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses approved for construction under the strategic housing development scheme; the number of houses approved that have been constructed; the number under construction; the number yet to begin construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10378/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Under the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 (the Act) introduced new streamlined arrangements to enable planning applications for strategic housing developments (SHDs) of 100 housing units or more, or student accommodation or shared accommodation developments of 200 bed spaces or more, to be made directly to An Bord Pleanála (the Board) for determination.

The Board has received 204 SHD applications up to the 30 April 2020, in respect of a total of 57,332 homes (comprising 16,322 houses, 33,855 apartments and 7,155 Build to Rent homes), 12,022 student bed spaces and 600 shared accommodation bed spaces. The Board has granted permission on 132 SHD applications in respect of a total of 35,871 homes (comprising 9,583 houses, 20,962 apartments and 5,454 Build to Rent homes), 9,498 student bed spaces and 410 shared accommodation bed spaces. With regard to the other 72 applications; 36 were refused, 1 was referred back to the Board following judicial review, 1 was withdrawn, with the

remainder still awaiting a decision.

Of the applications that were granted permission under the SHD arrangements, it is understood that commencement notices have been lodged in respect of 38 of these projects to date. A total of 9,553 homes were permitted in the developments in respect of which commencement notices have been lodged (comprising 4,262 houses, 5,002 apartments and 289 Build to Rent homes), as well as 5371 student bed spaces.

The recent review of the Strategic Housing Development arrangements highlighted that while they have generally been a success in providing a fast-track development consent process for developers of large-scale housing developments, the number of SHD permissions that have commenced development is less than might have been expected. Having reflected on the views of the Review Group on the rate of activation of SHD sites, it is considered appropriate that developers should be sufficiently motivated to commence development on foot of an SHD permission in a timely manner, given the efficiencies that the SHD arrangements provide.

Therefore, I indicated that I considered that it would be appropriate to introduce a “use it or lose it” measure requiring developers to have commenced a certain level of development within a certain period of time on foot of a grant of an SHD planning permission. My Department has been developing proposals in this regard, the further advancement of which will be considered in context of the legislative programme of the incoming Government.

### **Local Authority Housing**

714. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the additional resources provided to local authorities in Dublin city and county in the past 12 months to assist them with the processing of an increased number of planning applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10379/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The staffing arrangements, including recruitment and the detailed role and functions of the posts within a local authority, are a matter for the individual Dublin local authorities. In accordance with section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, the Chief Executive of the local authority makes such staffing and organisational arrangements as may be necessary for the purposes of carrying out the functions of the local authority for which he or she is responsible. This includes the allocation of resources to planning functions within the local authority as required.

### **Emergency Accommodation**

715. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons that lived in shelters or emergency accommodation in each of the years 2008 to 2019 and to date in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10381/20]

716. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons that are homeless; the number of such persons being housed in temporary accommodation or shelters which have been provided by private sector providers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10382/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 715 and 716 together.

My Department publishes a monthly report on homelessness. The monthly report is based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). The report captures details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities. Official homeless reports are published on my Department's website on a monthly basis and are available at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

These reports include information broken down by accommodation type at regional level. Emergency accommodation provided in a hotel is included within the private emergency accommodation (PEA) category along with other commercially provided emergency accommodation arrangements. The reporting on homelessness began in its current format with the introduction of the PASS system in 2014. My Department does not hold the details sought by the Deputy prior to this.

### **Approved Housing Bodies**

717. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the CEO of the Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority will be appointed as per SI No. 188 of 2020; the process for the appointment; the expected impact of the appointment on the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10383/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** As set out in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness (Action 2.15) it has been an objective of my Department to establish a statutory Regulator to oversee the effective governance, financial management and performance of voluntary and co-operative housing bodies and to transition from the current voluntary regulatory environment.

The legislative basis for statutory regulation, the Housing (Regulation of Approved Housing Bodies) Act 2019, was signed into law on 23 December 2019 and preparatory work is currently underway to establish the Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority (the Regulator).

The Act provides that the Regulator shall appoint the chief executive officer from recommendations made by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) after a competition has been undertaken in accordance with the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004.

Provision is also made for the appointment of a chief executive designate, by the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, in advance of the establishment of the Regulator from recommendations made by PAS after a competition has been held. If a chief executive designate is appointed, that person will be appointed chief executive on the establishment of the Regulator.

PAS launched the advertising campaign for the position of Chief Executive Designate / Chief Executive Officer (Principal Officer) of the Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority on 5th June 2020 (more detail is available on [www.publicjobs.ie](http://www.publicjobs.ie)). The closing date for applications is 25th June 2020 and it is anticipated that it will take a further nine weeks to go through the selection procedures before a suitable candidate is selected.

The appointment of a chief executive designate will give confidence to the sector that preparation for a statutory framework is well underway. The appointment of a chief executive designate will allow for preparatory work to be carried out on setting up the office of the Regulator. This will ensure that the Regulator, when established, will have the necessary resources to operate effectively and efficiently in line with their functions as set out in the Act.

The statutory regulatory framework will provide further assurances to investors, tenants, the Government and to the sector itself that social housing providers operate in a well-regulated and stable environment.

### **European Court of Justice Rulings**

718. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he has taken since November 2019 to ensure the State is compliant with the judgment of the European Court of Justice in a case (details supplied); if the daily fines relating to this judgement have stopped; if so, the date on which they ceased; if not, the estimated date they will cease; the cost of the fines relating to the case to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10384/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Compliance with the ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in case C-261/18 (Derrybrien Wind Farm) will be achieved when the Derrybrien Wind Farm in County Galway is subjected to retrospective environmental impact assessment (otherwise known as substitute consent). The Electricity Supply Board (ESB), which owns and operates the wind farm through a subsidiary, has committed to submit the wind farm to the statutory substitute consent process during Q2 2020.

Officials in my Department are in regular contact with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCA), who, as a shareholder of and with corporate governance responsibility for the ESB, are dealing directly with ESB with respect to updates on the resolution of the judgment. The ESB has outlined its programme of measures comprising preparation of a Remedial Environmental Impact Statement, a Remedial Natura Impact Statement and Substitute Consent Application, all of which are necessary elements to comply with the substitute consent process. This information has recently been communicated to the European Commission.

No payment demand for daily fines accrued has yet been received from the European Commission. The daily fine rate was set by the EU Court of Justice at EUR 15 000 per day, to run from the date of the judgment (12 November 2019) until the date of compliance with the judgment. The daily fine accrued to date (9 June 2020) therefore stands at EUR 3,150,000.

The final extent of daily fines which will be incurred is dependent upon the progress of the ESB, the owner and operator of the Derrybrien Wind Farm, in the substitute consent process. The judgment will be satisfied once the substitute consent process is complete.

### **Rental Sector**

719. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures in place to protect tenants in house share arrangements whose housemates have left due to Covid-19 leaving them liable for the remainder of the rent; his views on whether new measures are required to deal with this situation; if so, the measures he plans to bring forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10389/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** With effect from 27 March 2020, under new emergency measures introduced into law to protect tenants during the COVID-19 emergency period, tenants cannot be forced to leave their rental accommodation, other than in exceptional circumstances. The measures also prohibit any in-

crease to rent for the duration of the emergency period. Initially, these emergency laws will last for a period of 3 months, but they may be extended if the Government considers it necessary.

Tenants are required to pay rent to their landlord during the COVID-19 emergency period and, in the event of tenants having difficulty doing so, they are encouraged to engage with their landlords at the earliest opportunity. They should also engage with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) as income supports and Rent Supplement are available to assist them. Further information on these supports can be found by calling the DEASP Income Support Helpline for Covid-19 on 1890 800 024 or by visiting the DEASP website at:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-employment-affairs-and-social-protection/?referrer=https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/home.aspx>.

Tenants who wish to leave a tenancy early must serve their landlord with a valid notice of termination in writing providing the appropriate amount of notice period.

The Acts do not prescribe specific terms and conditions regarding the payment of rents or deposits for inclusion in individual letting agreements in the private rental market. Contract law governs such arrangements.

The specific terms associated with an individual tenant's rights and obligations are likely to be set out in a written contract signed by both the tenant and the landlord. Engagement between the parties to clarify the respective contractual obligations of tenants and the landlord is key in the circumstances outlined.

My Department and the RTB urge landlords to consider the negative impacts of COVID-19 on their tenants and to show forbearance where temporary rent arrears might arise. I have asked my Department to undertake a piece of research on the potential accumulation of rent arrears during the emergency period in conjunction with the ESRI as part of the established Department/ESRI housing research programme. The research will have regard to the range of rental and income supports being made available to those affected by COVID-19, and will assess the combined impact that these supports together with the changed consumption patterns have on the incidence of arrears.

My Department recently published a Guidance Document on COVID-19 supports for landlords and tenants, which sets out the emergency rental measures and income and other supports available to tenants and landlords during the emergency period. The Guidance document is available at:

[https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/images/uploads/general/COVID\\_Update\\_Guidance\\_Document\\_final.pdf](https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/images/uploads/general/COVID_Update_Guidance_Document_final.pdf)

and a list of Frequently Asked Questions has been developed and is available at:

[https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/images/uploads/Comms%20and%20Research/FAQs\\_on\\_Emergency\\_Legislation\\_Final.pdf](https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/images/uploads/Comms%20and%20Research/FAQs_on_Emergency_Legislation_Final.pdf)

During the emergency period, a landlord can still serve their tenant with a warning notice if their tenant is in rent arrears or otherwise failing to fulfil their obligations. The landlord must give their tenant 28 days, rather than the usual 14 days, from receipt of a rent arrears warning notice to pay the arrears. The longer rent arrears warning notice during the emergency period is intended to afford more time for tenants to seek any necessary income support. A notice of tenancy termination cannot be served by a landlord during the emergency period for any reason.

The RTB is encouraging all customers who may require assistance or advice, including in relation to any threatened eviction, to contact them via their web chat service as there may be delays to their phone lines during the emergency period. The webchat service can be accessed at the following link:

<https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/contact-us/>.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

720. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps which will be taken to deal with Covid-19 related rent arrears; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10391/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** With effect from 27 March 2020, under new emergency measures introduced into law to protect tenants during the COVID-19 emergency period, tenants cannot be forced to leave their rental accommodation, other than in exceptional circumstances. The measures also prohibit any increase to rent for the duration of the emergency period. Initially, these emergency laws will last for a period of 3 months, but they may be extended if the Government considers it necessary.

Tenants are required to pay rent to their landlord during the COVID-19 emergency period and, in the event of tenants having difficulty doing so, they are encouraged to engage with their landlords at the earliest opportunity. They should also engage with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) as income supports and Rent Supplement are available to assist them. Further information on these supports can be found by calling the DEASP Income Support Helpline for Covid-19 on 1890 800 024 or by visiting the DEASP website at:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-employment-affairs-and-social-protection/?referrer=https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/home.aspx>

My Department and the RTB urge landlords to consider the negative impacts of COVID-19 on their tenants and to show forbearance where temporary rent arrears might arise. I have asked my Department to undertake a piece of research on the potential accumulation of rent arrears during the emergency period in conjunction with the ESRI as part of the established Department/ESRI housing research programme. The research will have regard to the range of rental and income supports being made available to those affected by COVID-19, and will assess the combined impact that these supports together with the changed consumption patterns have on the incidence of arrears.

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[https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/images/uploads/general/COVID\\_Update\\_Guidance\\_Document\\_final.pdf](https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/images/uploads/general/COVID_Update_Guidance_Document_final.pdf)

and a list of Frequently Asked Questions has been developed and is available at:

[https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/images/uploads/Comms%20and%20Research/FAQs\\_on\\_Emergency\\_Legislation\\_Final.pdf](https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/images/uploads/Comms%20and%20Research/FAQs_on_Emergency_Legislation_Final.pdf)

During the emergency period, a landlord can still serve their tenant with a warning notice if their tenant is in rent arrears or otherwise failing to fulfil their obligations. The landlord must give their tenant 28 days, rather than the usual 14 days, from receipt of a rent arrears warning notice to pay the arrears. The longer rent arrears warning notice during the emergency period is intended to afford more time for tenants to seek any necessary income support. A notice of tenancy termination cannot be served by a landlord during the emergency period for any reason.

The RTB is encouraging all customers who may require assistance or advice, including in relation to any threatened eviction, to contact them via their web chat service as there may be delays to their phone lines during the emergency period. The webchat service can be accessed at the following link:

<https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/contact-us/>.

### Local Authority Housing

721. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average construction and all-in cost of building 1, 2, 3 and 4-bedroom public houses by region including Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford cities and surrounding commuter and non-urban areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10392/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** There are a number of variables involved in estimating the cost of providing social housing units, such as the form of delivery, size of unit, land, funding, etc. In terms of construction and ‘all-in’ costs, the averages as sought for the various sized units, based on full capital costs, are set out in the following tables, where the data is shown in terms of houses and apartments, both for Dublin and nationally.

HOUSES - DUBLIN					
	1 bed	2 bed(1 sto- rey)	2 bed(2 sto- rey)	3 bed	4 bed
Construction	€197,850	€207,975	€216,975	€227,275	€243,125
All-in Cost	€258,450	€270,575	€280,675	€292,500	€311,325

APARTMENTS - DUBLIN			
	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed
Construction	€221,450	€238,625	€261,425
All-in Cost	€289,250	€310,425	€338,150

HOUSES - NATIONALLY					
	1 bed	2 bed(1 sto- rey)	2 bed(2 sto- rey)	3 bed	4 bed
Construction	€155,818	€165,132	€174,206	€184,685	€199,491
All-in Cost	€201,359	€212,624	€222,582	€234,571	€252,047

APARTMENTS - NATIONALLY			
	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed
Construction	€174,159	€189,112	€209,482
All-in Cost	€225,082	€243,476	€267,629

The above figures are based on returned data from tendered social housing schemes over an extended period. ‘Construction’ cost is reflective of building costs (including VAT) and also in-

cludes normal site works and site development. ‘All-in Cost’ includes cost of construction, land cost, professional fees, utility connections, site investigations/surveys, archaeology where appropriate, VAT and contribution to public art. Abnormal costs are excluded from these figures.

## Housing Estates

722. **Deputy Norma Foley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the case of a housing estate (details supplied) will be investigated. [10404/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Section 10 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended), enabled the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to prescribe a list of unfinished housing developments to which an exemption from the local property tax applies. An exemption from the local property tax applies to developments listed in the Schedule to the Finance (Local Property Tax) Regulations 2013 (S.I. No. 91/2013).

The list of unfinished housing developments eligible for the exemption was compiled by local authorities, utilising the categorisation employed for the purposes of the National Housing Survey. Only developments (and parts of developments) that were deemed by local authorities to be in a “seriously problematic condition”, regardless of whether a developer was on or off site, were included in the Finance (Local Property Tax) Regulations 2013. These Regulations applied to 421 developments, comprising approximately 5,100 homes, which remain exempt from LPT.

In response to the specific matter in question, my Department has been in contact with Kerry County Council and my officials have been advised by the Council that the Estate was not included within the list of “unfinished housing estates” developments listed in the Schedule to the Finance (Local Property Tax) Regulations 2013, as it did not meet the criteria for inclusion of a development or part thereof for Property Tax Waiver. Accordingly, the occupier of any house within the Estate is liable for the local property tax. I understand, however, that the Bond provider has relinquished the bond to Kerry County Council. The Council, with this funding, will now be arranging to have the outstanding works completed in the Estate.

There were a number of approaches adopted towards addressing the legacy of unfinished housing developments, including the development of Site Resolution Plans (SRPs) for the finalisation of works on site to render estates as habitable as possible and the launch of the Public Safety Initiative (PSI) to address immediate public safety issues. In addition, Budget 2014 contained a special provision, in the form of a targeted €10m Special Resolution Fund (SRF).

An Annual Progress Report was compiled and published every year from 2012 to 2018. These reports are available on the Department’s website. For ease of access, the most recent report published in February 2018 is available at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/rebuilding-ireland/national-housing-development-survey/publication-2017-annual-progress>

As outlined in the Annual Progress Report 2017 (link provided above), the number of unfinished housing developments has reduced by 91% from around 3,000 developments in 2010, to 256 developments in 2017. A list of unfinished housing estates can also be found under the ‘unfinished’ tab layer on the MyPlan website available at the following link: [www.myplan.ie](http://www.myplan.ie)

Given the significant progress made, there are no plans at this time to revise the list of developments included in the Schedule to the Finance (Local Property Tax) Regulations 2013, either by removing or adding developments to it. Local authorities will continue to assess the

best options for resolution of unfinished developments and/or developments that are to be taken in charge.

### **Domestic Violence Refuges Provision**

723. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the recommendation of a report (details supplied) that a refuge centre be established in the county; if his attention has further been drawn to the fact that during the Covid-19 crisis the incidences of domestic violence have increased; if the necessary funds will be provided to the county council to acquire a suitable building for a refuge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10416/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Responsibility for Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs) and the management and the provision of services to support victims of domestic abuse rests with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and are delivered through Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

Under my Department's Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), capital funding may be provided, through housing authorities, to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) for the delivery of accommodation for people with specific categories of need. It is a matter for individual housing authorities to prioritise projects to be advanced under CAS. To date no proposal has been submitted from Dun Laoghaire Rathdown to my Department for consideration.

### **Local Authority Funding**

724. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if funding will be provided to Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council to acquire the 21 units at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10417/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** As housing authorities, local authorities are responsible for the identification of the social housing need in their area. The statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA) carried out annually since 2016 captures the total number of households qualified for social housing support to better inform policy and to allow local authorities, such as Dun-Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, to develop appropriate responses to meet this need.

Through the supports made available from my Department under Rebuilding Ireland, funding is available to deliver additional social housing stock through a range of initiatives, including, where appropriate, the acquisition or leasing of new and previously owned houses/apartments from the private market. As housing authorities, it is a matter for each local authority to determine the suitability of any units for acquisition and similarly for leasing, on the basis that the houses are suitable for social housing use and are suitable also in terms of a range of other considerations, including family size, sustainable communities and value for money.

As such, it is a matter for Dun-Laoghaire Rathdown County Council to determine the most appropriate response to the need for social housing supports in their area.

### **Local Authority Housing**

725. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the number of council house completions across the four Dublin local authorities was 228 in 2019 in comparison to 634 in 2018; if his attention has further been drawn to the fact that the projections for 2020 are lower again; his plans to improve these; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10418/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** In relation to the figure of 228 council house completions across the four Dublin local authorities cited by the Deputy, the total build output of the four Dublin local authorities in 2019 was in fact 1,665 social housing homes. This comprised 381 homes built directly by the local authorities, a further 658 homes delivered in partnership with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), 526 homes delivered through the Part V mechanisms and 100 homes restored to use under the Voids (capped) programme. This output represents 27.4% of the build output for the country.

Looking at a single delivery stream, i.e. local authority build, in isolation does not accurately portray the housing delivery activity in a local authority area. AHBs are significant delivery partners, providing homes for social housing eligible households on local authority waiting lists.

It should be noted that the four Dublin local authorities face particular challenges regarding the availability and cost of land for new builds and in the context of this challenge, the four local authorities also delivered a further 844 homes through acquisitions (30% of the national output); speeding up the availability of homes for families in the Dublin region. A further 332 homes were delivered through the leasing programme.

Nationally, more than 10,000 (10,007) new social housing homes were delivered through the delivery mechanisms of build (6,074), acquisition (2,772) and leasing (1,161) of which just under 29% (2,871) were delivered by the Dublin local authorities.

The latest Construction Status Report covers the period up to end Q4 2019 and shows that since the beginning of Rebuilding Ireland, a total of 233 schemes have been completed by the four Dublin local authorities delivering 4,007 homes. In addition to this, the report shows that there are already a further 121 schemes currently at planning, design, tender or construction stage, which will deliver 3,518 additional homes when complete. The timing of these completions may cross annual reporting periods, resulting in variations from year to year, however the objective is certainly to increase annual outputs.

My Department continues to provide funding, as well as technical support, advice and guidance to local authorities and AHBs to expand and accelerate their housing delivery, particularly around new build activity. Increasing build capacity is not an immediate input/output activity, it takes time to build capacity and supply, however this steady increase is visible in the outputs since 2016 when there were 657 new social home completions across 31 local authorities (excluding Voids) to over 5,770 in 2019.

### **National Monuments**

726. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will make contact with the Spanish Government to offer assistance to Valladolid City Council and the team undertaking works to locate the resting place of Red Hugh O'Donnell (details supplied); and if she will pursue the objective of returning the remains back to County Donegal. [9787/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** My De-

partment's National Monuments Service and colleagues in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade are in regular contact with their Spanish counterparts and local authorities in Valladolid in relation to this case.

I understand that the excavation team is currently compiling a detailed report for Valladolid City Council outlining the results of the archaeological investigations that have taken place, including the recording of the remains of some 15 individuals. While to date there is no archaeological or scientific evidence that the remains of Red Hugh O'Donnell have been discovered, I am aware that his dying wishes were to be buried in Valladolid, as recorded in his last will and testament.

My Department will maintain its ongoing contact with the project over the coming weeks. Whatever the final outcome, the interest there is in the case in both countries again highlights the very strong historical connections between Spain and Ireland that still echo today.

### **Ministerial Correspondence**

727. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she is in receipt of correspondence from a group (details supplied); and her views on the measures outlined in the plan. [9920/20]

731. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will address a matter regarding funding for the arts sector (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10015/20]

733. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the measures she is taking to bring about a recovery in the arts sector following the Covid-19 pandemic; if her attention has been drawn to the campaign by an organisation (details supplied) to address the issue; her views on the actions proposed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10059/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 727, 731 and 733 together.

I am aware of the correspondence to which the Deputy refers and proposals set out therein. The COVID-19 crisis gives rise to many challenges for the nation as a whole and is having an unprecedented impact on the arts, culture, heritage and Gaeltacht sectors.

From an early stage in the COVID-19 crisis, measures were put in place to sustain our cultural infrastructure, support artists and arts practitioners and ensure the ongoing provision of cultural services. Following a meeting I convened on 12 March with the Arts Council, the national cultural institutions and Screen Ireland, the Arts Council announced a series of immediate measures, including an undertaking to honour all funding commitments made to organisations and allow grantees to draw down up to 90% of their funding commitment.

The Government introduced a range of supports for those affected by COVID-19 and those working in the arts, culture and audiovisual sectors are eligible to apply for these supports. My Department has published an advisory booklet on its website which sets out support and information available to the arts sector in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Officials from my Department are in ongoing contact with the Arts Council and as well as with a broad range of sectoral stakeholders including resource organisations, advocacy groups as well as individual artists and arts practices.

The Council had undertaken a detailed survey of arts organisations to identify the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on audiences, employment and finances for March, April and May as well as a survey of artists seeking information of the economic impact on individual artists and the results are published on their website.

The Arts Council has established a short-term Advisory Group to identify ways to address impacts of the Covid-19 Crisis on the sector. This group brings together a number of leading voices from the arts and other sectors and will report to the Arts Council on measures to sustain the arts sector through the current challenging period. I understand that the Group will complete their work shortly and I look forward to receiving their report.

### **Hedge Cutting**

728. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to a local authority breaching hedge cutting laws during nesting season (details supplied). [9883/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The dates for the cutting of hedges are set down in primary legislation under the Wildlife Acts. Section 40 of the Act prohibits the cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation, with certain strict exemptions, from 1 March to 31 August. There is provision in the legislation for some restricted exemptions from the prohibition during the closed period - for example, for works undertaken in the ordinary course of agriculture or forestry, for health and safety reasons, for the clearance of vegetation relating to road and other construction works including the preparation of sites for development; in respect of works permitted under statute and for works undertaken for road safety reasons under Section 70 of the Roads Act 1983.

Officials of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department are aware of the works being undertaken by the local authority in question and consider that the works are exempted from the provisions of Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts as they relate to the preparation of a site for development

### **Departmental Correspondence**

729. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9922/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I wish to advise that a reply to the correspondence referred to by the Deputy has issued.

The Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business, published on 1 May 2020, sets out an indicative path to the easing of COVID 19 restrictions and other actions in order to facilitate the reopening Ireland's society and economy in a phased manner. Government announced the move on to Phase 2 of the Roadmap last Friday. Organisations should review the Roadmap carefully and carry out a detailed assessment of their activities with regard to the continuing public health measures. These organisations should, based on their assessment, identify which category in which phase of reopening they will be in a position to reopen safely and in line with the continued public health measures. It is not necessary for organisations to seek official authorisation to reopen.

My Department has published a new booklet on its website which sets out support and information available to the arts sector in response to the COVID-19 crisis. My Department also provides a helpdesk advice facility on income support for individuals at [artsunit@chg.gov.ie](mailto:artsunit@chg.gov.ie) and I would encourage people in the sector to make contact for advice.

The Government is providing a range of income supports for people who have lost employment as a result of the restrictions put in place to prevent the spread of the corona virus and are outlined as follows:

My colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection is responsible for a range of income supports including the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP). The PUP is available to employees and the self-employed who have lost their job on (or after) March 13 due to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. Last Friday, the Government approved an extension to the PUP until 10th August 2020 with a number of changes to the payment. Further details can be accessed at this link <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/be74d3-covid-19-pandemic-unemployment-payment/>. I understand that thousands of people in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment have now closed or are in the course of closing their claim as they had return to work as part of the first phases of the Roadmap for the Reopening of Society and Business.

Two jobseekers benefit schemes are in place for the self-employed as well as the Social Welfare Scheme for Self-Employed Artists. The latter scheme recognises the unique creative circumstances of artists in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance and gives them special assistance in their first year out of work, allowing them to focus on their creative output.

The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) was introduced on 26 March to support the viability of firms and preserve the relationship between the employer and employee, insofar as is possible, by subsidising a portion of the employer wage bill in circumstances where the employer's business has been negatively impacted by Covid 19. This scheme is administered by the Revenue Commissioners and along with the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), it is a significant though temporary measure that has been introduced to attempt to minimise the negative impact on the labour market through an exceptional period.

Last Friday the Government agreed that the TWSS would be extended until the end of August. Over 59,000 employers are now registered with Revenue for this scheme and over 520,900 employees have now received at least one payment under the scheme. I understand that as of 8th June, Revenue has generated further payments to employers under the scheme of €34.2 million.. Further details can be accessed at this link - <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/455ce-minister-donohoe-announces-extension-of-temporary-wage-subsidy-scheme-until-end-august>

The Government has introduced a range of business supports for those affected by COVID-19 and many of those working in the arts, culture and audiovisual sectors may be eligible to apply for these supports. These measures aim to help these organisations to restart, reconnect and rehire staff who have been laid off or furloughed. Full details of these measures can be accessed on the gov.ie website at the following link <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/fe8f00-government-outlines-further-measures-to-support-businesses-impacted/>

The Arts Council has established a short-term Advisory Group to identify ways to address impacts of the Covid-19 Crisis on the sector. This group brings together a number of leading voices from the arts and other sectors and will report to the Arts Council on measures to sustain the arts sector through the current challenging period. I understand that the Group will complete their work shortly and I look forward to receiving their report.

### Cycle to Work Scheme

730. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of persons that availed of and the costs incurred by her Department regarding the cycle to work scheme since it was introduced to date by year and cost in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9979/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.. The information supplied covers the period since the establishment of my Department in June 2011 . It should be noted that there is no actual cost to the Department from the Cycle to Work scheme. The Department initially pays an approved supplier for the bicycle, the employee signs an undertaking where the cost of the bicycle is recouped through payroll deduction over a year.

Year	€ Amount initially paid in year	Number of cases by year
2011	13,229	16
2012	19,117	26
2013	10,871	14
2014	18,141	22
2015	17,318	22
2016	12,324	16
2017	12,987	16
2018	19,555	25
2019	16,675	23
2020 (to date)	5,603	6
Total	145,820	186

*Question No. 731 answered with Question No. 727.*

### Built Heritage Investment Scheme

732. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when the 2020 decision on the built heritage investment scheme will be announced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10048/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** My Department provides financial support for the protection of heritage buildings and historic structures through 2 grant schemes which are, in the main, administered by the local authorities.

These Built Heritage Capital Grant schemes, with funding of just over €4m, have the potential to provide much needed economic stimulus as they operate right across the country in all local authority areas and provide employment for the many small businesses, skilled conservation specialists and tradespeople involved in heritage-related construction activity, supporting numerous small-scale conservation projects. This will help to sustain specialist heritage businesses whilst the market recovers.

I will shortly be announcing details of projects to be funded, as public health restrictions allow, under both the Built Heritage Investment Scheme 2020 and the Historic Structures Fund

2020. Details of the projects, including the amounts to be allocated to each local authority, will be published on my Department's website and on local authority websites.

In the light of COVID-19, any grant offer will include a requirement that works be carried out in accordance with the National Return to Work Safely Protocol as well as all public health and safety measures determined by the Government and HSE. It will be the responsibility of each project manager to monitor and ensure compliance with the most up to date and accurate information from the Government and the HSE websites.

*Question No. 733 answered with Question No. 727.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

734. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the supports in place to support the bean an tí in the Donegal Gaeltacht in 2020 in view of the fact that all summer courses are cancelled as a result of Covid-19; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10177/20]

**Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne):** The Deputy will be pleased to learn that I recently approved a once-off emergency measure worth €4.7m to support the stabilisation of the Gaeltacht Irish summer college sector.

The stabilisation fund is being provided as a specific once-off measure with the overall objective of ensuring the ongoing viability of the sector - thereby enabling it to continue to contribute to the systematic effort being made to support the language and Gaeltacht regions in line with the overarching objectives of the Government's *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* and the accompanying *Plean Gníomhaíochta 2018-2022* . (5-Year Action Plan for the Irish Language 2018-2022). The measure follows the cancellation, on 20th April 2020, of Irish summer college course by my Department in the interests of protecting public health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under this measure , up to €3.1m will be directed at supporting the college authorities to refund fees/deposits to parents while a further €1.6m is being allocated under the measure towards supporting the c. 700 certified Gaeltacht householders who normally keep students attending one of the recognised 42 colleges during the summer months.

My Department will continue to engage with the sector, namely the relevant college authorities as well as the Gaeltacht households recognised under the Department's Scéim na bh-Foghlaimoirí Gaeilge in order to initiate and administer the application process in relation to the measure.

### **Departmental Bodies Data**

735. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of persons employed on an agency basis in each State agency under the remit of her Department in 2019 and in quarter 1 of 2020, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10238/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I have been advised that the total number of persons employed on an agency basis in the State Agencies under this Department's aegis in 2019 was 49 and in Q1 2020 was 31.

A more detailed breakdown is outlined in the following table.

	2019	Q1 2020
Arts Council	2	Nil
Chester Beatty Library	Nil	Nil
Crawford Art Gallery	Nil	Nil
Foras na Gaeilge	Nil	Nil
Heritage Council	1	Nil
Irish Museum of Modern Art	6	4
National Concert Hall	1	1
National Gallery of Ireland	24	12
National Library of Ireland	2	2
National Museum of Ireland	3	3
Screen Ireland	5	5
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Nil	Nil
Ulster Scots Agency	2	2
Waterways Ireland	3	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>31</b>

### Arts Funding

736. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views regarding a potential cut in the arts allocation in the budgets of local authorities following a downturn in the economy post the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown. [10302/20]

737. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the loss in income for many artists due to Covid-19; and the supports in place or being prepared for a post-lockdown scenario. [10303/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 736 and 737 together.

The COVID-19 crisis gives rise to many challenges for the nation as a whole and is having an unprecedented impact on the arts, culture, heritage and Gaeltacht sectors. My Department has worked with the Arts Council from an early stage in the COVID-19 crisis, on measures to sustain our cultural infrastructure, support artists and arts practitioners and ensure the ongoing provision of cultural services. The Arts Council announced a series of immediate measures, including an undertaking to honour all funding commitments made to organisations and allow grantees to draw down up to 90% of their funding commitment.

My Department has published a new booklet on its website which sets out support and information available to the arts sector in response to the COVID-19 crisis. My Department also provides a helpdesk advice facility on income support for individuals at artsunit@chg.gov.ie and I would encourage people in the sector to make contact for advice.

The Government is providing a range of income supports for people who have lost employment as a result of the restrictions put in place to prevent the spread of the corona virus and are outlined as follows:

My colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection is responsible for a range of income supports including the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP). The PUP

is available to employees and the self-employed who have lost their job on (or after) March 13 due to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. Last Friday, the Government approved an extension to the PUP until 10th August 2020 with a number of changes to the payment. Further details can be accessed at this link <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/be74d3-covid-19-pandemic-unemployment-payment/>. I understand that thousands of people in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment have now closed or are in the course of closing their claim as they had return to work as part of the first phases of the Roadmap for the Reopening of Society and Business.

Two jobseekers benefit schemes are in place for the self-employed as well as the Social Welfare Scheme for Self-Employed Artists. The latter scheme recognises the unique creative circumstances of artists in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance and gives them special assistance in their first year out of work, allowing them to focus on their creative output.

The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) was introduced on 26 March to support the viability of firms and preserve the relationship between the employer and employee, insofar as is possible, by subsidising a portion of the employer wage bill in circumstances where the employer's business has been negatively impacted by Covid 19. This scheme is administered by the Revenue Commissioners and along with the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), it is a significant though temporary measure that has been introduced to attempt to minimise the negative impact on the labour market through an exceptional period.

Last Friday the Government agreed that the TWSS would be extended until the end of August. Over 59,000 employers are now registered with Revenue for this scheme and over 520,900 employees have now received at least one payment under the scheme. I understand that as of 8th June, Revenue has generated further payments to employers under the scheme of €34.2 million.. Further details can be accessed at this link . <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/455ce-minister-donohoe-announces-extension-of-temporary-wage-subsidy-scheme-until-end-augus>

The Government has introduced a range of business supports for those affected by COVID-19 and many of those working in the arts, culture and audiovisual sectors may be eligible to apply for these support. A number of organisations may be eligible for funding supports under the series of measures to support small, medium and larger business that are negatively impacted by COVID-19. These measures aim to help these organisations to restart, reconnect and rehire staff who have been laid off or furloughed. Full details of these measures can be accessed on the gov.ie website at the following link <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/fe8f00-government-outlines-further-measures-to-support-businesses-impacted/>

The Arts Council has established a short-term Advisory Group to identify ways to address impacts of the Covid-19 Crisis on the sector. This group brings together a number of leading voices from the arts and other sectors and will report to the Arts Council on measures to sustain the arts sector through the current challenging period. I understand that the Group will complete their work shortly and I look forward to receiving their report.

The Council has also undertaken a detailed survey of arts organisations to identify the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on audiences, employment and finances for March, April and May as well as a survey of artists seeking information of the economic impact on individual artists and the results are published on their website. In the context of the wider cultural sector, officials from my Department are continuing to work with the Arts Council as well as other parts of Government, to assess and measure the effects of COVID-19 on the cultural sector and to ensure that optimal use is made of available resources to sustain the sector through this crisis.

While my Department makes allocations to local authorities for a number of cultural and creative purposes, including Commemorations and measures under the Creative Ireland pro-

gramme, local authority budgets are matters for the local authorities concerned.

### **Architectural Heritage**

738. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the local and national campaign to save the remains of a cottage (details supplied); and if her Department has raised specific concerns with the local authority regarding the building, particularly its historical significance and the fact that many of the 1916 leaders and other historical figures had visited and stayed in the cottage. [10304/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. I have asked my officials in my Department to contact the Local Authority who are the relevant body responsible for protecting architectural heritage in this instance.

### **EU Funding**

739. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount of the structural funding from the EU that will be ring-fenced for culture and arts here. [10358/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The EU Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) is comprised of two regulations, Regulation 2020/460 (CRII), and Regulation 2020/558 (CRII Plus) which entered into force on 1 April and 23rd April 2020 respectively. The CRII regulations allow Member States to use unspent pre-allocated cohesion support, amounting to €8 billion, to respond to COVID-19 by supporting healthcare systems and the working capital of SMEs to remain in business to cushion the impact of the shock, matched by a further €29 billion in co-financing from the EU budget.

In practice, CRII allows Member States to use funding under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) strand of cohesion support, which ordinarily finances investment into the regions, to assist in the COVID-19 emergency response. There are two regional ERDF Operational Programmes in Ireland, implemented by two Managing Authorities. It is a matter for the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, in consultation with the Managing Authorities, to reorient funding to areas of most need currently, in line with the provisions of CRII.

The Creative Europe Programme is the main financial instrument at EU level to support the cultural and creative sector. At two recent meetings of the EU Council of Culture Ministers to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and the actions to be taken to mitigate its effects, I, along with a number of my counterparts, called for an increase in funding to the next Creative Europe Programme as well as additional and immediate direct support to the sector as part of the EU Recovery Plan to help it through this crisis and to rebound in its aftermath.

While discussions on the next EU budget are ongoing, several measures have been introduced with immediate effect in the Creative Europe Programme to protect the cultural and audiovisual sector while shut down, including; a new call for projects for the cross-border mainly digital distribution of performing arts works; €5m in vouchers for hardest-hit cinemas; maximum flexibility for existing projects to reach completion; accelerated selection procedure for many schemes so that artists can start work under pre-funding arrangements; facility to invoke force majeure to recover sunk costs for stalled productions and works; and, maximum flexibility on the repayment of loans.

Finally, the European Commission also recently published the EU Recovery Plan. The Plan includes a new initiative, REACT-EU, with a budget of €55 billion. It is proposed that the funds will support workers and SMEs and will be available across sectors, including culture. While the Plan is now subject to negotiation and approval by the Council and European Parliament, I am confident that measures in the Plan, together with those under the Creative Europe Programme, and the whole suite of measures that have been introduced by the Government are helping to protect the cultural, creative and audiovisual sectors during shutdown and as we emerge from public health restrictions.

### **Wildlife Protection**

740. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when the investigation into the death of 23 buzzards in County Cork will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10370/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Officials of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department are continuing their investigations into the deaths of the buzzards in Co. Cork. I am unable at this time to put a target date for completion on this investigation.

### **Wild Fires**

741. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of illegal burns that have occurred to date in 2020 on land owned by the National Parks and Wildlife Service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10371/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Wildfires are not a natural phenomenon in Ireland. The main cause of such conflagrations is thought to be the deliberate starting of fires without concern for the consequences. There have been 7 significant fires, 1 within Killarney National Park, and 6 in Wicklow Mountains National Park in 2020. In addition there have been a number of smaller fires outside the boundaries of the Park on which my staff have assisted the emergency services. These include a fire on NPWS land on All Saints Bog, Co Offaly, Camp fires at Pollardstown Fen Nature Reserve and Sliabh Bloom Mountains Nature Reserve, and fires at Cloonmoylan, Clooncullaun and Leaha bogs. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation for both National Parks and Wildlife Service staff and the Fire Service who are working tirelessly battling these conflagrations.

The primary responsibility in terms of fire-fighting lies with the Fire Service and the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. My staff, however, remain ever-vigilant in conditions when conditions exist that might result in fires in the National Parks. In an effort to reduce the incidence of such fires, NPWS have deployed increased patrols at our sites and remain in close liaison with both the Gardaí and the Fire Services. Where appropriate, cross compliance is pursued with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in relation to “agricultural” fires. Finally, Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts 1976, as amended, prohibits the cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation, with certain strict exemptions, from 1 March to 31 August. In addition, the Department, in partnership the Coillte Teo, has deployed drone technology in Wicklow and at the Sliabh Blooms.

### **Waterways Ireland**

9 June 2020

742. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the provision of matching funding for the Barrow Blueway, County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10471/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** In November 2019, funding of €5m was awarded under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund to Waterways Ireland and its partners, Kildare and Laois County Councils to progress the Barrow Blueway from Lowtown to Athy. As part of indicative timescales in relation to the project, Waterways Ireland has informed the Department that detailed analysis and design of the route and infrastructure is taking place currently. Work is due to commence on the project in Autumn 2020 with a completion date of Spring 2022.

The provision of the balance of the capital funding will now be addressed in the 2021 and 2022 Estimates' process and my Department is in touch with Waterways Ireland as to project scheduling, capital-flow needs and associated timing of this and other capital projects, including the conclusion of the ongoing Meelick Weir capital project.