

## Written Answers.

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

### Commissions of Investigation

1. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Taoiseach the costs incurred by the Commission of Investigation into the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation to date by category; the purpose for which the funding was spent in each case; and the beneficiaries in each case. [12844/20]

2. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach the projected costs in regard to the Commission of Investigation into IBRC. [12839/20]

**The Taoiseach:** From the date of its establishment to the end of May 2020, the Commission has spent a total of €7,865,848, excluding third party legal costs that have been incurred but not yet paid.

A breakdown of the main categories of expenditure incurred by the Commission to date is set out in the following table:

Commission of Investigation IBRC Expenditure from Establishment Jun 2015 - May 2020	Amount
Administrative Pay	€ 1,344,948
Travel and Subsistence	€ 15,793
Training and Development and Incidental Expenses (including legal fees of Counsel retained directly by the Commission)	€4,903,819
Postal and Telecommunications	€ 65,309
Office Equipment and IT External Service	€ 812,764
Office Premises Expenses	€ 723,216
Total	€ 7,865,848

The Commission is fully independent in all its operations. Any expenditure incurred by the Commission enables it to progress its investigation and pay for the day to day costs arising. In addition to the Commission's staff and the legal counsel it has engaged, the Commission has also incurred costs which have been paid to a broad range of suppliers who provide goods or services to the Commission for a range of functions such as IT, office equipment, electricity, office cleaning, etc.

The Commission has estimated that the final cost of the completion of the first module of its investigation, regarding the Siteserv transaction, will be from €11 - €14 million. However, this estimate assumes the investigation is completed in accordance with the timetable stated by the Commission and excludes costs or delays associated with judicial review hearings. The

Commission also acknowledges that it involves a substantial degree of uncertainty regarding the amount of costs actually recoverable by parties before the Commission, and it assumes the Commission's Legal Costs Guidelines are not successfully challenged. The Department of the Taoiseach has given its view on many occasions, including in briefings with Oireachtas representatives, that the final cost is likely to significantly exceed the Commission's estimate, and could exceed €30m.

### **Cabinet Committees**

3. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach the number of times Cabinet committee F (National Security) has met to date in 2020; and when the committee will next meet. [13138/20]

**The Taoiseach:** The Cabinet Committee on Security encompasses matters previously under the remit of Cabinet Committee F (National Security) and G (Justice) and deals with justice, defence, Garda Reform and national security issues. It last met on 30 October 2019 and no date has been set for the next meeting. In the intervening period, in the context of the COVID 19 crisis, the Cabinet has received updates on security issues as appropriate.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

4. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Taoiseach if he will clarify the public health guidelines in relation to gatherings for weddings and the numbers permissible in places of worship including wedding celebrations, to allow persons to properly plan and manage their weddings. [13259/20]

**The Taoiseach:** In line with the advice of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, NPHER recommended that for the duration of phase 3 (which commenced on 29 June), indoor and outdoor mass gatherings (including religious events and family events such as weddings) be restricted to 50 and 200 respectively, bearing in mind the following:

- Mass gatherings should be organised in advance to enable adequate planning by organisers so that prevention and control measures can be implemented, and physical distancing can be maintained so as to reduce the risk of transmission and avoid strain on health services;

- The mass gatherings numbers listed above are total numbers of people at mass gathering events including organisers, participants and attendees;

- Mass gatherings operating in line with the limits above should comply with the Public Health Checklist and physical distancing, having regard to the size of the venue;

- Adopting a cautious approach considering the high risk infection spread at mass gatherings, it is recommended that marquees etc be considered indoor venues for the purposes of these mass gatherings restrictions.

These limits will be increased to 100 (indoor) and 500 (outdoor) in phase 4.

However, concerns have been raised regarding the 50 person restriction for indoor gatherings in the context of religious services. In light of this, Government decided to exempt places of worship from the regulations restricting numbers on mass gatherings. The exemption applies to places of worship only and not to any gatherings that may take place after the religious ceremony such as wedding receptions.

Work is ongoing on new *COVID-19 Guidance for Religious Services* by the HSE/Health Protection Surveillance Centre. This will require plans to be developed for managing attendance at each premises, including an assessment to determine how many people can attend services within the requirements of social distancing.

### **Citizens' Assembly**

5. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Taoiseach if he will convene a citizens' assembly to discuss a shorter working week. [13534/20]

**The Taoiseach:** The Programme for Government provides for establishment of Citizens' Assemblies to consider: the type of directly elected mayor and local government structures best suited to Dublin; matters relating to drugs use; Biodiversity; and the future of education.

There are no plans at present for a Citizens' Assembly to consider the matter of a shorter working week.

A Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality was approved by Dáil Éireann on 9 July and Seanad Éireann on 11 July, 2019. Ms. Catherine Day was appointed Chair of the Assembly and the inaugural meeting was held on 25th of January 2020.

### **Departmental Staff**

6. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Taoiseach if his Department has established a working from home policy for its employees. [13554/20]

**The Taoiseach:** Since March 2020, in line with the public health advice of the Department of Health, the majority of staff in my Department have been working from home with the exception of staff supporting the essential operation of Government Buildings to support the work of the Taoiseach and Government during this period. In line with the Government's Return to Work Safely Protocol and to support the recovery of the wider economy, my Department will continue to facilitate staff to work from home for as long as possible.

In supporting staff working safely and effectively from home my Department has been guided by advice and a series of frequently asked questions developed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to manage work arrangements during COVID-19. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has also commenced work on the development of a remote working policy which will address remote working in the longer term for the civil service.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

7. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Taoiseach the number of all non-Covid-19 related deaths and cause of death that have occurred for each month of 2020, in tabular form. [13611/20]

**The Taoiseach:** The data requested by the Deputy is not yet available.

All deaths that occur in the State must be registered within 3 months from the date of death; for example, a death that occurred in April 2020 may not be registered until July. Furthermore, all deaths involving COVID-19 are reportable to the Coroner's office and are registered on re-

ceipt of the Coroner's certificate.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) is scheduled to publish Quarter 1 (Q1) 2020 data in August 2020, allowing time for COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 deaths to be registered for that quarter, while Quarter 2 (Q2) 2020 data are scheduled for publication in November 2020.

An additional information note was also published on the CSO website on the implications of COVID-19 on the processing of death certificates and is available at the following link:

<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/in/vs/informationnoteontheimplicationsof-covid-19ontheprocessingofdeathcertificates/>

### **Defence Forces Training**

8. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Defence the estimated cost of a new electric target range at the Defence Forces training centre; and when the works will be completed. [13139/20]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Defence Forces Built Infrastructural Programme 2020-2025 was published in January 2020. This Programme, which is a 5 year plan, will provide a blueprint for investment in the Defence Forces built infrastructure over a multi annual timeframe. The Deputy will appreciate that for commercially sensitive reasons I am not in a position to disclose estimated costs at this point in time.

As part of this programme, I can confirm that the procurement process for the upgrade of the existing Range 3 in the Defence Forces Training Centre at the Curragh Camp is underway. It is expected that the works will commence this year and will be completed within a 12 month timeframe.

### **Air Corps**

9. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Defence the number of pilot and air traffic controller posts that are vacant in the Air Corps; and the steps being taken to fill these posts. [13140/20]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The information requested by the Deputy is being compiled and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

### **Defence Forces Personnel**

10. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Defence if each long-term recommendation within the Public Service Pay Commission recommendations on recruitment and retention in the Permanent Defence Forces will be implemented in full by the deadline of 4 July 2020 as previously committed to. [13484/20]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Report of the Public Service Pay Commission (PSPC) on Recruitment and Retention in the Defence Forces was published on the 4th of July 2019. The Report was accepted in full by the Government at that time and, to facilitate implementation, an extensive High Level Plan titled “Strengthening our Defence Forces – Phase One” was also agreed and published on the same date.

The High Level Plan provides for actions or projects to be undertaken to deliver on the PSPC recommendations. It also proposes a timeframe for actions or projects to commence and identifies the lead actor to implement the action or project. The timeframe for commencement of actions is split into four distinct timelines i.e. immediate, short-term, medium-term and long-term. The Plan defines long-term as “action to commence within 6-12 months of approval of this Plan”. As such, it should be noted that there is no deadline of 4 July 2020 for the complete implementation of the long-terms projects set out in the Plan.

The table below outlines the status of the projects due for long-term implementation as outlined in the plan and the current status of each project.

	Project	Current Status
V1	Review of Pay Structures	Some initial preliminary work has commenced within my Department. The main body of work is to be done as part of a wider review of public sector pay arrangements. The timeframe for this wider review not confirmed at present.
R6	Professional Military Education (PME) Strategy	First draft of the PME Strategy is 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 (DFMHWG). This project is on target for completion in Q3 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 was reviewed in light of Covid-19. The draft report is now with project sponsors for consideration.
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.

The Covid-19 emergency has impacted project timeframes for some projects included in the “Strengthening our Defence Forces - Phase One” plan. For some projects resources were necessarily reassigned to matters relating to the COVID-19 response and other essential work took priority. At this point, 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.

### **Departmental Staff**

11. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Defence if his Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13545/20]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, my Department, in line with other civil and public service organisations, has adhered to public health advice and to the Guidance for Public Service Employers published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This has meant employees working from home where it is possible for them to do so, unless they need to attend the workplace to carry out essential work that cannot be discharged from home. Employees have been provided with information on working safely from home.

I understand that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has developed guidelines for civil service organisations (Working from Home during COVID-19 – Guidance for Civil Service Organisations), which is intended to assist civil service organisations as long as necessary to address the health and safety risks of COVID-19. These guidelines are due to issue shortly.

In addition, I understand that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has also commenced work on the development of a remote working policy which will address remote working in the longer term for the civil service.

### **Consular Services**

12. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update on the status of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12847/20]

16. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has received further information from the Chinese authorities in relation to a person (details supplied); if he expects the person to be allowed leave China and return here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13065/20]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 12 and 16 together.

I can confirm to the Deputy that we are providing consular assistance to this citizen, through our Consular Assistance Unit in Dublin, and through our Embassy in Beijing and our Consulate General in Shanghai. Our focus has been on supporting the citizen’s consular needs, particularly his health and welfare, while he and his legal team seek to resolve any outstanding legal matters with the local authorities. Our Consul General in Shanghai has been meeting regularly with the citizen since last year, when we were first informed of the case, and is providing all

possible support and advice. I can further advise that the case has been raised several times at diplomatic level with the relevant authorities, both here in Dublin and in China. This engagement has highlighted the humanitarian aspects of the case, and the importance of the citizen returning home as soon as possible. The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate to discuss the details of any individual consular case, nor to comment on matters pertaining to a legal process in another jurisdiction. However I can assure the Deputy that my Department will continue to provide all possible consular assistance to the citizen until he is permitted to return to Ireland.

### **Ministerial Correspondence**

13. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when a response will issue to two letters dated 23 March 2020 and 2 June 2020 sent by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13040/20]

14. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on whether the unilateral sanctions of illegal and unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States of America on Venezuela specifically are a significant cause of hardship to the civilian population and directly cause unnecessary deaths; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13041/20]

15. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on whether the unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States of America on Venezuela have caused considerable disruption to the economy in Venezuela with knock-on consequences for the civilian population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13042/20]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 13, 14 and 15 together.

Venezuela is currently experiencing the worst political, social, economic and humanitarian crisis in its history. I am particularly concerned regarding the humanitarian needs of the population, which are acute. Due to the severe lack of access to basic goods, services, medicines and medical equipment, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the country is extremely worrying.

Ireland supports the call for international solidarity in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. I fully support the calls by the UN Secretary-General and by the EU High Representative Josep Borrell for sanctions regimes to be applied in such a way as not to hinder the provision of essential equipment and supplies to fight COVID-19 and limit its spread. It is important that humanitarian exemptions provided for under UN and EU sanctions regimes are fully availed of and applied in an appropriate and timely manner in light of the current emergency. Through the use of these exemptions, Ireland, as an EU Member State, will play its part to ensure that sanctions do not impede efforts in the global response to COVID-19.

We also join the UNSG in urging countries with unilateral sanctions regimes to ensure that these sanctions do not in any way hinder the fight against COVID-19 or impede humanitarian assistance from reaching the most vulnerable.

At this time of global crisis, I believe that a strong multilateral response is essential. In order to contain and fight the virus, nations must work together and enhance international cooperation. For this reason, Ireland is encouraging a UN system-wide response, and we have significantly increased our financial support by quadrupling funding to the World Health Organisation for 2020. We have allocated over €115 million to the global COVID-19 response, and have

pledged an additional €18 million in support to GAVI for the 2021-25 period. Ireland is also proud to contribute to the European Union's global response to COVID-19, which has mobilised almost €36 billion to date.

I was pleased that Ireland participated in the International Donors Conference in solidarity with Venezuelan migrants and refugees in the midst of COVID-19 that took place on 26 May, co-hosted by Spain and the EU and convened in collaboration with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Ireland pledged €1 million in 2020 to the UNHCR and IOM Regional Response Plan for Venezuelan migrants and refugees.

As I said in my statement that I issued on the occasion of the Solidarity Conference, it is more important than ever for us to demonstrate the values of solidarity and our shared humanity. We know that the impact of this crisis will not fall equally, but will disproportionately impact those already suffering from humanitarian crises, including in situations of displacement, conflict or natural disaster.

Regarding the correspondence which the Deputy mentions, this was received by my Department, along with subsequent other linked correspondence, regarding the situation in Venezuela, and a composite reply issued on 9 June.

I will continue to monitor the situation in the country closely and engage with my EU colleagues and other key interlocutors on this important issue.

*Question No. 16 answered with Question No. 12.*

## **Human Rights**

17. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent infringement by Poland on LGBTQ rights and attempts to classify LGBT as an ideology. [13522/20]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am concerned regarding developments relating to LGBTI+ rights in Poland. The principles of equality and non-discrimination are enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. It is important that these principles are protected and promoted throughout the Union.

Advancing human rights is central to Ireland's foreign policy, The Global Island. Ireland is committed to promoting the rights of LGBTI+ persons who continue to suffer disproportionate levels of violence and discrimination around the world. Ireland continues to support initiatives in international fora which promote and protect the rights of LGBTI+ persons, and which condemn violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Embassy of Ireland in Poland also undertakes a number of initiatives to this end to raise awareness of and facilitate discussion on the rights of LGBTI+ individuals. This includes taking part in the Warsaw Equality Parade each year. The Embassy also works collaboratively with different NGOs in Poland to facilitate discussion around the issues facing LGBTI+ communities.

We will continue to work both bilaterally and at the EU level to promote and protect the rights of LGBTI+ communities across the EU and beyond.

## Departmental Staff

18. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13549/20]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (D/PER) is developing guidelines for civil service organisations (Working from Home during COVID-19 – Guidance for Civil Service Organisations), which is intended to assist Departments for as long as necessary to address the health and safety risks of COVID-19. These guidelines are due to issue shortly.

D/PER has also commenced work on the development of a remote working policy which will address remote working in the longer term for the civil service.

My Department is guided by central policies in terms of working from home arrangements for staff.

## Ministerial Meetings

19. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if a meeting was planned for early 2020 with those proposing a Hong Kong style, independent, municipality here; if the meeting was cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions; and if so, if it has been rescheduled for a later date. [13595/20]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Early in 2020, an initial approach was made to my Department by a Hong Kong-based consortium exploring the feasibility of a potential large-scale urban development.

The potential development is at a preliminary conceptual stage and it is understood that the consortium has spoken to contacts in a number of jurisdictions.

The promoters were encouraged to carry out more research on how their ideas might fit an Irish context. No arrangements were made for official meetings in Ireland.

## Middle East Peace Process

20. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he and his officials have taken to prevent the proposed annexation of territory in the Palestinian West Bank on 1 July 2020; the contact he has had with his Israeli counterpart and authorities, the American administration that is backing this move and his European colleagues in this regard; and his views on whether further annexation of Palestinian lands will irreparably damage a chance at a peaceful two-state solution. [13616/20]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I have been forthright on my views about Israeli Government statements regarding the possible annexation of territory in the West Bank. The unilateral annexation by Israel of any part of the occupied Palestinian territory would be a clear violation of international law. It would have no legitimacy, and would not be recognised or accepted by Ireland, or by the international community more generally.

Ireland will not give up on the Two State solution as long as that is the objective of the parties themselves, but annexation would without doubt threaten that prospect, and seriously

undermine efforts to find a negotiated solution that respects the legitimate positions of both parties.

As I stated publicly on 23 April: “I think it important, as a friend and partner of Israel, to be very clear about the gravity of any such step. Annexation of territory by force is prohibited under international law, including the UN Charter, whenever and wherever it occurs, in Europe’s neighbourhood or globally. This is a fundamental principle in the relations of States and the rule of law in the modern world. No one State can set it aside at will.”

I have in the past made my views on this clear to Israeli leaders, including during my most recent visit to Israel in December 2019, and my officials continue to convey our views to the Israeli authorities. I have also raised this issue in discussions with US representatives, and underlined my serious concerns about possible annexation.

I, and senior officials in my Department, have also highlighted the issue with a large number of EU Member States, to encourage a clear and united position. When this was discussed at the 15 May video conference meeting of EU Foreign Ministers, there was broad agreement that the EU and its Member States should convey these concerns directly to the new Israeli Government. That outreach is ongoing. I welcome the very clear statements that have been made on this matter by EU High Representative / Vice President Josep Borrell, who has said that any annexation could not pass unchallenged. Annexation would inevitably have negative consequences for the EU-Israel relationship.

Ireland has also taken opportunities to raise this issue at the UN, including in Ireland’s statements to the UN Security Council on 23 April 2020, and the Human Rights Council on 15 June 2020. Ireland will continue to prioritise the Middle East Peace Process as we prepare to take up our seat on the UN Security Council in January 2021.

## **United Nations**

21. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his priorities and the difference in approach and policy his Department and representatives hope to introduce and address following the successful election to the UN Security Council. [13617/20]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Following our election on 17 June, Ireland will take a seat on the United Nations Security Council for 2021 and 2022.

Our approach to the work of the Council will be guided by the principles and values enshrined in the United Nations Charter, which have informed Irish foreign policy over many decades.

The Council’s workload is very heavy, dealing with more than 30 country situations and 20 cross-cutting thematic issues that affect global peace and security. No two conflicts are the same and each needs to be approached with an understanding of root causes and contributory factors.

In line with the mandate of the Security Council as the principal organ charged with the maintenance of international peace and security, I would highlight three overarching principles that will guide our approach to the Council’s work.

The first is building peace, including championing the UN’s role in peacekeeping, reinforcing the link between peacekeeping and peace-building, and further developing cooperation on peace and security between the UN and regional organisations, including the African Union.

We need to ensure that peace is inclusive and fully involves civil society, particularly women and young people.

The second is preventing conflict. This means strengthening the full spectrum of the UN's conflict prevention activities – including preventative diplomacy, mediation and non-proliferation and disarmament - and addressing the structural drivers of conflict and insecurity, particularly climate change.

The third is ensuring accountability. This means upholding the rule of law, in particular international humanitarian and human rights law, prioritising the protection of civilians in conflict, ensuring humanitarian access and fighting against impunity.

Ireland aims to be an effective and impactful Member of the Council at a time when multilateralism is under grave pressure. Our work on peace and security issues on the Council will be fully integrated with our ongoing work on other foreign policy priorities, notably sustainable development and human rights.

During our campaign, we consulted widely with UN Member States to understand the views of the international community on key issues on the Security Council agenda. We will listen to the views of all parties before taking a position at the Council. We ran an inclusive campaign and we intend our Membership of the Council to be equally inclusive.

### **Economic Policy**

22. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider defining surfing as a tourist activity in view of the fact that so many surf shops are hives of activity for those visiting coasts (details supplied). [12804/20]

41. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Finance if the VAT rate assigned to the services provided by surfing schools will be examined (details supplied). [12853/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 22 and 41 together.

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 unless they fall within Annex III of the Directive, in respect of which Member States may apply either one or two reduced rates of VAT. Services such as hotel accommodation, restaurant and catering services and the use of sporting facilities are among the items listed in Annex III therefore, permitting Ireland to apply a reduced rate of VAT.

The provision of services by surfing or kayaking schools are not included in Annex III and as such are subject to the standard rate of VAT, currently 23%. There is no discretion under the Directive for Ireland to apply a reduced rate of VAT to these supplies.

### **Insurance Coverage**

23. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance the reason equestrian centres cannot get day cover for pony trekking companies (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12872/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** At the outset it should be noted that neither I, as Minister for Finance, nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products or have the power to direct insurance companies to provide cover to specific individuals or businesses. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance (the Solvency II Directive) which expressly prohibits Member States from doing so. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies to provide insurance to equestrian centres or as to how they price their policies or what terms and conditions they apply in those policies. As the Deputy will appreciate, I am also not in a position to comment or adjudicate on the specific type of matter raised in the details supplied.

It is my assumption that the question relates to the ability of the equestrian centre and/or the pony trekking company being able to acquire its claims history records, so as to allow the equestrian centre to source insurance from another provider. As I have stated previously, I strongly believe that insurers should treat their customers honestly, fairly and professionally, in line with the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code, and to be of assistance to the Deputy, my officials contacted the Central Bank in relation to the query. The Central Bank informed my officials that while there are detailed rules in its Consumer Protection Code relating to claims processing, the particular issue outlined relating to claims history records is not specifically covered by the Code. However, under the General Principles of the Code, a regulated entity must make full disclosure of all relevant information in a way that seeks to inform the consumer and must supply information to a consumer on a timely basis, having regard to the urgency of the situation and the time necessary for the consumer to absorb and react to the information provided. Therefore, it would be my expectation that customers are entitled to the records containing their claims record. However, as noted already this is not a matter that I can adjudicate on.

Finally, I would note that if a consumer has a complaint with the service of their insurance provider, it is advisable that they make a complaint to the firm's internal complaint resolution process. This includes if they believe that the regulated firm is not following the requirements of the Central Bank's codes and regulations or other financial services law. The Consumer Protection Code requires that if after 40 days the complaint has not been resolved to the customer's satisfaction, the regulated entity must inform the consumer that they may refer their complaint to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman (FSPO). The FSPO is a statutory official who acts as an independent arbiter of disputes which consumers may have with their insurance company or other financial service provider. The FSPO can be contacted either by email at [info@fspoi.ie](mailto:info@fspoi.ie) or by telephone at 01-567-7000.

## Tax Reliefs

24. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Finance the grants and supports available for making adaptations to cars to help parents travel with children with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13067/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Department of Health/HSE administer a Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant to assist persons with disabilities. Information in relation to these supports can be found in the following link, as well as a broader range of transport supports for persons with disabilities: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/eb4974-mobility-allowance-and-motorised-transport-grant/>

In addition to these supports, the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme provides for relief from Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT), Value Added Tax (VAT) and Motor Tax where a vehicle has been specially constructed or adapted for use by a passenger with disabilities and where the VRT and VAT has been paid by the passenger with disabilities or by a family

member residing with and responsible for the transportation of that passenger with disabilities. In addition, the related Fuel Grant Scheme provides for a grant in respect of the fuel used in transporting a passenger with disabilities. More details of these reliefs and the grant in respect of fuel usage are available on the Revenue website at the following link: <https://revenue.ie/en/importing-vehicles-duty-free-allowances/guide-to-vrt/reliefs-and-exemptions/scheme-for-persons-with-disabilities.aspx> .

### Living City Initiative

25. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance the amount allocated in Budget 2019 for the living cities initiative; the amount spent; his views on the effectiveness of the initiative; if he has considered introducing a grant element to the scheme for those on low incomes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13393/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Living City Initiative (LCI) (provided for in Finance Act 2013 and commenced on 5 May 2015) is a tax incentive aimed at the regeneration of the historic inner cities of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick and Waterford. The scheme provides income or corporation tax relief for qualifying expenditure incurred in refurbishing/converting qualifying buildings which are located within pre-determined ‘Special Regeneration Areas’ (SRAs).

In accordance with my Department’s Tax Expenditure Guidelines, the following criteria apply to its evaluation:

As a demand led tax expenditure, LCI is not subject to the estimates process and is not a voted expenditure.

There are three types of relief available:

1. Owner-occupier residential relief;
2. Rented residential relief; and,
3. Commercial/Retail relief.

The following table outlines the cost/uptake for all 3 elements of the scheme combined between 2013 and 2017 (the most recent year for which data are available).

Year	No. of claimants	Max Tax Cost (€M)*	Amount claimed (€M)
2017	20	0.1	0.4
2016	15	0.2	0.5
2015	13	0.2	0.5
2014	N/A	0.1	0.2
2013	N/A	0.05	0.1

\*assumed at 40% for IT and 12.5% for CT

Finally, as the Deputy may be aware, LCI was due to terminate on 5 May 2020 in accordance with its sunset clause. However, Finance Bill 2019 provides for an extension of the scheme until 31 December 2022. The rationale behind this decision is to allow time for a series of enhancements to the incentive (as provided for in Budget 2017) to take full effect.

**Wage Subsidy Scheme**

26. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will continue the temporary wage subsidy scheme into 2021 in circumstances in which certain seasonal sectors of the economy have passed their season; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13531/20]

43. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review the temporary wage subsidy scheme to enhance the amount available for persons whose work is seasonal and increases in the summer months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12911/20]

48. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if he will expand the temporary wage subsidy scheme to include hotel workers and each other business that will return to work from 29 June 2020 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13051/20]

51. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the temporary wage subsidy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13199/20]

57. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if the temporary wage subsidy scheme will be extended for seasonal workers and employers that did not have staff in employment during January, February or early March 2020 but would have had full staffing at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13265/20]

69. **Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance if an issue in relation to the temporary wage subsidy scheme will be addressed (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13499/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 26, 43, 48, 51, 57 and 69 together.

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

The TWSS is an emergency measure to deal with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy. Of necessity, the underlying legislation and the scheme itself were developed quickly, having regard to the objective of getting assistance to employers and employees, where businesses have been seriously affected by the pandemic and the necessary restrictions introduced to fight the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

In the context of the compelling need for immediate implementation of the TWSS, the scheme necessarily had to build on data returned to Revenue through its real-time PAYE system. The key conditions of the scheme, as prescribed in the underlying law, are 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 before, in general, 15 March 2020, but extended recently to 1 April 2020.

The latter two conditions were particularly designed with a view to preventing abuse of the scheme. The wage subsidy per employee is calculated based on the net pay reported for January and February 2020. It follows that the TWSS can only operate in respect of an employee, whether full-time or part-time, who was on the payroll of the employer as at 29 February 2020.

Thus, where an individual commenced a new employment after that date, or returned to the payroll of his or her employer after that date following a period of unpaid leave, he or she does not meet the eligibility criteria with the employer as he or she would not have been on the employer's payroll at that date. There are no plans at the present moment to revisit the core criteria.

The Deputies will be aware that the Government decided on 5 June 2020 to extend the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) until the end of August. The intention is to continue to monitor the scheme closely in the coming period.

The new Programme for Government contains a commitment that a July Jobs Initiative will be brought forward which will, among other things, "set out a pathway for the future implementation of the Temporary Wage Subsidy". The matter raised by the Deputies will be one of the many factors that will be taken into account as part of that exercise.

In relation to other direct support measures, I would draw the Deputies' attention to a recent publication by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, which outlines the key financial supports and resources that are being made available to help all businesses and sectors impacted by Covid-19. This publication is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c644c0-supports-for-businesses-impacted-by-covid-19/>

### **International Bodies**

27. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if he has considered the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on foreign debt (details supplied); his views on the recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13634/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Minister for Finance is Ireland's Governor to the IMF, I propose to respond to the Deputy's question as far as it relates to the Fund. I presume that the Deputy is referring to the 2012 set of UN Guiding Principles on Foreign Debt and Human Rights, endorsed by resolution (A/HRC/RES/20/10) obliging governments (lenders and borrowers) to ensure the primacy of human rights when they make lending and borrowing decisions.

I welcome the opportunity that the Deputy's question affords me to clarify the richness of Ireland's engagement with International Financial Institutions. While the role of the IMF is probably most often perceived through a fiscal and monetary lens that is accordingly associated with economic policy, our international development policy is also an important driver and compass in our engagement with the Institution. Our current whole-of-Government international development strategy, A Better World, is grounded and informed by the overarching principles in the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Echoing the priorities articulated in our international development strategy, Ireland's IMF engagement advocates the promotion and protection of human rights and prioritises gender equality.

Of course, the IMF's primary mission is to ensure the stability of the international monetary system. It focuses on achieving sustainable growth and a stable macroeconomic environment, which in themselves are supportive of human rights, while encouraging member Governments and other Agencies to work together towards designing development strategies that take human rights into account. Broadly speaking, many of the Fund's activities – reducing macroeconomic imbalances and structural bottlenecks; eliminating obstacles to international payments; and preventing financial crises – contribute directly or indirectly to reducing poverty and fostering human rights. However, the IMF recognises that while growth, macroeconomic stability, and a well-functioning international monetary system can contribute to an environment that supports

poverty reduction, they cannot, by themselves, eliminate poverty or protect human rights.

The Fund has also acknowledged that it must be aware of any adverse effects of the corrective policy actions required as part of individual IMF programmes. Although the costs of adjustment are inevitable with any programme of financial support, the IMF insists that they need not to fall disproportionately on the poor nor compromise human rights. In some cases, the Fund encourages Governments to introduce appropriate social protection measures to help alleviate adverse social consequences during periods of adjustment. With regard to gender specifically, the IMF has increasingly recognised this as a macro-critical issue, noting that reducing gender gaps can have important economic benefits. Gender informs the Fund's country work both in terms of surveillance and the structural reform commitments required by IMF-supported programmes which aim to promote gender equality. Gender issues are also an integral part of capacity development through technical assistance and training.

The IMF has a system of checks and balances to ensure accountability, ranging from internal and external audits, risk management, and evaluations of its policies and operations. The Fund is also accountable to all 189 member countries through the Board of Governors and the Board of Executive Directors on which all members are represented. The IMF recognises the benefits of a transparent and wide engagement with civil society groups to gather broader perspectives about the impact of the Fund's work and improve policy advice and analysis and has worked to increase dialogue with CSOs.

In conclusion, I wish to assure the Deputy that a commitment to human rights shall remain central to Ireland's ongoing engagement with the IMF.

### **International Bodies**

28. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if he has considered the recommendation of a group (details supplied) which states that the IMF should only be permitted to impose one condition on borrowers, the full repayment within the agreed upon time limit, thus separating the IMF lending and policy advice functions; his views on the recommendation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13635/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Minister for Finance is Ireland's Governor to the IMF, I propose to respond to the Deputy's question. I presume that the Recommendations that Deputy Shortall is referring to are those contained in the "Unhealthy conditions: IMF loan conditionality and its impact on health financing" report published by Eurodad (the European Network on Debt and Development), which is a network of 50 civil society organisations (CSOs) from 20 European countries. This report outlined an interesting analysis of the impact of certain loan conditionality with a particular focus on health financing. It is timely that the Deputy raises this Report given the imperative for significantly ramping up the requirement for global healthcare financing against a backdrop of severe economic pressures.

As a recent graduate of a thankfully successful IMF programme ourselves, I can assure the Deputy we are very conscious of the perils of counter-productive conditionality attendant to sovereign financing. However, the objective of conditionality is not to penalise those who access IMF financing but rather to create conditions of sustainability and resilience. As I have recently noted, Ireland's reforms and reorientation after the financial crisis has left us in a far better position to deal with the range of impacts of the current pandemic crisis.

The IMF's primary mission is to ensure the stability of the international monetary system. This is achieved via:

- Surveillance - monitoring member country policies as well as national, regional, and global economic and financial developments;

- Policy advice - promoting policies designed to foster economic stability, reduce vulnerability to economic and financial crises, and raise living standards;

- Capacity development - providing technical assistance and training to help member countries build better economic institutions; and

- Financial assistance - providing loans to member countries that are experiencing actual or potential balance-of-payments problems.

IMF financial assistance is usually provided within the context of individual country adjustment programmes which include a set of corrective policy actions designed to overcome the problems that led the country to seek financial aid. These policy adjustments are an integral part of IMF lending and essential in order to restore sound financial and economic fundamentals and build resilience, thereby avoiding repeated crises and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Fund's members. Commitments to undertake certain policy actions as part of an IMF-supported programme are formulated and agreed in close collaboration with the requesting country's Government. The over-arching goal is always to restore or maintain balance-of-payments viability and macroeconomic stability without resorting to measures that are destructive or harmful to national or international prosperity. These measures are also required to safeguard IMF resources by ensuring that the country's balance of payments will be strong enough to permit it to repay the loan so that these funds can be made available to other member countries in need.

The conditionality of IMF programmes is broadly assessed by the Fund's Executive Board and staff in periodic Reviews of Program Design and Conditionality. The most recent Review in 2018 examined the performance of Fund-supported programmes ongoing between September 2011 and end-2017 and concluded that conditionality was generally well-tailored to country needs and programme objectives. However, the Fund did acknowledge the need for IMF-supported programmes to work in concert with national reform plans; to improve two-way communication with the broader public to support buy-in; and to take institutional and political capacity to deliver programme objectives on a realistic timetable into consideration.

It is important to highlight that the financial assistance provided by the IMF is flexible and responsive. This has been aptly demonstrated over the last few months in the Fund's rapid and comprehensive response to the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis. The IMF has played a significant role in providing vital emergency assistance to help members to deal with the immediate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, over 100 of the Fund's 189 members have requested emergency assistance. Of these, 70 requests for emergency financing have been approved for a total of US\$ 24.4 billion. Much of this assistance was delivered through emergency financing instruments which focus on providing a fast-disbursement and limited-conditionality emergency response

Indeed, the Deputy will note that the increased use of these flexible instruments with low conditionality is in line with the thrust of the Eurodad Recommendation.

## **Tax Collection**

29. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance if the due date for inheritance tax 2020 will be deferred from 31 October 2020 in cases in which the inheritance consists of property in order to afford persons time to dispose of the properties in question which was held

up due to the Covid-19 crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12708/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The standard rate of Capital Acquisitions Tax is 33%. There are three tax-free thresholds depending on the relationship between the disponent and the beneficiary, with CAT applying on the amount inherited or gifted over the thresholds, as follows:

**Group A** threshold (€335,000) - Applies where the beneficiary is a child (including certain foster children) or minor child of a deceased child of the disponent. Parents also fall within this threshold where they take an absolute inheritance from a child.

**Group B** threshold (€32,500) - Applies where the beneficiary is a brother, sister, niece, nephew, or lineal ancestor or lineal descendant of the disponent.

**Group C** threshold (€16,250) - Applies in all other cases.

All gifts/inheritances received since 1991 from all disponents in the relevant group must be aggregated together when calculating the taxable value. The balance of gifts or inheritance above the threshold is taxable.

I am advised by Revenue that the date on which capital acquisitions tax (CAT) is payable is determined by the 'valuation date' on which the market value of the property included in a gift or an inheritance must be established. Where this date is between 1 January and 31 August, CAT is payable by 31 October in the same year. Where this date is between 1 September and 31 December, CAT is payable by 31 October in the following year.

Section 30 of the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act 2003 contains the rules for determining the valuation date. The valuation date depends on the circumstances particular to a case and is not a fixed date in relation to all gifts and inheritances. In the case of a gift, the valuation date is generally the date on which the property is given to a beneficiary. In the case of an inheritance, however, it can be earlier as it is the date on which the executors of the will become entitled to retain the property for the benefit of a beneficiary. Generally, this is the date on which probate or administration is granted.

Where the benefit consists of property, it may well be the case that CAT is payable before a beneficiary has received the property due to a delay in completing the administration of an estate. Equally, where a beneficiary has actually received the property, CAT may be payable before a beneficiary has had the opportunity to sell that property and pay the tax liability. Outside of the current COVID-19 circumstances, the length of the conveyancing process is such that it is often the case that a CAT liability arises before a property can be sold to pay that liability. To provide for such situations, taxpayers have a statutory entitlement to payment by instalments in certain circumstances. Monthly instalment payments for up to five years may be allowed subject to the payment of interest at an annual rate of 8%. However, Revenue has discretion to allow payment of CAT by instalments over a longer period in exceptional circumstances where the tax cannot be paid without excessive hardship.

In such circumstances, Revenue also has discretion to allow payment to be postponed for such period and on such terms (including the waiver of interest) as it thinks fit. Revenue will consider each case on its merits, taking into account both the financial circumstances of the beneficiary and the nature of the gift or inheritance involved.

## **Tax Code**

30. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether persons that have received lump sum compensation payments due to medical negligence and are in possession of a tax exemption certificate having paid a 1% Government levy at the outset of investing with a financial institution, should face a further 1% levy should they choose to switch their investment to another institution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12722/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that section 189 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 exempts permanently incapacitated individuals from income tax, pay related social insurance (PRSI), universal social charge and capital gains tax on the income arising and gains accruing from the investment of certain compensation payments. This may be the tax exemption to which the Deputy refers. This exemption does not extend to any other type of charge or levy.

I am also advised by Revenue that a stamp duty levy of 1% on certain life assurance premiums paid by Irish policyholders is payable by a life assurance company under section 124B Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999. While the legislation imposes the levy on the insurance company, the general practice with insurance premiums is for the insurer to pass the charge on to the policy holder/investor. There are no exemptions available in relation to any of the policies (or investment products) covered by the charge. The current stamp duty legislation does not provide for any account to be taken of the exemption given in relation to other types of taxes and charges.

The 1% levy applies to all premiums paid to an insurance company. If a policy holder cancels an existing policy and invests in a new policy with a different insurance company, this second company would also be liable to pay the 1% levy on the amount of the premium paid and would probably pass the charge on to the policy holder. The stamp duty legislation does not provide for any account to be taken of a previous 1% charge paid to a different insurer.

### **Wage Subsidy Scheme**

31. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance if a reply will issue to correspondence from a person (details supplied) regarding the temporary wage subsidy scheme. [12730/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) is provided for in section 28 of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020. Of necessity, the underlying legislation and the scheme itself were developed quickly, having regard to the objective of getting financial assistance to employers and employees, where businesses have been seriously affected by the pandemic and the necessary restrictions introduced to fight the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

The key eligibility criterion for the TWSS requires that the employer must make a declaration which states that, based on reasonable projections, as a result of disruption to the business caused or to be caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, there will be a decline of at least 25% in the future turnover of, or customer orders for, the business for the duration of the pandemic and that as a result the employer cannot pay normal wages and outgoings fully, but nonetheless wants to retain its employees on the payroll. In the case of the public sector this criterion is not met. Thus, the TWSS is not available to employers in the Public Service and Non-Commercial Semi-State Sector.

It is noted that the person who is the subject of the Deputy's question applied to her employer to resume work, while she was on a period of approved special leave without pay following

maternity leave. The issue of the person's resumption of duty in such circumstances is a matter for the employer concerned.

### **Tax Code**

32. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address the case of a person (details supplied). [12758/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The question relates to an individual who is in receipt of a car provided by his employer, which has not been in use in recent months due to the current COVID-19 related restrictions.

I am advised by Revenue that, for the period of the current COVID-19 related restrictions, it has agreed concessional treatment in relation to the operation of benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax charge on employer-provided vehicles. For the duration of the restrictions on work and travel, where an employee is in receipt of a vehicle (car or van) provided by his/her employer, the following may apply:

(a) **Employer Takes Back Possession of the Vehicle**

Where an employer takes back possession of the vehicle and an employee has no access to the vehicle, no BIK shall apply for the period.

(b) **Employer Prohibits Use**

Where an employee retains possession of a vehicle, but the employer prohibits the use of the vehicle, no BIK shall apply if the vehicle is not used for private use. Records should be maintained to show that the employer has prohibited its use and no such use has occurred, e.g. communication from employer, photographic evidence of odometer, etc.

(c) **Employer Allows Private Use**

Where an employee has a car provided by his/her employer and

- the circumstances in the previous example don't apply,
- limited or reduced business mileage (if any) is undertaken during the period of the COVID-19 crisis, and
- personal use is limited,

the amount of business mileage travelled in January 2020 may be used as a base month for the purposes of calculating the amount of BIK due. Thus, the percentage applied in the calculation of the cash equivalent of the benefit of a car, which is based on annualised business mileage, may have regard to the actual business mileage for January 2020, for the period of the COVID-19 related restrictions. Appropriate records should be kept, e.g. business mileage travelled in January 2020, amount of private use, photographic evidence of odometer, etc.

**Employee Continues Working**

Where an employee continues to undertake business travel as usual in an employer-provided vehicle, the usual BIK rules will apply. Further information on the taxation of employer-provided vehicles is available on Revenue's website.

Guidance on the above concession was published by Revenue in March 2020. This guid-

ance and many other tax-related matters pertaining to COVID-19 can be found on Revenue's website.

### **Value Added Tax**

33. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 81 of 16 June 2020, the reason dentists are excluded from a VAT exemption when many other medical professions are included; the reason dentists protecting patients from Covid-19 are treated differently to nursing homes protecting their residents from Covid-19 or doctors protecting their patients from Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12759/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The European Commission Decision C(2020)2146, adopted on 3 April 2020, provides for the importation of goods to fight the effects of COVID -19 from outside the European Union without the payment of VAT or Customs Duty from January 2020. Such relief is permitted where the goods are imported by or on behalf of State bodies, public bodies and other bodies governed by public law, disaster relief agencies and organisations approved by Revenue including organisations regulated by the State and involved in the care, support and treatment of people at risk of COVID-19 and there is no scope to extend this to other sectors. The goods must be distributed or made available free of charge to the persons affected by or at risk from or involved in combating the COVID-19 outbreak by the bodies and organisations referred to above. The relief is scheduled to end on 31 July 2020 but there is provision for an extension if this is required following a review and consultation with Member States.

Following a request from my Department, Revenue has also implemented, on an administrative basis, the application of the zero rate of VAT to the domestic supply of personal protection equipment, ventilators, thermometers, hand sanitisers and oxygen as necessary to combat COVID-19 when supplied to hospitals, nursing homes, GP practices and the like, for use in the delivery of COVID-19 related health care services to their patients. This concessionary treatment will apply until 31 July, subject to review. The scope of the relief corresponds with the relief on the importation of these goods by the bodies specified in the Commission Decision.

Any further extension of zero rating to cover supplies of medical equipment and/or personal protection equipment to dentists and 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.

It remains the case that businesses 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.

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

34. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) will be taxed on the emergency Covid-19 payment they received for a number of weeks whilst unable to work due to Covid-19 restrictions. [12769/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Payments under the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) are subject to income tax as are Pandemic Unemployment Payments. The Payments under TWSS are also subject to USC while Pandemic Unemployment Payments

follows the general taxation rule for social welfare payments and are exempt from that charge. Amounts paid under both schemes are exempt from PRSI charges in the case of employees.

Revenue has advised me that the person in question initially received PUP payments in April 2020 and transferred to TWSS payments in May 2020. Neither of the schemes is being taxed in real-time through the PAYE system and the person may become liable for tax and USC (for TWSS) at the end of the year. Any liabilities due will be calculated by Revenue through the PAYE End of Year Review process.

The level of tax and USC due by the person may be reduced or eliminated by the amount of unused tax credits available to him at the end of the year. Any liability due may also be further reduced if the person has additional tax credits, for example health expenses, to offset. Revenue has also very recently placed all recipients of the TWSS and the PUP, including the person in question, on the 'week 1 basis' of taxation for the remainder of the year. This 'preserves' unused tax credits that can then be used to offset any tax or USC liabilities that arise for 2020.

Finally, Revenue has assured me that if any tax and USC liabilities still arise following the allocation of unused credits, it will work with the person to collect the outstanding liabilities over an extended period. This will be achieved by reducing his tax credits for future years, thereby minimising any financial hardship for him to the greatest extent possible.

### **Wage Subsidy Scheme**

**35. Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if an employer is obliged to top-up a wage if it is accessing the temporary wage subsidy scheme (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to construction companies accessing the scheme and failing to top-up the wages of their staff; if his officials and or the Revenue Commissioners engaged regarding the Sectoral Employment Order (Construction Sector) 2019 in the context of establishing the scheme and rolling it out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12802/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** 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. Of necessity, the underlying legislation and the scheme itself were developed quickly, having regard to the objective of getting financial assistance to employers and employees, where businesses have been seriously affected by the pandemic and the necessary restrictions introduced to fight the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

The TWSS is predicated on the employer wanting to keep the employees on the payroll and to retain them until business picks up. The amount of the subsidy for each employee is calculated based on the average net weekly pay reported for January and February 2020. There is no distinction made regarding the subsidy amount based on whether the business has closed due to the restrictions brought in by the Government or has continued to trade with employees continuing to part-time or work full time with similar hours as before the Covid-19 pandemic.

The employer is expected to make best efforts to maintain the employee's net income reflected in the average net weekly payment for January and February 2020, for the duration of the TWSS. However, there is no minimum amount that the employer must pay as an additional payment in order to be eligible for the scheme, but for Revenue operational systems reasons the employer will need to enter at least €0.01 in Gross Pay when running its payroll.

I have been advised by Revenue that the question of an individual's entitlements in an employment context, and the question of what wages an employer may or may not be in a position to pay such an employee in the light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the employer's

business, are matters that are outside the remit of the TWSS. The scheme has no role in relation to the employer/employee relationship in so far as the terms, conditions and entitlements of the employment are concerned; neither are Sectoral Employment Orders relevant to the operation of the scheme.

Finally, I would add that details of subsidy payments made by pay date are available to view in each employee's myAccount record on Revenue's online system. This facility allows employees to see whether their employer is participating in the scheme and being refunded a wage subsidy on their behalf. Where the amount of subsidy paid is available from the relevant employer payroll submissions made to Revenue, that amount is also displayed.

### **Tax Credits**

36. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance if a tax credit issue will be resolved for a person (details supplied). [12815/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the matter to which the Deputy is referring has been resolved.

Revenue has updated the person's tax record to reflect her current employment and has issued a revised Revenue Payroll Notification (RPN) to her employer. Once the RPN is activated by the employer the person will be automatically refunded any tax and USC overpayments in her next salary payment.

Revenue has also advised me that an amended tax credit certificate has issued to the person setting out the revised position.

### **Garda Stations**

37. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 325 to 329, inclusive, of 16 June 2020, the Garda stations included in the Garda building and refurbishment programme 2016–2021; if new Garda building upgrade projects at stations not originally included in the plan as set out by the Minister for Justice and Equality in 2015 have now been included; the details and cost of these new developments; the estimated total State investment in the plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12820/20]

38. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 325 to 329, inclusive, of 16 June 2020, his plans for the further upgrading of the current Garda station in Sligo; the funding to date spent on upgrading the station since 2018; the estimated total investment in the station when all upgrade works are completed; the cost-benefit analysis conducted on the decision to divert planned State funding away from the plan to build a new Garda station in Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12826/20]

39. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 325 to 329, inclusive, of 16 June 2020, his plans for the site of the proposed new Garda station in Caltragh, County Sligo in view of the extensive investment into the purchase of the site already undertaken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12827/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 37 to 39, inclusive, together.

I must advise the Deputy that matters pertaining to Garda policy are in the first instance

for my colleague, the Minister for Justice. As such, my Department has no basis on which to provide a detailed response on this matter. However, the Office of Public Works (OPW), under the remit of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform have provided information in relation to Sligo Garda Station, which I have included below.

The expenditure by OPW Property Maintenance on Sligo Garda Station from 2017 is as follows:

	OPW Funded	Garda funded	Total
2017	€58,163.31	€199.49	€58,362.80
2018	€76,946.19	€39,171.39	€116,117.58
2019	€291,527.54	€419,566.37	€711,093.91
2020	€142,781.50	€493.73	€143,275.23

Property Maintenance are on site in Sligo Garda Station working on the cell upgrade, this project was recently amended to increase the number of cells in the station from 3 to 5. This project is co-funded by the OPW and GEM.

The project consists of internal upgrade works to provide a new custody suite including three new cells built to current anti-ligature standards, prisoner processing, interview, solicitor and doctor's rooms. The three existing cells were not suitable for upgrading and the proposed new cells are located in a different section of the building requiring adjacent prisoner processing facilities. Following a review by GEM the contract was amended to provide a further 2 cells – work is continuing on this project and works are currently due to be completed in December 2020. The balance to pay on this project is approximately €1.3 million.

Property Maintenance are also currently preparing a tender package to provide a portacabin for Scene of Crimes unit at Sligo, this is a Garda funded project with an estimated cost of €200,000.

Sligo Garda Station was announced as part of the Garda Building & Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021. It was previously confirmed as a Public Private Partnership project, however in a PQ response on 16 June, Minister Charlie Flanagan advised that:

Sligo station is undergoing a very extensive refit and I understand that this is felt to be a more appropriate and much faster way of delivering a modern Garda Station for Sligo, in accordance with its role in the new Garda Operating Model and having regard to the fact that the current location of the station is considered optimum from the operational perspective.

It is however important to note that, while it was decided that delivery of a new station in Sligo under the PPP was no longer justified, the Commissioner decided that the upgrading of the existing station to a high standard will continue.

I can confirm that this decision was not made in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Commissioner's decision was communicated to my Department by letter received on 2 January 2020.

### Commissions of Investigation

40. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Finance the amount spent on the Commission of Investigation into the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation in each of the years 2015 to 2019 and to date in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12840/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** A breakdown by year of the costs incurred by the Department of Finance on the IBRC Commission of Investigation is set out in the table below.

Year	Total
2015	€223,724.55
2016	€27,180.63
2017	€74,303.49
2018	€31,383.64
2019	€280,405.67
2020 (YTD)	€117,374.60
Total	€754,372.58

The total amount of €754,372.58 is made up of legal costs of €728,155.17 and €26,217.41 which was spent on an eDiscovery tool required to comply with directions from the Commission.

In addition to the costs incurred by the Department of Finance, the Special Liquidators of IBRC incurred the costs as set out below.

Year	Total
2015	€2,249,711
2016	€764,040
2017	€121,951
2018	€45,396
2019	€85,245
2020 (to end-May)	€90,906
Total	€3,357,249

The total amount of €3,357,249 is made up of KPMG costs of €2,787,131 and legal costs of €570,118.

*Question No. 41 answered with Question No. 22.*

### **Mortgage Lending**

42. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Finance the measures which have been put in place for those that were in the process of buying a home but now find themselves on the temporary wage subsidy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12876/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** It is assumed that the Deputy is referring specifically to the position of those home buyers who require a mortgage to purchase the home.

The Central Bank has advised that, in relation to consumers who have or wish to obtain a mortgage and indeed in respect of financial services more generally, 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.

Lenders continue to process mortgage applications and have supports in place to assist customers impacted by COVID-19. The Banking & Payments Federation Ireland 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.

Within the parameters of the regulatory framework, as set out below, the decision to grant or refuse an individual application for mortgage credit, or temporarily suspend a mortgage approval in principle, is a commercial decision to be made by the regulated entity and it is not possible for me or the Central Bank to instruct lenders in that regard. Also, 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 and, in such cases, the decision to withdraw or vary the offer is a commercial and contractual matter for the lender.

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 further 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.

*Question No. 43 answered with Question No. 26.*

### **Tax Compliance**

44. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12929/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I previously dealt with this issue in my reply to Parliamentary Question Dail Question No. 78 (Ref: 10965-20) answered on the 16th June 2020.

Revenue has reconfirmed to me that no interest has been charged in respect of the period that the cheque payment in question remained uncashed.

However, an interest charge remained in respect of the late payment of the liability and it is in this context that Revenue contacted the deceased person's family representatives seeking supporting documentation in respect of the appeal against this charge.

Revenue has confirmed that the required documentation has now been received and the interest on late payment charge has been waived.

### **Insurance Coverage**

45. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on matters raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) in respect of hire purchase insurance claims; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12946/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** At the outset, it is important to note that as Minister for Finance, I cannot direct insurers as to the particulars of settlement offers they should either make or accept in settling claims, including for hire purchase insurance claims, as that is a decision for them considering the merits and specifics of each individual case.

However, in order to understand the nature of such Hire Purchase insurance claims, my officials contacted Insurance Ireland (the representative body for insurance providers in this country). In their reply, Insurance Ireland stated that when a vehicle is written off due to an accident or is stolen and not recovered the insurance company will make a settlement based on the value of the car (referred to as total loss settlement). However, if the car is under finance, there may be a difference between the value of the car at the time of the loss and the total amount of finance owed under the finance agreement (often this is impacted by the depreciation of the car and interest rate attached to the credit facility amongst other factors). They confirmed that the insured loss is the value of the car at the time of the loss not the total amount of finance (including any deposit paid for the car), and that it is very likely that the cost of finance outstanding on a car will be considerably in excess of the value of the car. They mentioned that this is particularly the case when there is also a requirement for a final payment included in the finance contract.

Insurance Ireland also noted that there are insurance products available, which are referred to as GAP (Guaranteed Asset Price) or RTI (Return to Invoice) insurance, which compensate the customer for the gap between the value of the car at the time of the loss and the cost to replace the car. However, they noted that this cover does not tend to be sold as part of a traditional motor policy, instead they are sold by the finance providers (in many instances these will be vehicle manufacturers and retailers). Therefore, Insurance Ireland advises that consumers review the finance documentation they received when they purchased the finance for the car with a view to understanding if they were offered GAP cover and if the potential risks associated with same was explained to them at the time of purchasing the finance.

In addition to the above, it is worth recalling that the Central Bank of Ireland's Consumer Protection Code was introduced in 2006 and revised in 2012. It requires firms to act honestly fairly and professionally in the best interest of consumers, and to act with due care and diligence. The Code contains specific requirements in respect of the handing of claims, such as requiring firms to have certain procedures in place as well as requirements around the provision of information to consumers on claims. While the Central Bank of Ireland does not adjudicate on individual consumer complaints, the Code sets out how a regulated entity must engage with a consumer on complaints, which includes complaints around the handing of insurance claims.

In situations where a person is not satisfied with the actions of an insurance provider in terms of the settlement of a claim, it is advisable that that person make a complaint to the firm's internal complaint resolution process. The Consumer Protection Code requires that if after 40 days the complaint has not been resolved to the customer's satisfaction, the regulated entity must inform the consumer that they may refer their complaint to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman (FSPO).

The FSPO is a statutory official who acts as an independent arbiter of disputes, which consumers may have with their insurance company or other financial service provider. The FSPO can be contacted either by email at [info@fspoi.ie](mailto:info@fspoi.ie) or by telephone at 01-5677000. Investigations by the FSPO are free of charge to the complainant.

Finally, Insurance Ireland also operates an Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to insurance, which can be accessed at: [feedback@insuranceireland.eu](mailto:feedback@insuranceireland.eu).

## **Mortgage Lending**

46. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address concerns raised by a person (details supplied) in relation to their mortgage application and the subsequent knock-on effects of being placed on the temporary wage subsidy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12994/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As you will be aware both officials and myself 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. 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.

The Wage Subsidy Scheme is one of the main tools with which we are protecting the income of employees who otherwise would not be working and it is hoped that it will be a major boost in saving the businesses for which they work. As of 18 June 551,800 employees have received a subsidy since the start of the Scheme, 232,400 employees received a subsidy in the previous week and an estimated 410,000 employees were being supported by the Scheme having received a subsidy in their most recent pay period.

Whilst I completely acknowledge the seriousness of the issue you have raised and its impact on those affected, what I cannot do is mandate how temporary payments received under the Wage Subsidy Scheme are treated in lending sustainability evaluations by regulators and lenders.

The banking crisis we faced over ten years ago was fuelled by unsustainable lending. There are now thankfully far firmer regulatory controls and restrictions on lenders. Speaking on this particular issue, on 7 May the Governor of the Central Bank publicly noted that if an individual borrower's circumstances have changed such that doubt is cast over the sustainability of potential borrowing, it is in the best interests of the borrower and the bank if the situation is reviewed.

Furthermore as Minister for Finance I cannot mandate or overrule the internal risk assessment processes in any bank, even one in which the State has a shareholding. Decisions in this regard are the sole responsibility of the board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The independence of 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.

In relation to AIB, officials in the Department received the following advice from AIB Group:

"AIB is actively engaging with all customers who have applied for a mortgage with the bank. We are closely monitoring the impact of Covid-19 on our customers. AIB is required to complete a responsible and prudent assessment of all applications from the borrower's and the lender's perspective.

"Existing mortgage approvals (Approval in Principle – AIPs) are unaffected by Covid-19 (amount/rate/term etc.).

"When customers wish to progress to the loan offer stage, we are obliged to understand their current financial circumstances, as our primary concern is to do what is right for our customers, in the short and long term".

“Where a customer has been adversely impacted by Covid-19, and there are concerns about their longer term income to service the mortgage, it may not be in the customer’s best interest to proceed with the application at this time. The bank will engage with those customers individually over the coming months and deal with each one on a case by case basis.”

### **Wage Subsidy Scheme**

47. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Finance if he will amend the temporary wage subsidy scheme in order that companies that were allowed by the Revenue Commissioners to make quarterly payroll returns are eligible having regard to a company (details supplied) that did not make a payroll return on 29 February 2020 but did make a payroll return as scheduled on 31 March 2020 and will do so again on 30 June 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12995/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Government’s priority in so far as the Temporary Wages Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) is concerned is to ensure that employers experiencing significant negative economic disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic can register for and start to receive payment quickly. The overarching ambition of the scheme is to ensure the key relationship between employers and employees is maintained to the greatest extent possible so that businesses can restart operations quickly once the crisis has passed.

In the context of the compelling need for immediate implementation of the TWSS, the scheme had to build on data returned to Revenue through its real-time PAYE system for January and February 2020. The key eligibility criteria for the scheme, as prescribed in the underlying law, are 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, which was recently extended, by concession, to ‘before’ 1 April 2020.

The latter two criteria were particularly designed to prevent abuse and exploitation of the scheme.

Under PAYE legislation employers who qualify to pay their PAYE/PRSI/USC liabilities to Revenue on a quarterly basis, but operate their payroll on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis, must file payroll submissions with Revenue each time they pay their staff. This payroll data is the key requirement without which the TWSS cannot operate and it is not possible to provide access to the system where employers have not met these statutory filing requirements.

Revenue has advised me that the difficulties encountered by the business in question in accessing the TWSS arose because it failed to file payroll submissions for January and February through the real-time PAYE system. The fact that the business is facilitated with a quarterly payment arrangement for its PAYE liabilities does not remove the requirement to file payroll submissions with Revenue each time it pays wages. The consequence of not filing the January and February payroll submissions is that the TWSS system cannot calculate a subsidy payment for the business in respect of its employee because the required data has not been provided. It is not possible for Revenue to develop solutions that could provide access where an employer has not adhered to the statutory requirements.

*Question No. 48 answered with Question No. 26.*

## Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

49. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider an extension of Covid-19 pandemic support schemes to aid those in the photography and videography business sector until such time as the sector can sustainably recover; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13149/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** 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) and is being extended until the end of August.

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 the Deputy refers is no different in this regard.

The Government decided on 5 June 2020 to extend the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) until the end of August. The intention is to continue to monitor the scheme closely in the coming period. I expect that decisions will be taken at an appropriate time on next steps for the TWSS beyond end-August. In this regard, I acknowledge that certain sectors will face particular challenges into the future as we re-open our economy, and this is one of many factors that will inform such future decisions.

In relation to other direct support measures, I would draw the Deputies' attention to a recent publication by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, which outlines the key financial supports and resources that are being made available to help all businesses and sectors impacted by Covid-19. This publication is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c644c0-supports-for-businesses-impacted-by-covid-19/>

## Wage Subsidy Scheme

50. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the position for companies operating the temporary wage subsidy scheme when some employees are brought back to work and other employees are not brought back; if employees that come back and are working go off the scheme and receive their full normal pay; if they are expected to work under the temporary wage subsidy scheme with no extra remuneration guaranteed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13197/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Section 28 of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 is the legislation underpinning the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS). The Government's priority in so far as the TWSS is concerned was, and is, to ensure that all employers experiencing significant negative economic disruption from COVID-19 can register for, and start to receive, payment quickly. The purpose of the scheme is to ensure that the relationship between employers and employees is maintained to the greatest extent possible so that businesses can restart operations quickly once that is possible. Eligibility for the scheme can be satisfied by an employer once they meet the relevant criteria.

The key criterial for eligibility for the scheme, as prescribed in the underlying law, are 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, in general, 15 March 2020, but recently extended, by concession, to 1 April 2020.

The latter two criteria were particularly designed to prevent abuse and exploitation of the scheme.

The TWSS 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 amount of the subsidy for each employee is calculated based on the average net weekly pay reported for January and February 2020.

There is no distinction made regarding the subsidy amount based on whether the business has closed for any defined period due to the restrictions brought in by the Government or has continued to trade with employees continuing to work full time or part time, with similar hours as before the Covid-19 pandemic. Eligibility is not dependent on employees being in or out of the workplace. However, if the employment ceases to be eligible for the TWSS and/or the employer is no longer receiving a subsidy in respect of that person, the question of the particular employment arrangements that might apply between the employer and the employee is outside the remit the scheme.

The employer is expected to make best efforts to maintain the employee's net income, reflected in the average net weekly payment for January and February 2020, for the duration of the TWSS. There is, however, no minimum amount that the employer must pay as an additional payment in order to be eligible for the scheme, but, for Revenue operational systems reasons, the employer will need to enter at least €0.01 in Gross Pay when running its payroll.

If the employer makes an additional payment greater than the difference allowed by the scheme, then the subsidy value refundable to the employer will be reduced by this excess amount when the refund reconciliation is performed by Revenue in due course. The scheme is not prescriptive as regards the hours that must be worked.

Finally, Revenue published detailed guidance on employer eligibility and supporting proofs for the TWSS and it is available on the Revenue website:

*<https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/communications/documents/guidance-on-employer-eligibility-and-supporting-proofs.pdf>*

*Question No. 51 answered with Question No. 26.*

## **Employment Data**

52. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners collate data on the number of self-employed musicians here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13201/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that it uses the NACE (European Economic Activity Classification) system for categorising activities and taxpayers into sectors. Based on this classification, there were 2,415 self-employed income tax returns filed for 2017 (the latest year available) by taxpayers in the 'Performing Arts' category.

The NACE system does not provide a more granular breakdown, such as ‘musician’ only.

### **Wage Subsidy Scheme**

53. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if a decision on a temporary wage subsidy scheme application by a business (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reviewed to allow the business to reopen and in view of the circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13204/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) is an emergency measure to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy. The underlying legislation and the scheme itself were developed within a very short timeframe to support the urgent Government objective of getting much needed assistance to employers and employees, where businesses have been seriously affected by the necessary restrictions introduced to fight the pandemic. The overarching ambition of the scheme is to ensure the key relationship between employers and employees is maintained to the greatest extent possible so that businesses can restart operations quickly once the crisis has passed.

The TWSS builds on data returned to Revenue by employers through the real-time PAYE System for January and February 2020. The key eligibility criteria for the scheme, as prescribed in the underlying law, are 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, which was recently extended, by concession, to ‘before’ 1 April 2020.

The latter two criteria were particularly designed to prevent abuse and exploitation of the scheme.

Revenue has advised me that the weekly payroll submissions for February 2020 in respect of the business in question were not received until 10 June 2020, which is significantly outside of the ‘before’ 1 April 2020 deadline. Revenue has further confirmed that the January and March 2020 payroll submissions were also not received until 10 June 2020 and that over the course of 2019, payroll submissions were generally not received until well after the required deadlines. It is for these reasons that the business cannot access the TWSS and it is not possible for Revenue to design systems that will allow entry to the scheme where the legislative requirements have not been adhered to.

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

54. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the supports and or tax credit support PAYE workers can avail of as a result of having to use their primary residence as a workplace during Covid-19 restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13207/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that while working remotely does not entitle PAYE workers to a tax credit, there is a Revenue administrative practice in place relating to e-workers who incur certain expenditure in the performance of the duties of their employment from home. Revenue have confirmed that PAYE workers using

their primary residence as a workplace during Covid-19 restrictions qualify as e-workers.

e-Workers will incur certain expenditure in the performance of their duties from home, such as additional heating and electricity costs. Revenue allows an employer to make payments up to €3.20 per day to employees, subject to certain conditions, without deducting PAYE, PRSI or USC.

Revenue has also advised me that the provision of equipment, such as computers, printers, scanners and office furniture by the employer to enable the employee work from home will not attract a Benefit-In-Kind charge, where the equipment is provided primarily for business use. The provision of a telephone line, broadband and such facilities for business use will also not give rise to a Benefit-in-Kind charge, where private use of the connection is incidental.

Where an employer does not pay €3.20 per day to an e-worker, I am advised by Revenue that employees retain their statutory right to claim a deduction under section 114 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in respect of actual vouched expenses incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of the duties of their employment. PAYE employees are entitled to claim costs such as additional light and heat in respect of the number of days spent working from home, apportioned on the basis of business and private use. PAYE workers can claim e-working expenses by completing an Income Tax return at year end by logging into the myAccount facility on the Revenue website.

Finally, I am advised that Revenue have published detailed guidance on this subject and on the question of how claims for e-working expenses should be calculated and submitted - see their Tax and Duty manual TDM 05-02-13 e-Working and Tax, which is available on their website.

### **Mortgage Lending**

55. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance the steps persons (details supplied) can take in relation to a mortgage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13241/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As you will be aware both officials and myself 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. 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.

The Wage Subsidy Scheme is one of the main tools with which we are protecting the income of employees who otherwise would not be working and it is hoped that it will be a major boost in saving the businesses for which they work. As of 18 June 551,800 employees have received a subsidy since the start of the Scheme, 232,400 employees received a subsidy in the previous week and an estimated 410,000 employees were being supported by the Scheme having received a subsidy in their most recent pay period.

Whilst I completely acknowledge the seriousness of the issue you have raised and its impact on those affected, what I cannot do is mandate how temporary payments received under the Wage Subsidy Scheme are treated in lending sustainability evaluations by regulators and lenders.

The banking crisis we faced over ten years ago was fuelled by unsustainable lending. There

are now thankfully far firmer regulatory controls and restrictions on lenders. Speaking on this particular issue, on 7 May the Governor of the Central Bank publicly noted that if an individual borrower's circumstances have changed such that doubt is cast over the sustainability of potential borrowing, it is in the best interests of the borrower and the bank if the situation is reviewed.

Furthermore as Minister for Finance I cannot mandate or overrule the internal risk assessment processes in any bank, even one in which the State has a shareholding. Decisions in this regard are the sole responsibility of the board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The independence of 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 requested a comment from PTSB on how it is dealing with customer queries in relation to the matter raised by you and received the following response:

“We have a duty of care to our customers to ensure that any lending is affordable for them. In accordance with consumer protection requirements, we are facilitating mortgage-approved customers on the TWSS in drawing down their loans subject to their employers providing assurance on the sustainability of their income when the TWSS comes to an end. We are doing everything we can to support our customers at this difficult time and are working with them on a case by case basis to assess their individual situations.”

In addition, the bank confirmed that it is happy to engage with any customer, in a confidential way, to address questions or concerns they might have.

### **Value Added Tax**

56. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will reduce the VAT rate for the hospitality sector to assist the industry with recovery as a result of the impact caused by the Covid-19 crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13254/20]

71. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reduce VAT on the hospitality and tourism sector in view of the adverse impact of Covid-19 on the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13525/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 56 and 71 together.

The Government is fully aware of the unprecedented impact that the coronavirus is having on business and people's livelihoods. In this regard a range of measures have been introduced to provide income support to those who need it while also giving confidence to employers to retain the link with employees so that when this crisis passes our people can get back to work as quickly and seamlessly as possible.

In addition to current support measures, my officials are examining a range of possible measures to ensure that the economy is in a position to recover rapidly while maintaining a stable tax base.

*Question No. 57 answered with Question No. 26.*

## Housing Data

58. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance the number of residential units delivered by NAMA or NAMA debtors by county, price and type of building, that is house, apartment, duplex and so on in tabular form. [13275/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** NAMA has an objective of funding or facilitating the delivery of 20,000 residential units, subject to commercial viability, across NAMA-secured residential sites in Ireland. NAMA provides funding, on a commercial basis, to its debtors and receivers for the construction of new residential units where it can be shown that residential development will enhance the value of the secured-asset, consistent with section 10 of the NAMA Act.

Between 2014 and end-March 2020, NAMA has directly funded or facilitated the delivery of 11,761 units in Ireland. A breakdown of these units by county, price and type is set out below.

Table 1: Units delivered by County

County	Units delivered between Q1 2014 and Q1 2020
Dublin	8,449
Cork	1,155
Kildare	903
Wicklow	504
Galway	282
Meath	134
Laois	75
Wexford	56
Louth	46
Monaghan	44
Kilkenny	42
Clare	37
Waterford	34
Total	11,761

Table 2: Units delivered by Price

Price Bracket	%
< €300k	38%
€300k-€500k	45%
> €500k	17%
Total	100%

Table 3: Units delivered by Type

Unit Property Type	%
Apartments	35%
Duplex	3%
Estate House Detached	7%

Unit Property Type	%
Estate House Semi-detached	34%
Estate House Terraced	20%
Town House	1%
Total	100%

### Help-To-Buy Scheme

59. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance if the help-to-buy scheme will be extended to second-time buyers. [13304/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The definition of first time buyer in the Help to Buy scheme (HTB) is as follows:

‘first-time purchaser’ means an individual who, at the time of a claim under subsection (3) has not, either individually or jointly with any other person, previously purchased or previously built, directly or indirectly, on his or her own behalf a dwelling;

The intention is to target HTB at those who have not had the opportunity to build up equity in another property which could be used to purchase the second or subsequent property. I do not propose amending or removing the first-time buyer requirement in HTB.

### Insurance Industry

60. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance the progress being made by insurance companies on car insurance premium refunds due to the Covid-19 pandemic; if he is satisfied with the response from insurance companies to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13352/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** These are extraordinary times, and I believe that all sectors must play their role in ensuring that we, as a country, get through them. In view of this, I and my officials have been engaging with the insurance industry through Insurance Ireland in regards to forbearance measures particularly for business customers. In addition, the Deputy will be aware that at a meeting on 17 April with Insurance Ireland, I called on insurers to be pro-active and generous in relation to their treatment of motor insurance customers during this period. In this regard, I pointed out that a combination of the very profitable part of this market over the last 12 months and what is likely to be a significant reduction in claims for this period due to the travel restrictions that are in place, provided a strong case for premium refunds, thus providing some financial relief to their customers.

On 24 April, Insurance Ireland announced that a number of their members (Allianz, AXA, FBD, RSA and Zurich) had signed up to commitments on premium reliefs for motor customers. In addition, Liberty Insurance wrote to me directly informing me of discounts that they would apply to their customers. It is important to note that each insurer has a different mix of customers and different claims experience and that the financial supports, such as refunds or discounts, applied by each insurance company will reflect their own individual claims experience to date.

In regard to the response by the insurance industry to date, Insurance Ireland wrote to me on 25 May in respect of this and other commitments made by the insurance sector. In relation to motor insurance refunds, they outlined that six general insurance companies had, in May 2020, announced refunds in premiums to Irish motor insurance customers totalling €54.5 million. I

welcome the announcements as they are a step in the right direction.

I am aware that some have expressed disappointment over the level and manner of refunds and/or discounts. In this regard, it would appear that insurers have applied a flat rate across all policyholders rather than looking at the situation in a more granular fashion. For instance, a strong case can be made that those who have been cocooning deserved a larger refund, due to their cars being off the road altogether. However, the methodology of the premium relief process is a matter outside of my control and it is important to note that each insurance company will make their own decisions as to the level and manner of financial supports, including whether to issue refunds and/or discounts based on their own particular circumstances.

Finally, I would also stress the need for other insurers operating in the Irish motor insurance market who have not yet made such premium relief announcements to do so, as there is a need by all players in the market to take a longer-term perspective in relation to their customers. I believe customers will remember and favour those companies in the future that have made steps towards meeting their needs at this difficult time.

### Value Added Tax

**61. Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 89, 91, 107, 131 and 142 of 16 June 2020, if he will consider reducing the VAT on yoga services to the permissible 12% under the requirements of the EU VAT directive in order to assist yoga studios nationwide post-Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13355/20]

**77. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the reason gyms are paying a 9% VAT rate while yoga studios pay a 13.5% rate; the supports he will put in place to help yoga studios reopen in view of the reduction in class sizes that will be necessary to maintain physical distancing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13644/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 61 and 77 together.

The VAT rating of goods and services is subject to the requirements of the EU VAT Directive, with which Irish VAT law must comply. Under the Directive, Ireland can and does apply a reduced rate of VAT, currently 13.5%, to supplies by yoga studios. The Directive does not permit the application of a rate below 12% to the supply of such services. Ireland has a second reduced rate of 9% and a further reduced rate is not permitted under the Directive. Therefore, while it is permissible to reduce the rate of VAT on yoga services from 13.5% to 12%, this could only be done if either the 13.5% or 9% rate was discontinued.

Gym membership fees are considered to be the right of admission to facilities for taking part in sporting or physical education activities. The Directive permits the application of a rate of not less than 5% for such services, and accordingly the second reduced rate of VAT, currently 9%, has been applied to gym membership fees. Where separate charges apply in respect of training classes, for example aerobic classes supplied in a gym, these charges are liable at the reduced rate of VAT, currently 13.5%.

Yoga studios may be eligible for financial support under the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS). That scheme was legislated for in section 28 of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020, an emergency measure to deal with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy. Detailed information is available on the Revenue website in relation to this scheme.

## **Insurance Industry**

62. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 45 of 3 June 2020, if a company (details supplied) is in breach of the voluntary agreement by increasing the premium for a business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13364/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As outlined in my previous reply to the Deputy on this issue, 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. However I am not in a position to adjudicate as it is very much a matter for the insurer based on the merits and specifics of each case.

For instance, on a general level, my understanding is that insurers will use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply. For example, in relation to commercial vehicle insurance, factors may include those such as the age and type of vehicle, how and where it is used, the claims record, the number of drivers, and the storage and use of the vehicle. Insurers also price in accordance with their own past claims experience, and do not all use the same combination of rating factors, so as a result prices vary across the market. While I cannot comment on the specific case referenced in the details supplied, a number of these factors may be influencing the reasons why the terms may change upon renewal. As I have consistently stated, it is my view that it is important for consumers to shop around on their insurance policies in order to achieve a lower price where possible.

As the Deputy notes in her question, the forbearance agreement entered into by the relevant insurers is voluntary. As a result, neither I, nor the Central Bank, can enforce any of its provisions nor adjudicate on elements of it. Nonetheless, I expect insurers to act in line with the principles of the agreement. Furthermore, as the Deputy will be aware, I asked Insurance Ireland to put in place a mechanism which provides proof of delivery. My Department received the first “Activity Report” on this issue from Insurance Ireland on 25 May. This Report shows that in the period 23 March to 4 May, Insurance Ireland members processed 4,093 forbearance requests for business customers worth a total of €5,242,349. My officials have sought more detailed information from Insurance Ireland on the nature of the forbearance being offered, as I want to be certain that they are adhering to the spirit of the commitment they entered into. It should also be noted that my Department is in regular touch with the Alliance for Insurance Reform on these matters.

Finally, I would note that if a consumer has a problem with the service provided by their insurance provider, it is advisable that they make a complaint to the firm’s internal complaint resolution process. The Consumer Protection Code requires that if after 40 days the complaint has not been resolved to the customer’s satisfaction, the regulated entity must inform the consumer that they may refer their complaint to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman (FSPO). The FSPO is a statutory official who acts as an independent arbiter of disputes which consumers may have with their insurance company or other financial service provider. The FSPO can be contacted either by email at [info@fspoi.ie](mailto:info@fspoi.ie) or by telephone at 01-567-7000.

## **Wage Subsidy Scheme**

63. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the calculation of average net weekly pay for the purposes of the temporary wage

subsidy scheme may cause an underpayment to some persons that are usually paid monthly (details supplied); if adjustments are planned to rectify the underpayment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13365/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) is an emergency measure to deal with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy. Of necessity, the underlying legislation and the scheme itself were developed quickly, having regard to the objective of getting assistance to employers and employees, where businesses have been seriously affected by the pandemic.

The amount of subsidy payable to eligible employees is based on their ‘average revenue net weekly pay’ (ARNWP) for January and February 2020, as returned by the employer to Revenue through the real-time PAYE system. The ARNWP calculation is based on the number of insurable weeks within the January/February period rather than the pay frequency used as this is a more accurate and consistent method across all types of employees.

Revenue advise me that, for example, an employer payroll submission for an employee who is monthly paid and works for the full month of January 2020 includes a pay frequency of ‘monthly’ with ‘five insurable weeks’, while another employee who is also monthly paid and starts work with the employer on 20 January includes a pay frequency of ‘monthly’ with ‘two insurable weeks’. To correctly calculate the ARNWP for both employees, the use of insurable weeks rather than pay frequency is necessary. Using a pay frequency-based calculation on the second employee would be incorrect as the payment reported is in respect of two weeks work rather than a full month.

Revenue further advise me that, in the example referenced by the Deputy, there is no underpayment of subsidy. If the employee was paid for two full months in January and February 2020, then there are nine insurable weeks reported on the payroll and the ARNWP is correctly calculated by dividing the total net pay figure by nine.

## Pension Provisions

64. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration will be given to allowing the unlocking of private pension funds for the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic in the case of unemployed PAYE taxpayers; if tax would have to be paid on such funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13384/20]

**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 that 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 monitored 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.

I am advised by Revenue that, as of 25 June 2020, over 552,200 employees had received a subsidy since the start of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS), 247,300 employees had received a subsidy in the previous week and an estimated 405,000 employees were being supported by the scheme having received a subsidy in their most recent pay period.

Revenue further advises that it regularly publishes statistics in relation to the TWSS. The most recent update can be found at the following link:

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/registrations/wage-subsidy-scheme-statistics-25-june-2020.pdf>

Data from the Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection showed there were 465,900 people in receipt of a Pandemic Unemployment Payment on 22 June 2020. A total of 693,800 people had received at least one payment since the scheme started. The data are available at the link:

<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/77508/12053c11-e227-4a26-af6d-355c5f240b17.pdf#page=null>

## **Wealth Audit**

**65. Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance the current mean and median household income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13396/20]

**66. Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance the percentage of households that have higher incomes and assets compared to 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13397/20]

**67. Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance the rates of relative and absolute poverty; the rates of relative and absolute poverty in 2005, 2010 and 2015, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13398/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 65 to 67, inclusive, together.

My Department monitors trends in household income on an ongoing basis. Information in respect of these trends is captured in the annual Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) produced by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The most recent 2018 SILC data indicates that the median household disposable income was €42,183, while the mean household disposable income was €50,640.

In response to the Deputy’s query concerning the percentage of households that have higher incomes and assets compared to 2005, I am advised by the CSO that SILC data cannot precisely identify the income of the same cohort of households as in 2005. I am further advised by the CSO that information on asset holdings contained in the Household Finance and Consumption Survey (HFCF) does not pre-date 2013. Therefore it is not possible to identify the assets held by households in 2005 and compare those to household assets held in 2018.

With regards to the poverty indicators that the Deputy has requested, these are also available

through the published SILC data. SILC produces three metrics for measuring poverty. Those ‘at risk’ of poverty, are identified as those living below 60% of median equivalised disposable income. In this instance, the equivalised disposable income refers to the total disposable income of each household divided by the equivalised household size. This may also be referred to as relative poverty.

On the other hand, the measurement for ‘enforced deprivation’ refers to households that are considered to be deprived because they cannot afford two or more of the eleven goods and services which are considered to be the norm for other people in society. This is a measurement for absolute poverty.

Furthermore, the ‘consistent poverty’ rate measures those who are both ‘at risk’ of poverty and experiencing ‘enforced deprivation’. The data for 2005, 2010, and 2015 as requested are provided in the table below. The ‘at risk’ of poverty rate and the ‘consistent poverty’ rate both declined from 2005 to 2010, while the ‘deprivation rate’ increased in that time period. The impact of the economic crisis is evident in the rise in all three metrics between 2010 and 2015.

Table - Income and Poverty Rates, statistical indicator and Year

Year	2005	2010	2015
At Risk of Poverty Rate (%)	18.3	14.7	16.3
Deprivation Rate (%)	14.8	22.6	25.4
Consistent Poverty Rate (%)	7	6.3	8.5

Source: CSO SILC data various years.

## Mortgage Lending

68. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which he and major financial institutions are accommodating those in receipt of the temporary wage subsidy scheme with mortgage applications (details supplied); and the measures being taken by the Central Bank to ensure that financial institutions are acting in the best interests of customers during the Covid-19 pandemic. [13472/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Central Bank has advised 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, and my Department maintains close contact with the Central Bank and Banking & Payments Federation Ireland (BPF) as the lending industry works to address the difficulties arising from the COVID-19 situation.

Lenders continue to process mortgage applications and have supports in place to assist customers impacted by COVID-19. The BPF 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.

Within the parameters of the regulatory framework, as set out below and as acknowledged by the Deputy, the decision to grant or refuse an individual application for mortgage credit, or temporarily suspend a mortgage approval in principle, is a commercial decision to be made by the regulated entity. Accordingly, it is not possible for me to instruct lenders in that regard.

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 and 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. The CMCAR further provides 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. 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.

*Question No. 69 answered with Question No. 26.*

### **Mortgage Lending**

70. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the practice of banks during Covid-19 to halt the drawdown process of mortgages for applicants whose companies are in receipt of the temporary wage subsidy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13524/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Central Bank has advised 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, and my Department maintains close contact with the Central Bank and Banking & Payments Federation Ireland (BPMFI) as the lending industry works to address the difficulties arising from the COVID-19 situation.

Lenders continue to process mortgage applications and have supports in place to assist customers impacted by COVID-19. The BPMFI 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.

Within the parameters of the regulatory framework, as set out below, the decision to grant or refuse an individual application for mortgage credit, or temporarily suspend a mortgage approval in principle, is a commercial decision to be made by the regulated entity. Accordingly, it is not appropriate or possible for me to instruct lenders in that regard.

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 and 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. The CMCAR further provides 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. 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.

*Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 56.*

## Tax Reliefs

72. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will reintroduce tax relief on trade union subscriptions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13535/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** A review of the appropriate treatment for tax purposes of trade union subscriptions and professional body fees was carried out by my Department in 2016, and included in the 2016 report on tax expenditures published on Budget day 2016.

*[http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2017/Documents/Tax\\_Expenditures\\_Report%202016\\_final.pdf](http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2017/Documents/Tax_Expenditures_Report%202016_final.pdf)*

The review concluded that:

“...analysis of the scheme using the principles laid down by the Department’s Tax Expenditure Guidelines shows that it fails to reach the evaluation threshold to warrant introduction in this manner.

The reinstatement of this tax relief would have no justifiable policy rationale and does not express a defined policy objective. Given that individuals join trade unions largely for the well-known benefits of membership, and the potential value of the relief to an individual would equate to just over €1 per week, this scheme would have little to no incentive effect on the numbers choosing to join. There is no specific market failure that needs to be addressed by such a scheme, and it would consist largely of deadweight.”

This issue was discussed during the Committee Stage of the Finance Bill 2019 in Dáil Éireann. Given that the previous examination of the matter was undertaken in 2016, during the course of the debate I undertook to have my officials carry out an updated review into the specific issue of tax relief, acknowledging stakeholder viewpoints and taking into account international practice in the area. I understand that the relevant work is at an advanced stage at present.

## Departmental Staff

73. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13548/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I wish to advise the Deputy, that on 23rd March 2020 my Department issued an interim working from home policy document to staff to address health and safety issues in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition the Department has to date issued seven (7) Health and Wellness bulletins publication to staff to assist and advise on best practices when working from home and guidance relating to continued engagement with the Department and fellow colleagues. Areas covered in the bulletins included guidance in relation to ergonomics set up and related exercises staff members can undertake, also included were references and guidance to the eight (8) Dimensions of Wellness and the five (5) ways of wellbeing for Mental Health so as ensure staff the continued wellness and positive mental health of staff of the Department. On an ongoing basis, staff of the Department are provided with information and contact details for the confidential service provided by the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service, further details are available at *<https://www.cseas.per.gov.ie/>*.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has developed guidelines for civil ser-

vice organisations (Working from Home during COVID-19 – Guidance for Civil Service Organisations), which is intended to assist civil service organisations as long as necessary to address the health and safety risks of COVID-19. These guidelines are due to issue shortly.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has commenced work on the development of a remote working policy which will address remote working in the longer term for the civil service.

### **Mortgage Lending**

74. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Finance if loan-to-value, LTV, exemptions have been stopped since Covid-19; the representations he has made to the banking sector on behalf of homeowners that cannot borrow due to banks no longer issuing LTV exemptions in circumstances in which a 20% deposit is not achievable particularly for those in negative equity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13565/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Central Bank has statutory responsibility for the regulation of mortgage lending by banks and other regulated entities and, in line with its independent mandate to preserve and protect financial stability in Ireland, it introduced macro-prudential measures for residential mortgage lending by such institutions in February 2015. The objective of these mortgage measures is to increase the resilience of the banking sector and households to reduce the risk of credit-house price spirals from developing.

These macro-prudential measures apply certain loan-to-value (LTV) and loan-to-income (LTI) restrictions to residential mortgage lending by financial institutions regulated by the Central Bank. The current restrictions, which have not changed since the impact of Covid-19, comprise an LTI limit of 3.5 times the borrower's income; in respect of the LTV limit, for first time primary dwelling borrowers it is 90% of the value of the residential property and 80% for second and subsequent buyers (for buy to let mortgage borrowers the LTV limit is 70%).

However, the macro-prudential mortgage lending framework also provides a certain allowance or discretion to lender to exceed these LTI and LTV limits. For example, in any one calendar year, lenders can give an LTV allowance to:

- Up to 5% of the value of mortgages to first time primary dwelling buyers
- Up to 20% of the value of mortgages to second and subsequent primary dwelling buyers
- Up to 10% of the value of mortgages to buy-to-let buyers.

In addition, the mortgage lending measures provide that borrowers who are currently in negative equity and want to move home by purchasing another property are exempt from the LTV limits.

However, the utilisation and allocation of these exemption allowances is solely a matter for individual lenders, having regard to the lender's own credit policies and based on an evaluation of each specific borrower. Therefore, subject to compliance with this macro prudential residential mortgage lending framework, and also to compliance with all the other relevant legal and regulatory requirements governing the provision of mortgage credit to consumers including the relevant provisions of the European Union (Consumer Mortgage Credit Agreements) Regulations 2016 and the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code 2012 'Knowing the Consumer and Suitability' obligations, it remains a matter for each mortgage lender to set its own mortgage lending policies and to make its own mortgage lending decisions in individual cases and

it is not appropriate or possible for me to instruct lenders in that regard. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that the Central Bank has 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. In addition, my Department maintains close contact with the Central Bank and Banking & Payments Federation Ireland as the lending industry works to address the difficulties the COVID-19 situation is causing for both borrowers and lenders.

### **Wage Subsidy Scheme**

75. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Finance if a temporary wage subsidy scheme application by a person (details supplied) will be re-examined due to an error. [13624/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) is a fully automated solution that is dependent on timely payroll data being provided by employers to Revenue through the real-time PAYE reporting system in accordance with legislative obligations. The system specifically requires that eligible employees were on the employer payroll on 29 February 2020 and that the employer reported the February payroll to Revenue before 15 March 2020. The 15 March 2020 deadline was recently extended to 'before' 1 April 2020 by Revenue under its care and management provisions. Where an employer fails to meet these statutory reporting obligations within the required timelines, it is not possible for the TWSS system to generate any subsidy payment.

Revenue has advised me that the difficulties encountered by the company in question in accessing the TWSS arose because it failed to file its February payroll submission until after the extended concessionary deadline ('before' 1 April 2020). Revenue further advised me that the company also failed to file payroll submissions on time on a number of occasions since the real-time PAYE system commenced operations on 1 January 2019. The late filing of the February payroll submission prevented the TWSS system from calculating any subsidy on behalf of the company's only employee and it is not possible for Revenue to design a technical solution that could provide access in circumstances where an employer has not adhered to the statutory requirements.

### **Insurance Coverage**

76. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions he has had with the insurance industry in relation to the refusal by insurance companies to honour business interruption policies in insurance policies in circumstances in which insurance includes cover for infectious diseases; the result of these discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13629/20]

**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, in terms of honouring business interruption claims and with regard to whether forbearance and other flexible measures are being offered to them. I have considerable sympathy for such policyholders.

Whilst 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, I believe that as a general rule insurers should not attempt to reject claims on the basis of interpreting policies to their own advantage. I believe that they 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 Pro-

tection 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 or litigation.

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.

The Deputy should also note that the Central Bank wrote to the CEOs of major insurers outlining its expectations of them in this crisis from a consumer protection perspective. This included the Bank’s belief that while most insurance policies are clear, if there is a doubt about the meaning of a term, the interpretation most favourable to the consumer should prevail. The Central Bank is continuing to engage with the non-life insurance industry on these matters and will continue to closely monitor the situation to ensure that firms are meeting the expectations as previously set out.

In terms of meeting again with industry, my officials are in regular contact with Insurance Ireland on the above matters and are keeping me updated on developments.

Finally, it is also worth noting I have also held two meetings with the Alliance of Insurance Reform, the latest meeting which took place on 17 June. These meetings were very useful as I was able to hear first-hand the issues faced by businesses in relation to insurance.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Deputy that my Department will continue to be as pro-active as it can be on these insurance issues and will continue to liaise with the Central Bank and Insurance Ireland, as well as the Alliance for Insurance Reform on an ongoing basis.

*Question No. 77 answered with Question No. 61.*

## **Employment Data**

78. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a breakdown of the number of persons, earners and tax units who are self-employed and PAYE workers for each of the years 2016 to 2019 by the economic and industrial sector they were employed, income brackets (details supplied), the amount of tax paid in each earning and tax category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13652/20]

80. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the average pre-tax and after-tax incomes of tax units earning above €100,000 annually; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13654/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 and 80 together.

Regarding Question 13652/20, I am advised by Revenue that the available information on income distribution is published at link: <https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Staire/Select-VarVal/Define.asp?maintable=RVA01&PLanguage=0>. This information provides a breakdown of income taxpayers in 2016 and 2017 by range of gross income and by taxpayer type (PAYE or self-employed) and provides data on both incomes and tax liability.

Regarding Question 13654/20, the information in the table at the above link allows for the net income (gross income less tax deducted) to be calculated for all income ranges, including those earning in excess of €100,000.

Data in relation to 2018 will be published at the same location in the coming months. The deadline for filing self-assessment tax returns for 2019 is later in 2020. However, information in relation to incomes and taxes paid by PAYE taxpayers in 2019 across sectors is available in Revenue's publication '*Statistics and Insights from the First Year of Real-Time Payroll Reporting (PAYE Modernisation)*' , which is available at link <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/research/research-reports/income-tax.aspx>.

Further information regarding sectoral breakdowns is published at link <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/receipts/receipts-sector.aspx>. The information includes a sectoral breakdown of tax receipts for 2016, 2017 and 2018, and will be updated to include data in relation to 2019 in the coming weeks.

### Company Data

79. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies registered here; the number of those that paid corporation tax in the latest available annual figures; the number that did not pay corporation tax; the median and mean corporation tax payments for all companies registered here in that year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13653/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I have assumed that the Deputy's question relates to companies registered for tax in Ireland. Revenue's latest annual report on corporation tax was published on 25 June 2020. The Corporation Tax 2019 Payments and 2018 Returns report is based on Revenue's analysis of corporation tax payments in 2019 and corporation tax returns for 2018. The report includes details of companies registered for tax in Ireland, and Figure 7 on page 17 provides the number of companies that filed corporation tax returns in 2018, broken down by those reporting profits and liable to tax.

I am advised by Revenue that information is not available in respect of the mean and median tax payments for all companies. However the report provides extensive breakdowns of the available information concerning the amount of corporation tax paid by sector and by net payment amount, for example in Figure 3 and Table 5. The report is available at <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/research/ct-analysis-2020.pdf>.

*Question No. 80 answered with Question No. 78.*

## **National Debt**

81. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Finance the measures being taken to refinance the outstanding obligations into long-term debt of the State in view of the historically low borrowing costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13672/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) has taken advantage of the favourable funding and interest rate environment of recent years to lengthen the maturity of the National Debt and lock-in the benefit of low interest rates.

Since the turn of 2015, the NTMA has issued €90 billion of medium- to long-term debt. This was issued in the form of standard benchmark bonds, green bonds, inflation-linked bonds and ultra long-term (circa 50–100 year) private placements. This €90 billion of funding had an average maturity of circa 14 years and an average rate of less than 1%. It included two new 30-year bonds, a new 20-year bond and two new 15-year bonds.

Debt refinancing “chimneys” over the four year period 2017–2020 that had, at one point, stood at some €70 billion have effectively been eliminated. By contrast, the refinancing requirement over the next four years 2021–2024 is far lower, at just over €27 billion.

Over €23bn of EU-IMF Programme debt in the form of loans from the IMF and the Danish and Swedish bilateral loans was repaid in full and ahead of schedule.

Large cash balances – presently around the €30 billion mark – have been built up and these can be used to part-fund the deficit and repay maturing debt.

Furthermore, the purchase of €17 billion of Floating Rate Notes from the Central Bank of Ireland since late 2014 and their replacement with medium- to long-term fixed rate bonds protects the state against future interest rate rises. This is ahead of the minimum schedule; a strategy driven by the low interest rate environment of recent years.

## **Mortgage Lending**

82. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Finance the measures being taken to assist applicants that were refused access to a mortgage on the basis they are in receipt of a Covid-19 pandemic payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13673/20]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Central Bank has advised 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, and my Department maintains close contact with the Central Bank and Banking & Payments Federation Ireland (BPF) as the lending industry works to address the difficulties arising from the COVID-19 situation.

Lenders continue to process mortgage applications and have supports in place to assist customers impacted by COVID-19. The BPF 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.

Within the parameters of the regulatory framework, as set out below, the decision to grant or refuse an individual application for mortgage credit, or temporarily suspend a mortgage approval in principle, is a commercial decision to be made by the regulated entity. Accordingly, it is not appropriate or possible for me to instruct lenders in that regard.

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 and 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. The CMCAR further provides 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. 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.

### Departmental Projects

83. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the financial management shared services project; the cost for each year since the project was introduced in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12749/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** I am informed by the National Shared Services Office (NSSO) that the Financial Management Shared Services Programme has exited a final design review process, and the next steps involve a process of engagement with client departments to agree a timeline for deployment.

The key deliverable is an integrated and modern financial management system for all of central Government, which will replace 31 individual financial management systems, each of which will require updating or replacement in the coming years. Investment in this centralised system will future proof the Government's finance function and strengthen financial data insights for Public Service Bodies.

The Programme is also a key enabler for essential financial reporting reform that was approved by the Government in October 2019, as outlined in the 2019 OECD Report on "Financial Reporting in Ireland".

The table below outlines the costs for each year since the project began:

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1.7m	2.2m	9.7m	7.5m	12.8m	11.3m

### Heritage Sites

84. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will facilitate the longer opening of heritage sites outside of the traditional season in order to benefit from a potential increase in staycations and domestic holidays and in order to accommodate visitors and to avoid overcrowding sites during seasonal weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13091/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** The Heritage Visitor sites managed by the Office of Public Works have been directly affected by the Covid-19 crisis with both the year-round and seasonal sites within the portfolio largely closed to

the public during the shutdown. These properties have however been reopening progressively since 18th May last when certain outdoor locations resumed and the position in relation to the remainder is being actively examined. Currently, the OPW is working to resume operations at a broad range of remaining indoor sites in line with the Government's most recent Roadmap which indicated that the Museums and Galleries would reopen after 29th June.

Visitor sites within the portfolio will, when they resume, offer a changed service to members of the public in many cases with some restrictions evident in terms of the numbers who can be admitted, accessing confined spaces etc. However, it is the firm intention of the OPW to support insofar as possible the re-invigoration of the domestic Irish tourism sector and to offer the best possible visitor experience to the public while still allowing for necessary Covid restrictions. It is not at this stage clear what the extent of the visitor appetite will be and how long into the Autumn demand will be sustained, but the OPW will keep opening times for seasonal sites under review if it is clear that there is a significant demand, and will respond accordingly. It ought to be borne in mind however that the visitor portfolio operates within defined financial parameters and that it may not be feasible in all cases to sustain a longer season if there is not a vibrant demand or if attractions cannot be staffed appropriately and safely.

### Flood Relief Schemes

85. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated or full cost of each flood relief scheme for the Glashaboy and Bride rivers in County Cork and the Slaney river, Enniscorthy, County Wexford; the status of each project; and the project which will commence first. [13233/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** Please see below the information requested in tabular form:

	Estimated full Project Cost	Current Status	Construction Start Date
Glashaboy FRS	c. €13.9m	Confirmation Stage - awaiting Confirmation	Expected Q3 2021
Blackpool FRS	c. €20.5m	Confirmation Stage - awaiting Confirmation	Expected in first half of 2021
Enniscorthy FRS	c. €50m	Confirmation Stage - awaiting Confirmation	Expected in second half of 2021

The Blackpool and Glashaboy Flood Relief Schemes are currently undergoing assessment as part of the Confirmation process of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. Further information has been requested by the Minister as part of the environmental impact assessment which he is carrying out on both proposed Schemes. This information is currently being prepared and is expected to be provided to the Minister by October 2020. The Confirmation process will be concluded by the Minister in the quickest possible time frame.

In relation to the Enniscorthy Scheme a request for tender of services for environmental consultants is currently being progressed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The public consultation phase is also due to be commenced by DPER shortly.

For all schemes it should be noted that estimated costs are based on current design and are pre-tender estimates and therefore subject to change. Once each scheme is Confirmed, the detailed design will be completed and a tender competition held to appoint a works contractor. It is hoped that construction will commence on all three schemes in 2021.

## Public Sector Staff

86. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of administrative officer positions in the public service that will become available in counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Longford, Cavan and Monaghan over the next year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13632/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** As the Deputy will be aware the Public Appointments Service (PAS) is an independent, statutory body which provides professional recruitment and selection services to the civil and public service.

PAS advertised an Administrative Officer competition in October 2019 to fill vacancies which may arise in the Civil Service. Vacancies are filled as and when required by employing Departments. The number of assignments depends on the demand from Departments/Offices and that demand is subject to their pay and numbers allocation.

## Local Authority Funding

87. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when funding will be provided to Kerry County Council to carry out repairs on the cliff at Dromature, Ballyheigue, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12690/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I have been advised that an application submitted under the OPW Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection scheme by Kerry County Council for a project at Ballyheigue comprising the use of rock armour to stabilise the cliff is currently under consideration. The Council will be notified shortly of a decision.

## Flood Prevention Measures

88. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when works will be commenced by Meath County Council following a successful voluntary homeowners relocation scheme application by persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12723/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** Having identified the property in question for consideration, Meath County Council applied for funding under the Remedial Works element of the 2017 Voluntary Homeowners Relocation Scheme.

The application was approved by the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland on the 5th December 2019.

I have been advised by Meath County Council that it aims to begin the process of engaging Consulting Engineers to carry out detailed design on this project in mid-July. The Council will endeavour to expedite the process of engagement of Consultants and Contractors toward commencing works in the last quarter 2020.

## Community Employment Schemes

89. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if, fur-

ther to the passage of the motion on community employment pension scheme on 26 April 2018, he met with unions that represent community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors in order that negotiations could commence with a view to creating a process to bring this issue to finality. [12771/20]

90. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if, further to the passage of the motion on community employment pension scheme on 26 April 2018, he made available the financial resources to address this issue. [12772/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 and 90 together.

This issue relates to a claim by community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors who have been seeking, through their union representatives, the allocation of Exchequer funding to implement a 2008 Labour Court recommendation relating to the provision of a pension scheme.

The matter was the subject of extensive discussion at the Community Sector High Level Forum which was reconvened to examine certain issues pertaining to the Community Employment sector and in particular to ensure that the matter was fully examined having regard to both costs and precedent in the context of the wider Community and Voluntary sector. The membership of this Forum includes public service management and union representatives including the direct involvement of officials from my Department who were involved in all stages of the in-depth deliberation process.

The implications arising from this claim extend well beyond the CE Supervisors and Assistant Supervisors cadre and could have impacts across the entire Community and Voluntary sector (which may employ over 100,000 people). While CE supervisors and assistant supervisors represent only a very small part of the wider community and voluntary sector, any explicit provision of State funding for such a scheme in respect of those employees would inevitably give rise to claims for similar schemes and funding provision on the part of those many thousands of workers in the broader sector. Accordingly there has to be regard to the full potential Exchequer exposure associated with setting such a precedent.

With this in mind, a detailed scoping exercise was carried out by my Department in 2017 in order to comprehensively examine and assess the full potential implications of the issues involved.

The scoping exercise found that this matter presents very significant issues for the Exchequer, with a potential cost exposure for the State of between €188m and €347m per annum (depending on the exact size of the sector which is difficult to ascertain) were consequential demands to be made to fund employer pension contributions for all similar State funded Community and Voluntary organisations whose employees are in a similar position to the Community Employment scheme supervisors. This excludes any provision for immediate ex-gratia lump sum payment of pension for those imminently retiring, as sought, which could, depending on the size of the sector, give rise to a further Exchequer cost exposure of up to €318m.

It continues to be the position that state organisations are not the employer of the particular employees concerned and accordingly it is not a matter for the State to provide funding for occupational pension scheme provision in this regard.

As a newly appointed Minister, I intend to give careful consideration to this issue and I will engage directly with the relevant stakeholders in the period ahead.

## Flood Risk Management

91. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of a project (details supplied) identified in the flood risk management plan; the part within the ten-year time frame it is listed to be progressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12801/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** In May 2018, I launched 29 Flood Risk Management Plans for the main river basins in Ireland, identifying a total of 118 flood relief projects to protect the main flood risk areas throughout the country. These Plans and projects are a key part of the overall flood risk management strategy set out in the National Development Plan 2018 - 2027, involving total investment of almost €1 billion over the ten-year timeframe of that Plan.

The flood relief projects identified in the Flood Risk Management Plans are to be funded under the Government's 10-year flood risk investment programme of almost €1 billion under the National Development Plan 2018 – 2027.

A proposed flood relief scheme at Inchigeelagh has been identified by the CFRAM programme to be progressed at a preliminary cost estimate of approximately €2.6 million. This proposed scheme consists of flood walls and embankments and will protect 28 properties when completed.

As it is not possible to implement all of the 118 projects at the one time, a total of 60 projects have been prioritised for the initial tranche of investment and delivery, based on the level of risk and number of properties to be protected. While the proposed scheme for Inchigeelagh is not in the first tranche of projects to be progressed, the OPW and the local authority will work closely to ensure that they will be commenced as soon as possible within the 10 year timeframe for the programme of investment.

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

## Garda Stations

92. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost-benefit analysis conducted by the OPW on the decision to divert as planned State funding away from a new Garda station in Sligo and instead to invest in remedial works at the current station and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12822/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** A new Regional Garda station for Sligo was originally proposed by Garda Estates in late 2016. OPW purchased, on behalf of the Garda Estates request, a site adjacent to an existing OPW owned site used by Social Protection near Sligo town for that purpose. The Sligo site was to be used for a new Regional Garda Station as part of the Garda PPP bundle. Sligo was to be a regional Garda HQ similar to the Wexford Regional HQ completed by OPW in autumn 2017. In December of 2019 Gardai notified OPW and their parent Department, the Department of Justice and Equality, of revised Garda operational plans. These revised Garda operational plans led to the omission of a new Regional Sligo Garda station from their PPP bundle.

The Garda Commissioner decides Garda operational matters.

In accordance with the Public Spending Code, it is the responsibility of the Sponsoring Agency, in this case the Gardai, to prepare (a) the Strategic Assessment Report and (b) develop the Business Plan to include an appropriate financial, economic and sensitivity appraisal.

### **Public Sector Staff**

93. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 228 of 27 March 2018, if the staff at Shannon Commercial Properties that commenced their employment with Shannon Development will be redeployed as a matter of urgency in view of the length of time they have been on the redeployment list; the number of staff involved; if the Labour Relations Commission recommendation 21632 will be honoured; the efforts made since 2017 to redeploy the staff affected; if he will intervene to approve the redeployment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12866/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Public Service Agreements (PSAs) provided for agreed redeployment arrangements to apply in the civil service and in other parts of the public service.

Redeployment was primarily a mechanism for the transfer of surplus staff to areas where appropriate vacancies exist. However mobility is now the primary mechanism for staff to move across the Civil Service

My Department remains responsible for redeployment in the civil service and non-commercial state bodies and these redeployments panels are operated by the Public Appointments Service (PAS).

No Shannon Development staff assigned from the redeployment panel in the last 12 months. However I am advised that one member of staff was offered a position around March last year, however they turned it down as it was outside the 45km rule, and as such have remained on the panel.

It is the continued position that these staff will be redeployed when suitable vacancies become available.

The redeployment panel and scheme will be reviewed by officials in my Department over the coming months, in collaboration with PAS.

### **Roads Maintenance**

94. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if repairs will be carried on a bridge on the River Maine at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12870/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** I have asked the Office of Public Works (OPW) to look into this matter and to revert directly to the Deputy.

### **Public Sector Staff**

95. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the clerical officer positions advertised by the Public Appointments Service with an application

closing date of 24 March 2020 will be filled. [12905/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** As the Deputy will be aware the Public Appointments Service (PAS) is an independent, statutory body which provides professional recruitment and selection services to the civil and public service.

PAS advertised a nationwide Clerical Officer competition in March 2020 to fill vacancies which may arise in the Civil Service. Vacancies will be filled as and when required by employing Departments. The number of assignments depends on the demand from Departments/Offices and that demand is subject to their pay and numbers allocation.

All competitions are time bound and this is usually between 18 months and 2 years. This affords an opportunity for those on the panel to be recruited and also gives those not on the panel an opportunity to compete. While every effort is made to make sure that panels are not large, placement on panels is no guarantee of appointment to a position.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

96. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has considered the introduction of measures to incentivise working from home in view of the ongoing capacity constraints across public transport and so on. [13017/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** This response is in respect of the Civil and Public Service only.

Since March 2020 Civil Service employers and employees have been finding flexible solutions to address the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis. These include a large proportion of civil and public servants working from home in the first instance, as well as the introduction of staggered hours and extended shift patterns to accommodate social-distancing requirements for those staff who must attend business premises. Such measures also ensure that more space is made available on our public transport, allowing those workers who must travel to work premises via public transport to do so.

My department has recently produced guidance for Civil Service employers to support the current home-working arrangements (Working from Home during COVID-19; Guidance for Civil Service Organisations). Further guidance on remote working is being developed.

### **Brexit Preparations**

97. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the construction of infrastructure projects the OPW is carrying out and-or has appointed a contractor for in respect of Brexit at each seaport and airport; when each construction project will be completed; the cost of same; and the projects that are the subject of conciliation. [13141/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** The Office of Public Works has, on behalf of the relevant Government Departments and State agencies, completed a number of construction projects in Dublin Port, Dublin Airport and Rosslare Harbour to ensure that there are sufficient facilities in place to deal with the increase in official checks and controls that will arise as a result of the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

None of the construction projects complete to date are subject to conciliation.

It is envisaged that the further facilities will be provided in 2020 to expand upon, and supplement, the existing facilities. Contractors will be appointed to these projects when the necessary statutory approvals are in place.

### **Office of Public Works**

98. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to review and update the terms of a licence regarding accommodation between the OPW and the Bar Council at the High Court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13214/20]

99. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a full schedule of rental accommodation and or office locations and fees received by the OPW from the Bar Council for the past five years to date will be provided. [13215/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 and 99 together.

I understand from the Commissioners of Public Works that the accommodation agreements in place between the OPW and the Bar Council relate to licensing arrangements to occupy the Law Library in the Four Courts. These arrangements are complex and date back to the early 1800s when the original Law Library in the Old Four Courts was constructed with funds provided by the Benchers, the predecessors of the Bar Council.

Since 1931, the occupation by the Bar Council at the Four Courts complex has been by way of historical licence agreements with the Commissioners of Public Works that currently remain in place. Due to the nominal amount of rent set out in the licence agreements, the OPW is not in receipt of rent from the Bar Council.

The management and provision of facilities at the Four Courts is a matter for the Courts Service to determine and there are no plans at present to alter the current licensing arrangements.

### **Flood Relief Schemes**

100. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the timeline for the resumption of the Glashaboy flood relief scheme, Glanmire, County Cork; the details of the latest delay; the estimated timeline for the resumption and completion of works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13251/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** The Office of Public Works, under the provisions of the Arterial Drainage Acts, has submitted the proposal for the Glashaboy Flood Relief Scheme, accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) and Natura Impact Statement (NIS), to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for formal Confirmation.

On foot of the European Union (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Arterial Drainage) Regulations 2019, which were published in *Iris Oifigiúil* on 27 September 2019, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has undertaken an environmental assessment of the proposed scheme in line with required legislative requirements. This involved an independent assessment of the EIAR / NIS and a public consultation process.

On the 5 May 2020, the Office of Public Works received correspondence from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform that the independent assessment is now complete. This

correspondence has requested, pursuant to section 7(B) sub-section 4 of the 2019 European Union (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Arterial Drainage) Regulations, certain items of further information that are required to complete the process. My Office is currently preparing the additional information requested - which generally relates to further detail on the processes followed and assessments undertaken in developing the scheme - to be submitted to the Department in order that the assessment can be completed and the scheme confirmed by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. This information is currently scheduled to be provided to the Department no later than October 2020.

The procurement and appointment of a Contractor will be progressed for this scheme following formal Ministerial Confirmation. The flood relief scheme will be funded from within the allocated €1 billion for flood risk management over the period 2018-2027. Provision for the cost of the Scheme is included in the Office of Public Works' multi annual capital allocation.

OPW is committed to funding this project and attends monthly steering meetings to offer every assistance to Cork City Council to ensure a contractor is engaged, and the works commence, as soon as possible.

### **Departmental Staff**

101. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13552/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** In March of this year my department produced the document, DPER principles for remote working during the COVID-19 Crisis, which contains key principles for the large number of staff of the department that have been provided with remote working facilities as part of our response to COVID-19.

Since then, my department has developed guidelines for civil service organisations (Working from Home during COVID-19 – Guidance for Civil Service Organisations), which is intended to assist civil service organisations as long as necessary to address the health and safety risks of COVID-19. These guidelines have issued recently.

My department has also commenced work on the development of a remote working policy which will address remote working in the longer term for the civil service.

### **Garda National Immigration Bureau**

102. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works plans to refurbish the Garda immigration unit based at Shannon Airport; if so, when the work will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13610/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** In consultation with An Garda Síochána, the Office of Public Works has designed new accommodation for An Garda Síochána at Shannon Airport, including the relocation of immigration desks. In order to progress these works further, preliminary structural work needs to be undertaken by Shannon Airport Authority. The Office of Public Works is awaiting confirmation from Shannon Airport Authority in relation to these works in order to progress this project.

## **Flood Prevention Measures**

103. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason a person (details supplied) did not satisfy the criteria for the voluntary homeowner's relocation scheme in 2016; the actions that will be taken to assist them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13613/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** In April 2017, the Government agreed the administrative arrangements for a once-off Voluntary Homeowners Relocation Scheme for those primary residential homes that flooded during the flooding event in Winter 2015/2016. The scheme was only applicable to a homeowner's primary residence that flooded i.e. flood water entered and significantly damaged the building as a result of the flood event between 4th December 2015 and 13th January 2016 such that rendered it uninhabitable.

As the homeowners property referred to by the Deputy is located within the area to be defended by the proposed Springfield, Clonlara Flood Alleviation Scheme, the residence does not meet the criteria for this scheme.

This Flood Alleviation Scheme is being progressed by Clare County Council (CCC) with support from the OPW. The engineering design consultants have finalised the Stage I options report and updated the planning report for the scheme in light of updated survey information and consultations with relevant stakeholders and with CCC and the OPW. When the flood waters in the area receded in early April, this enabled completion of the onsite inspection and walkover survey required to finalise the Environmental Assessment and report. Planning drawings have also recently been finalised. CCC has been in contact with land owners affected by the proposals and has consulted with local residents. The Council has indicated that they expect to submit the proposed scheme for planning approval in July subject to completion of all documentation.

## **Community Employment Schemes**

104. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the community sector high level forum last met; the plans there are for it to meet again to resolve the ongoing issues it was set up to examine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13696/20]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** This issue relates to a claim by community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors who have been seeking, through their union representatives, the allocation of Exchequer funding to implement a 2008 Labour Court recommendation relating to the provision of a pension scheme.

The matter was the subject of extensive discussion at the Community Sector High Level Forum which was reconvened to examine certain issues pertaining to the Community Employment sector and in particular to ensure that the matter was fully examined having regard to both costs and precedent in the context of the wider Community and Voluntary sector. These discussions provided a clear understanding to each of the parties of their respective positions in relation to this matter and the formal engagement process between the parties was accordingly concluded on this basis. The membership of this Forum includes public service management and union representatives.

It will be appreciated that the implications arising from this claim extend well beyond the CE Supervisors and Assistant Supervisors cadre and impact across the entire Community and

Voluntary sector. It is accordingly appropriate that the wider sector implications should be fully taken into account in considering the cost implications arising from this issue.

Taking this important consideration into account it is accordingly the position that a detailed scoping exercise was carried out by my Department in 2017 in order to comprehensively examine and assess the full potential implications of the issues involved.

The scoping exercise clearly illustrated that this matter presents very significant issues for the Exchequer, with a potential cost exposure for the State of between €188 million per annum and €347m depending on the size of the sector which is difficult to ascertain, were consequential demands to be made to fund employer pension contributions for all similar State funded Community and Voluntary organisations whose employees are in a similar position to the Community Employment scheme supervisors. This excludes any provision for immediate ex-gratia lump sum payment of pension for those imminently retiring, as sought, which could, depending on the size of the sector, give rise to a further Exchequer cost exposure of up to €318 million.

To fund an employer pension contribution for CE Supervisors and Assistant Supervisors alone would cost the State an estimated €6m per annum, excluding any provision for immediate ex-gratia lump sum payments, estimated at a further €19.2m before administration/implementation costs.

While CE supervisors and assistant supervisors represent only a very small part of the wider community and voluntary sector, any explicit provision of State funding for such a scheme in respect of those employees would inevitably give rise to claims for similar schemes and funding provision on the part of those many thousands of workers in the broader sector. My Department has to have regard to the full potential Exchequer exposure associated with setting such a precedent.

It continues to be the position that state organisations are not the employer of the particular employees concerned and accordingly it is not for the State to provide funding for occupational pension scheme provision.

As a newly appointed Minister, I intend to give careful consideration to this issue and I will engage directly with the relevant stakeholders in the period ahead.

### **Special Educational Needs**

105. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the July provision; when this is expected to commence; if all information has been provided to deal with the issues to enable it be provided; the level of take-up of the scheme compared to previous years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13192/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

To date 231 schools have indicated that they intend to run a school based programme involving approximately 3,700 children. 9,781 families have registered for the home based summer programme involving 9,820 children.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

Home-based provision will be available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year. In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher / SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on [Gov.ie/summerprovision](http://Gov.ie/summerprovision)

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent or the school is free to plan and organise the programme in accordance with the Departments guidance. There is also some flexibility on the timing of the running of the programme.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has published information to assist Parents in sourcing the services or a Tutor or SNA for the 2020 Summer Provision The information is available on the NSCE website at <https://ncse.ie/information-for-parents-on-private->

*home-tutor-services-advertising-platforms-for-the-2020-summer-provision-scheme*

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*

### **Third Level Staff**

106. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to increase the number positions in universities for the academic year 2020-2021 across professions (details supplied); and the intake for these professions in each of the years 2017 to 2019 and to date in 2020. [13297/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The Higher Education Authority collects data on student enrolment in higher education institutions (HEIs). Attached is the latest HEA disaggregated data of the type sought by the Deputy in the relevant period.

It should be noted that HEIs are autonomous with regard to management of their academic affairs including admissions procedures. The Central Applications Office (CAO) processes applications for undergraduate, and some postgraduate, courses on behalf of the HEIs. Decisions on admissions, including the number of places offered, are made by the HEIs which then instruct the CAO to make offers to successful candidates. The Department does not have any role in the operation of the CAO.

The Department was engaged in the development of the National Framework for Health and Social Care Workforce Planning published in November 2017. Current and future demands for health and social care workers are examined under this framework and appropriate supply responses formulated with HEIs where necessary in order to ensure the delivery of an integrated approach to workforce planning.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2020-06-30\_pq106-30-06-20\_en.xlsx">Specific Professions</a>]

### **Third Level Education**

107. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will be made on the provision of in-college summer courses for postgraduate students particularly those parts of courses that do not lend themselves to being done online; if there have been discussions with the HEA in relation to the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12704/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** To assist with the development of plans for the re-opening and operation of higher education in an environment that may require social distancing and other public health requirements, the Department of Education and Skills is engaging with relevant stakeholders from the higher education sector. This work is ongoing, and it is hoped that a communication for the sector will be published in the coming weeks.

However Higher Education Institutions are autonomous institutions and are entitled to regulate their own academic affairs and administrative processes. Decisions on how courses will operate will be made by each institution, and arrangements will vary between institutions and

between courses. Therefore the HEIs themselves are best placed to provide answers on in-college summer courses.

### **Special Educational Needs**

108. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if each school will be allocated at least the same number of SNA hours for the 2020-2021 academic year they had for 2019/2020; if so, the reason a school (details supplied) was notified of a loss of SNA hours; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12705/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** On 2 April I announced the deferral of the roll out of the new frontloaded model of SNA allocations to mainstream classes which was to be introduced in the 2020/21 school year as part of the phased roll out of the School Inclusion Model (SIM).

The 2019/20 mainstream class SNA allocations were frozen on 24 April 2020, the date circular 30/2020 issued, and automatically rolled over to the 2020/21 school year. This means that no school received a mainstream SNA allocation for 2020/21 of less than that which they had for the 2019/20 school year on the date the circular issued.

SNA allocations for special classes and special schools are not impacted by this model of allocation and continue to be allocated, by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in the normal way. There is a prescribed special class to SNA ratio.

Circumstances may arise where this level of support is not sufficient to meet the care needs of the cohort of students enrolled. In such circumstances, the school may apply to the NCSE for access to additional care supports, clearly outlining the reason why the additional support is necessary.

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

### **Schools Building Projects**

109. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason tenders for building projects are being requested to provide a quotation for possible Covid-19 related disruptions and compliance on building projects in view of the fact the rules and regulations regarding Covid-19 are changing constantly according to changes in the suppression of the illness; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12706/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The Deputy will be aware that, in consideration of the challenges that the Return to Work Safely Protocol introduces to certain construction operations, the Office of Government Procurement last week published guidance for those Employers that are currently party to a standard form Public Works Contract (PWC) in relation to the implementation, by contractors, of the measures associated with meeting the requirements of the Protocol on construction sites.

In anticipation of this guidance, the Department has, over recent weeks, been engaging with a small number of contractors on projects where a Letter of Intent had issued prior to the shutdown to determine what, if any, additional costs are likely to arise when contracts are awarded on those projects.

### **Schools Building Projects**

110. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a building project application by a school (details supplied) in County Mayo. [12712/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I can confirm that my Department received an application, for capital funding, under the Additional School Accommodation scheme, from the school authority referred to by the Deputy. Once the application has been assessed, the school authority will be contacted directly with a decision.

### **Schools Refurbishment**

111. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if remedial work at a school (details supplied) will be expedited to facilitate provision for children with special needs for the area. [12724/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I wish to advise the Deputy that works under the Fire Remediation Programme have commenced recently in the school to which he refers. The plan is that these works will cease at the end of July in all schools, whether the works are completed or not, to enable schools to plan for reopening following the Summer holidays. It is open to the school to host the Summer provision programme during the month of August.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

112. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the reopening of schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12725/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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 its students, teachers and providers.

My Department has been engaging with the representative bodies of English language education providers across a range of issues over the course of the Covid-19 outbreak to date. This includes the body of which the provider in question is a member. These engagements have included discussions and information exchanges surrounding the reopening of this sector.

The timeline and arrangements for the safe re-opening of English language education providers is guided by public health advice and by the Government's Roadmap for the gradual lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. Following its re-phasing, the re-opening of all adult education facilities is now part of Phase 3 of the Roadmap, which allows these facilities to re-open from 29 June.

While my Department will not be issuing guidelines specifically for the re-opening of the English language education sector, guidance to assist the tertiary education sector more generally in planning for reopening is being prepared at present and will be available shortly. My Department will further engage with the provider representative bodies within the English language education sector in relation to their detailed plans for the wider re-opening of their premises and as they seek to provide greater clarity for their member providers. 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 are undertaken as part of their development and implementation. 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 inform these plans, supplemented by any guidance issued by the Department for the tertiary education sector when available. This protocol envisions close engagement between staff and their employers during the planning, development and implementation of these new workplace measures. The experience of the re-opening of educational facilities in other areas and jurisdictions will also inform this process.

### **Emergency Works Scheme**

113. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the emergency school works application made by a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12727/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the revised Emergency Works Application submitted has been approved and the school has been given permission to tender for a consultant in that respect. As this is a devolved project, it is now a matter for the school authority to progress the project.

### **Student Accommodation**

114. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding third-level accommodation fees; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12740/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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.

Refund or cancellation policies in student accommodation should be set out in the license agreement signed at the beginning of the academic year. While I would hope that accommodation providers would show flexibility to students in the current times, 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.

### **Special Educational Needs**

115. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a reply will issue to correspondence from a person (details supplied) regarding the summer provision 2020; if contact will be made with the person to discuss the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12741/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous

years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>

My Department has responded to the email referenced by the Deputy.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

116. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding returning to full-time education in September 2020. [12744/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** On 12 June, my Department published the report to Government "Planning for reopening schools in line with the Roadmap for reopening society and business" <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/framework-for-reopening-and-operating-schools.html>.

The report sets out the clear ambition to develop a sustainable plan to fully reopen schools at the start of the next school year in late August/September in line with normal timeframes.

The overriding objective of the plan is to protect the health of staff and students while pro-

moting the educational and development needs of children.

The report also sets out in brief the contingencies that must be considered during the coming period in the context of Covid-19. My Department is engaging with the education partners and other key stakeholders on working through these contingencies in detail and on the development of guidance and supports for the reopening of schools to ensure that the return to school is safe for children and staff.

### **School Funding**

117. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied); when a decision will be made on same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12745/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I can confirm that my Department recently received an application, for capital funding, from the school referred to by the Deputy. This application is currently under assessment and my Department has been in contact with the school authorities requesting additional information. Once this information is received and the assessment complete, a decision will issue to the school authority directly.

### **School Accommodation**

118. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that require temporary accommodation for September 2020; the number finding it difficult to find suitable accommodation; the number at primary and post-primary level and by patronage; the number that have confirmed availability of temporary accommodation units in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12750/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department's Planning and Building Unit is working closely with school authorities and patron bodies to ensure that contingency arrangements are in place, where necessary, if a school building project is not completed in time for the start of new school year as a result of delays caused by Covid. This work is on-going and it is envisaged that all issues will be addressed prior to the start of the new school year.

### **School Transport**

119. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she has received a proposal from a body in relation to school transport providers (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12754/20]

146. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration will be given to a proposal from an organisation (details supplied) in order to boost the school transport sector. [12945/20]

171. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the proposal presented by an organisation (details supplied) regarding school transport providers; and if she will engage with the organisation and respond to its proposals. [13101/20]

215. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if proposals by

a federation (details supplied) will be reviewed and addressed in relation to school transport services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13422/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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.

Following the decision to close schools in March in an effort 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 continue to be paid at 50% while schools remained 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.

With regard to extending the age of vehicles operating School Transport services, Bus Éireann sets the standard it requires in relation to services operating as part of the School Transport Scheme. In the interest of maintaining the highest standards of safety it is not permitted to operate any bus older than 20 years on school transport services. This standard applies to both vehicles operated by Bus Éireann and those procured from private operators. There are no plans at present to change the current age profile of vehicles operating services as part of the School Transport Scheme.

With regard to the extension of the retirement age of School Bus Drivers it is Bus Éireann company policy that normal retirement age for all Bus Éireann staff is currently 66 years. However Bus Éireann Part-time School Bus Drivers and drivers nominated by private operators who operate service as part of the School Transport scheme may continue to perform in the role provided they hold the requisite licence and satisfy an annual medical examination until they retire at age 70. This policy and criteria is applied to all drivers who provide school transport services on behalf of Bus Éireann equally. As the policy has already been reviewed to extend the retirement age from 66 to 70, there are no plans to have this age limit extended at present.

### **Special Educational Needs**

120. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to allow preschool children starting primary school in September 2020 to attend the July provision this summer; if there is a similar programme in place for preschool children transitioning to primary school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12757/20]

182. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if one-to-one tutor time under the July provision programme will be provided to children in 2020, particularly one with a dual diagnosis of Down's syndrome and autism and serious medical heart and lung underlying issues, meaning they cannot attend a school for the programme; if there are additional supports in place to support such children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13148/20]

213. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to extend the July provision to children in the junior cycle of secondary school including children with Down syndrome; if there are such supports in place to help parents and children make up for the lost time in school due to Covid-19; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13369/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of *Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education* including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

Home-based provision will be available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year. In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher / SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

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

30 June 2020

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

In relation to support for pre-school children the Department of Children and Youth Affairs launched a dedicated campaign and website to supports transition called “Lets Get Ready” which has received a positive response so far.

This resource has been prepared jointly with my Department. It is universal in scope, and is aimed at children returning to pre-school as well as children returning to or transitioning to school.

Information on the site is at a level for all to understand and include a section called ‘Ready for Everyone’ to specifically support transitions for children with special / additional needs.

The website, which is being updated and reviewed by the DCYA based on the feedback from various sources, is available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/74b0d-ready-for-everyone>.

## Tax Credits

121. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the possibility of allowing a tax credit or tax allowance for teachers to buy digital technology to assist in remote learning will be examined. [12775/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** Resources to support the transition to distant learning have been developed by the Department’s support service, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and are available 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).

My Department is continuing to engage with the education partners on planning arrangements for the reopening of schools in accordance with the measures included in the national roadmap for reopening society and all decisions on how schools are to reopen will be informed by relevant public health advice.

As you will be aware policy for provision of tax credits or tax allowances including for the purchase of digital devices does not fall to the remit of my Department. Therefore it is not possible for me to say if such approaches will be adopted.

## Special Educational Needs

122. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the criteria to attend the summer schemes for children with disabilities is amenable to each child's individual needs. [12777/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

To date 231 schools have indicated that they intend to run a school based programme involving approximately 3,700 children. 9,781 families have registered for the home based summer programme involving 9,820 children.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

Home-based provision will be available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year. In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by

Parents of a registered teacher/SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has published information to assist Parents in sourcing the services of a Tutor or SNA for the 2020 Summer Provision. The information is available on the NSCE website at <https://ncse.ie/information-for-parents-on-private-home-tutor-services-advertising-platforms-for-the-2020-summer-provision-scheme>.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

### **Student Grant Scheme**

123. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review the selection processes regarding SUSI applications in view of the effects from the recent Covid-19 pandemic on employment (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12783/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** For the 2020/21 academic year, student grant applications will be assessed based on gross income from all sources for the period 1st January 2019 to 31st 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 have their application assessed under the change in circumstances provision of the relevant Student Grant Scheme.

The income of all parties to the application will be assessed or reassessed on the current year (2020) and they may also be asked to provide evidence of the current year's (2020) income. SUSI also requires confirmation that the change is not a temporary change and is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Following such a review, the applicant may fall within the thresholds to become eligible for grant assistance or be entitled to an increased rate of grant or the special rate of grant.

The applicant can request a review by contacting the SUSI Support Desk at 0761 087 874 or emailing [support@susi.ie](mailto:support@susi.ie).

Apart from the Student Grant Scheme, 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 student's local Tax Office or from the Revenue Commissioners website, [www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie).

### **School Staff**

124. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if payslips can be sent to teachers and other civil servants electronically instead of by post (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12793/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** As you know my Department operates one of the largest payrolls in the State, paying approximately 120,000 school employees per fortnight. The school employee payrolls are highly automated and have been subject to an unprecedented level of change over the past decade, to implement changes in public service terms and conditions, pay policy and PAYE Modernisation. My Department prioritises statutory and pay affecting changes in its work programme for enhancements annually. Changes also have to be considered in the context of existing contractual arrangements and technical infrastructure.

My Department has a legal obligation under Section 4 of the Payment of Wages Act to provide each school employee with a payslip.

It is intended to implement online payslips for school employees as part of an overall payroll upgrade project which will take a number of years to procure and implement. My Department is bound by EU and national procurement requirements in seeking to replace the existing system.

Electronic payslips are currently issued to Civil Servants within my Department.

### **Schools Site Acquisitions**

125. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the planned location for a permanent school premises (details supplied); the capacity it is planned to increase the school to; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12794/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** As the Deputy may be aware, the school referenced by the Deputy was established in 2014 under the patronage divesting process.

The patronage divesting process intended that, in the relevant areas, schools could be opened where a school building became, or was due to become available as a result of an amalgamation/closure of an existing school.

A vacant former school building in the town is in the Minister's ownership, having been transferred under the Redress process. The Department considers that there is scope for expanding the size of the school property on site and has been considering possibilities in this regard. The Department will contact the school patron when the Department's considerations in this regard have been completed, at which point there should be clarity on the school's size long-term.

In order to facilitate the opening of the school, its initial establishment, as with most new schools, has been in interim accommodation, pending the planned permanent school building being available for use.

### **Special Educational Needs**

126. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the July provision will be available to children with learning disabilities in a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12800/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

My Department issued guidance to these schools to support management and staff in the delivery of summer programmes for children with special educational needs and those experiencing educational disadvantage as we continue to operate in line with public health advice to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance includes information in respect of hand hygiene, physical distancing, use of PPE and a risk assessment template.

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

It is therefore a matter for the Board of Management of the school having regard to the resources available whether or not it will participate in the programme.

To date 231 have indicated they intend to provide the school based summer provision.

Home-based provision is available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year.

In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher / SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on [Gov.ie/summerprovision](https://www.gov.ie/summerprovision)

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the school is free to plan and organise the programme in accordance with the guidance issued.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*

### **Special Educational Needs**

127. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address a matter regarding the summer programme for children in special education (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12806/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>.

## **Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

128. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding schools losing teachers due to the pupil-teacher ratio; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12807/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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 enrolment 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 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 as per the arrangements set out in Circular 18/2020 for the 2020/21 school year.

## **School Staff**

129. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will lose a teacher for the school year commencing in September 2020. [12810/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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 appeal from the school submitted by the Deputy was considered by the Primary Staffing Appeals Board and deemed ineligible as the appeal did not meet the criteria published in Circular 18/2020. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board is independent of the Department and its decision is final.

## **School Transport**

130. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the consultation that has taken place between her Department and the school bus transportation sector regarding school transport in September 2020; the dates of all correspondence in this regard; the issues discussed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12829/20]

184. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when Covid-19 guidelines for school transport services for the 2020-2021 academic year will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13171/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department 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.

With regard to the re-opening of schools for the 2020/21 academic year, my Department is currently engaging intensively with Bus Éireann, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the National Transport Authority on the logistical considerations that arise from public health advice in planning for the reopening of schools. The operation of school transport services in September 2020 will be informed by the outcome of this planning for re-opening schools.

### **Teaching Council of Ireland**

131. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will work with the Teaching Council to ensure that newly qualified teachers that were completing the Droichead programme are not disadvantaged by the sudden closure of schools in March 2020; if she will work with the Teaching Council to ensure that Droichead completion is accepted by the Teaching Council if principals are satisfied to sign off on same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12831/20]

201. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps she will take to ensure that newly-qualified teachers engaged in the Droichead process will be given credit by the Teaching Council for days that they have worked from home (details supplied). [13289/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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, the Teaching Council has 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.

The Council has also clarified that any time spent engaging in Droichead after 12 March can be included in verification of the Droichead process. This includes remote teaching and learning, professional discussions and online observations.

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.

While I understand that the Council has communicated with all NQTs and schools affected, further details of the revised arrangements can be found at [www.teachingcouncil.ie](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie).

### **School Meals Programme**

132. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address matters (details supplied) regarding the delivery of school meals during Covid-19; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12838/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The Government's decision on school meals was announced on Thursday March 26th and detailed guidelines issued to schools to help them operate the School Meals Programme amid the extended Covid-19 restrictions. The guidelines were also published on the Department's website.

In general, schools participating in the School Meals Programme are funded to provide school meals and the sourcing of a food supplier for these meals is arranged by the schools.

Schools were asked to identify those pupils most in need and to contact parents to ask if they wished to avail of the service during the school closure period. Tusla Education Support Service staff liaised with Principals to ensure that children/families in need of the School Meals Programme were identified and supported. Schools were allowed to maintain the service during the Easter holidays in 2020 if they wished to do so.

Schools were asked to arrange a food package to be delivered to pupils. The type and range of food provided, as well as the method and logistics of supplying the food was decided by the individual schools.

A variety of delivery methods were available to schools. Some schools have availed of support available via TUSLA Education Support Service and others have availed of delivery arrangements via the local community and voluntary networks. Some food suppliers delivered directly to families and in some areas families collected the food packages directly from the school.

An Post agreed to facilitate delivery of non-perishable food packets on a complimentary basis for schools during the Covid 19 school closure period, where schools could not identify an alternative delivery method and within An Post capacity limits. The Department established a pre-booking system for schools who wished to use An Post and it has generally worked well. 85 to 100 schools have used this system.

To date, An Post have delivered over 17,000 food parcels to disadvantaged students since the schools closed up to the end of June 2020.

### **Special Educational Needs**

133. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the supports available to children with special educational needs whose usual school and summer camp is not partaking in the voluntary July programme and when no offer of home-based provision has been provided; if no provisions have been provided, if she will work towards the early opening of dedicated special needs schools such as a school (details supplied); and if she will make a

statement on the matter. [12850/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme can run across the summer before the start of the new school year. Schools are free to run the programme for a minimum of 2 weeks and can extend up to four weeks from 29th June to August 21st where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

My Department issued guidance to these schools to support management and staff in the delivery of summer programmes for children with special educational needs and those experiencing educational disadvantage as we continue to operate in line with public health advice to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance includes information in respect of hand hygiene, physical distancing, use of PPE and a risk assessment template.

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

It is therefore a matter for the Board of Management of the school having regard to the resources available whether or not it will participate in the programme.

To date 231 have indicated they intend to provide the school based summer provision.

Home-based provision is available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year.

In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher / SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on [Gov.ie/summerprovision](https://www.gov.ie/en/summerprovision)

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Department's website.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has published information to assist Parents in sourcing the services of a Tutor or SNA for the 2020 Summer Provision. The information is available on the NCSE website at <https://ncse.ie/information-for-parents-on-private-home-tutor-services-advertising-platforms-for-the-2020-summer-provision-scheme>.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance informa-

tion for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

### **Special Educational Needs**

134. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if second-level students with Down's syndrome can avail of the July provision. [12855/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. I have asked my officials to review the programme having regard to the need to ensure equity as far as possible. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>.

### **Special Educational Needs Staff**

135. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an increased number of special needs assistants will be approved for a school (details supplied) to support the current extra needs of students and the new students enrolled; if the various needs of the students requiring supports will be examined in view of the fact extra training will be required to support their needs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12867/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The allocation and coordination of SNA support for schools are the responsibility of the NCSE and my Department has no role in making individual determinations.

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.

Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are employed by the managerial authorities of individual schools or by Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The Board of Management is the SNA's employer and the recruitment and deployment of SNAs within schools are matters for the individual Principal/Board of Management, subject to Departmental guidelines.

When appointing an SNA, it is a matter for the Board of Management to ensure that SNAs are in a position to effectively meet the care needs of the pupil(s) for whom SNA support has been allocated in the school. Where additional training is required in order to carry out the assigned duties, the school authorities should arrange for the appropriate training to be provided to enable SNAs attend to the pupil's care needs.

Where specific training is required, the Board of Management should liaise with the Health Service Executive (HSE) in order to ensure that the HSE provides guidance and training that enables the SNA to meet the care needs of the pupil in an appropriate manner. It is a matter for individual school authorities to make such arrangements locally.

### **School Funding**

136. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the request for funding to lease an established outdoor facility for physical education purposes by a school (details supplied) will be approved as a matter of urgency in view of the fact that the facilities of the school are operating beyond a safe capacity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12868/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** As the Deputy will be aware, a major capital project to construct a new school building and PE Hall for the school in question is included in my Department's building programme to be delivered as part of the National Development Plan.

In this regard, the procurement of the Design Team and Project Manager to deliver the project has commenced.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department's current focus is to prioritise funding for essential classroom accommodation and accordingly, my Department is not in a position to provide funding to lease an outdoor sporting facility. The school has been advised accordingly.

### **Special Educational Needs**

137. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the fact that some schools have decided not to proceed with the July provision in 2020; her views on whether the remuneration given to teachers and special needs assistants and the existing arrangements for the taxation of this income to be the main reason that schools have decided not to provide these services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12874/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

My Department issued guidance to these schools to support management and staff in the delivery of summer programmes for children with special educational needs and those experiencing educational disadvantage as we continue to operate in line with public health advice to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance includes information in respect of hand hygiene, physical distancing, use of PPE and a risk assessment template.

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

It is therefore a matter for the Board of Management of the school having regard to the resources available whether or not it will participate in the programme. My Department does not have specific information on the reason individual schools opt against participating in the programme.

To date 231 have indicated they intend to provide the school based summer provision.

Home-based provision is available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year.

In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher/SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

Both teachers and SNAs working on the programme receive additional remuneration under the programme for the work done and this is taxable in the normal way.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

### **Schools Building Projects**

138. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a matter regarding a school (details supplied); if the matter will be concluded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12879/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question received capital grant approval for an extension to their school building and this project is due to commence construction shortly.

The Deputy will be aware that under the National Development Plan (NDP), increased funding has been provided for the school sector capital investment programme. This funding allows for a continued focus on the provision of a new permanent school places to keep pace

with demographic demand and also provides for an additional focus on the refurbishment of existing school buildings to include the building and modernisation of PE facilities in post-primary schools.

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

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

### **School Transport**

139. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the arrangements being made in terms of the school transport providers whose fleet or individual buses have been tied up since the commencement of Covid-19; and the communications made with them regarding payment and with regard to physical distancing requirements on school buses subcontracted for the purpose of transporting children and children with special needs or disabilities to school. [12880/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department 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 school closures in March in an effort to contain the spread of Covid 19 it was decided that contractors would continue to be paid at 50% while schools remained closed in the current school year.

With regard to the re-opening of schools for the 2020/21 academic year, my Department is currently engaging intensively with Bus Éireann, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the National Transport Authority on the logistical considerations that arise from public health advice in planning for the reopening of schools. The operation of school transport services in September 2020 will be informed by the outcome of this planning for re-opening schools.

### **English Language Training Organisations**

140. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the English language industry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12883/20]

149. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to assist a sector (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12957/20]

156. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on a document (details supplied); if she is considering introducing the measures outlined; her plans to engage with the groups; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12969/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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 this process, the representative bodies for English language education providers have engaged with the Working Group surrounding their proposals for supports to aid the recovery of this sector. In this forum, the providers have been advised of the measures introduced by Government, as part of the wider Covid-19 response, to support businesses at this time. These measures include the 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.

Further to the above, the provider representatives have been advised of the eligibility of businesses in this sector 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. A full list of these supports and related information is available for providers here: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

My Department will continue to engage with provider representatives as we move forwards and the sector re-opens.

### **English Language Training Organisations**

141. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of the consideration given to the scheduled reopening of language schools; the engagement she has had with the sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12901/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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 its students, teachers and providers.

My Department has been engaging with the representative bodies of English language education providers across a range of issues over the course of the Covid-19 outbreak to date. These engagements have included discussions and information exchanges surrounding the re-opening of this sector.

The timeline and arrangements for the safe re-opening of English language education providers is guided by public health advice and by the Government's Roadmap for the gradual lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. Following its re-phasing, the re-opening of all adult education facilities is now part of Phase 3 of the Roadmap, which allows these facilities to re-open from June 29th .

While my Department will not be issuing guidelines specifically for the re-opening of the

English language education sector, guidance to assist the tertiary education sector more generally in planning for reopening is being prepared at present and will be available shortly. My Department will further engage with the provider representative bodies within the English language education sector in relation to their detailed plans for the wider re-opening of their premises and as they seek to provide greater clarity for their member providers. 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 are undertaken as part of their development and implementation. 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 inform these plans, supplemented by any guidance issued by the Department for the tertiary education sector when available. This protocol envisions close engagement between staff and their employers during the planning, 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 shared as part of this process.

### **Teaching Council of Ireland**

142. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the resources will be put in place to allow the Teaching Council prioritise registration for soon to be qualified primary school teachers in order that they can deliver home tuition; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12909/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The Teaching Council have informed me that owing to the extenuating circumstances brought about by COVID-19 the Council has modified their existing processes and IT system to support the timely online processing of NQT registrations and help mitigate against delays. The Council has engaged with the HEIs and their final year student teachers regarding the initial stages of the modified process including the importance of completing the vetting process without delay.

It should be noted that the registration process cannot commence until the HEI exam boards sit to confirm the final results. The HEIs have indicated that the majority of exam boards are scheduled for late June- early July.

I am assured that the Teaching Council is acutely aware of the importance of ensuring that the summer NQTs are registered by the start of the school year and that it is actively working towards a timely and efficient registration process.

### **Home Tuition Scheme**

143. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are delays in the registration of home tutors. [12910/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department's Home Tuition Grant Scheme provides funding towards a compensatory educational service for children with special educational needs seeking an educational placement. Provision is also made for early intervention for children with autism.

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

As tuition takes place outside the usual school structure it is important that the educational programme provided generally reflects that which would be provided in a school environment.

It is appropriate therefore that the qualification standard for Home Tuition generally reflects that required in a school environment. Accordingly, it is a condition of the scheme that parents/guardians must recruit a tutor who is qualified in the relevant sector, and is registered with the Teaching Council, similar to the requirement for teachers in schools.

In addition, tutors engaged must be vetted by the National Vetting Bureau via the Teaching Council of Ireland's online vetting process, prior to the commencement of the delivery of tuition.

My Department has no flexibility in this regard.

The same conditions apply whether Parents use the grant to engage tutors to deliver tuition in their home or private providers to deliver tuition in a group setting.

The Teaching Council of Ireland outlines that it will endeavour to process applications for registration within 4-6 weeks. For people holding overseas qualifications it is within 12 weeks. The Council has confirmed that it is currently meeting these processing times.

### **School Staff**

144. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will remain a two-teacher school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12912/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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 appeal from the school submitted by the Deputy was considered by the Primary Staffing Appeals Board and has been upheld, pending confirmation of enrolments in September. The school has been notified of this decision.

### **Special Educational Needs**

145. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if clarity will be provided regarding the July provision for parents of children that ordinarily avail of a combination of school-based provision and home help and now must choose between them, therefore leaving them with less support than in previous summers. [12944/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous

years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/ transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's setting
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

Home-based provision will be available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year. In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher/SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

The scheme does not provide for movement between the home and the school strands of the scheme.

*Question No. 146 answered with Question No. 119.*

147. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding schools (details supplied); and the status of the plans for these schools. [12947/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The permanent project for the primary school referred to by the Deputy is being delivered under my Department's Design & Build Programme.

The project is currently on site and being progressed, anticipated handover is prior to the start of the next school year.

The post primary school to which the deputy refers will open in interim accommodation for the next academic year in the Primary School.

### **Emergency Works Scheme**

148. **Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review the decision not to grant emergency aid to a school (details supplied) in view of the fact that there are genuine concerns that the school may not reopen in September 2020 due to health and safety concerns; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12955/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The procedures relating to the Emergency Works Scheme provide that a school authority can issue an appeal of any initial decision under the scheme. The school can simply write to *emergency\_works@education.gov.ie* requesting this appeal be considered. Any such appeal will be treated as a matter of urgency.

*Question No. 149 answered with Question No. 140.*

### **School Transport**

150. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the procedures and support available to school bus operators following Covid-19 restrictions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12958/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department 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 school closures in March in an effort to contain the spread of Covid 19 it was decided that contractors would continue to be paid at 50% while schools remained closed in the current school year.

With regard to the re-opening of schools for the 2020/21 academic year, my Department is currently engaging intensively with Bus Éireann, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the National Transport Authority on the logistical considerations that arise from pub-

lic health advice in planning for the reopening of schools. The operation of school transport services in September 2020 will be informed by the outcome of this planning for re-opening schools.

### **Special Educational Needs**

151. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of DEIS schools and special schools, respectively that have to date opted in to provide the July provision; and the number of teachers and SNAs that have opted to provide home schooling July provision for special needs children. [12961/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

Home-based provision will be available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year. In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher/SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

To date 231 schools have indicated that they intend to run a school based programme involving approximately 3,700 children. 9,781 families have registered for the home based summer programme involving 9,820 children.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced. To date 71 schools have indicated that they intend to run this programme.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at [Gov.ie/summerprovision](http://Gov.ie/summerprovision)

### **Special Educational Needs**

152. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review the decision to withdraw school bus transport for the July provision programme; if her attention has been drawn to the impact on schools that cover a large area across an entire county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12962/20]

161. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her Department is providing transport for the July provision for those that have previously needed it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12998/20]

196. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to

provide school transport to support the summer provision programme for children with special needs and students in DEIS schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13256/20]

205. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if transport will be provided for children with intellectual disabilities and other children that cannot avail of the summer provision without transport in July and August 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13302/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department 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.

With regard to transport arrangements for the July Programme my Department will provide grant funding to support parents with the cost of transport arrangements for those children who are eligible for school transport and who have been approved to participate in the school based July Programme.

Schools are required to identify children who are on a School Transport service or who are in receipt of a grant. School Transport Section will be in contact with schools and families in regard to the arrangements for payment.

Grant payment is based on the distance that a family reside from their child's school of attendance. The calculation is based on four trips per day (home to school and school to home, morning and afternoon) multiplied by the number of days a child attends school for the programme. The current rate of grant is 39.12 cent per kilometre for the first 6,437 kilometres travelled and 21.22 per kilometre for each kilometre travelled thereafter.

### **School Transport**

153. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is considering allowing an extension to the age of vehicles operating school transport services; if she is considering increasing the limit to 25 years subject to six monthly CVRT testing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12966/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department 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.

Bus Éireann sets the standard it requires in relation to services operating as part of the School Transport Scheme. In the interest of maintaining the highest standards of safety it is not permitted to operate any bus older than 20 years on school transport services. This standard applies to both vehicles operated by Bus Éireann and those procured from private operators. There are no plans at present to change the current age profile of vehicles operating services as part of the School Transport Scheme.

### School Transport

154. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is considering the introduction of grant aid for the initial costs associated with returning the school transport fleet to full roadworthiness on the return of school transport services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12967/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department 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 school closures in March in an effort to contain the spread of Covid 19 it was decided that contractors would continue to be paid at 50% while schools remained closed in the current school year.

With regard to the re-opening of schools for the 2020/21 academic year, my Department is currently engaging intensively with Bus Éireann, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the National Transport Authority on the logistical considerations that arise from public health advice in planning for the reopening of schools. The operation of school transport services in September 2020 will be informed by the outcome of this planning for re-opening schools.

### Special Educational Needs

155. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if children with Down's syndrome, autism and other disabilities that are finishing sixth class in June 2020, will be included in the July provision in advance of going on to secondary school in September 2020; if not, the reason; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12968/20]

158. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools taking up the July provision in 2020; the number of pupils involved; the number of pupils in a home setting as opposed to a school setting; the number that were provided with the July provision in 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12987/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of *Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education* including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

Approximately 15,000 children were eligible for July Provision in 2019 of which 10,563 or 70% accessed the scheme. There were two strands to the July Provision scheme, a school-based scheme and a home-based scheme. In 2019, 7,158 accessed the home based scheme and 3,405 accessed the school based scheme in 232 participating schools.

With regard to Summer Provision 2020, to date 231 schools have indicated that they intend to run a school based programme involving approximately 3,700 children. 9,781 families have registered for the home based summer programme involving 9,820 children.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. I have asked my officials to review the programme having regard to the need to ensure equity as far as possible. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria. Sixth class pupils are eligible for the programme.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

Home-based provision will be available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year. In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher/SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4

weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

*Question No. 156 answered with Question No. 140.*

### **Special Educational Needs**

157. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the restrictions being put on July provision in terms of disabilities or DEIS as opposed to non-DEIS schools; the reason schools were not given guidance; if that impacted on the number of schools providing provision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12986/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

My Department issued guidance to these schools to support management and staff in the delivery of summer programmes for children with special educational needs and those experiencing educational disadvantage as we continue to operate in line with public health advice to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance includes information in respect of hand hygiene, physical distancing, use of PPE and a risk assessment template.

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

It is therefore a matter for the Board of Management of the school having regard to the resources available whether or not it will participate in the programme.

To date 231 have indicated they intend to provide the school based summer provision.

Home-based provision is available where a child's local school is not providing a programme

or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year.

In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher/SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

*Question No. 158 answered with Question No. 155.*

### **Special Educational Needs**

159. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the specific guidance she has given directly to schools on the 2020 July provision; if none has been provided, the reason; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12988/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

My Department issued guidance to these schools to support management and staff in the delivery of summer programmes for children with special educational needs and those experiencing educational disadvantage as we continue to operate in line with public health advice to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance includes information in respect of hand hygiene, physical distancing, use of PPE and a risk assessment template.

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

It is therefore a matter for the Board of Management of the school having regard to the resources available whether or not it will participate in the programme.

To date 231 have indicated they intend to provide the school based summer provision.

Home-based provision is available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year.

In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher/SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

### **Schools Building Projects**

160. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the building programme for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12996/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I am pleased to inform the Deputy that, in relation to the school to which he refers, my Department has recently approved this project to proceed to tender. This funding is being provided under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2018.

*Question No. 161 answered with Question No. 152.*

### **Special Educational Needs**

162. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will respond to correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13012/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** Under the Assistive Technology scheme, as set out in my Department's Circular 0010/2013, funding is provided to schools towards the cost of computers and specialist equipment, which are required for educational purposes. Equipment is provided under this scheme for children with more complex disabilities who, in order to access the school curriculum, require essential specialist equipment which they do not already have, or which cannot be provided for them through the school's existing IT provision.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports. SENOs also make recommendations to my Department

where assistive technology/specialised equipment is required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in making recommendations for support.

In order to qualify for equipment under the assistive technology scheme, a student must have been diagnosed with a physical or communicative disability and must also have a recommendation in a professional assessment that the equipment is essential in order to allow the student to access the curriculum. It must also be clear that the existing I.T. equipment in the school is insufficient to meet the child's needs.

Schools make applications directly to the SENO, providing details of the student's special educational needs or disability, including details of the approach taken by the school in making relevant interventions.

SENOs will review the application, and professional reports provided in support of same, in order to establish whether the criteria of the scheme have been met. They will then make a recommendation to my Department as to whether or not assistive technology is required; and based on this recommendation, my Department will decide on the level of grant, if any, to be provided.

Although equipment is sanctioned under the Assistive Technology scheme for use by particular students, it is the property of the school, and the school's management authority is responsible for maintenance, repair, and insurance of the equipment.

In relation to the child named by the Deputy in his correspondence, an application has yet to be received by my Department, and may still be with the SENO for processing. The Deputy's query will therefore be forwarded to the NCSE for direct reply.

### **School Transport**

**163. Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a reply will issue to correspondence received from a person (details supplied) in relation to the provision of school transport to a school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13028/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department 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.

With regard to transport arrangements for the July Programme my Department will provide grant funding to support parents with the cost of transport arrangements for those children who are eligible for school transport and who have been approved to participate in the school based July Programme.

Schools are required to identify children who are on a School Transport service or who are in receipt of a grant. School Transport Section will be in contact with schools and families in regard to the arrangements for payment.

Grant payment is based on the distance that a family reside from their child's school of attendance. The calculation is based on four trips per day (home to school and school to home, morning and afternoon) multiplied by the number of days a child attends school for the programme. The current rate of grant is 39.12 cent per kilometre for the first 6,437 kilometres travelled and 21.22 per kilometre for each kilometre travelled thereafter.

### **Special Educational Needs**

164. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a space will be made available on the summer or July provision for a child (details supplied). [13029/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

Where an eligible child cannot access a school based programme, they can apply for the home based strand.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020>.

html.

### Special Educational Needs

165. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if clear and concise information will be provided to parents, schools and the HSE in relation to summer provision and also that children with a moderate intellectual disability or Down's syndrome that attend secondary school be included along with children that had their assessments put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic. [13031/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>.

166. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an inspector has been contacted or has contacted a school (details supplied) as raised in Dáil Éireann on 20 May 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13050/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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 appeal from the school submitted by the Deputy was considered by the Primary Staffing Appeals Board and deemed ineligible as the appeal did not meet the criteria published in Circular 18/2020. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

### **Special Educational Needs**

167. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review a case (details supplied). [13054/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

In developing the programme, my officials had extensive discussions with stakeholders.

I am aware there is an ongoing dialogue with Down Syndrome Ireland on the programme.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing

- Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
- Children who have a moderate general learning disability
- Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>.

### **Oideachas Tríú Leibhéal**

168. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cad iad na bearta a dhéanfaidh sí chun a chinntiú go mbeidh caighdeán cuí i labhairt na Gaeilge ag na daltaí ardteiste a rachaidh ar aghaidh chuig na coláistí oiliúna i mí Mheán Fómhair 2020 ós rud é nach raibh aon scrúdú béil ann i mbliana; an dtabharfaidh an tAire aon treoir do na coláistí oiliúna faoin méid sin; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [13070/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** Caithfidh ardchaighdeán líofachta sa Ghaeilge a bheith ag mic léinn ar dhul isteach i gClár Oideachais Tosaigh do Mhúinteoirí dóibh de bhrí gur riachtanas é chun Gaeilge a mhúineadh a bheith inniúil sa Ghaeilge agus in ann í a úsáid mar ghnáth-theanga chumarsáide sa seomra ranga.

Dé hAoine, 8 Bealtaine, fógraíodh go raibh scrúduithe na hArdteistiméireachta á gcur siar. Tar éis cinneadh na Comh-Aireachta, bhí sé de rogha ag daltaí gráid ríofa a fháil sna hábhair a bhí á ndéanamh acu agus scrúduithe na hArdteistiméireachta 2020 a dhéanamh níos déanaí nuair a mheasfar go bhfuil sé sábháilte na scrúduithe a reáchtáil. Rinneadh an cinneadh seo tar éis an chomhairle sláinte phoiblí agus eolas eile a mheasúnú agus féachaint ar na himpleachtaí a ghabh leis na scrúduithe a reáchtáil ar an dáta athsceidéalta de 29 Iúil 2020.

Is iad gráid ríofa an tslí is fearr le meastóireacht chruinn a fháil ar an marc a gheobhadh dalta i ngach comhpháirt den scrúdú. Meastar gurb iad na múinteoirí is fearr a d'fhéadfadh breithiúnas cothromaithe a thabhairt ar conas mar a d'éireodh le dalta sna scrúduithe agus cén marc is dócha a gheobhadh sí nó sé. Agus gráid mheasta á gcinneadh acu, iarradh ar mhúinteoirí féachaint ar an bhfianaise a bhain le hinniúlacht ó bhéal, inniúlacht éisteachta agus inniúlacht scríofa sna teangacha. Measadh marc agus rangú do gach ábhar Ardteistiméireachta amhail is gur chríochnaigh daltaí gach ceann de chomhphárteanna ábhartha an chúrsa, go raibh na scrúduithe béil agus praiticiúla déanta, amhail is gur lean an scolaíocht ar aghaidh mar is gnách in 2020, agus go ndearnadh na scrúduithe mar is gnách.

I gcás na dteangacha, thángthas ar an marc agus an rangú measta amhail is go ndearnadh an scrúdú béil agus gur marcáladh é mar is gnách. Ciallaíonn sé sin go mbeidh an grád ríofa chomh gar agus is féidir do thoradh na hArdteistiméireachta traidisiúnta agus inchomparáide le gráid Ardteistiméireachta i mblianta roimhe seo.

Ina theannta sin, bheadh na daltaí tar éis am a chaitheamh sa chúigiú agus sa séú bliain ag ullmhú do na scrúduithe béil suas go dtí dúnadh na scoileanna agus bheidís i mbun staidéir agus ag ullmhú dóibh suas go dtí an tseachtain roimh thosach beartaithe na gcomhphárteanna seo den scrúdú. Fógraíodh ar an 19 Márta go raibh na scrúduithe béil agus na comhphárteanna

praiticiúla á gcur ar ceal. Bhí na scrúduithe sin le tosú an tseachtain dár gcionn, ar an 23 Márta.

### School Funding

169. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will clarify the position of schools (details supplied) in the current capital programme; if both schools have secured capital funding; the position in the departmental approval process each project currently sits; the location for each of the permanent schools; and the arrangements in place for temporary classrooms for each school in 2020/2021. [13099/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** A planning application for the first 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.

Architectural planning has commenced for the permanent project for the school with site surveys underway. The permanent site for the project is located at Coolamber Drive, Rathcoole.

Regarding the second school referred to by the Deputy, I can confirm that my Department has approved temporary accommodation to cater for the school's interim accommodation needs. The responsibility for the installation of this accommodation has been devolved to the Board of Management.

Similarly architectural planning has commenced for the permanent project for this school with site surveys also underway.

The new school will be located on the site adjacent to the current school site.

When planning is secured for these schools, they will proceed to tender and construction.

Officials of the Department have been in contact with the schools to advise of their current status.

### State Examinations

170. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the appeals process for students that were self-taught and did not receive a grade for subjects in which they were self-taught; the reason their pre-leaving certificate examinations are not sufficient for estimating grades; her plans to rectify same; when they will get to sit an exam; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13100/20]

189. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of external leaving certificate candidates that were unable to register for predicted grades through the P-POD system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13218/20]

190. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all external leav-

ing certificate candidates will be in receipt of a calculated grade; if she is satisfied that her Department communicated effectively with such candidates and that candidates were adequately informed of the process they needed to follow in order to receive a calculated grade; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13219/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** It was announced on Thursday 25 June that all out-of-school Leaving Certificate 2020 students are being contacted directly by my Department to notify them of an application process for Calculated Grades. These are students who entered for their examinations as external candidates and who indicated that they were not attending for tuition at any school, or centre of education recognised by the State Examinations Commission for the purposes of holding examinations.

The Calculated Grades Executive Office (CGEO) is emailing each of the 923 students who are classified as out-of-school learners to outline the steps they need to follow to be considered for Calculated Grades. The process is set out in the *Guide to Calculated Grades for Out-of-school Learners* which is available on my Department's website.

The arrangements seek to include as many out-of-school students as possible in the Calculated Grades system provided that there is credible, satisfactory evidence from an appropriate source, on which an estimated percentage mark can be based.

The process for out-of-school students seeks to mirror the fundamental principles which applied to the Calculated Grades process which schools have undertaken for their students. Both schemes are grounded in principles of objectivity, fairness, and equity. It is necessary to ensure students in both categories are treated in a comparable manner which means that those exercising professional judgement on their behalf should not rely on any one source of evidence. In the school based process, teachers were advised to exercise caution in relation to pre-Leaving Certificate ("mock") examinations. Students in this group will be asked to apply to the CGEO by sending the application form through registered post by Thursday 2 July 2020 with details of their engagement with tuition on a subject-by-subject basis.

Following assessment of the application, the CGEO will seek an estimated percentage mark from the source nominated by the student and will make an assessment as to whether the estimated mark can be accepted in line with the principles and requirements of the scheme.

Students will be notified of decisions, and reason(s) for decisions, in writing and will have a right of appeal subject to setting out grounds for the appeal. The appeal will involve a review of the original decision. Any student dissatisfied at that stage will have access to an independent appeals scrutiny process.

Every effort will be made to provide a calculated grade for as many students as possible, provided there is credible and satisfactory evidence, from an appropriate source, on which an estimated percentage mark can be based. Where this is not possible, students will have the opportunity to sit the 2020 Leaving Certificate examinations at a later date when safe to do so.

It should be noted that the Irish University Association (IUA) announced on 25 June that, in the extraordinary circumstances of 2020, students who have applied for a Calculated Grade in a subject or subjects in the Leaving Certificate 2020, with a view to satisfying matriculation/basic minimum entry requirements and for whom the CGEO has been unable to award such a grade in the subject(s), will be granted an exemption in the subject(s) solely for matriculation/basic minimum entry purposes. Full details can be found on the IUA website.

A total of 683 students have yet to complete the initial registration process for Calculated Grades. Of these, some 80 are out-of-school learners. The Calculated Grades Executive Office

continues to attempt to engage with those students yet to register, through making direct contact with the students themselves.

*Question No. 171 answered with Question No. 119.*

### **School Accommodation**

172. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the temporary prefabricated accommodation for a school (details supplied) while the permanent buildings are being built; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13104/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I can confirm that in relation to the school to which the Deputy refers, a contract is due to be awarded this week (commencing 29 June, 2020) for the additional interim accommodation required for the school for the next academic year. However, a decision in relation to planning permission for this additional accommodation is still awaited. It should be noted that these delays are related due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

My Department is in contact with the school Principal and the Patron Body in relation to the matter.

### **School Transport**

173. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the financial assistance available to private school bus operators that have suffered a loss of income as result of Covid-19 and that will not be able to resume services, leaving up to 90,000 students without school transport; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13105/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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.

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 these 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.

### **Emergency Works Scheme**

174. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a recently submitted application for emergency works by a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13106/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the additional works to which he refers have been approved. They have now been incorporated into the existing project being delivered under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme.

### **Special Educational Needs**

175. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding July provision facilities that are being organised by many schools in conjunction with teachers and special needs assistants; if specific guidelines will be issued to these schools with regard to social distancing and safety relating to Covid-19; and if these guidelines will be issued to school management as soon as possible. [13109/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

My Department issued guidance to these schools to support management and staff in the delivery of summer programmes for children with special educational needs and those experiencing educational disadvantage as we continue to operate in line with public health advice to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance includes information in respect of hand hygiene, physical distancing, use of PPE and a risk assessment template.

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

It is therefore a matter for the Board of Management of the school having regard to the resources available whether or not it will participate in the programme.

To date 231 have indicated they intend to provide the school based summer provision.

Home-based provision is available where a child's local school is not providing a programme

or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year.

In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher/SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on *Gov.ie/summerprovision*

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*. Public health guidance has also issued to schools.

### **Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

176. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional resources will be made available to reduce class sizes in a school (details supplied) in view of the fact that classes are being amalgamated and the sizes of classes are increasing to over 30 from September 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13113/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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.

There is no change to the staffing of the school referred to by the Deputy for the 2020/21 school year.

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 appeal received from the school referred to by the Deputy has been refused by the Primary Staffing Appeals Board on the basis that the grounds of the appeal do not warrant a departure from the staffing schedule. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board is independent of the Department and its decision is final.

### **Special Educational Needs**

177. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will amend the summer provision programme to allow children transitioning to mainstream schools from an early years setting that have a diagnosis as laid out in the guidance document to avail of the programme and receive support from a tutor in the same way a child transitioning to a special school or class; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13117/20]

178. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason she will not allow those children transitioning to a mainstream school that have a diagnosis as laid out in the document to participate in the summer provision programme (details supplied). [13118/20]

211. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a child (details supplied) cannot qualify for the new expanded home-based July summer provision programme despite having severe emotional and behavioural difficulties; if there is a way by which their parents can get them accepted onto the programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13359/20]

262. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if parents that hire tutors and teachers to carry out and deliver services under the July and summer provision programme to allow their child transitioning into a mainstream school will qualify for reimbursement from her Department for costs. [13687/20]

263. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if parents that hire tutors and teachers to carry out and deliver services under the July and summer provision programme for their child due to the fact that her Department is failing to fully carry out the summer provision programme will qualify for reimbursement from her Department for costs. [13688/20]

264. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that have signed up July and summer provision programme to date. [13689/20]

265. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason her Department has excluded every child transitioning to mainstream schooling regardless of their diagnosis from accessing the July and summer provision programme. [13690/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of *Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education* including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome

- Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
- Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
- Children who have a moderate general learning disability
- Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

To date 231 have indicated they intend to provide the school based summer provision.

Home-based provision will be available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year. In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher/SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

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

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on [Gov.ie/summerprovision](http://Gov.ie/summerprovision).

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at [Gov.ie/summerprovision](http://Gov.ie/summerprovision)

In relation to support for pre-school children the Department of Children and Youth Affairs launched a dedicated campaign and website to supports transition called "Lets Get Ready" which has received a positive response so far.

This resource has been prepared jointly with my Department. It is universal in scope, and is aimed at children returning to pre-school as well as children returning to or transitioning to school.

Information on the site is at a level for all to understand and include a section called 'Ready for Everyone' to specifically support transitions for children with special/additional needs.

The website, which is being updated and reviewed by the DCYA based on the feedback from various sources, is available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/74b0d-ready-for-everyone>.

## Gaelscoil Issues

179. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if confirmation of the recommendation by a taskforce in an area (details supplied) in County Kerry in respect of Gaeltacht schools will be provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13130/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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.

There is no change to the staffing of the schools concerned for the 2020/21 school year.

The unique challenges facing Gaeltacht schools and their importance in the maintenance of Irish as the main language of Gaeltacht communities is recognised. To support the delivery of high quality Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht schools, the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme was launched in 2017 as part of the overall implementation of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022. Under the terms of the Scheme, a package of additional targeted supports is being provided to these schools from September 2018 to support the delivery of high-quality Irish-medium education. These additional supports include:

- access to an annual grant of €1200 grant for the purchase of Irish-medium teaching resources
- additional Irish-language support teaching hours based on school enrolment
- additional continuing professional development for teachers, delivered by COGG
- additional Inspectorate support via advisory visits to support schools in meeting their targets in the implementation of Irish-language-based criteria.

Schools in the Scheme have also been permitted to form clusters to create temporary full-time posts by combining part-time Irish language support hours. From 2019 schools in the Scheme had the option to combine part-time Irish language support hours with special education teaching hours to create temporary full-time posts, provided that teachers selected had a high level of proficiency in the Irish language and an understanding of immersion education, so that they could fulfill the roles, as appropriate.

## Student Grant Scheme

180. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is an alternative application process in place for those applying for SUSI that do not have a public services card and cannot organise the face-to-face meeting to receive one; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13131/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** Students are not required to hold a Public Services Card in order to apply to SUSI for funding.

Students can register for a SUSI account online at [www.SUSI.ie](http://www.SUSI.ie). When registering an account, the student will be required to provide the following information:

- PPS number,

- First name,
- Surname,
- Date of birth,
- Email address.

Alternatively, students can login to their SUSI account using their verified MyGovID.

### Schools Building Projects

181. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the new major refurbishment or construction of new schools that have commenced in County Kildare; the date on which each construction project will be completed; and the school construction projects nationally that are the subject of conciliation in tabular form. [13133/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

School construction projects nationally that are the subject of conciliation	Roll Number	County
St.Francis Special School	19337Q	Laois
Maynooth ETNS	20292E	Kildare
Colaiste Bhaile Chlair and Claregalway ETNS	20211B/76233C	Galway
St.Columba's Boys NS, Douglas	13828F	Cork
Davis College,Mallow	71020G	Cork
Holy Family NS, Mullingar	17327D	Westmeath

Regarding new major refurbishment or construction of new schools that have commenced in County Kildare, 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.gov.ie](http://www.education.gov.ie) and is updated regularly.

*Question No. 182 answered with Question No. 120.*

### Student Grant Scheme

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if applicants for higher education grants that worked during the Covid-19 emergency will not incur a reduction or cessation of SUSI grant entitlement in view of the fact that they worked as requested during the emergency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13165/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I am conscious of the difficulties being experienced by students and their families as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and 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.

Accordingly, the following arrangements have been put in place:

For the 2020/21 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.

The means test arrangements of the Student Grant Scheme are applied nationally. Student grant applications are means tested on gross income from all sources earned inside and outside the State within a specified reference period. In the case of both employed and self-employed applicants, gross income, before deduction of income tax or universal social charge, is assessed with certain specified social welfare and health service executive payments excluded. Therefore, all income is assessed from the same starting point.

The Student Grant Scheme provides for different levels of income thresholds where families have (i) less than 4 dependent children (ii) between 4 and 7 dependent children and (iii) 8 or more dependent children. In recognition of the additional cost to families where more than one person is attending college, income thresholds may also be increased by up to €4,830 for each additional family member attending college at the same time. In this way, the Student Grant Scheme is responsive to the individual circumstances of particular families.

The income threshold for the special rate of grant has been increased from €24,000 to €24,500 for the 2020 scheme, so as to ensure that students from families dependent on welfare will continue to be eligible for the special rate of grant. (This reflects the Budget 2019 increase to the maximum point of the weekly State Contributory Pension, plus maximum Qualified Adult Allowance for a person over 66 years).

Apart from the Student Grant Scheme, 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 student's local Tax Office or from the Revenue Commissioners website, [www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie)

*Question No. 184 answered with Question No. 130.*

### **Third Level Admissions**

**185. Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will work with third-level universities to expand the number of medical training places for students applying through the Central Applications Office system to help increase the number of doctors nationally. [13190/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** Higher education institutions are autonomous with regard to management of their academic affairs including admissions procedures. The CAO processes applications for undergraduate, and some postgraduate, courses

on behalf of the HEIs. Decisions on admissions, including the number of places offered, are made by the HEIs which then instruct the CAO to make offers to successful candidates. Neither I nor my Department have any role in the operation of the CAO.

However a quota applies to the intake of EU students to medical education. Thereafter, the number of places allocated to non-EU students is a matter for the individual HEI concerned with the availability of clinical placements being an important factor in this regard.

### **School Funding**

186. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be provided to a school (details supplied) to enable it to proceed with the building of a school hall, woodwork room, music room and additional classrooms; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13195/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I can confirm that my Department recently received an application, for capital funding, from the school referred to by the Deputy. This application is currently under assessment and my Department has been in contact with the school authorities requesting additional information. Once this information is received and the assessment complete, a decision will issue to the school authority directly.

### **Special Educational Needs**

187. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason she has restricted access to the July provision scheme in particular for those students with Down syndrome, despite assurances that no such restrictions would be in place; if her attention has been drawn to the distress caused by these restrictions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13196/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings

5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:

- Children with Down syndrome
- Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
- Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
- Children who have a moderate general learning disability
- Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>.

### **Schools Building Projects**

188. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the development of school buildings on a site (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason two developments are being proposed for the site despite it only being suitable for one; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13200/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** A building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is included in my Department's Building Programme. In line with the Public Spending Code and to maximise the use of State assets, my Department is considering the options available in meeting the accommodation needs of this school as well as meeting the needs of another school in the area.

*Questions No. 189 and 190 answered with Question No. 170.*

### **Teacher Training**

191. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the professional master's in education can be completed in one year following an undergraduate degree; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13229/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** Initial teacher education (ITE) for primary and post-primary teachers is facilitated through a range of concurrent (undergraduate) and consecutive (postgraduate) programmes.

The Teaching Council is the statutory body charged with determining standards for the teaching profession and for accrediting programmes of ITE. All ITE programmes that lead to registration with the Council must have professional accreditation from the Council.

All persons wishing to teach in recognised schools must meet the professional registration standards and criteria set by the Teaching Council.

Changes to the duration and content of all initial teacher education programmes were made

in response to recommendations in the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 and were incorporated into the Teaching Council's Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education and Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers.

Improvements which have been made to initial teacher education programmes include the reconfiguration of the content and duration of courses, with the duration of concurrent ITE programmes set at a minimum of four years while the postgraduate programmes of teacher education are set at two years, thereby facilitating an innovative reconceptualisation of programmes.

The lengthened and reconfigured programmes include substantial periods of school placement as central to student teacher development and a number of mandatory elements including literacy and numeracy, teaching, learning and assessment including school and classroom planning, differentiation, behaviour management, inclusive education (special education, multiculturalism, disadvantage, etc) and ICT in teaching and learning.

These reforms focus on improving the quality of teaching in our schools, which is central to the educational outcomes of our children. I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has no plans at present to modify the duration of the postgraduate entry route to teaching.

### **Special Educational Needs**

192. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the guidelines and protocols for the summer provision (details supplied). [13232/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

My Department issued guidance to these schools to support management and staff in the delivery of summer programmes for children with special educational needs and those experiencing educational disadvantage as we continue to operate in line with public health advice to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance includes information in respect of hand hygiene, physical distancing, use of PPE and a risk assessment template.

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

It is therefore a matter for the Board of Management of the school having regard to the resources available whether or not it will participate in the programme.

To date 231 have indicated they intend to provide the school based summer provision.

Home-based provision is available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year.

In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher / SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on *Gov.ie/summerprovision*

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent or school is then free to plan and organise the programme in accordance with the guidance on my Departments website.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*

### **Schools Refurbishment**

193. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) will reopen; the reason no date has been given for the completion of repairs to the school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13238/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The Deputy may wish to note that the project to which he refers has been devolved for delivery to the school authority under my Department's Summer Works Scheme. As such, it is a matter for the school authority, advised by its design team, to progress the project .

### **School Accommodation**

194. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration will be given to providing additional accommodation for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13249/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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*.

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.

### **School Transport**

195. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when parents will be refunded for school transport fees in circumstances in which the service paid for was lost due to Covid-19 school closures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13255/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department 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.

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. My Department has been engaging with Bus Éireann in developing a plan for facilitating these refunds and I can confirm that refunds will start issuing to families at the end of this month.

*Question No. 196 answered with Question No. 152.*

### **Special Educational Needs**

197. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason children that have Down's syndrome, are deaf or blind or have a moderate general learning disability are excluded from the July provision in the case of a pupil that is transitioning into mainstream primary school or that is in a mainstream post-primary school. [13270/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism

2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>

### **Schools Refurbishment**

198. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of works at a school (details supplied); and the measures underway to ensure the opening of same is secured for September 2020. [13271/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The Deputy will be aware that the project to which he refers has been devolved for delivery to the school authority under my Department's Summer Works Scheme. As such, it is a matter for the school authority to progress the project.

I can inform the Deputy that we are aware from our engagement with the school with respect to this project that it will not be completed in time for September 2020 as the tragic and extremely difficult issues that arose in the school last year have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 situation. The Department fully appreciates that this is extremely disappointing and frustrating for the entire school community given that they have already spent an entire school year without access to their school building.

I can assure everyone associated with the project that the school authority and its design team, supported by the Department, has done and is doing everything it can to ensure the earliest possible return to the school whilst ensuring that the quality and integrity of the works that need to be completed are protected. In that respect, a significant milestone in progressing the project was achieved last week as the tender for the works in question was advertised on the e-Tenders system. I can also assure the Deputy that my Department will continue to support the contingency arrangements that are currently in place for the school.

### **Summer Works Scheme**

199. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount provided to schools in County Wexford through the summer works scheme in each of the years 2017 to 2019 and to date in 2020, in tabular form. [13283/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table below:

Year	2017 Expenditure	2018 Expenditure	2019 Expenditure	2020 Expenditure (to date)
Summer Works Scheme (Wexford)	€2,048,663	€782,404	€397,248	€55,117

The purpose of the Summer Works Scheme is to devolve funding to individual school authorities to undertake small-scale building works which, ideally, can be carried out during the summer months or at other times that avoid disrupting the operation of the school.

Under the terms of the scheme, school authorities are empowered to manage these works with guidance from and minimal interaction with the Department.

Funding for small scale projects will be allocated in accordance with the prioritisation criteria attaching to the scheme which, in the normal course, include the ability to have the works carried out during the summer.

### Emergency Works Scheme

200. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applications for emergency works that were refused in 2019 and quarter 1 of 2020, in tabular form. [13284/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I wish to inform the Deputy that the information sought is set out in the following table:

Emergency Works Refused 2019	Emergency Works Refused Q1 2020
128	27

*Question No. 201 answered with Question No. 131.*

### Special Educational Needs

202. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if post-primary children that were eligible and received home based July provision in previous years are automatically entitled to same in 2020; if parents will be reassured that their expenses will be covered when they submit the claim form at the end of the tuition in view of the absence of an email facility in relation to the matter from her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13290/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous

years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

All children that previously qualified for July Provision are eligible for summer provision 2020.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>

Home-based provision will be available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year. In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher / SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on [Gov.ie/summerprovision](http://Gov.ie/summerprovision).

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance informa-

tion for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

### **Schools Building Projects**

203. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of a building project (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13292/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** A Stage 3 Tender Report, for the school referred to by the Deputy, has been reviewed by my Department. A request for some additional information has recently been sent to the school and its Design Team. On receipt of this information, the review of the tender report will be completed.

Subject to no issues arising, it is envisaged that works should commence in the third quarter of 2020.

### **Schools Building Projects**

204. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 261 of 16 June 2020, when a decision will issue in relation to a school (details supplied) in view of the fact all information has been returned to her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13300/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** A project under the Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2018 has been devolved for delivery to the school authority. This project provides for two general classrooms with ensuites, two special education needs classrooms and a WC for Assisted User to replace existing prefabricated accommodation.

Officials in my Department have reviewed the additional information submitted and a decision will be relayed to the school shortly.

*Question No. 205 answered with Question No. 152.*

### **Schools Building Projects**

206. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the tendering of works at a school (details supplied) can be fast-tracked to ensure the school is open for September 2020. [13309/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The Deputy will be aware that the project to which he refers has been devolved for delivery to the school authority under my Department's Summer Works Scheme. As such, it is a matter for the school authority to progress the project.

However, I can inform the Deputy that the tender for the works in question has been advertised on the e-Tenders system as the school authority is bound to do under procurement legislation which also sets timelines for tendering processes.

### **Special Educational Needs**

207. **Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the decision to limit the number of pupils with Down syndrome that can avail of the July provision; the reason access has deteriorated in the past few years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13313/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year’s settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. I have asked my officials to review the programme having regard to the need to ensure equity as far as possible. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child’s eligibility, they should consult their child’s school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

Home-based provision will be available where a child’s local school is not providing a

programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year. In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher / SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

To date 231 schools have indicated that they intend to run a school based programme involving approximately 3,700 children. 9,781 families have registered for the home based summer programme involving 9,820 children.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

### **Education and Training Boards**

208. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the date of submission of the original planning application to Louth County Council for the new LMETB head office building; the date of granting of the original permission to build and submission of a subsequent application for alteration or extension to the original plans, respectively; the date of decision if granted or due; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13321/20]

209. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide details of the new leases of premises entered into by LMETB in Navan, County Meath while waiting for the construction of the new head office; if she has approved these leases as is required; the date of approval; the duration of each lease entered into; the cost per annum of each; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13322/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I can inform the Deputy that the dates the events to which he refers occurred were as follows:

Date of submission of original planning application to Louth County Council: 16/10/2015

Date of Final Grant of Permission: 12/01/2016

Date of subsequent submission to Louth County Council: 27/06/2017

Date of Final Grant of planning permission: 21/09/2017

Regarding your question on the leases of premises pending construction of a new head office, my Department understands that no new leases have been entered into for head office administrative purposes.

### **Special Educational Needs**

210. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will consider allowing the July provision to take place in mainstream schools that do not have an ASD unit but have students with special needs due to the importance for these students to get back into a school routine and have some social interaction ahead of returning to school in September 2020; if her Department has considered this already; if so, the outcome of such considerations; if her Department will consider engaging teachers and SNAs, many of which are willing to provide this service in schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13336/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

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

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

It was not possible to extend the a school based programme to all mainstream primary schools due a number of factors including the timing of the launch of the scheme and the distribution of children with complex needs across the primary school community.

Home-based provision is available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year.

In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher/SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on *Gov.ie/summerprovision*

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*

*Question No. 211 answered with Question No. 177.*

### **School Accommodation**

212. **Deputy Francis Noel Duffy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason

for the failure to fulfil commitments to a school (details supplied); when the situation will be rectified to the satisfaction of stakeholders; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13367/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The school to which the Deputy refers was established in 2018 and is currently in interim accommodation on the Firhouse Education Campus.

Due to additional accommodation requirements in the Gaelscoil in which they are currently located my Department has been informed that it is not possible for the secondary school to continue to operate in that building.

My Department has informed the secondary school that interim accommodation for the school will be provided on the Citywest Education Campus for the 2020/2021 academic year.

My Department is in on-going communication with the Patron Bodies concerned regarding all options.

*Question No. 213 answered with Question No. 120.*

### **Special Educational Needs**

214. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason school transport will not be provided for a child (details supplied) in County Donegal to accommodate their July provision attendance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13388/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department 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.

With regard to transport arrangements for the July Programme my Department will provide grant funding to support parents with the cost of transport arrangements for those children who are eligible for school transport and who have been approved to participate in the school based July Programme.

Schools are required to identify children who are on a School Transport service or who are in receipt of a grant. School Transport Section will be in contact with schools and families in regard to the arrangements for payment.

Grant payment is based on the distance that a family reside from their child's school of attendance. The calculation is based on four trips per day (home to school and school to home, morning and afternoon) multiplied by the number of days a child attends school for the programme. The current rate of grant is 39.12 cent per kilometre for the first 6,437 kilometres travelled and 21.22 per kilometre for each kilometre travelled thereafter.

*Question No. 215 answered with Question No. 119.*

### **Third Level Institutions**

216. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will liaise with third-level institutions to ensure that all students are provided with ample notice regarding arrangements for the autumn semester; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13439/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** To assist with the development of plans for the re-opening and operation of higher education in an environment that may require social distancing and other public health requirements, the Department of Education and Skills is engaging with relevant stakeholders from the higher education sector. The importance of informing students of arrangements for the new semester in a timely manner forms part of these discussions and all those involved are committed to this. This work is ongoing, and it is hoped that a communication for the sector will be published in the coming weeks.

However Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are autonomous institutions and are entitled to regulate their own academic affairs and administrative processes. Decisions on how courses will operate will be made by each institution, and arrangements will vary between institutions and between courses. The HEIs will communicate the arrangements for the new academic year to students as soon as these arrangements have been finalised.

### **Special Educational Needs**

217. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to advance the summer provision; the uptake for the 2020 programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13450/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing

- Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
- Children who have a moderate general learning disability
- Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

Home-based provision will be available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year. In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher/SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on [Gov.ie/summerprovision](http://Gov.ie/summerprovision)

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

To date 231 schools have indicated that they intend to run a school based programme involving approximately 3,700 children. 9,781 families have registered for the home based summer programme involving 9,820 children.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at [Gov.ie/summerprovision](http://Gov.ie/summerprovision).

### **Special Educational Needs**

218. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of summer provision for a school (details supplied); the action being taken to ensure that the programme can proceed at this school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13454/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary

aged children with complex needs.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

My Department issued guidance to these schools to support management and staff in the delivery of summer programmes for children with special educational needs and those experiencing educational disadvantage as we continue to operate in line with public health advice to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance includes information in respect of hand hygiene, physical distancing, use of PPE and a risk assessment template.

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

It is therefore a matter for the Board of Management of the school having regard to the resources available whether or not it will participate in the programme.

To date 231 schools have indicated they intend to provide the school based summer provision.

Once registered, the school is free to plan and organise the programme in accordance with the the guidance on my Departments website. When the programme has been delivered, it submits the necessary documentation for the funding available under the programme.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at [Gov.ie/summerprovision](http://Gov.ie/summerprovision).

### Special Educational Needs

219. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the home-based summer education provision will be extended to children with complex needs in secondary schools; and the criteria for those eligible for the provision. [13474/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/ transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>.

### Childcare Services

220. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action she has taken to ensure after-school childcare providers which operate within schools can access these premises from 29 June 2020. [13485/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department has a general policy of encouraging the use of school facilities by community and other groups where this is possible and following consultation with the relevant school authorities, published Guidelines on the use of School Buildings outside of school hours.

These guidelines can be viewed on my Department's website at this link: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/guidelines-on-the-use-of-school-buildings-outside-of-school-hours.pdf>.

It is recognised that schools play an important role in their wider communities and many schools make their facilities available outside of school hours for a variety of different uses and users. The use of school facilities are a matter for individual Boards of Management.

The core objective of any decision in this regard, is that any activity is operated in a safe manner and must be consistent with public health advice and the Roadmap for reopening society and business.

### Special Educational Needs

221. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the decision to exclude post-primary school children with Down's syndrome from the summer provi-

sion programme will be reversed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13486/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria. I have asked my officials to review the programme having a regard to the need to ensure equity as far as possible

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>.

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

222. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the provisions being made to continue the education of apprentices that had started their courses in view of the restrictions on attending courses and or practical experience; if theory modules and exams can be conducted through online formats; if learning management systems will be provided for home learning; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13493/20]

223. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the provisions which will be made for continued payment of apprentices that still have phases of their pro-

gramme to complete but may have already received payment for the full phase previously (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13494/20]

237. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional places for apprentices or supports for employers considering taking on more apprentices can be considered for 2020 in view of an increased level of demand and the ongoing need for skilled trades; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13581/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The Department of Education and Skills, SOLAS and the education and training providers are actively working to put in place alternative learning and assessment solutions for all apprentices, while maintaining the quality and integrity of the apprenticeship programme.

Alternative assessments for theory components of those craft apprenticeship programmes which were due to be completed in March this year have been delivered. Planning is underway to support the delivery of training and remaining practical assessments within health and social distancing guidelines once public health considerations provide for the return to training for this cohort of learners.

The issue of the timing of that return is under consideration at the current time in the overall context of the reopening of the education sector. Training allowances will generally be payable in cases where apprentices are required to recommence an off-the-job phase of their apprenticeship training due to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on their original phase.

The impacts of COVID-19 on apprenticeship intake will be considered as part of the overall recovery plan. A new action plan for apprenticeship which will be a successor to the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship (2016 – 2020) is due for completion in 2020 and will seek to deliver on the target of 10,000 registration per annum by 2025 as set out within the Programme for Government.

In the meantime SOLAS will continue to provide ongoing updates for apprentices and employers in relation to the impact of Covid-19 on apprenticeship programmes. These may be found at [www.apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie) and also on Twitter @apprenticesirl.

### Special Educational Needs

224. **Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the decision to limit the number of pupils with Down’s syndrome that can avail of the July provision; the reason access has deteriorated in the past number of years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13497/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression

among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria. I Have asked my officials to review the programme having a regard to the need to ensure equity as far as possible.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html>

### Third Level Institutions

225. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the results of a survey by a union (details supplied) regarding student experiences of sexual violence, sexual harassment and college-based education, prevention and support strategies; and the steps she is planning to take to address the matter. [13520/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** In April 2019 a framework for consent in Higher Education Institutions "Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive - Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions" was launched by the Department. The framework aims to ensure the creation of an institutional campus culture which is safe, respectful and supportive.

Following the launch of the framework, the Department provided funding to support its implementation across the higher education sector. Funding was provided to the ESHTTE project (Ending Sexual Harassment and Violence in Third-Level Education) led by the National Women's Council of Ireland, the NUIG SMART Consent programme and the UCC Bystander Intervention project. Funding was also provided in December 2019 to higher education institutions to fund a broad range of activities and initiatives in this area.

The key recommendations of the SES survey cited are made with the intention of supporting the cultural change that has begun in institutions over recent years, and particularly through the implementation of the consent framework guidelines as they apply to all stakeholders.

## State Examinations

226. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if clarification will be provided on a special case regarding predictive grading relating to the leaving certificate 2020 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13521/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** A process is in place for students who are attending school were also studying a Leaving Certificate subject or subjects outside of school.

The Calculated Grades Executive Office (CGEO) is receiving reports from schools on the students taking subjects outside of school for whom schools were unable to provide an estimated percentage mark in a particular subject.

Following an assessment of the reports from schools, the CGEO will make contact with the school to confirm the process undertaken to arrive at a decision that an estimated mark could not be provided.

Every effort will be made to provide a calculated grade for as many students as possible where they are taking subjects outside of school, provided there is credible and satisfactory evidence, from an appropriate source, on which an estimated percentage mark can be based.

Where this is not possible, students will have the opportunity to sit the 2020 Leaving Certificate examinations at a later date when safe to do so.

It should be noted that the Irish University Association (IUA) announced on 25 June that, in the extraordinary circumstances of 2020, students who have applied for a Calculated Grade in a subject or subjects in the Leaving Certificate 2020, with a view to satisfying matriculation/basic minimum entry requirements and for whom the CGEO has been unable to award such a grade in the subject(s), will be granted an exemption in the subject(s) solely for matriculation/basic minimum entry purposes. Full details can be found on the IUA website.

## School Staff

227. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will end the two-tier pay scale for school secretaries; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13533/20]

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

In Budget 2020 I increased the number of secretaries and caretakers in certain schools, allowing schools with enrolments of 500-625 to fill secretary vacancies provided they have fewer than 1.5 secretaries; schools with enrolments of 626-699 to fill vacancies provided they have fewer than two secretary posts filled, and schools of 700 or more to fill caretaker vacancies provided they have fewer than two caretakers. These measures will take effect from September 2020.

In Spring 2019 I relaxed the moratorium for those C&C and ETB schools with enrolments of 700 and more which allows them to employ additional school secretaries up to a maximum of two per school. There are 91 schools in the C&C and ETB Sector who meet this crite-

ria, based on the information currently available to this Department. This was an initial step and took immediate effect.

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

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

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

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

The increases recommended by the Arbitrator are binding and must be applied by all schools who employ staff to whom the Arbitrator's recommendation applies.

A survey of Secretaries and Caretakers undertaken in 2019 identified some schools that are non-compliant with the provisions of the 2015 Arbitration Agreement, and my Department has contacted these schools to remind them of their obligations under the agreement, as implemented through various circulars. The links below will bring you to the most recent circulars in respect of the pay increases under the 2015 Arbitration Agreement.

[https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0076\\_2018.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0076_2018.pdf)

[https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0077\\_2018.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0077_2018.pdf)

Officials from my Department attended a meeting of the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on the 9th of April 2019 to discuss the status of non-teaching staff.

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

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

Officials from the Department met with FÓRSA representatives in September 2019. Management Bodies representing the employers of schools impacted by the action were also in attendance at the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to further explore the details of the pay claim as presented by FÓRSA and the nature of the industrial action.

On 30 September 2019 FÓRSA requested the Department to agree to use the services of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) to resolve the dispute. As is normal practice the Department agreed to use the industrial relations machinery of the state in an effort to resolve this matter.

In order to address the various issues within the claim and to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution, the Department and Management Bodies are in discussions with FÓRSA under the auspices of the WRC. These talks are subject to the normal procedures including confidentiality. The talks began in the WRC in October.

Following industrial action, which commenced on the 10 January 2020, both parties have agreed to return to talks at the WRC. FÓRSA agreed to the WRC request to suspend their ongoing work-to-rule to allow the talks to progress. This suspension was effective from 21 January 2020.

### **Departmental Staff**

228. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13546/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** In advance of the COVID-19 restriction measures, officials at the HR Unit of my Department engaged with the management of the line sections in the various locations within my Department in order to put measures in place which involved a combination of some onsite essential working and wider remote working arrangements. The HR Unit in conjunction with the Corporate Services Unit of my Department continues to monitor and issue relevant guidance to Department staff as required,

I am also aware that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has just issued guidelines for all civil service organisations (Working from Home during COVID-19 – Guidance for Civil Service Organisations), which will further assist civil service organisations to address the ongoing health and safety risks of COVID-19.

That Department has also commenced work on the development of a remote working policy which will address remote working in the longer term for the civil service. My Department will be guided by these central policies in the development, including consultation with staff, of a tailored working from home policy which meets the business needs of this Department and its staff.

### **Schools Building Projects**

229. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the projected timeline for the completion of a school extension for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13556/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I wish to inform the Deputy that the project to which she refers has been devolved to the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) for delivery as part of a programme of school building projects.

The NDFA is currently undertaking the second phase of the process of appointment of multi-disciplinary technical advisors (design teams) for these projects. Thereafter, it will ensure that the project progresses to design stage, obtains the necessary statutory planning permission,

and moves the project onward to tender and construction in due course. As the project is at an early stage in the delivery process, it is not possible at this time to give a date for its completion.

### **Special Educational Needs**

230. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the requirements for schools to have ASD units; if it is demand led; the extent to which this demand is analysed and assessed by her Department to ensure the additional education needs of children in a particular area are met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13559/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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; 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 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.

As Minister for Education & 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 on two occasions so far. However, it is a measure of last resort and will only be used where it is necessary to secure the establishment of the additional places.

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

231. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to schools charging parents for the use of separate stationary equipment for children when they return to school as part of Covid-19 health and safety protocols; if her attention has been further drawn to the inherent cost barrier for families on low or reduced income as a result of Covid-19 and for families that already experience financial difficulties when schools return; the measures she will introduce to prevent the increase in costs for families incurred by Covid-19 health and safety protocols applied to the school environment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13560/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I recognise that this is a particularly challenging time for all students, and parents across the education system.

On 12 June, my Department published the report to Government “Planning for reopening schools in line with the Roadmap for reopening society and business” The report sets out the clear ambition to develop a sustainable plan to reopen schools at the start of the next school year. The report also sets out in brief the contingencies that must be considered during the coming period in the context of Covid-19

These contingencies and guidance will be worked through in detail in the coming weeks with education partners and stakeholders to ensure that the return to school is safe for children and staff. My Department recognises that additional funding will be required for schools including supporting enhanced cleaning to prevent COVID-19 infections. Parents will not incur costs for these safety measures. My Department is engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the requirement to provide funding to schools for this purpose.

### Special Educational Needs

232. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when her Department will issue guidelines to schools in managing the July provision programme in summer 2020; the reason for the delay in issuing guidelines on the July provision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13561/20]

233. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to address the shortage of places in schools that cannot facilitate all children with additional needs within the July provision programme; if such children can be transferred to a teacher from another school that still has places; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13562/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of *Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education* including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

My Department issued guidance to these schools to support management and staff in the delivery of summer programmes for children with special educational needs and those experiencing educational disadvantage as we continue to operate in line with public health advice to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance includes information in respect of hand hygiene, physical distancing, use of PPE and a risk assessment template.

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

It is therefore a matter for the Board of Management of the school having regard to the resources available whether or not it will participate in the programme.

To date, 231 have indicated they intend to provide the school based summer provision.

A child may avail of the programme provided by a primary school other than than his/her normal school. Eligible schools with special classes can accept eligible pupils from other school on the basis that the host school can accommodate the additional children within the existing resources of their classes.

Where a school facilitates eligible pupils from other schools, arrangements should be made for the transfer of all relevant pupil documentation, i.e. student profiles, IEPs etc, in order that teachers can plan appropriately. In addition, parents should be advised of all necessary school policies, procedures etc. of the host school

Home-based provision is available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year.

In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher/SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on *Gov.ie/summerprovision*

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*

### **Schools Building Projects**

234. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a new school building project (details supplied); the timeline for site procurement and commencement of building works; if the school will be in use by August 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13570/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The provision of permanent accommodation for the new post primary school to serve Greystones and Kilcoole requires the acquisition of a site by my Department.

A potential site option has been identified and negotiations are ongoing with the landowner with a view to acquiring this site.

My Department is committed to delivering a site for the new post primary school for the Greystones and Kilcoole area of County Wicklow and work is ongoing to achieve this as soon as possible. Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further details at this time. However, once there is sufficient certainty in respect of a site the project to deliver the permanent accommodation can advance into the architectural planning stage and onwards to tender and construction stages.

It is difficult to indicate a timeframe for any site acquisition as each process is unique and in some instances complex issues can arise which can cause delays.

Until such time as the permanent site is acquired, it is planned that the school will open in suitable interim accommodation in time for the 2020/21 academic year.

### **Student Grant Scheme**

235. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there will be changes in the SUSI grant scheme in 2020 in relation to the financial situation persons find themselves in due to the impact of Covid-19 on the economy. [13573/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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.

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 counselors 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).

### **Schools Building Projects**

236. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the time frame of the building of five prefabs for a school (details supplied) which were due to be finished by September 2020 but have been delayed by the Covid-19 restrictions. [13574/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** I can confirm that in relation to the school to which the Deputy refers, a contract is due to be awarded this week (commencing 29th June, 2020) for the additional interim accommodation required for the school for the next academic year. However, a decision in relation to planning permission for this additional accommodation is still awaited. It should be noted that these delays are related due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

My Department is in contact with the school Principal and the Patron Body in relation to the matter.

*Question No. 237 answered with Question No. 222.*

### **Special Educational Needs**

238. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address the situation of children with additional learning needs that attend a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13596/20]

239. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project (details supplied); and the action she will take to ensure the ongoing issue is resolved for the opening in September 2020. [13597/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The new school building for the project to which the Deputies refer is over 95% complete. There continues to be a very close engagement between Westmeath County Council (to whom the project has been devolved for delivery) and its design team, the Department of Education and Skills and the contractor in relation to getting the remaining elements of work completed during the summer to enable the school reopen for the coming school year. That being the case, the alternative accommodation kindly provided by the school authorities and patron of the other school in question in the last school year should no longer be required for that purpose.

The school authority is being kept up-to-date on progress in this respect.

### **Special Educational Needs**

240. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of parents of children that qualify for the July provision scheme that will have to arrange their own private transportation to and from schools to access the 2020 scheme; the maximum distance parents will be expected to travel; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

[13609/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department 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.

With regard to transport arrangements for the July Programme my Department will provide grant funding to support parents with the cost of transport arrangements for those children who are eligible for school transport and who have been approved to participate in the school based July Programme.

Schools are required to identify children who are on a School Transport service or who are in receipt of a grant. School Transport Section will be in contact with schools and families in regard to the arrangements for payment.

Grant payment is based on the distance that a family reside from their child's school of attendance. The calculation is based on four trips per day (home to school and school to home, morning and afternoon) multiplied by the number of days a child attends school for the programme. The current rate of grant is 39.12 cent per kilometre for the first 6,437 kilometres travelled and 21.22 per kilometre for each kilometre travelled thereafter.

### **Special Educational Needs**

241. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason reports from parents indicate that capacity numbers do not meet requirements further to his statement of 5 June 2020 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13612/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include additional primary aged children with complex needs.

The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism

2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
  - Children with Down syndrome
  - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
  - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
  - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
  - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website [www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html](http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html).

### **Special Educational Needs**

242. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the preparation and guidelines her Department has issued to schools for the summer scheme; the number of children it is expected to facilitate; and the schools that have confirmed they will take part by county in tabular form. [13618/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

My Department issued guidance to these schools to support management and staff in the delivery of summer programmes for children with special educational needs and those experiencing educational disadvantage as we continue to operate in line with public health advice to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance includes information in respect of hand hygiene, physical distancing, use of PPE and a risk assessment template.

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

It is therefore a matter for the Board of Management of the school having regard to the re-

sources available whether or not it will participate in the programme.

To date 231 have indicated they intend to provide the school based summer provision.

A list of participating schools is being finalised which I will forward to the Deputy in the coming days.

Home-based provision is available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year.

In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher/SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent or school is then free to plan and organise the programme in accordance with with the guidance on my Departments website.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

### **Student Grant Scheme**

243. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address the anomaly in the SUSI grant scheme by which a student applies initially as a dependent of their parents but subsequently gets married during the period of their third-level education but are still assessed as a dependent of their parents. [13627/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The decision on eligibility for student grant applications is a matter for the centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland).

For student grant purposes, students are categorised according to their circumstances either as students dependent on parents or a legal guardian, or as independent mature students.

A student may be assessed as an independent student (i.e. assessed without reference to parental income and address) if he/she has attained the age of 23 on the 1st of January of the year of first entry to an approved course, and is not ordinarily resident with his/her parents from the previous 1st October. Otherwise, he/she would be assessed as a dependent student, i.e. assessed with reference to parental income and address.

A student's status for grant purposes is defined at their first point of entry to an approved further or higher education course or at their point of re-entry to an approved course following a break in studies of at least three years, and continues to apply for the duration of their studies.

When considering whether a student meets the conditions to be assessed independently of his or her parents, the grant awarding authority (SUSI) is obliged to satisfy itself beyond doubt that an acceptable degree of proof of independent living in the relevant period has been submit-

ted by the grant applicant. The onus is on the grant applicant to provide the necessary documentary evidence as requested by the grant awarding authority.

Applicants who do not meet the criteria to be assessed as an independent student for grant purposes, or who cannot supply the necessary documentation to establish independent living for the required period, may still apply to SUSI to have their grant eligibility assessed as a dependent student. The relevant information, including details of parental income, would be required by SUSI to determine grant eligibility as a dependent student.

Further information regarding class of applicant (independent or dependent) and the types of documentation accepted as evidence of living independently from parents is available from SUSI's website: <https://susi.ie/eligibility/applicant-class/>.

If the student in question considers that he has been unjustly refused a student grant or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, he may appeal this decision to SUSI within the statutory time limit of 30 days of his decision letter.

Where an individual applicant has an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted online by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe of 30 days.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

244. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will make accommodation for instances in which parents choose to delay their child's start or return to primary school on the grounds of Covid-19 health concerns, in so far as enrolment figures required for the retention of teachers are concerned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13639/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** On 12 June, my Department published the report to Government "Planning for reopening schools in line with the Roadmap for reopening society and business" [www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/framework-for-reopening-and-operating-schools.html](http://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/framework-for-reopening-and-operating-schools.html).

The report sets out the clear ambition to develop a sustainable plan to fully reopen schools at the start of the next school year in late August/September in line with normal timeframes.

The report also sets out in brief the contingencies that must be considered during the coming period in the context of Covid-19 including those referred to by the Deputy. These contingencies and guidance will be worked through in detail in the coming weeks with education partners and stakeholders to ensure that the return to school is safe for children and staff.

### **School Staff**

245. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to ensure school secretaries are employed as full-time public servants particularly in view of the contribution they made to the education of children during the course of the Covid-19 crisis and in view of the increased role they will have to play to ensure public health measures are followed as the schools go back in the autumn; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13656/20]

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

In Budget 2020 I increased the number of secretaries and caretakers in certain schools, allowing schools with enrolments of 500-625 to fill secretary vacancies provided they have fewer than 1.5 secretaries; schools with enrolments of 626-699 to fill vacancies provided they have fewer than two secretary posts filled, and schools of 700 or more to fill caretaker vacancies provided they have fewer than two caretakers. These measures will take effect from September 2020.

In Spring 2019 I relaxed the moratorium for those C&C and ETB schools with enrolments of 700 and more which allows them to employ additional school secretaries up to a maximum of two per school. There are 91 schools in the C&C and ETB Sector who meet this criteria, based on the information currently available to this Department. This was an initial step and took immediate effect.

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

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

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

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

The increases recommended by the Arbitrator are binding and must be applied by all schools who employ staff to whom the Arbitrator's recommendation applies.

A survey of Secretaries and Caretakers undertaken in 2019 identified some schools that are non-compliant with the provisions of the 2015 Arbitration Agreement, and my Department has contacted these schools to remind them of their obligations under the agreement, as implemented through various circulars. The links below will bring you to the most recent circulars in respect of the pay increases under the 2015 Arbitration Agreement.

[www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0076\\_2018.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0076_2018.pdf).

[www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0077\\_2018.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0077_2018.pdf).

Officials from my Department attended a meeting of the Joint Committee on Education and

Skills on the 9th of April 2019 to discuss the status of non-teaching staff.

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

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

Officials from the Department met with FÓRSA representatives in September 2019. Management Bodies representing the employers of schools impacted by the action were also in attendance at the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to further explore the details of the pay claim as presented by FÓRSA and the nature of the industrial action.

On 30 September 2019 FÓRSA requested the Department to agree to use the services of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) to resolve the dispute. As is normal practice the Department agreed to use the industrial relations machinery of the state in an effort to resolve this matter.

In order to address the various issues within the claim and to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution, the Department and Management Bodies are in discussions with FÓRSA under the auspices of the WRC. These talks are subject to the normal procedures including confidentiality. The talks began in the WRC in October.

Following industrial action, which commenced on the 10 January 2020, both parties have agreed to return to talks at the WRC. FÓRSA agreed to the WRC request to suspend their ongoing work-to-rule to allow the talks to progress. This suspension was effective from 21 January 2020.

### **School Staff**

246. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if school secretaries that are normally laid off during the summer will be kept in full employment to help prepare for post-Covid-19 education in the autumn; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13657/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The Boards of Management of schools are responsible for the employment of school secretaries and it is a matter for each school to determine the level of secretarial services required for the school. Funding to cater for these services is made available from the Ancillary Services and Capitation Grants

On Friday 12th June my Department published the report to Government "Planning for re-opening schools in line with the Roadmap for reopening society and business" [www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/framework-for-reopening-and-operating-schools.html](http://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/framework-for-reopening-and-operating-schools.html).

Detailed engagement with education partners and stakeholders is underway in relation to the development of public health guidance in a school setting. 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 Supports**

247. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the type of PPE provision (details supplied) that will be provided to schools for the reopening; if the cost of same will be covered by her Department; and if so, if the budget will be allocated based on geography and size of school or enrolment numbers. [13659/20]

248. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the protocol for school staff and students that are at high risk to Covid-19 or living with a family member at high risk when schools reopen. [13660/20]

254. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if students have been involved in the process for schools reopening; and if not, if they will be included in the process. [13666/20]

255. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a budget will be made available to schools to rent nearby facilities such as youth clubs, churches, sports halls and so on to provide space for students for non-contact teaching days if a hybrid model is adopted to provide space outside of the home and enable parents and guardians to work. [13667/20]

256. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to change the absence system for students and teaching staff when schools reopen in view of the fact students will need to stay home if they have symptoms. [13668/20]

257. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there will be an increase in allocation to hire more teachers or rehire retired teachers necessary for student to teacher ratio. [13669/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** On 12 June, my Department published the report to Government “Planning for reopening schools in line with the Roadmap for reopening society and business” [www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/framework-for-reopening-and-operating-schools.html](http://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/framework-for-reopening-and-operating-schools.html).

The report sets out the clear ambition to develop a sustainable plan to fully reopen schools at the start of the next school year in late August/September in line with normal timeframes.

The report also sets out in brief the contingencies that must be considered during the coming period in the context of Covid-19. These contingencies including those referred to by the Deputy, will be worked through in detail in the coming weeks with education partners and stakeholders to ensure that the return to school is safe for children and staff. Student representatives have been involved in stakeholder consultations.

Staff and students who have symptoms of COVID-19 must not attend school, are required to phone their GP and follow the HSE guidance on self-isolation. Guidance in relation to these absences will be developed centrally following consultation with education partners.

My Department recognises that additional funding will be required for schools to support enhanced cleaning to prevent COVID-19 infections. My Department is engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the requirement to provide funding to schools for this purpose.

My Department has also arranged for a drawdown framework to be established to enable schools purchase hand-sanitisers for use in the school and classroom. The procurement process for this framework has already commenced and it is intended these materials will be available in early August.

*Questions - Written Answers*  
**Special Educational Needs**

249. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if students with Down's syndrome entering mainstream primary school or in mainstream post-primary schools are eligible for the July provision; and if not, the reason the matter was not made clear in the announcement of 5 June 2020. [13661/20]

250. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the recommendations for families and students that cannot secure a tutor and their school is not participating in the July provision. [13662/20]

251. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the percentage of children deemed eligible for July provision in past years; and the percentage of these children that were able to avail of the July provision. [13663/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of *Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education* including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

Approximately 15,000 children were eligible for July Provision in 2019 of which 10,563 or 70% accessed the scheme. There were two strands to the July Provision scheme, a school-based scheme and a home-based scheme. In 2019, 7,158 accessed the home based scheme and 3,405 accessed the school based scheme in 232 participating schools.

With regard to Summer Provision 2020, to date 231 schools have indicated that they intend to run a school based programme involving approximately 3,700 children. 9,781 families have registered for the home based summer programme involving 9,820 children.

In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with complex special educational needs.

The eligibility criteria includes the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
4. Children transitioning into a special class or special school from early year's settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:

Children with Down syndrome

Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing

Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment

Children who have a moderate general learning disability

Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Funding for summer provision is not available to in respect of children who are not covered by the programme criteria. A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

If a Parent is in doubt about their child's eligibility, they should consult their child's school or contact my Department. Contact details are available on my Departments website [www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html](http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html).

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

Home-based provision will be available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year. In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher/SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on [Gov.ie/summerprovision](http://Gov.ie/summerprovision).

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has published information to assist Parents in sourcing the services or a Tutor or SNA for the 2020 Summer Provision The information is available on the NSCE website at <https://ncse.ie/information-for-parents-on-private-home-tutor-services-advertising-platforms-for-the-2020-summer-provision-scheme>.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at [Gov.ie/summerprovision](http://Gov.ie/summerprovision).

## State Examinations

252. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to replace the leaving certificate examinations for the class of 2021; the type of assessment the class of 2021 can expect; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13664/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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 distance 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, the Department recently published a report to Government on Planning for reopening schools in line with the Roadmap for reopening. This report is available on my Department's website.

My Department, in consultation with relevant agencies, including the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), identified the following key priorities in supporting students in re-engaging with the curriculum in the new school year:

1. The wellbeing and socialisation of students
2. Assessing where students are in terms of their learning
3. Identifying the additional supports that particular learners may require
4. Exploring options for remote provision that will compliment in-school provision and address curriculum gaps experienced during school closure

It is recognised that schools continue to be best placed to make decisions about how to support and educate all their learners during this period. My Department will continue to collaborate with the NCCA to develop guidance to schools to assist them in their planning for the next school year so as to ensure that curricular priorities are delivered and that teaching and learning is optimal in these circumstances, guided at all times by public health advice.

Students going into sixth year in post primary schools are a group that will receive a particular focus in the context of their preparations for the Leaving Certificate examinations in 2021. The State Examinations Commission (SEC) has statutory responsibility for the operation of the state examinations. My Department will engage with the SEC in their development of fair and robust assessment arrangements in relation to both the Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate examinations for 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.

### **School Accommodation**

253. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to a video by parents and guardians raising issues and problems concerning the move of a school (details supplied) out of the community to Citywest; the alternative measures that can be taken in order to keep the school within the community; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13665/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The school to which the Deputy refers was established in 2018 and is currently in interim accommodation on the Firhouse

Education Campus.

Due to additional accommodation requirements in the Gaelscoil in which they are currently located my Department has been informed that it is not possible for the secondary school to continue to operate in that building.

My Department has informed the secondary school that interim accommodation for the school will be provided on the Citywest Education Campus for the 2020/2021 academic year.

My Department is in on-going communication with the Patron Bodies concerned regarding all options.

*Question Nos. 254 to 257, inclusive, answered with Question No. 247.*

**258. Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to move the two tier pay scales for teachers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13670/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. The starting salary for a new entrant teacher in 2012 was €30,702. As a result of the programme of pay restoration, the starting salary of a teacher is now €36,953 and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692.

Section 11 of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 provides that “the Minister [for Public Expenditure and Reform] shall, within three months of the passing of this Act, prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report on the cost of and a plan in dealing with pay equalisation for new entrants to the public service.”

The report laid before the Oireachtas on foot of this provision by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform assesses the cost of a further change which would provide a two scale point adjustment to new entrants recruited since 2011. The total cost of such an adjustment across the public sector is of the order of €200 million, of which Education accounts for €83 million. The report also acknowledges that, during the financial crisis, there were policy changes which affected remuneration in different occupations across the public sector (including education).

The matter of new entrant pay is a cross sectoral issue, not just an issue for the education sector alone. The Government supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

On 24 September 2018, an agreement was reached between the Government and the public services committee of ICTU in respect of new entrant pay.

This agreement is benefitting 16,000 teachers and nearly 5,000 SNAs within the education sector. The deal provides for a series of incremental jumps for new entrants.

Minister McHugh is fully aware that the teacher unions have outstanding issues of concern following the September 2018 agreement. These outstanding matters will be given full consideration. This will happen either in the context of any pay review mechanism agreed by the parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement, or in the context of the next round of pay talks. The positions of each of the parties on these matters must be given due regard in endeavouring to reach a mutually agreed resolution.

The current series of restorative measures for new entrants have been achieved through con-

tinued engagement and collective bargaining between the Government and the public service unions and shows the benefits that such engagement can bring.

### **School Transport**

259. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the school transport that will be available for students in September 2020; and the guidelines for transport for students with additional needs. [13671/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department 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.

With regard to the re-opening of schools for the 2020/21 academic year, my Department is currently engaging intensively with Bus Éireann, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the National Transport Authority on the logistical considerations that arise from public health advice in planning for the reopening of schools. The operation of school transport services in September 2020 will be informed by the outcome of this planning for re-opening schools.

### **English Language Training Organisations**

260. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures being taken to protect foreign language schools in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13680/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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 this process, the representative bodies for English language education providers have engaged with the Working Group surrounding their proposals for supports to aid the recovery of this sector. In this forum, the providers have been advised of the measures introduced by Government, as part of the wider Covid-19 response, to support and protect businesses at this time. These measures include the 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.

Further to the above, the provider representatives have been advised of the eligibility of busi-

nesses in this sector 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. A full list of these supports and related information is available for providers here: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

My Department will continue to engage with provider representatives as we move forwards and the sector re-opens.

### **Special Educational Needs**

261. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of the July provision; if it will be made mandatory for schools which cater for persons with special needs to provide the programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13681/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

The programme is a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional primary aged children with complex needs.

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

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

It is therefore a matter for the Board of Management of the school having regard to the resources available whether or not it will participate in the programme.

My Department does intend to make participation in the summer programme mandatory.

To date 231 have indicated they intend to provide the school based summer provision.

Home-based provision is available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year.

In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher / SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with complex special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on [Gov.ie/summerprovision](http://Gov.ie/summerprovision).

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the guidance on my Departments website.

A programme for DEIS schools for this Summer was also announced.

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at [Gov.ie/summerprovision](http://Gov.ie/summerprovision).

*Questions Nos. 262 to 265, inclusive, answered with Question No. 177.*

### Special Educational Needs

266. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the schemes or supports available to assist primary schools to purchase resources and reading materials for children with special education needs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13699/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** This Department provides a book grant to all recognised primary and post primary schools within the Free Education Scheme in order to provide assistance for books including Book Rental Schemes. Under this scheme, the Department provided funding of €16.9 million in 2019 to all of these schools.

Additional funding of €1million which is being allocated to 102 Primary DEIS schools for a new pilot programme for the 2020/21 school year. The aim of this pilot is to provide free school books for students in the schools involved, and to support these schools in eliminating the cost of school books for parents. Under Circular 46/2013, DEIS schools receive a book grant of €21 per student. This pilot will provide an additional €64 per student to increase the overall book grant rate to €85 per student enrolled in the school. This additional funding issued to schools in May 2020.

A range of supports and guidance have also been provided for schools to assist schools in providing for the education for children with special educational needs during the 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 *<https://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.

Pending the wider re opening of schools, my Department also published on 12th June, 2020, details of a summer programme for children with special educational needs enrolled in special schools, special classes and mainstream classes. The programme incorporates some aspects of the July Provision of previous years.

Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education, is a significantly expanded programme for children with complex special educational needs which aims to re-establish the child's relationships and connection with school and their peers as a basis for learning and participation and to help the child to re-engage in learning and social activities and help them adapt to new routines and changes. The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that the child can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers. In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with special needs.

The eligibility criteria has been widened to include the following categories of children:

Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism

Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties

Any child in a special class or special school

Children transitioning into a special class from early year's settings

Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:

Children with Down syndrome

Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing

Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment

Children who have a moderate general learning disability

Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

All special schools and primary schools with special classes are invited to provide the school based summer provision for their students. This programme will run for a minimum of two weeks and can extend up to four weeks where the schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants are willing to participate.

Home-based provision will be available where a child's local school is not providing a programme or does not have the capacity to accommodate a child in a planned programme this year. In this situation my Department will provide grant funding towards the engagement by Parents of a registered teacher / SNA to provide home based support for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks.

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

A dedicated online registration system for families of children with special needs to access Summer Provision is now available on [Gov.ie/summerprovision](https://www.gov.ie/summerprovision).

Parents are asked to register their participation online, providing some outline information of the extent of their participation in the programme e.g. number of weeks.

Once registered, the parent is then free to plan and organise the programme for their child by consulting with the child's school and securing the services of a teacher or SNA.

Full information on the scheme and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at *Gov.ie/summerprovision*.

### School Staff

267. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review the decision to refuse the provision of extra teaching staff to a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13702/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** 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.

There is no change to the staffing of the school referred to by the Deputy for the 2020/21 school year.

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 appeal from the school submitted by the Deputy was considered by the Primary Staffing Appeals Board and deemed ineligible as the appeal did not meet the criteria published in Circular 18/2020. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board is independent of the Department and its decision is final.

### School Staff

268. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which adequate provision can be made in respect of teaching staff levels at a school (details supplied); if her attention has been drawn to the possibility of the loss of a teacher and the negative consequences arising therefrom; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13704/20]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley):** The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for determining the appropriate staffing levels in relation to the support of pupils with special educational needs in special schools, in accordance with the policies of my Department.

Staffing arrangements for special schools are in line with policy advice provided by the NCSE in 2013, which did not recommend alteration to staffing ratios established under the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) Report in 1993.

Enhanced pupil teacher and SNA ratios are provided to special schools to support them in dealing with pupils' educational and care needs.

Since 2012, special schools are staffed on the basis of individual pupil profile and the disability categorisations of those pupils, as opposed to being based primarily on school designa-

tion, in accordance with my Department's most recent Circular 0032/2019 - Appointment of Administrative Deputy Principal and Staffing in Special Schools.

Special school staffing allocations are reviewed and updated each year by the NCSE and special schools are staffed on the basis of each year's current school enrolments.

The NCSE are currently undertaking policy advice on the educational provision that should be in place for students educated in special schools and special classes. This policy advice will make recommendations on the provision required to enable students in special schools and classes achieve better outcomes.

The NCSE have been asked to complete and submit its report to the Minister not later than December 2020. There will be no change to the staffing arrangements currently in place in special schools, pending the receipt and consideration of this policy advice.

The NCSE recently published their staffing allocation for 2020-21, and this is available on their website at *www.ncse.ie*.

The NCSE is continuing to engage with this school on the matter of their staffing allocation for 2020-21.

### **Maternity Leave**

269. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will extend maternity leave for mothers in view of the difficulties they experienced due to Covid-19; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12871/20]

273. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to an additional twelve weeks maternity leave for those that have been on such leave during the Covid-19 restrictions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13440/20]

275. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when maternity leave will be extended by three months. [13719/20]

289. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will review the need to extend maternity benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12948/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 269, 273, 275 and 289 together.

I am conscious of demands on parents at this time and hope that the additional measures to support working parents that we 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.

As the law now stands, a mother is entitled to paid maternity leave of up to 26 weeks, 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.

Any amendment to the legislation governing the provision of maternity leave, which falls under my responsibility, would require primary legislation. The provision of maternity benefit is under the remit of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

It should be noted too that, 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.

Consideration is being given currently to all issues.

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.

### **Departmental Regulations**

270. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will advise on an issue raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13073/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The National Vetting Bureau conducts vetting in accordance with the requirements of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016. Vetting is an operational matter for the Garda authorities and neither I as Minister nor the Department of Justice and Equality have a role in these matters.

I have requested information on the matter referred to by the Deputy and will write directly to him when it is received.

### **Road Traffic Offences**

271. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding speeding detection fines; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13263/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I have requested information from the Garda Commissioner in relation to this matter but it was unfortunately not possible to compile it in the time available.

I will write to the Deputy directly with the information requested, when it is available.

### **Carer's Leave**

272. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is leave to allow family members to take off work in circumstances (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13338/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The main purpose of the Carer's Leave Act 2001 is to provide an entitlement for an employee to avail of unpaid leave from his/her employment to enable him/her to personally provide full-time care and attention for a person who is in need of such care. The period of leave to which an employee is entitled is subject to a maximum of 104 weeks in respect of any one care recipient and the minimum statutory entitlement is 13 weeks. An employer may refuse, with good reason, an application for carer's leave for a period of less than 13 weeks.

A person availing of carer's leave may also qualify for Carer's Benefit or Carer's Allowance. The payment of benefits is a matter for the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

There are no plans at present to amend the provisions of the Carer's Leave Act.

In certain limited circumstances force majeure leave may also be available.

Employees and employers should engage to ensure that sufficient flexibility is shown to manage both work life balance and business needs at this time.

*Question No. 273 answered with Question No. 269.*

### **EU Directives**

274. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the 5th EU Anti-Money Laundering Directive will be transposed here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13674/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As the Deputy will be aware, on 30 May 2018 the European Parliament adopted Directive EU 2018/849, the 5th EU Anti-Money Laundering Directive (5AMLD). The Directive is available at the following link <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018L0843>.

This Directive extends the rules on the use of virtual currencies, clarifies the requirements for the beneficial ownership register introduced by 4AMLD, places stricter requirements on the use of e-money products, and further clarifies the minimum enhanced due diligence protocol when conducting financial transactions with persons in high-risk third countries.

The legislation is technical and complex and the 18 month transposition period provided for in the Directive is shorter than the period which would normally be applied for similar instruments.

However work on transposition of this Directive is well advanced, with both my Department and the Department of Finance providing for transposition measures in our respective areas of competence.

The previous Government, in January 2019, approved the drafting of the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) (Amendment) Bill. The General Scheme of the Bill is available on my Department's website at the following link: [www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/General\\_Scheme\\_-\\_Criminal\\_Justice\\_\(Money\\_Laundering\\_and\\_Terrorist\\_Financing\)\\_Amendment\\_Bill\\_2019](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/General_Scheme_-_Criminal_Justice_(Money_Laundering_and_Terrorist_Financing)_Amendment_Bill_2019).

While my Department is working on this Bill to transpose certain elements of the Fifth EU Anti-Money Laundering Directive, it should be noted that the Department of Finance is also engaged in giving effect to certain provisions of the Directive, including those relating to:

- facilitating increasing transparency on who really owns companies and trusts by establishing beneficial ownership registers;
- ensuring the creation of, and access to, centralised national bank and payment account registers or central data retrieval.

Further information in that regard can be obtained from the Department of Finance.

*Question No. 275 answered with Question No. 269.*

### **Citizenship Status**

276. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons granted citizenship in each year of the past five years at the absolute discretion of the Minister based on their ancestors having strong ties to Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12707/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. All applications for a certificate of naturalisation are processed and assessed individually in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

Statistics are not compiled in such a manner as to identify those applications where a certificate of naturalisation for citizenship has been granted on the basis of Irish association. The retrieval of this data would require a case by case examination of applications received during the timeframe specified and would represent a significant diversion of resources from day to day processing. However, I can say that there are currently 267 Irish association cases under active consideration by my Department.

It is open to an applicant to apply under Section 16(a) of the 1956 Act where the applicant is of Irish descent or has Irish association. Under the legislation a person is of Irish association if they are related by blood, affinity or adoption to a person (living or deceased) who is or was an Irish citizen or entitled to be an Irish citizen. A civil partner of such a person may also qualify.

In such cases, the conditions for naturalisation set out under Section 15 of the Act, including residency requirements, may be waived on a discretionary basis. The onus is on the applicant to provide sufficient evidence of Irish descent or Irish association.

### **Direct Provision System**

277. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedures in place and the efforts made to ensure that direct provision accommodation centres are in com-

pliance with planning laws and with fire and safety regulations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12713/20]

278. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her Department carries out assessments and investigations of direct provision accommodation centres to ensure they are in compliance with planning laws and with fire and safety regulations at the time the tender is awarded and after that time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12714/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 277 and 278 together.

All requests for tender, issued on behalf of my Department for accommodation for international protection applicants, require bidders to comply with the relevant regulations and the associated Technical Guidance Documents where applicable, including but not limited to the following;

- Building Control Acts 1990 and 2007
- Building Regulations 1997 to 2017
- Building Control Regulations 1997 to 2009
- Housing Acts 1966 to 2004
- Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2005
- Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003
- Any statutory modification or re-enactment of same

Each premises must hold, or have the capability to obtain, the following certification;

- Fire Safety Certificate;
- Certificates of Design, Installation, Commissioning and Handover for the Fire Alarm System, as per IS 3218:2013 or equivalent. The Fire Alarm shall meet the requirements of an L1, LD1 or LD2 type system as appropriate;
- Certificates of Design, Installation, Commissioning and Handover for the Emergency Lighting System, as per IS 3217:2013, or equivalent;
- Safe Electric test sheet/certification of electrical installation.
- Certificate and Opinion of Compliance with the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003.

It is also part of the contracts, under our expressions of interest process, that all contractors comply with planning and development legislation, building control regulations as well as fire services legislation. All centres are monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure ongoing compliance.

All accommodation centres under contract to my Department are subject to three unannounced inspections per annum: twice by officials of the Immigration Service of my Department and once by an independent company (QTS Limited). Inspections cover a wide range of issues including fire safety and other health and safety issues.

Any issue identified is communicated in writing to the contractor and the contractor is re-

quired to address any issue identified immediately. Officials from the Immigration Service follow up to ensure that relevant issues have been addressed.

As a result of health and safety restrictions with respect to the COVID-19 crisis, it has not been possible to carry out inspections at this time. As soon as the HSE advises that it is appropriate to commence inspections again, the relevant officials in the Immigration Service will resume the inspection process.

While we are unable to carry out inspections at this time, we are in regular contact with our centres through a dedicated communications team from the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS). This team undertakes calls with all centre managers across our network of permanent and temporary centres. The calls also ensure that any issues or concerns can be raised without delay for appropriate resolution for the benefit of residents and staff.

### **Garda Deployment**

279. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of road traffic units assigned by Garda district to County Cork in each of the years 2015 to 2019 inclusive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12766/20]

280. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of road traffic units assigned by Garda district in County Cork. [12767/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 279 and 280 together.

The Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for the management of An Garda Síochána, including personnel matters and deployment of resources. This includes responsibility for personnel matters and the distribution of personnel across the various Garda Divisions. As Minister, I have no role 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.

The resources provided 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. As at 31 May 2020, there are now 14,700 Gardaí nationwide, supported by over 3,000 Garda staff and these numbers are continuing to grow.

This total figure includes the Garda trainees from two separate intake classes who attested earlier than scheduled in March 2020, following an operational decision by the Garda Commissioner to augment An Garda Síochána's capacity to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is important to note that road traffic legislation is enforced as part of the day-to-day duties of all members of An Garda Síochána, as well as through specific enforcement operations.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that the strength of Roads Policing Units on the 31 May 2020, the latest date for which figures are available, stood at 736.

I understand that the Commissioner established the Garda National Roads Policing Bureau to ensure a consistent approach to road safety and enforcement of road traffic legislation across the country. This is achieved through coordination of enforcement and development of policy based on research and analysis of statistics and by engaging in campaigns in partnership with other State agencies.

I understand that in addition to a focus on the lifesaver offences of speeding, seatbelts, mobile phones and driving under the influence, Divisional Roads Policing Units work closely with other relevant Divisional Units to target known criminals and to disrupt their activities through strict enforcement of road traffic legislation.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that there are 6 Roads Policing Units in the Divisions across County Cork.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that as at 31 May 2020 there were 84 Garda members assigned to the Roads Policing across the three Garda Divisions in Co. Cork (33 in Cork City, 27 in Cork North and 24 in Cork West).

I am further informed that for the period referred to by the Deputy (2015-end June 2020), there have been 6 Roads Policing Units in the Garda Divisions in County Cork. I understand these are located in Cork City (at Anglesea Street as a Divisional RPU), Cork North (Fermoy, Mallow, Middleton) and Cork West (at Bandon and Macroom).

### **Coroners Service**

281. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to replace the Coroner in south Tipperary upon their retirement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12805/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** Section 6 of the Coroners (Amendment) Act, 2019 amended Section 11 of the Coroner Act, 1962, to increase the mandatory retirement age for Coroners from 70 to 72. Accordingly, the present Coroner for Tipperary South will retire on June 25th, 2021.

It has been agreed to amalgamate, by way of Section 7 of the Coroners Acts 1962 – 2019, the two Coroner Districts of Tipperary North and Tipperary South with effect from June 25th 2021. On that date, Mr Joseph P Kelly will become Coroner for the newly amalgamated Coroner District of Tipperary.

### **Garda Stations**

282. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 325 to 329, inclusive, of 16 June 2020, the Garda stations included in the Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016–2021; if new Garda building upgrade projects at stations not originally included in the plan as set out in 2015 have now been included in the plan; the details and cost of these new developments; the estimated total State investment in the overall capital plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12818/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for the management and control of An Garda Síochána and for the effective and efficient use of Garda resources. Further, the Office of Public Works (OPW) has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. Works in relation to Garda accommodation are therefore progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the OPW.

I have requested information from the Garda Commissioner in relation to this matter but it was unfortunately not possible to compile it in the time available.

I will write to the Deputy directly with the information requested, when it is available.

### **Garda Stations**

283. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 325 to 329, inclusive, of 16 June 2020, if she will provide a copy of the letter referenced outlining the decision not to proceed with a new Garda station for Sligo received by her on 2 January 2020; if she will provide a copy of all correspondence between the Garda Commissioner and her on the issue of the new Sligo Garda station as part of the PPP bundle between 1 August 2019 and 18 June 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12819/20]

284. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost-benefit analysis conducted by her Department on the decision to divert as planned State funding away from a new Garda station in Sligo and instead to invest in remedial works at the current station instead; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12821/20]

285. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the decision to invest in the old Garda station in Sligo instead of investing in a new station as originally planned has been future proofed against the future operational needs of An Garda Síochána in Sligo; if the decision took into consideration responsibilities in relation to the Disability Act 2005 and providing disability access of public buildings to staff and the public; the green energy perspective of the decision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12824/20]

286. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will make additional funding available under the Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016–2021 to proceed with the building of a new Garda station in Sligo as originally planned at the site already purchased; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12828/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 283 to 286, inclusive, together.

At the outset it is important to be clear that the Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for the management and control of An Garda Síochána and for the effective and efficient use of Garda resources. Further, the Office of Public Works (OPW) has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. Works in relation to Garda accommodation are therefore progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the OPW

As set out in the response of the former Minister to Parliamentary Question Nos. 325, 326, 327, 328 and 329 of 16 June 2020, the decision not to proceed with a new Garda station in Sligo, as part of the Garda PPP programme, was made by the Garda Commissioner in his capacity as Accounting Officer and as the person responsible, by law, for the allocation of Garda resources. This decision was taken in the context of the significant reorganisation of Garda resources which underpins the new Garda Síochána Operating Model announced by the Garda Commissioner last year.

As part of the reduction of bureaucracy and streamlining of administrative processes in the new Operating Model, the number of Garda Regions and Divisions is being reduced and Sligo Garda Station will be neither a Regional nor a Divisional Headquarters. As a consequence, Garda management has decided that a building of the scale envisaged under the original PPP programme is no longer operationally required in Sligo and the allocation of public funding for such a project can no longer be justified.

This decision was communicated to my Department by letter received on 2 January 2020. The substance of this letter pertaining to Sligo Garda station was outlined to the Deputy in response to Parliamentary Question Nos. 325, 326, 327, 328 and 329 of 16 June 2020.

I am informed that, in order to ensure that there is adequate accommodation to provide an effective Garda policing service in Sligo, the existing Sligo Garda station is undergoing a very extensive refit overseen by the Office of Public Works (OPW). This option has been judged by the Garda authorities to be a more appropriate and much faster way of delivering a modern Garda station, in accordance with its role in the new Garda Operating Model and having regard to the fact that the current location of the station is considered optimum from the operational perspective.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that the ongoing upgrade works, which include the provision of new cells and custody management facilities, and future planned additional works, are intended to deliver a modernised Garda station in Sligo.

For the information of the Deputy, the following table, furnished to me by the OPW, details expenditure since 2017 on Sligo Garda Station including both the Garda and the OPW votes.

Year	Expenditure on Sligo Garda Station (combined total, OPW and Garda Votes)
2017	€58,362
2018	€116,117
2019	€711,093
2020	€143,275

As the Deputy will appreciate, this demonstrates the scale of the works which have been underway to ensure that Sligo Garda station is fit for purpose and meets the needs of An Garda Síochána.

The OPW, as the body responsible for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation, is responsible for ensuring that public buildings are, as far as practicable, accessible to persons with disabilities. The OPW also has responsibility for ensuring the sustainability and energy efficiency of buildings under its control. The Deputy will appreciate that these are matters in which I have no direct role as Minister for Justice.

### **Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service**

287. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the length of the backlog in processing EU treaty rights reviews; the number of persons on the list for review; if the INIS is operating at full capacity in relation to processing these applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12833/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The EU Treaty Rights Review Unit of the Immigration Service Delivery (ISD) of my Department processes review applications received from applicants who have been refused residence permits as family members of EU citizens exercising free movement rights in compliance with the requirements of EU Directive 2004/38/EC and the Free Movement of Persons Regulations 2015.

There is a significant number of review cases on hand arising from a sustained increase in applications since 2014. Currently, there are 2,283 cases awaiting processing at EU Treaty Rights review stage, of which 1,751 review applications (76%) have been awaiting a decision

for over a year, with the oldest cases having been received in May 2017.

The work involved in assessing review applications is detailed and complex and often requires significant interaction with the applicant and other State bodies to ensure that the full set of facts are available to the deciding officer.

The ISD is committed to processing applications with the objective of achieving the highest possible level of efficiency for applicants, while at the same time, safeguarding the integrity of the State's immigration system. The ISD appreciates the impact of associated delays on the persons concerned and is undergoing an analysis of resources available to process these cases in a timely manner.

In addition, the restrictions arising from the current COVID-19 pandemic have also regrettably resulted in significant challenges to the delivery of normal services. As a result of these restrictions, the EU Treaty Rights Review Unit and ISD in general, along with many other public and private sector organisations are experiencing significant disruption in delivering core functions.

The EU Treaty Rights Review Unit continues to work within these restrictions, while recognising that public safety and the wellbeing of staff are both urgent priorities.

### **Alcohol Sales**

288. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to review legislation relating to alcohol delivery services specifically in relation to the regulation of a number of practices including point of sale, age verification and legal hours of both sale and delivery. [12933/20]

296. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the requested meeting with officials for a campaign (details supplied) will be organised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13011/20]

334. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will consider issues raised by an organisation (details supplied) in relation to alcohol delivery services; if she will address loopholes in the system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13636/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 288, 296 and 334 together.

A number of issues have been raised by the Deputy including in relation to the possibility of a meeting. I regret that it was not possible to compile this information in the time available and I will respond directly to him in writing.

*Question No. 289 answered with Question No. 269.*

### **Prisoner Health**

290. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to the fact that access to prisoners by addiction practitioners working for the community prison links service has not been consistently available across all prisons since the onset of Covid-19, in particular in Mountjoy and Wheatfield prisons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12951/20]

291. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will direct that prisons include the community prison links service on the list of professional contacts for prisoners in order that access to clients can be had via telephone and more comprehensively post-Covid-19; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12952/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 290 and 291 together.

I am informed by the Irish Prison Service that Community Prison Links is primarily a community-based programme that works with people in the community around addiction issues. In some cases the organisation continues to work with individuals in the event they enter into the custody of certain prisons in the State. As Community Prison Links is primarily community-based, and only available in a limited number of prisons, the Irish Prison Service does not intend to make the service available on the prisoner phone system. However, I am advised that the situation will be kept under review.

Regarding access to prisons, as the Deputy will appreciate, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic a range of measures including restrictions on access to prisons have been required to protect our prison population, in line with public health advice.

I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that, throughout the Covid-19 crisis, every attempt has been made to maintain as many therapeutic services as possible for the whole prison population. These include services such as healthcare, psychology, psychiatry and drug counselling. I am informed that new approaches were introduced to maintain and deliver these services during the pandemic, including innovations including telephone and video facilities for as many services as possible.

I and the Irish Prison Service appreciate that many services are eager to resume contact with prisoners. I am assured that every effort is currently being made to broaden access and reinstate as many services as possible in a safe, controlled and appropriate manner and that services will be facilitated, insofar as is possible in line with national and international best practice guidelines. However, the Deputy will appreciate that such steps pose a number of challenges in a prison environment and must be carefully calibrated in line with ongoing risk assessments. The Irish Prison Service advises me that in this context, it will not be expected that all services could be afforded these opportunities, as the Irish Prison Service is limited in both time availability and the safe logistical access of prisoners to these services.

### **Legal Aid**

292. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to review the civil legal aid scheme with particular emphasis on the legal aid scheme and its application in family law cases; the date of the last comprehensive review of the legal aid scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12953/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The statutory position regarding the provision of civil legal aid derives from the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 under which the Legal Aid Board was established as the statutory provider of legal aid through the civil legal aid scheme.

Approximately two thirds of the cases dealt with by the Legal Aid Board, under the civil legal aid scheme, are connected with family law matters. The legal aid scheme as administered by the Board is recognised as having a key role in a modernised family court system, as is the use of family mediation.

In that context, I would like to draw the Deputy's attention to the fact that comprehensive proposals for modernisation and reform of the family court system, which include the preparation of a Family Court Bill, are being developed by my Department. Those proposals will involve a broad consideration as to the best means of providing access to various family law mechanisms available to those families involved in private family law cases, not least through the legal aid scheme. That consideration, will also allow for an examination of the recommendation contained in the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality Report on Reform of the Family Law System concerning the need for a full review of the legal aid scheme, with particular regard to means test rates, contribution requirements and eligibility.

As regards reviews in general, the Legal Aid Board reviews the operation of the civil legal aid scheme and submits proposals to my Department for consideration. My Department works with the Legal Aid Board on an ongoing basis in evaluating these proposals with the aim of optimising the ability of the Board to provide civil legal aid to persons of insufficient means.

### **English Language Training Organisations**

293. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on a document (details supplied); if she is considering introducing the measures outlined; her plans to engage with the groups; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12972/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** My Department has taken extensive measures to date to support students and the English language educational sector all the while engaging with MEI (Marketing English in Ireland), the representative body for the majority of language schools in Ireland. With regard to the visa measures outlined in the document referred to by the Deputy, my Department is committed to retaining the current Stamp 2 permission and the ancillary right to work for students holding this permission.

On 13 May 2020, my Department announced that immigration permissions due to expire between 20 May and 20 July 2020 will be automatically extended for two months. Any permission which was renewed by an earlier notice of 20 March 2020 and which therefore has a new expiry date between 20 May 2020 and 20 July 2020 is also renewed. This exceptional temporary measure also applies to non-nationals currently outside the State, provided the person otherwise meets the conditions set out in the notices.

On 26 May 2020 further measures were introduced to assist international students studying English in Ireland who have been impacted upon by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new measures are as follows:

- Students who left the State before completion of their studies due to COVID-19 may return and resume their studies and the duration of their absence will not count towards the two years maximum period of English language study allowed; and
- International English language students with a current, valid permission who are still in the State and who have completed the maximum two years permitted as a language student, but due to COVID-19 are unable to return home, may remain as students until the end of the year provided they re-enrol in an online course of study for the remainder of the year.

These new measures to support students will provide some assurance and certainty for the coming months. We will continue to keep the situation under active review as matters evolve in our national response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The renewal of permission is on the same basis as the existing permission and the same conditions attach. This means, for instance, that students will need to ensure that they remain enrolled on their course of study.

MEI (Marketing English in Ireland) have confirmed that most colleges are now offering on-line courses, and students should contact their college directly to make any necessary arrangements.

Visa required students will need to apply for a visa before returning to the State if the validity period of the visa held has expired. While the Immigration Service has temporarily ceased accepting new visa applications, persons legally resident in the State are included in the categories of Priority / Emergency cases, which will continue to be processed. Visa required students are advised to consult the Immigration Service website for the required documentation - [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie).

While both the Dublin area Registration Office in Burgh Quay and regional Registration Offices operated by An Garda Síochána remain temporarily closed, arrangements have been put in place for students awaiting first time registration, students who wish to change their permission applications and students who wish to avail of the Third Level Graduate Programme.

A new online Registration Renewal System for non-EEA national students based in Dublin was launched by my Department on 22 June, 2020.

Students wishing to renew their registration will complete their renewal online without having to book an appointment or personally attend the registration office. The service will be made available to all categories of non-EEA national students residing in the Dublin area only, who are eligible for renewal of their permission to reside in Ireland.

Students seeking to renew their permission will now complete the application form online via the following link <https://inisonline.jahs.ie>, upload copies of supporting documents online, pay the applicable fee and then submit their passport and current IRP card via registered post. Documents will be checked and, if approved, the passport will be stamped and returned by registered post and an IRP card issued by express post.

In general, the requirements for which countries are visa required to come to Ireland are kept under regular review in consultation with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. There are a wide range of factors that need to be taken into account, including the promotion of business and trade and facilitating people who genuinely wish to come here. However, there are a number of other factors that also must be taken into consideration when any change to the visa regime is contemplated.

The Government is pursuing a strategy of greater co-ordination and co-operation on visa issues with the United Kingdom (UK) in the context of the Common Travel Area (CTA) and the future expansion of the British-Irish Visa scheme. This scheme, which is agreed on a country by country basis, enables short stay visa holders to travel freely within the CTA. Since its launch for China and India there has been a substantial increase in the numbers of visitors from these countries. As part of this greater co-operation, the matter of alignment of those States whose citizens are visa required is an important consideration. The greater the extent of alignment between the two jurisdictions, the greater the opportunity to increase the numbers of tourism and business visits to the CTA.

As with all visa services worldwide, the overarching concern is to strike an appropriate balance between protecting the country's vital national interests by maintaining an effective immigration regime, while at the same time facilitating travel for those who want to come to Ireland.

Further updates will be provided on the Immigration Service website when available, and I would encourage all students to regularly consult our updates on the website at: [www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/COVID-19-updates-and-announcements](http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/COVID-19-updates-and-announcements).

A detailed Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document is also available on this website on the impact of COVID-19 on immigration and international protection. This document is regularly updated.

## Immigration Policy

294. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 260 of 9 June 2020, the procedure now being followed by the immigration authorities to determine the entitlement of the applicant under Irish or international law in view of the fact that the order to deport has been revoked; the extent to which the case can validly progress in the short term; the means by which it can be progressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12978/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** My Department is obliged, pursuant to section 26 of the International Protection Act 2015, to ensure that the identity of any person who applies for international protection is kept confidential. Section 26(1) sets out that *“the Minister and the Tribunal and their respective officers shall take all practicable steps to ensure that the identity of applicants is kept confidential”*.

Therefore, if an application for international protection has been made in the State, it is not the practice to comment on such applications. The applicant or their designated legal advisor should contact the International Protection Office (IPO) or the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) directly, as appropriate. This will enable a full and comprehensive reply to be provided.

The staff of the Chief International Protection Officer and International Protection Officers are independent by law in the exercise of their international protection functions. They are also bound by confidentiality provisions in respect of applicants as set out in the 2015 Act, and as a consequence, will only deal with the applicant or their legal representative in the processing of their application.

The law governing the examination and determination of applications for international protection is set out in the International Protection act 2015 and the document in the link below will help in understanding the procedures for processing such applications. [www.ipa.gov.ie/en/IPO/InfoBookletNew.pdf/Files/InfoBookletNew.pdf](http://www.ipa.gov.ie/en/IPO/InfoBookletNew.pdf/Files/InfoBookletNew.pdf) .

## Football Association of Ireland

295. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has engaged with an organisation (details supplied) in 2020 regarding issuing funding to it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12993/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has not issued any funding to the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) in 2020.

My Department has engaged with the FAI in 2020 in relation to the payment of a multi-annual grant awarded through the administration of the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration

Fund in 2016. The €150,073 grant, to be paid between April 2017 to April 2020, was awarded to the FAI following an open call for proposals for integration-related projects.

The relevant project combines football with English language teaching in order to integrate migrants into local communities. Such a project helps build engagement between established local communities and those newly joining those communities. EU funding covers 75% of the project cost and the FAI provide the remaining 25% of the cost.

The FAI received one (€45,000) instalment of their grant to date in 2017. Since the project commenced, Department officials have twice carried out spot checks to verify the expenditure. In addition, the FAI reports quarterly on financial and operational activities and these reports are reviewed by my Department.

A decision not to make any further instalment payments of the grant to the FAI was taken immediately after the CEO of Sport Ireland informed this Department, in April 2019, of its decision to withhold future funding to the FAI. The Department informed the FAI of this decision and that funding would only be restored once it become clear that confidence in governance for the organisation is re-established.

Following an audit of the FAI and revised guidance from Sport Ireland the following was agreed between the Department and the FAI in April 2020:

- My Department would restore funding from when it was suspended up until April 2019. However, the Department will retain funds until a final reconciliation is complete and a balancing statement will be issued.

- No extension would be provided to the Grant Agreement which ended on 9 April 2020.

- The FAI should provide quarterly reports and final reports to cover the period until the end of Grant Agreement.

At the time of this response the Department is awaiting reports and a final claim from the FAI for the previous 12 months.

*Question No. 296 answered with Question No. 288.*

## **Visa Applications**

297. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of joint family visa applications in the case of persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13024/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As previously advised, the joint family visa applications referred to by the Deputy were submitted to the Visa Office in Abuja, Nigeria on 1 April 2019. They were subsequently received by the Immigration Service in Dublin on 20 January 2020, for further processing, in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification.

The Policy Document contains a stated business target that visa applications to join non-EEA national family members should be dealt with within six months of receipt of application. However, it should be noted that this is a business target and does not constitute a legal obligation. The business target reflects the detailed and often complex assessment that is required to be carried out in relation to applications for family reunification.

It is not possible to give a definitive date as to when these applications will be finalised. All applications are processed in chronological order, based on date order of receipt. While every effort is made to process applications as soon as possible, processing times will vary having regard to the volume and complexity of applications, the possible need for the Immigration Service to investigate, inquire into, or seek further information, and the resources available.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the way the Immigration Service Delivery function (ISD) of my Department conduct its business. In line with advice issued by Government, HSE and the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), ISD has implemented a suite of measures to help in reducing the spread of the virus. These measures include the closure of our offices in Burgh Quay and the implementation of remote working for Immigration Services staff in order to comply with social and physical distancing measures. Unfortunately, these measures have led to a reduction in processing capacity. While delays are expected including in the processing of family re-unification visa applications, ISD is endeavouring to keep operating to the best of its ability.

Further updates will be provided on the Immigration Service website when available, and I would encourage the Deputy to view the updates and the detailed Frequently Asked Questions document on the Immigration Service website at: [www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/COVID-19-updates-and-announcements](http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/COVID-19-updates-and-announcements).

In addition, applicants can e-mail queries directly to [visamail@justice.ie](mailto:visamail@justice.ie) and may also keep up to date on Visa applications at [www.inis.gov.ie/en/inis/pages/visa%20decisions](http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/inis/pages/visa%20decisions).

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.

## Deportation Orders

298. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the request to set aside a deportation order in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13025/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 01 February 2019.

Representations, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), have been received on behalf of the person requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked.

This request will be considered as soon as possible and a decision will then be made to either "affirm" or "revoke" the existing Deportation Order. This decision will be communicated in writing. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

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.

### **Citizenship Ceremonies**

299. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will consider online citizenship ceremonies for naturalised citizens in view of the fact regular citizenship ceremonies cannot take place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13026/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** Following on from the necessary postponement of the citizenship ceremonies scheduled for July of this year in the INEC Killarney, work commenced immediately on the examination of alternative methods of service delivery.

A critical consideration is the protection of the welfare and safety of the participants and the general public. It is also essential that any arrangements put in place ensure the event is held with an appropriate degree of dignity and solemnity, as befits an event of such importance in the lives of our new citizens. Apart from marking a key milestone in the lives of those who have chosen this State as their home, the citizenship ceremonies satisfy an important legal requirement for the granting of a certificate of naturalisation as successful applicants must take an oath of fidelity to the Nation, as administered by the Presiding Officer, a retired member of the judiciary.

Testing has already commenced on platforms which will enable the delivery of virtual ceremonies and as soon as the necessary arrangements are in place a notice will be placed on the ISD website and applicants will be informed.

It is my Department's intention that large scale ceremonies will recommence once circumstances allow.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

300. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the resources she has made available regarding the enforcement of the terms and conditions attached to the locator form; the procedures in place to track and engage with persons that are non-compliant; if gardaí have arresting and or supervisory powers in relation to the locator form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13097/20]

306. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has engaged with the Minister for Health and the Garda Commissioner in respect of the use of a locator form for persons entering the State; the resources she has made available regarding the enforcement of the terms and conditions attached to the locator form; if she has consulted with the Garda Commissioner in this regard; the procedures in place to track and engage with persons that are non-compliant; if she has engaged with the Minister for Health and the Garda Commissioner in this regard; if gardaí have arresting and or supervisory powers in relation to the locator form; if not, her plans to introduce them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13198/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 300 and 306 together.

My Department agreed to undertake, on behalf of the health authorities, the collection of public health passenger locator forms on a temporary administrative basis. Any case of non-

compliance are referred directly to the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) for follow up. Section 31(a) of the Health Act 1947 (as amended) provides for powers of arrest for An Garda Síochána. The Act and the regulations were brought forward by the Minister for Health.

The system of spot checks and follow up calls is being operated by officials from the Border Management Unit (BMU) of my Department and the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) on behalf of the health authorities. The BMU operate the scheme at Dublin Airport, which is the principal route through which people enter the State by air. The Garda National Immigration (GNIB) manage the compliance for the other ports after which the passenger locator forms are forwarded to the BMU in Dublin Airport, who also carry out the follow-up calls for those ports.

The BMU has established a system to follow-up on all arrivals at a proportionate rate of a minimum of 70%, after removal of the exempt categories of passengers. The cohort of passengers failing to answer initial phone calls are followed up with repeated further telephone contacts. The first calls are made two days after passengers have arrived into the State. For any passengers staying in the State for up to 14 days or more, a second call will be made on day 10 to ensure they are still residing at the address provided and self-isolating.

The BMU operates 24/7 on a split roster over two terminals in Dublin Airport, comprising of eight teams working a 12 hour shift. The current staffing numbers are as follows:

1 Assistant Principal Officer

2 Higher Executive Officers

18 Executive Officers

128 Clerical Officers.

Since the introduction of the Passenger Locator Form, every member of the Unit has been involved in the collection of passenger information and follow up phone calls to passengers.

The BMU are undertaking this role on behalf of the Department of Health until the end of June, 2020 at which time it will be necessary for BMU staff to revert to their core duty of immigrating passengers to protect and secure Ireland's borders.

### **Garda Transport Provision**

301. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a contract has recently been put out for tender for the supply of new motorbikes for the Garda fleet; and if so, when she expects the new motorbikes to come into the fleet. [13145/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** In accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. In addition, the allocation of Garda resources is a matter for the Commissioner, in light of identified operational demands. This includes responsibility for the allocation of Garda vehicles among the various Garda divisions. As Minister, I have no role 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.

As the Deputy may be aware, significant capital investment is being made in An Garda Síochána, including a total of €46 million specifically for the Garda fleet between 2016 and 2021.

This continuing investment is intended to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

Of this investment, a total of €9 million was made available for purchase and fit-out of additional Garda vehicles in 2020. I am also informed that in order to protect the ongoing availability of vehicles and in anticipation of the impact of public health restrictions on motor factory or fit-out workplaces, 94 additional vehicles were purchased by the Garda authorities in March 2020 at a cost of €2.4m and fit-out costs of €600,000. In addition, a further 210 vehicles have been hired by An Garda Síochána this year, to provide additional capacity during the Covid-19 pandemic.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that as of 31 May 2020, there were 2,928 vehicles attached to the Garda Fleet, including vehicles attached to the national units and not including hired vehicles. I understand from the Garda authorities that this total includes 115 motorcycles.

Motorcycles for the Garda fleet are procured using a contract put in place by the Office of Government Procurement Contract.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that An Garda Síochána has recently taken delivery of 25 new motorcycles and that these are expected to be allocated in the near future, when the necessary operational fit-out has been completed. Allocation will be a matter for the Commissioner and his management team, on the basis of identified operational demand.

### **Garda Transport Provision**

302. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if funding will be provided to purchase extra Garda public order unit vans; and if so, when those vans will come into the fleet in addition to the 15 new Garda public order unit vans that came into the fleet in 2019 and 2020. [13146/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** In accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. In addition, the allocation of Garda resources is a matter for the Commissioner, in light of identified operational demands. This includes responsibility for the allocation of Garda vehicles among the various Garda divisions.

As Minister, I have no role 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.

Significant capital investment is being made in An Garda Síochána, including a total of €46 million specifically for the Garda fleet between 2016 and 2021. This continuing investment is intended to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

Of this investment, a total of €9 million was made available for purchase and fit-out of additional Garda vehicles in 2020. I am also informed that in order to protect the ongoing availability of vehicles and in anticipation of the impact of public health restrictions on motor factory or fit-out workplaces, 94 additional vehicles were purchased by the Garda authorities in March 2020 at a cost of €2.4m and fit-out costs of €600,000. The allocation of these and all other vehicles in the fleet is entirely a matter for the Commissioner and his management team.

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I am informed by the Garda authorities that as of 31 May 2020, there were 2,928 vehicles attached to the Garda Fleet, including vehicles attached to the national units.

I understand that as of May 2020, a total of 29 vehicles categorised as public order vans were deployed nationally across all Garda regions and that 15 public order vans were added to the fleet in the second half of 2019.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that there are no plans to purchase additional public order vans this year and that the operational need for all vehicle types will be considered in the context of the 2021 budgetary process.

Finally and for clarity, it may be noted that the total fleet figure included above does not include the additional 210 vehicles which have been hired by An Garda Síochána this year, to provide additional capacity during the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Garda Training**

303. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when each specialist training course held at either Garda headquarters or the Garda training college will resume. [13147/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The administration and management of An Garda Síochána is by law a matter for the Garda Commissioner. This includes responsibilities for matters including recruitment and training of members. These are not matters for which I am responsible as Minister.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated public health restrictions, public access to the Garda College has been prohibited since 12 March 2020. At that time, over 300 Garda trainees attested earlier than scheduled and sworn members of Garda College staff were deployed to operational duties in order to enhance Garda capacity to respond to that pandemic.

In terms of current position, I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that arrangements have now been made which are permitting further intakes of Garda recruits, despite the current situation.

However I am informed that it remains the case that all specialist training, with the exception of Firearms Training, was suspended on 16 March 2020 in the context of the pandemic. I understand that this suspension remains in place at this time, notwithstanding the arrangements in place the intake of new recruits. An Garda Síochána indicate that a definitive date cannot be provided at this point for resumption of all specialist training, but that plans for resumption will be drawn up in the coming weeks and months, in line with Government and public health guidance.

### **Student Visas**

304. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration has been given to further visa extensions for students that are here to study English that have had classes cancelled as a result of the ongoing pandemic; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13155/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** On 13 May 2020, my Department announced that immigration permissions due to expire between 20 May and 20 July

2020 will be automatically extended for two months. Any permission which was renewed by an earlier notice of 20 March 2020 and which therefore has a new expiry date between 20 May 2020 and 20 July 2020 is also renewed. This exceptional temporary measure also applies to non-nationals currently outside the State, provided the person otherwise meets the conditions set out in the notices.

On 26 May 2020, my Department set out further measures to assist international students studying English in Ireland who have been impacted upon by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new measures are as follows:

- Students who left the State before completion of their studies due to COVID-19 may return and resume their studies and the duration of their absence will not count towards the two years maximum period of English language study allowed; and

- International English language students with a current, valid permission who are still in the State and who have completed the maximum two years permitted as a language student, but due to COVID-19 are unable to return home, may remain as students until the end of the year provided they re-enrol in an online course of study for the remainder of the year.

These new measures will provide students with some assurance and certainty for the coming months. We will continue to keep the situation under active review as matters evolve in our national response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The renewal of permission is on the same basis as the existing permission and the same conditions attach. This means, for instance, that students will need to ensure that they remain enrolled on their course of study.

Visa required students will need to apply for a visa before returning to the State if the validity period of the visa has expired. While the Immigration Service has temporarily ceased accepting new visa applications, persons legally resident in the State are included in the categories of Priority / Emergency cases, which will continue to be processed. Visa required students are advised to consult the Immigration Service website for the required documentation - [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie).

While both the Dublin area Registration Office in Burgh Quay and regional Registration Offices operated by An Garda Síochána remain temporarily closed, arrangements have been put in place for students awaiting first time registration, students who wish to change their permission applications and students who wish to avail of the Third Level Graduate Programme.

A new online Registration Renewal System for non-EEA national students based in Dublin was launched by my Department on 22 June, 2020.

Students wishing to renew their registration will complete their renewal online without having to book an appointment or personally attend the registration office. The service will be made available to all categories of non-EEA national students residing in the Dublin area, who are eligible for renewal of their permission to reside in Ireland.

Such students will now complete the application form online via the following link <https://inisonline.jahs.ie>, upload copies of supporting documents online, pay the applicable fee and then submit their passport and current IRP card via registered post. Documents will be checked and, if approved, the passport will be stamped and returned by registered post and an IRP card issued by express post.

Further updates will be provided on the Immigration Service website, and I would encour-

age all students to regularly consult our updates on the website at:

*[www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/COVID-19-updates-and-announcements](http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/COVID-19-updates-and-announcements)*.

A detailed Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document, which is regularly update, is also available on this website on the impact of COVID-19 on immigration and international protection.

## Student Visas

305. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration has been given to reviewing the requirement for English language students to enrol in an online course in order to gain an extension to their student visa, in view of the fact contact learning in an English speaking environment is usually the express reason these students have chosen to travel here. [13156/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I appreciate that students have travelled to Ireland to avail of in-person classes. However, due to the current COVID-19 restrictions that is not possible at this time. I understand and recognise the difficulties that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on all immigrants, and in particular our international student population.

My Department has taken extensive measures to date to support students and the English language educational sector.

On 13 May 2020, my Department announced that immigration permissions due to expire between 20 May and 20 July 2020 will be automatically extended for two months. Any permission which was renewed by an earlier notice of 20 March 2020 and which therefore has a new expiry date between 20 May 2020 and 20 July 2020 is also renewed. This exceptional temporary measure also applies to non-nationals currently outside the State, provided the person otherwise meets the conditions set out in the notices.

On 26 May 2020 further measures were introduced to assist international students studying English in Ireland who have been impacted upon by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new measures are as follows:

- Students who left the State before completion of their studies due to COVID-19 may return and resume their studies and the duration of their absence will not count towards the two years maximum period of English language study allowed; and
- International English language students with a current, valid permission who are still in the State and who have completed the maximum two years permitted as a language student, but due to COVID-19 are unable to return home, may remain as students until the end of the year provided they re-enrol in an online course of study for the remainder of the year.

These new measures to support students will provide some assurance and certainty for the coming months. We will continue to keep the situation under active review as matters evolve in our national response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The renewal of a permission is on the same basis as the existing permission and the same conditions attach. Therefore, anyone resident in Ireland with a student permission is required to attend scheduled classes and, in the current circumstances, this includes where classes are provided online. The Government Roadmap for reopening society and business will guide when

on-site classes can recommence.

Visa required students will need to apply for a visa before returning to the State if the validity period of the visa held has expired. While the Immigration Service has temporarily ceased accepting new visa applications, persons legally resident in the State are included in the categories of Priority / Emergency cases, which will continue to be processed. Visa required students are advised to consult the Immigration Service website for the required documentation - [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie).

While both the Dublin area Registration Office in Burgh Quay and regional Registration Offices operated by An Garda Síochána remain temporarily closed, arrangements have been put in place for students awaiting first time registration, students who wish to change their permission applications and students who wish to avail of the Third Level Graduate Programme.

A new online Registration Renewal System for non-EEA national students based in Dublin was launched by my Department on 22 June, 2020.

Students wishing to renew their registration will complete their renewal online without having to book an appointment or personally attend the registration office. The service will be made available to all categories of non-EEA national students residing in the Dublin area only, who are eligible for renewal of their permission to reside in Ireland.

Students seeking to renew their permission will now complete the application form online via the following link <https://inisonline.jahs.ie>, upload copies of supporting documents online, pay the applicable fee and then submit their passport and current IRP card via registered post. Documents will be checked and, if approved, the passport will be stamped and returned by registered post and an IRP card issued by express post.

Further updates will be provided on the Immigration Service website when available, and I would encourage all students to regularly consult our updates on the website at: [www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/COVID-19-updates-and-announcements](http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/COVID-19-updates-and-announcements) .

A detailed Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document is also available on this website on the impact of COVID-19 on immigration and international protection. This document is regularly updated.

*Question No. 306 answered with Question No. 300.*

### **Direct Provision System**

**307. Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of inspection visits to permanent and temporary direct provision centres in County Wicklow since March 2020; the way in which it has been ensured adequate Covid-19 restriction measures have been adhered to in direct provision centres in the county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13239/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** It was not deemed safe for staff or residents to have on-site inspections since the commencement of the COVID-19 pandemic. As soon as it is practicable and safe to do so, inspections will recommence. Only permanent accommodation centres are subject to the formal inspection process due to differing contractual obligations on permanent accommodation centres as opposed to emergency accommodation.

Our absolute priority is to ensure the health and welfare of our residents, centre staff and the wider community. We have been working closely with the HSE at national and local level on a daily basis to ensure that we are taking the right steps at this time.

My Department has 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 centre. We intend to continue this policy after the crisis.

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 currently has dedicated self-isolation facilities for residents in Dublin, Cork and Dundalk. Residents in these facilities have their own bedroom and their own bathroom

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 management and their 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.

Residents in all centres have been made aware of the need to practice social and physical distancing and good hand hygiene and coughing/sneezing etiquette. Translations of public health advice have been provided to centres. During this time, centres have been asked to increase the standard and frequency of cleaning throughout the centres, paying particular attention to communal areas. A regular supply of hand sanitiser is in place for all centres and this is distributed as needed. Other PPE is also distributed as needed and in line with HPSC guidelines on its appropriate use in residential settings.

During this time, to ensure that we are in regular contact with our centres, a dedicated communications team within IPAS has been established. This team undertakes regular calls with all centre managers across our network of permanent and temporary centres. Feedback from these conversations is reflected in the newsletters circulated to all centre managers and to residents to promote shared learning and best practice. The calls also ensure that any issues or concerns can be raised without delay for appropriate resolution for the benefit of residents and staff. In addition, residents also have the option to contact IPAS staff directly via email and can also raise concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children.

My Department also established a national telephone support service for residents run by the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and the Freephone number has been highlighted to all residents through one of our regular newsletters.

While inspections of accommodation centres cannot take place at this time, I hope that this information will provide you with some reassurance that we are continuing to work closely with the HSE and centre management to protect the health and safety of all residents and staff as a priority.

### **Immigration Status**

308. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13244/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** In response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

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

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

### **Citizenship Status**

309. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if citizenship will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13245/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** My Department has no record of receiving a current application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy.

A previous application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person concerned on 28 September 2018. A letter was issued on the 22 October 2018 stating that the application was deemed ineligible due to the required criteria not being met at that time.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory conditions as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. All applications for a certificate of naturalisation are processed and assessed individually in accordance with the provisions of the Act. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

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

### **Residency Permits**

310. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if arrangements will be made to grant an emergency GNIB card in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13246/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The restrictions attendant to the current COVID-19 pandemic have regrettably resulted in significant challenges to the delivery of normal services. However I can assure the Deputy that the matter is receiving ongoing

attention and as soon as a practical plan is in place for the re-commencement of normal service delivery, notifications will be placed on our website ([www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie)).

Currently the Dublin area Registration Office located in Burgh Quay remains temporarily closed and consequently no IRP cards are being issued. Please also note that all Registration Offices for non-Dublin residents operated by An Garda Síochána have also temporarily closed.

There is no impediment to the person concerned leaving the State should such flights be available however if they wish to return to the State and their IRP card has expired that person will need to apply for an online visa from outside the State in order to return to the State. The person concerned should contact their nearest Embassy or Visa Office to confirm what, if any, supporting documentation is required to return to the State.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic some leeway was given to people, legally resident in the state, to travel with an expired IRP card and a copy of the Minister's statement. However, this emergency period is over and airlines now work on the instructions that visa required persons for Ireland require either a valid IRP card or a valid visa.

The ISD website, link below, will be updated as necessary to reflect the latest positions.

[www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/COVID-19-updates-and-announcements](http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/COVID-19-updates-and-announcements).

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

311. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Probate Office will reopen to the public. [13278/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** Under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the work to restructure the Probate Office, taking account of current public health guidelines, to facilitate personal appointments is ongoing.

The primary concern of the Courts Service is to protect service users and staff and to ensure that appointments can be facilitated safely.

I was further informed that the application process is also being redesigned and that all existing applicants will be notified shortly of the new arrangements. However, it will be some weeks before the service is restored. When the service for new personal applicants for Probate reopens, resources will be directed to reduce the adverse impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on waiting times.

### **Garda Transport Provision**

312. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda vehicles attached to the Wexford Garda fleet as of 22 June 2020, in tabular form. [13286/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** In accordance with the

Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. In addition, the allocation of Garda resources is a matter for the Commissioner, in light of identified operational demands. This includes responsibility for the allocation of Garda vehicles among the various Garda divisions. As Minister, I have no role 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.

Significant capital investment is being made in An Garda Síochána, including a total of €46 million specifically for the Garda fleet between 2016 and 2021. This continuing investment is intended to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

Of this investment, a total of €9 million was made available for purchase and fit-out of additional Garda vehicles in 2020. I am also informed that in order to protect the ongoing availability of vehicles and in anticipation of the impact of public health restrictions on motor factory or fit-out workplaces, 94 additional vehicles were purchased by the Garda authorities in March 2020 at a cost of €2.4m and fit-out costs of €600,000. The allocation of these and all other vehicles in the fleet is entirely a matter for the Commissioner and his management team.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that as of 31 May 2020, there were 2,928 vehicles attached to the Garda Fleet, including vehicles attached to the national units.

The table below, furnished to me by the Garda authorities, sets out the number of vehicles allocated to Wexford Division as at 31 May 2020.

Wexford Division	Cars	Vans	Motor-cycles	4x4	*Others	Total
Enniscorthy	23	2	1	1	0	27
New Ross	8	2	0	0	0	10
Wexford	20	6	0	1	0	27
Total	51	10	1	2	0	64

\* The category 'others' refers to MPV, SUV, Minibus or Prisoner Conveyance Vehicles

Finally and for clarity, it may be noted that the total fleet figure included above does not include the additional 210 vehicles which have been hired by An Garda Síochána this year, to provide additional capacity during the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Anti-Racism Measures

313. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a staff member of a company (details supplied) is sitting on the anti-racism committee in view of the involvement of the company in the private prison industry, multiple allegations of human rights abuses at its facilities and its involvement in the surveillance of asylum seekers in the UK. [13298/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** In determining the membership of the Anti-Racism Committee, my Department was eager to gain from the experience and expertise of a person with a management background who has contributed to the equality and diversity agenda within the corporate sector. The work of the Committee will be action-oriented and practical, and requires a membership with practical experience from varied sectors, includ-

ing the corporate sector.

The individual to whom the Deputy is referring has been appointed to the Anti-Racism Committee in her personal capacity because of her considerable expertise at senior management level in promoting diversity and inclusion in side and outside the workplace. She has demonstrated a strong leadership role in championing diversity and inclusion within leadership roles in the corporate sector in Ireland and is personally very committed to this area. For her role and work in this area she was made a Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite by the French Ambassador to Ireland.

As a member of the Anti-Racism Committee this individual does not represent the interests of a particular company; rather she is on the Committee to provide her expertise and experience in advancing inclusion, equality and diversity in the workplace from the corporate sector perspective.

Given her track record, I anticipate she will have extensive action-oriented and practical insights to inform the work of the Committee.

I acknowledge there have been concerns voiced regarding Sodexo in the United Kingdom. However, in Ireland Sodexo was awarded the *Gold Standard in Excellence Through People* by the National Standards Authority of Ireland in 2018. It was also voted one of the Best Large Workplaces in Ireland in 2018 by the Great Places to Work Institute. Sodexo Ireland has no role in managing any international protection accommodation centres in Ireland, nor does it run immigration detention centres as they are not used in Ireland. At a global level, the Sodexo Group has joined the G7 Business for Inclusive Growth (B4IG) coalition coordinated by the OECD. This is a coalition of 34 leading international companies who have made a commitment to step up business action to advance human rights throughout their value chains, by building inclusive workplaces and strengthening inclusion in their internal and external business ecosystems.

For these reasons, I am confident that the person in question is an appropriate member of the Anti-Racism Committee and that she will make a very valuable contribution to its work.

### **Prisoner Complaints Procedures**

314. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the introduction and implementation of the new Prison Service complaints policy; if she will provide same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13323/20]

316. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of category A serious complaints made by prisoners in 2019 and to date in 2020; the details of the outcomes upheld, not upheld, not proven, terminated, incomplete or withdrawn; the length of time it took to complete and communicate the outcomes of complaints to prisoners; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13325/20]

317. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of complaints made by prisoners in 2019 and to date in 2020; the details of the outcomes upheld, not upheld, not proven, terminated, incomplete or withdrawn; and the length of time it took to complete and communicate the outcomes of complaints to prisoners. [13326/20]

318. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of complaints made by prisoner officers against prisoners and persons on remand in 2019 and to date in 2020; the details of the outcomes upheld, not upheld, not proven, terminated, incomplete or withdrawn; and the length of time it took to complete and communicate the outcomes

of complaints to prisoner officers. [13327/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 314 and 316 to 318, inclusive, together.

A prisoner complaints system was introduced by the Irish Prison Service in November 2012, based on a model recommended by the then-Inspector of Prisons, the late Judge Michael Reilly. The current Irish Prison Service Complaints Policy is available on the website [www.irishprisons.ie](http://www.irishprisons.ie).

As set out in more detail in that policy, all prisoners have the right to make a complaint at any time and all complaints are treated with the utmost seriousness. Complaints vary in nature and seriousness - for example, some may relate to conditions of accommodation, quality of food or access to services while other complaints can be more serious such as allegations of assault, mistreatment or intimidation. The current system categorises complaints according to their nature and seriousness, ranging from the most serious 'Category A' complaint through to a 'Category F' complaint. Further information on this system, including these categories, is available on the website of the Irish Prison Service at the following link: [www.irishprisons.ie/prisoner-services/prisoner-complaints/](http://www.irishprisons.ie/prisoner-services/prisoner-complaints/).

The most serious "Category A" complaints are those alleging assault or use of excessive force against a prisoner, or ill treatment, racial abuse, discrimination, intimidation, threats or any other conduct against a prisoner of a nature and gravity likely to bring discredit on the Irish Prison Service. I understand that Category A complaints are investigated by persons outside the Prison Service.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of Category A complaints received in 2019 and to date in 2020 that were upheld, not upheld, not proven, terminated, incomplete or withdrawn is set out in the following table, furnished to me by the Irish Prison Service.

	2019	2020 (as at 25 June)
Outcome	Category A Complaints by Outcome	Category A Complaints by Outcome
Upheld	3	0
Not Upheld	18	2
Not Proved	0	0
Terminated 57B (5) (c)	0	0
Incomplete	26	21
Withdrawn	7	1
Part upheld	3	0
Discontinued	2	0
Re Categorised	1	0
Total complaints made	60	24

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the length of time it has taken to complete the investigation of Category A complaints by prisoners in 2019 and to date in 2020 is set out in the following table, furnished to me by the Irish Prison Service. I am assured by the Irish Prison Service that, throughout the prison estate, every effort is made to communicate the outcome of any investigation to the complainant and all other parties involved (where appropriate) within a week of receipt of information on that outcome.

Category A Complaints Investigations completed	2019	2020 (as at 25 June)
3 months or less to complete	0	2
3 – 6 months to complete	33	1
6 – 12 months to complete	1	0
Outstanding investigations	26	21
Total	60	24

I understand that, due to the necessary restrictions introduced in relation to prisons in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, investigators could not be facilitated in entering prisons. This has resulted in a number of cases outstanding. However, I would like to assure the Deputy that all such cases have been assigned to investigators and these are included in the 2020 figures. I further understand that investigators will return to prisons next week, to resume their work.

In relation to Question 318, I understand from the Deputy's clarification that the information sought relates to complaints by prisoner and not prison officers.

In relation to the total number of complaints made in 2019 and to-date in 2020 across all complaint categories, I am informed that unfortunately it has not been possible for the Irish Prison Service to collate this information in the timeframe available. I have requested the Irish Prison Service to compile this information and I will write directly to the Deputy with this information as soon as it is available.

Finally, I note that the former Inspector of Prisons carried out a review of the complaint system in June 2016 and made a number of recommendations. His report "Review, Evaluation and Analysis of the Operation of the present Irish Prison Service Complaints Procedure" is available on my Department's website - [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie).

I have been advised that the introduction and implementation of a new Prison Service Complaints Policy is a priority for the Irish Prison Service. I understand that work is well advanced on measures to implement the new Policy, which includes a fully integrated IT complaints system to streamline the management of all complaints along with a new appeal process.

More specifically, I am informed that a new Complaints Unit has been established in the Irish Prison Service and that training is currently being rolled out to prison staff. Amendments required to the Prison Rules, 2007 are also currently being finalised. I understand that the Irish Prison Service expects to introduce the new prisoner complaints system before the end of 2020.

### **Prisoner Complaints Procedures**

315. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timeline for extending the remit of the Office of the Ombudsman to include prisoner complaints; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13324/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** A prisoner complaints system was introduced by the Irish Prison Service in November 2012, based on a model recommended by the then-Inspector of Prisons, the late Judge Michael Reilly who was independent of Government in the exercise of his functions. This system categorises complaints according to their nature and seriousness, ranging from the most serious 'Category A' complaint through to a 'Category F' complaint. Further information on this system is available on the website of

the Irish Prison Service at the following link: [www.irishprisons.ie/prisoner-services/prisoner-complaints/](http://www.irishprisons.ie/prisoner-services/prisoner-complaints/).

The Inspector carried out a review of this system in June 2016 and made a number of recommendations. His report “*Review, Evaluation and Analysis of the Operation of the present Irish Prison Service Complaints Procedure*” is available on my Department’s website - [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie).

As the Deputy will be aware, among the key recommendations in that report was that complaints by prisoners should be subject to review by the Ombudsman, who would also be able to deal with complaints directly in the case of undue delay. This recommendation was accepted and my officials, including officials from the Irish Prison Service, have been progressing the matter, with the aim of establishing a more effective complaints system for prisoners.

I understand that, in discussions on these matters with the Ombudsman, it has been agreed that his engagement with the process will begin after the new complaints procedure has been introduced and bedded down as an internal process in the Irish Prison Service in the first instance.

These changes to the Irish Prison Service process requires administrative supports such as additional personnel, changes to the Prison Rules, drafting of new policy documents and a new ICT system. I am informed that work is well advanced on all of these measures and the Irish Prison Service expect to introduce the new prisoner complaints system before the end of 2020.

*Question Nos. 316 to 318, inclusive, answered with Question No. 314.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

319. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the blanket extension which was granted to American citizens, which allowed them to stay here for an extra two months due to the Covid-19 pandemic will affect their ability to return here for longer than one month later in 2020 (details supplied); if they will be allowed another three month visit; if not, if the visit will be restricted to one month due to the blanket extension which was granted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13362/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** In light of the uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, immigration permissions due to expire between 20 May 2020 and 20 July 2020 have been automatically extended for two months. The renewal of permission is on the same basis as the existing permission and the same conditions attach.

Any permission which was renewed by the previous notice of 20 March 2020 and which therefore has a new expiry date between 20 May 2020 and 20 July 2020 is automatically renewed by this notice for a further 2 months.

Any person whose permission was renewed under these provisions will not be affected on subsequent visits to the State provided they are for genuine short term visits.

The Deputy should be aware that there is not an automatic entitlement to visit the country for 90 days. As is provided for in Section 4(6) of the Immigration Act 2004, entry for a particular period is at the absolute discretion of the Immigration Officer examining the application for entry at the port. Each application for entry to the State is assessed on its own merits.

Therefore, the person referred to by the Deputy should ensure that on arrival in the state they have all of the appropriate documentation, confirming the purpose of their visit, available for

inspection by the immigration officer. All relevant factors are taken into account, the principal ones being the purpose of the visit or stay, the duration of stay, the ability of the individual to support themselves during their stay, and proof that the person will exit the country on or before the expiry of any permission given. It is important to note that the powers granted to an Irish Immigration Officer are not unfettered. The Immigration Act 2004 provides for the grounds on which an individual may be granted or refused leave to land at a port of entry.

### Protected Disclosures

320. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a whistleblower complaint was received from a person (details supplied) by e-mail on 9 May 2020; if so, the stage at which the complaint is at; and when the complaint will receive a response. [13363/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The Protected Disclosures Act was enacted in 2014 to introduce specific protections for whistleblowers. The Deputy will appreciate that the protection of the identity of the persons making disclosures is a core provision in the Act. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for me to comment as to whether my Department has received a specific disclosure or not.

I would ask that the Deputy encourage the person in question to contact my Department directly by emailing *speakup@justice.ie*. The person may, if they so wish, indicate that they consent to sharing of information with the Deputy.

### Child Abuse

321. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a retrospective child abuse case deemed founded by Tusla is normally then investigated by An Garda Síochána or the DPP regardless of whether they investigated it previously; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13373/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The Deputy will appreciate that, in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including the investigation of allegations of criminal offences. Further, the Director of Public Prosecutions is independent in the exercise of her functions. As Minister, I have no role in such criminal investigations or decisions on prosecutions.

I have requested information from An Garda Síochána and will write directly to the Deputy when I receive it. Information in relation to Tusla may be requested directly from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

### Visa Applications

322. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an application for a long stay visa will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13444/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The person concerned was informed, by email dated 29 May 2020, that they must apply for de facto preclearance prior to

applying for an Irish entry visa. To date, no application for preclearance has been received. The visa application cannot be processed without prior preclearance.

Further information on the preclearance process for de facto partners of Irish Nationals is available on my Department's website at:

[www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/de-facto-partner-of-an-irish-national](http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/de-facto-partner-of-an-irish-national) .

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

### **Garda Strength**

323. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number and rank of members of An Garda Síochána assigned to County Mayo in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13463/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for the management of An Garda Síochána, including personnel matters and deployment of resources. As Minister, I have no role 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.

The resources provided 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. As at 31 May 2020, there are now 14,700 Gardaí nationwide, supported by over 3,000 Garda staff and these numbers are continuing to grow.

This total figure includes the Garda trainees from two separate intake classes who attested earlier than scheduled in March 2020, following an operational decision by the Garda Commissioner to augment An Garda Síochána's capacity to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Specifically in relation to Mayo, I am informed by the Garda authorities that as at 31 May 2020 there were 348 Gardaí assigned to the Mayo Division. This represents a significant increase of 45 Gardaí in the Division since the end of 2015.

A detailed breakdown of the Garda workforce, including both Garda members and staff, is available on my Department's website.

Detail of Garda deployment for all Garda Divisions, as furnished to me by An Garda Síochána, is available at the following link:

[www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_May\\_2020.xlsx/Files/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_May\\_2020.xlsx](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_May_2020.xlsx/Files/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_May_2020.xlsx) .

This information is updated every month with the latest data provided by An Garda Síochána and published on my Department's website, in the interests of transparency and for the convenience of Deputies and the wider public.

Additional information on the Garda workforce, as furnished to me by An Garda Síochána, is available at the following link: [www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Garda\\_Workforce](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Garda_Workforce).

Information on Garda staff, as furnished to me by An Garda Síochána, is available at the following link: [www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Garda\\_Staff](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Garda_Staff).

### Garda Strength

324. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff employed at the Garda Information Services Centre, Castlebar, County Mayo over the past four years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13464/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As the Deputy is aware, the Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for the management of An Garda Síochána, including personnel matters and 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 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. As at 31 May 2020, there are now 14,700 Gardaí nationwide, supported by over 3,000 Garda staff and these numbers are continuing to grow.

The Garda Information Service Centre (GISC) was established by An Garda Síochána in Castlebar in 2005. I understand that it operates on a 24 hour and seven day a week basis, all throughout the year, with objectives including the reduction of time spent by operational members on administrative duties and improvement of the quality of data at An Garda Síochána. I am informed by An Garda Síochána that the GISC is staffed entirely by Garda Staff.

The following table, furnished to me by the Garda authorities sets out the number of staff assigned to GISC from 2016 up to 31 May 2020.

Year	Total Garda staff assigned to GISC (FTE)
2020 (as at 31 May)	211.9
December 2019	215
December 2018	221.8
December 2017	207.2
December 2016	184.3

I am advised that there are vacancies in GISC and that, while recruitment has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, An Garda Síochána continues to recruit Garda staff in line with “A Policing Service for the Future”, the implementation plan for the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland.

I am further informed that a review of the functions of GISC has been carried out, as recommended by the Commission and that its recommendations and staffing implications are under consideration.

### Garda Youth Diversion Projects

325. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will reinstate Garda youth diversion project funding to a project (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13490/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the statutory framework relating to young offenders and the Garda Diversion Programme is set out in the Children Act 2001. The nationwide network of Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) is supported by my Department.

GYDPs are community-based, multi-agency, crime prevention initiatives which seek to divert young people who have become involved in criminal or anti-social behaviour. The projects aim to support young people and bring about the conditions in which their behavioural patterns in relation to law and order can develop and mature through positive interventions and interaction.

My Department has a responsibility to ensure that an effective GYDP service is in place for young people who commit offences and for whom the Diversion Programme is considered suitable. This includes the need for local community-based GYDPs to provide intensive and effective interventions as well as activities suitable for young people with challenging behaviour and who need additional support. The Department is also committed to ensuring that additional services will be put in place for harder-to-engage young people, who have not previously been seen as suitable for GYDPs.

I can confirm that my Department no longer provides funding to the organisation referred to by the Deputy. This decision was taken after a long process of careful consideration and discussion, including with An Garda Síochána locally, and following a number of meetings with the organisation itself.

Revised arrangements funded by my Department are in place in the area to ensure that the GYDP service continue to be available. The replacement service providers are all GYDPs which had already been in operation locally and which have the necessary skills and expertise to ensure that the service is available to all young people in the area who could benefit from it.

I would also like to assure the Deputy that my Department is committed to making sure that GYDP services continue and indeed are enhanced in the specific area referred to. My Department has doubled spending for GYDPs in the relevant area, with approximately €848,000 allocated this year compared to €426,000 last year.

### **Garda Strength**

326. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the Garda staffing levels in each division prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic; and the increases in staffing since the outbreak of the pandemic in each division in tabular form. [13527/20]

335. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details of Garda staffing levels in each Garda station across the Clare Garda division prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in tabular form; the details of increases in staffing in these stations since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13637/20]

336. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details of Garda staffing levels in each Garda station across the Limerick Garda division prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in tabular form; the details of increases in staffing in these stations

since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13638/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 326, 335 and 336 together.

The Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for the management of An Garda Síochána, including personnel matters and 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 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. As at 31 May 2020, there are now 14,700 Gardaí nationwide, supported by over 3,000 Garda staff and these numbers are continuing to grow.

This total figure includes the Garda trainees from two separate intake classes who attested earlier than scheduled in March 2020, following an operational decision by the Garda Commissioner to augment An Garda Síochána's capacity to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic.

A detailed breakdown of the Garda workforce, including both Garda members and staff, is available on my Department's website.

Detail of Garda deployment for all Garda Divisions, as furnished to me by An Garda Síochána, is available at the following link:

[www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_May\\_2020.xlsx/Files/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_May\\_2020.xlsx](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_May_2020.xlsx/Files/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_May_2020.xlsx).

This information is updated every month with the latest data provided by An Garda Síochána, in the interests of transparency and for the convenience of Deputies and the wider public. As such, this database includes the changes in figures since the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak for all Garda Divisions.

Additional information on the Garda workforce, as furnished to me by An Garda Síochána, is available at the following link: [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Garda\\_Workforce](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Garda_Workforce).

Information on Garda staff, as furnished to me by An Garda Síochána, is available at the following link: [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Garda\\_Staff](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Garda_Staff).

## Equality Issues

327. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will amend the Employment Equality Act 1998 to include trade union membership as a prohibited ground for discrimination; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13532/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015 outlaw discrimination in a wide range of employment and employment-related areas. These Acts aim to protect workers against certain types of discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment that could occur in the course of their working life. The legislation promotes equality in the workplace and bans discrimination across nine different grounds. It defines discrimination as treating one person in a less favourable way than another person based

on any of the following 9 grounds:

Gender; Civil status; Family status; Sexual orientation; Religion; Age; Disability; Race; Membership of the Traveller community.

Ireland's equality legislation is robust and comprehensive, and is constantly kept under review and amended as necessary. However there are no plans to amend the relevant Acts at present.

### Departmental Staff

328. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13551/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has developed guidelines 'Working from Home during COVID-19 – Guidance for Civil Service Organisations'. These guidelines, which are due to issue shortly, are intended to assist civil service organisations as long as necessary to address the health and safety risks of COVID-19. Further details on the development of this policy are available at [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie).

DPER has also commenced work on the development of a policy to address remote working in the longer term for the civil service.

My Department has put arrangements in place for staff currently working from home and using the DPER guidelines, will develop Department-specific guidance on Working from Home in the context of ongoing restrictions related to COVID-19.

### Domestic Violence Services

329. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources provided to the services working with those experiencing domestic abuse in counties Longford and Westmeath during Covid-19. [13593/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I can assure the Deputy that combatting domestic abuse is a priority for me and my Department. It is also an important aspect of the National Strategy for Women and Girls and the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence.

At an early stage in the Covid-19 pandemic and in recognition of the added risk of domestic abuse which some people face in that context, my Department developed an inter-agency plan to address domestic abuse during this pandemic. An Garda Síochána too confirmed that it continued to attach the highest priority to domestic abuse incidents during the pandemic, including through 'Operation Faoiseamh', a proactive initiative designed to ensure victims of domestic abuse are supported and protected throughout the period.

As part of this inter-agency plan and in addition to the funding already allocated for 2020, my Department has to date provided an additional €285,000 to organisations in the sector, to support and extend the existing services they offer, during the period of the Covid-19 crisis.

The additional funding provided to date in this way consists of the following:

- Women's Aid: €63,000 for additional resources to extend the Support and Referral Service and the High Risk Support project;
- Rape Crisis Centre Network Ireland: €50,000 to support the work of local centres and to manage information on advice and guidance for frontline trauma support workers;
- Ruhama: €14,000 for additional support packs for women seeking to exit prostitution;
- Men's Development Network: up to €39,340 for an extension of the Male Advice line and extra telephone support for the Men Ending Domestic Violence programme;
- Safe Ireland: €36,000 for additional personnel capacity and communicating with their service users;
- Move Ireland: €33,000 for additional helpline and counselling support for perpetrators;
- Rape Crisis Centre Forum: €50,000 for local awareness-raising campaigns and for development of a package of revised service processes, standards and procedures, including adaptations to new ways of working arising from pandemic.

Other actions under the plan aimed at ensuring that domestic abuse and sexual violence continue to receive the highest priority from the civil and criminal justice system. This includes priority by the Legal Aid Board and Courts Service for domestic abuse cases, and availability of a Legal Aid Board helpline to ensure that persons experiencing domestic violence issues get prompt legal advice and legal representation in court where needed.

I understand that Tusla has also put a range of practical supports in place including funding, identification of additional accommodation capacity, and provision of additional ICT resources.

You may also wish to note that the former Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection recently announced that rent supplement would be made available on a short-term basis to victims of domestic abuse, referred via Tusla-funded domestic abuse service providers, with these arrangements to be reviewed after six months of operation.

Finally, the Deputy may be interested to know that my Department is also leading a public awareness campaign on domestic abuse during the Covid-19 crisis, in partnership with front-line services in the community and voluntary sector. Further information on the organisations involved in this initiative as well as services and supports for victims is available on the website [www.stillhere.ie](http://www.stillhere.ie).

### **Direct Provision System**

330. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the newly appointed manager in a direct provision centre (details supplied) has been appropriately vetted by An Garda Síochána and undertaken the requisite training before assuming the position. [13607/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** While the employment details of staff at accommodation centres is a matter for the owners of those centres, I have been informed that the new manager of the accommodation centre mentioned by the Deputy is fully vetted and has completed the requisite training.

### **Courts Service**

331. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedures and steps that a person must take to get emergency access to the family law courts in view of the ongoing difficulties being experienced by family court applicants trying to get access to their children following previous court orders. [13614/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** 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. The scheduling and hearing of court cases is a matter for the Presidents of the Courts and the presiding Judges.

To be of assistance, I have had enquiries made with the Courts Service who have confirmed that anyone with an urgent family law application can contact their local court office by e-mail or telephone and arrange an appointment.

While I appreciate the concerns that the public health emergency is causing for many families in relation to court orders for access, setting the terms of court orders and related proceedings are matters proper to the judiciary. Neither I nor my department are involved in such matters.

It is important to point out first and foremost that court orders in relation to access remain in place and the restrictions brought in to tackle Covid-19 do not stop them being implemented.

During this time, however, there may be instances where it is impossible for couples to adhere strictly to the terms of an order and the HSE has issued detailed guidance on Covid-19 which includes information for people with particular health risks.

The President of the District Court recently clarified that parents could come to mutually agreed arrangements for alternative contact, which could involve phone calls, or skype etc., such agreement being noted by email or text message.

It is also important to note that if parties cannot agree on an alternative arrangement, mediation services are still available and should be used. The Family Mediation Service of the Legal Aid Board is offering free telephone mediation and conflict coaching. More details about this service can be found at [www.legalaidboard.ie](http://www.legalaidboard.ie), while other free parent support services which provide help and advice are available from [www.onefamily.ie](http://www.onefamily.ie) and [www.treoir.ie](http://www.treoir.ie).

The judiciary and the Courts Service have advised that the District Court will continue to hear urgent matters in all District Court districts throughout the country as before. Urgent matters have been extended to include additional areas in Criminal, Family, and Child Care Law.

In the area of Family Law the President of the District Court announced on 8 May details of matters which can be dealt with. These include the following:

- Domestic violence applications,
- Applications and hearings for breach of maintenance or access that have occurred during the emergency period or applications and hearings for temporary guardianship orders,
- Remote call-overs and hearings may be conducted in some courts,
- Consent orders that do not require the hearing of evidence may be applied for by email by the applicant's solicitor exhibiting consent in writing from the respondent's solicitor. Following consideration by an assigned judge, orders will issue from the Court Office as appropriate without the need for the parties or their legal representatives to attend court.

## Departmental Policy Functions

332. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she considers An Garda Síochána as falling under the aegis of his Department in respect of Government policy. [13615/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I can confirm that I, as Minister for Justice, am responsible for policy in relation to the policing and security of the State. Under the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended, the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána and I have no function in relation to the management decisions he makes, such as how and where he deploys his resources or on operational matters.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Scheme of the Policing and Community Safety Bill is currently being prepared in my Department. The Bill is aimed at delivering on the recommendations made by the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland including its recommendation that the Commissioner be given greater autonomy as ‘CEO’ of An Garda Síochána and that his operational independence be made explicit in legislation.

## Prison Visiting Regulations

333. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason visits to prisons are only recommencing on 20 July 2020 when visits to other institutions are being allowed from 29 June 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13630/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I am acutely aware of the supportive role that families and friends play in the rehabilitation of prisoners and in their preparation for life in the community after release from prison.

I understand that, with this in mind, the Irish Prison Service continued to facilitate physical family visits to prisons for as long as it was safe to do so. However, the Covid-19 pandemic clearly presents unique challenges to congregated settings, including our prisons.

Covid-19 in a prison setting would present significant challenges, in terms of controlling the spread of the virus amongst staff and prisoners; in the provision of appropriate medical treatment to affected persons; and the maintenance of staffing levels. To respond to this threat, a very significant number of actions were taken by the Irish Prison Service, informed and guided by the advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) and consistent with the prison specific guidance for the management of Covid-19 issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in March 2020.

In that context, the Deputy will appreciate it was necessary in the interest of the health and welfare of our prison population to suspend physical family visits in March, when public health restrictions on movement and gatherings were introduced due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Due to these and other measures introduced by the Irish Prison Service as well as the efforts of staff, Red Cross Volunteers and prisoners themselves, there has to date been no confirmed prisoner case of Covid-19 in our prisons. Nevertheless the Deputy will appreciate that the risk continues and must be managed.

In line with the Government Roadmap and with infection control in mind, the Irish Prison Service has completed a comprehensive risk assessment on the return of physical prison visits to each prison, within relevant physical and resource confines. I am informed that the Irish

Prison Service plans for a phased recommencement of physical family visits from Monday 20 July 2020.

However, the Deputy will appreciate the recommencement of visits poses a number of challenges in such an environment and must be carefully calibrated in line with ongoing risk assessments, taking account of latest public health advice, Government restrictions and the prevailing transmission rate of the virus in the community.

To illustrate the scale of this challenge, the Irish Prison Service indicates that prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, over 4,500 visitors entered our prisons on a weekly basis. In order to ensure effective infection control and allow for appropriate social distancing on resumption of physical visits, it will be necessary for capacity in both waiting areas and visiting areas to be significantly reduced to ensure family members and friends can resume visits safely. This will impact on the ability of the Irish Prison Service to meet the anticipated level of demand for physical visits in the immediate term.

I am, of course, mindful of the ongoing impact of these necessary measures on prisoners and their families. In that regard, I would note that parallel to the suspension of physical visits, the Prison Service introduced a number of new innovations including video visits, to enable prisoners to maintain contact with their families during these difficult times. I hope that, as physical visits recommence gradually, it will be possible to continue the innovation of the video calls, which I know have been appreciated by families.

*Question No. 334 answered with Question No. 288.*

*Questions Nos. 335 and 336 answered with Question No. 326.*

### **Garda Stations**

337. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a full assessment has been carried out on the refurbishment costs for Sligo Garda station, including costs such as those incurred for deep retrofitting and procurement of space when refurbishment is ongoing; and the details of same. [13691/20]

338. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a comparative assessment has been done on the cost of a full refurbishment of Sligo Garda station; the cost of a new build on the site already purchased for this purpose; and the details of same. [13692/20]

339. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the rationale and time frame for reversing a decision in view of the fact that political commitments to construct a new Garda station in Sligo were in place, including the purchase of a greenfield site for same. [13694/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 337 to 339, inclusive, together.

At the outset it is important to be clear that the Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for the management and control of An Garda Síochána and for the effective and efficient use of Garda resources. Further, the Office of Public Works (OPW) has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. Works in relation to Garda accommodation are therefore progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the OPW.

The overall purpose of the Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 is to

address deficiencies in the Garda estate and provide fit-for-purpose facilities for Garda members and staff as well as the public interacting with them. The programme is continuing to make progress at a range of locations around the country.

A Public Private Partnership (PPP) project was included in this programme and at the time of launch, it was intended to deliver three new Garda stations- namely a new District Headquarters at Macroom, a new District Headquarters at Clonmel and a new Regional / Divisional Headquarters in Sligo. As the Deputy will recall, it was unfortunately the case that there were significant delays in relation to this intended PPP, due in the first instance to lengthy processes for acquisition of sites at all relevant locations.

At the same time, very significant developments were occurring in relation to policing in Ireland. The report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland was published and is now being taken forward under the 4-year implementation plan A Policing Service for our Future.

In keeping with that report and implementation plan, the Garda Commissioner last year announced a new Operating Model for An Garda Síochána. This new Operating Model reorganises resources around the delivery of frontline policing, placing an increased emphasis on Gardaí being out visibly on patrol, engaging with communities, preventing crime and supporting victims. As part of the reduction of bureaucracy and streamlining of administrative processes, the number of Garda Regions and Divisions is being reduced and additional power will be devolved to local level so as to enable the delivery of better and more localised policing services nationwide.

Clearly, this new model also has implications for Garda accommodation requirements. Following a review of its accommodation requirements, the Commissioner and his management team decided that the PPP should proceed to deliver new stations in Macroom and in Clonmel. However, the Commissioner determined that the provision of a new station at Sligo should not proceed as part of the PPP.

Sligo station is undergoing a very extensive refit and I understand that this is felt to be a more appropriate and much faster way of delivering a modern Garda Station for Sligo, in accordance with its role in the new Garda Operating Model and having regard to the fact that the current location of the station is considered optimum from the operational perspective.

It is however important to note that, while it was decided that delivery of a new station in Sligo under the PPP was no longer justified, the Commissioner decided that the upgrading of the existing station to a high standard will continue.

The Commissioner's decision was communicated to my Department by letter received on 2 January 2020.

I understand that significant remedial works have already taken place in the existing station, including the complete upgrade of the three floors in the building containing the public office and the provision of new locker facilities. I understand that further upgrades are progressing and include the provision of new cells and custody management facilities.

I am advised by the OPW that property maintenance personnel are currently on site in Sligo working on internal upgrade works at the station, to provide a new custody suite including new cells built to current standards, prisoner processing, interview, solicitor and doctor's rooms. I understand that the existing cells were not considered suitable for upgrading and the new cells are located in a different section of the building, requiring adjacent prisoner processing facilities. I understand that these works are currently due to be completed in December 2020. I am

further advised that the OPW is currently preparing a tender package to provide facilities for a scene of crimes unit.

In general I understand from the Garda authorities and the OPW that further upgrades will ensure that Garda accommodation needs in Sligo are addressed and that the station is upgraded to meet the future operational requirements of Garda members, staff and the public who use it.

In relation to expenditure, the following table, furnished to me by the OPW, details expenditure since 2017 and to date in 2020 on Sligo Garda Station including expenditure by the OPW drawing down on funds in both the Garda and the OPW votes.

Year	Expenditure on Sligo Garda Station (combined total, OPW and Garda Votes as paid by OPW)
2017	€58,362
2018	€116,117
2019	€711,093
2020 (to date)	€143,275

The Deputy will appreciate that this demonstrates the scale of the works which have been underway to ensure that Sligo Garda station is fit-for-purpose and meets the needs of An Garda Síochána.

### Covid-19 Pandemic

340. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if inquests will take place into the deaths of those that died of Covid-19 in nursing homes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13707/20]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I would like to express my deepest condolences to all of those who have lost loved ones during the current pandemic.

Deaths which have occurred due to COVID-19 infection are due to natural causes. While decisions on the necessity to carry out an inquest into any death are at the discretion of the Coroner, inquests are not carried out into deaths due to natural causes.

### Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

341. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount that has been distributed from the restart grant by local authority in tabular form. [12858/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I have set out in the table below the value of Restart Grant applications which have been approved and paid by each Local Authority as of 26th June, 2020.

Local Authority	Value of Applications Paid
Carlow	€433,183
Cavan	€435,815
Clare	€1,920,115

Local Authority	Value of Applications Paid
Cork City	€1,662,876
Cork County	€1,755,004
Donegal	€1,194,280
Dublin City	€193,497
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	€411,738
Fingal	€3,045,760
Galway City	€2,376,904
Galway County	€1,964,334
Kerry	€1,535,192
Kildare	€1,447,909
Kilkenny	€1,103,725
Laois	€633,402
Leitrim	€429,675
Limerick	€3,454,722
Longford	€310,275
Louth	€1,161,068
Mayo	€2,848,607
Meath	€2,898,785
Monaghan	€1,833,548
Offaly	€167,139
Roscommon	€753,794
Sligo	€941,745
South Dublin	€413,924
Tipperary	€1,918,059
Waterford	€2,200,181
Westmeath	€1,981,641
Wexford	€2,980,187
Wicklow	€1,073,637
GRAND TOTALS	€45,480,721

### Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

342. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if exceptions are being made to businesses applying for the restart grant that are not tax compliant due to difficult financial circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13086/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** On Friday, 15 May, 2020, the Government decided to establish a new a new €250m Restart Grant providing direct grant aid to micro and small businesses to help them with the costs associated with reopening and reemploying workers following COVID-19 closures.

The grant is being administered by the local authorities and the online Application Form went live on Friday May 22, 2020.

To avail of the Restart Grant, applicants must be a commercial business and be in the Local Authorities Commercial Rates Payment System and:

1. have an annual turnover of less than €5m and employ 50 people or less;
2. have suffered a projected 25%+ loss in turnover between 1 April and end June 2020;
3. commit to remain open or to reopen if it was closed;
4. declare the intention to retain employees that are on The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme

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. Those businesses with outstanding tax arrears or rates bills are also eligible to make an application if they meet the criteria as set out above.

The Restart Grant support is just one part of the wider €12bn package of supports for firms of all sizes, which includes grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities, all of which will help to improve cashflow amongst SMEs.

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/>.

### Co-operative Sector

343. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of worker cooperatives that received funding in each of the years 2016 to 2019 and to date in 2020; and the amount of funding that each received. [13102/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** My Department supports co-operatives in the same way as it supports other enterprises. Worker co-operatives set up prior to 2019 cannot be definitively identified on the Register of Friendly Societies as worker co-operatives so it is not possible to give a definitive position in relation to any funding provided to such entities. Since 2019, no co-operatives have been registered under the worker co-operative category.

My Department provides a range of grants and funding streams for ambitious start-ups, principally through the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs). The 31 LEOs are located throughout the country and provide a range of supports for the micro and small business sector.

Enterprise Ireland have a number of targeted supports for start-ups, including co-operative start-ups, that have global ambition, the potential to scale and meet Enterprise Ireland's eligibility criteria. Enterprise Ireland supports enterprises in regional and rural areas to start, innovate and remain competitive in international markets, now and into the future. Supports include competitive feasibility funding, mentoring grants and innovation vouchers.

While Enterprise Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices has funded co-operatives, they have not funded in the period referenced "worker co-operatives".

### Farm Safety

344. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if his attention has been drawn to evidence indicating that injuries and fatalities related to agriculture are increasing; and the steps he is taking to address the matter. [13508/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varad-**

**kar):** The agriculture sector remains one of the most high-risk sectors in terms of workplace fatalities and injuries and this is a matter of concern to both myself and to the Health and Safety Authority.

So far this year, of the total twenty- seven workplace fatalities which have been reported to the Health and Safety Authority twelve have been in the that sector and, tragically, three of these involved young children.

The agriculture sector is different from other sectors as farms, as well as being workplaces, are usually homes with children and the elderly also living on the farm. Many farmers are part time or have employment off the farm and, being self-employed, many are reluctant to retire resulting in the average age of a farmer being over 58 in Ireland.

The Health and Safety Authority has an extensive agriculture health and safety programme which focusses on the provision of advice, guidance, e-tools and educational supports as well as inspections and investigations. This programme is completed in a collaborative manner and involves key farming stakeholder groups and relevant Government Departments and State Agencies. The focus of these efforts is to put measures in place that can prevent the high levels of injuries and fatalities that we see in the agriculture sector.

In the past few weeks, the Health and Safety Authority ran a Farm Safety Media Campaign, which was specifically designed to promote the farm safety message, particularly regarding tractor safety, through TV, Radio, Farming Press and social media platforms. The Health and Safety Authority participated in TV interviews focusing firstly on child safety on farms during the COVID lockdown and, secondly, in response to examples of poor behaviour by young farmers featuring on social media.

The Health and Safety Authority also conducted a specific Livestock Safety Campaign in the first quarter of this years during which 340 Livestock Safety inspections were carried out in addition to routine inspections. A revised Bale Handling Information Sheet has been produced and this will be circulated to all farm contractors.

With the announcement of Government restrictions due to COVID-19, the Health and Safety Authority continued to investigate farm fatalities but proactive farm safety inspections were suspended. In recent weeks, the inspectors of the Health and Safety Authority have focussed their inspections on sectors and on businesses reopening in accordance with the Governments phased reopening of the economy with a particular emphasis on compliance issues relating to the Return to Work Safely Protocol.

However, the Health and Safety Authority are resuming routine inspections across all sectors and in that regard, a Farm Safety Campaign focusing on Tractor and Machinery Safety will commence between 13th and 24th of July and the Farm Safety Partnership Advisory Committee intends to deliver a new Programme of Work during 2020.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

345. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when guidelines and a time for reopening of business will issue to the beauty sector (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12688/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The National Return to Work Safely Protocol is the primary 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 requests, my predecessor, Ms Heather Humphreys, T.D., Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation met with members of the hairdressing and beauty industry via teleconference on 7th May, 20th May and 16th June. The Minister requested that, where sectors are developing return to work protocols or guides, they should work together to align this work.

On 5th June the Irish Hairdressing Federation submitted their protocol to the Minister who duly forwarded it to the then Minister for Health and to the HSE, for consideration. The document, which was developed and supported by the Irish Hairdressers Federation, the Hair and Beauty Industry Confederation (HABIC), the Hairdressing Council of Ireland, Synergy Hair Group and the Barber Society of Ireland, was drawn up with reference to the National Return to Work Safely Protocol.

On June 19, the Government, having considered the expert public health advice provided by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), approved the rephrasing of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. Apart from some exceptions, most sectors have been brought forward to Phase 3, which began on Monday 29th June.

Under the rephased Roadmap, hairdressers, barbers, nail and brow salons, beauty salons, spas, make-up application services, tanning, tattooing and piercing services can reopen on 29 June. Full details are available at [www.gov.ie/en/news/58bc8b-taoiseach-announces-roadmap-for-reopening-society-and-business-and-u/](http://www.gov.ie/en/news/58bc8b-taoiseach-announces-roadmap-for-reopening-society-and-business-and-u/).

As we move forward on reopening of society and business, it is important to note that all decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of the remaining restrictions will be informed by the public health advice at the time.

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

346. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the supports being considered for businesses in the autumn and winter months of 2020, when queuing outside will not be possible due to weather conditions; the engagement that has taken place with local authorities in relation to same; and the local authorities with which there has been engagement. [12696/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** 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).

The National Standards Authority of Ireland's (NSAI) published 'COVID-19 Workplace Protection and Improvement Guide', which is available at [www.nsaie.ie/covid-19workplaceprotection/](http://www.nsaie.ie/covid-19workplaceprotection/), 'Covid-19 Retail Protection and Improvement Guide' which is available at [www.nsaie.ie/covid-19retailprotection/](http://www.nsaie.ie/covid-19retailprotection/) and 'Covid-19 Shopping Centre Recovery and Protection Guide' [www.nsaie.ie/COVID-19ShoppingCentreProtection/](http://www.nsaie.ie/COVID-19ShoppingCentreProtection/) which gives practical 'how to' guidance for Shopping Centre Management teams in implementing the mandatory Return to Work Safely Protocol in a shopping centre environment. These Guides contain useful 'how to' information that can be applied across many businesses.

I understand from my colleague the Minister for Transport that the National Transport Authority (NTA) is engaging with local authorities to support them in the development of COVID mobility plans and importantly to also support the local authorities in their delivery of required infrastructure improvements. Dublin City Council (DCC) and the NTA have already published a framework of proposals to address the new and urgent needs relating to commercial activity and mobility in Dublin City Centre. As we move through the phases of the 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.

The NTA has written to all 31 local authorities to offer its financial and technical support and this support will be funded through the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport'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.

I understand that some local authorities have already put improvements in place to facilitate increased active travel and it is expected these improvements will continue in the coming weeks and months.

Also, the former Minister for Rural and Community Development, Michael Ring T.D. has recently announced a new €15 million call under the Department's Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2020 which has been tailored to address the emerging challenges associated with COVID-19. This means:

A focus under the standard Town and Village Renewal Scheme on interventions that can respond to the new challenges associated with COVID-19 and support the economic and social recovery of rural towns and villages;

The introduction of a new strand of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme for 2020 that focuses on immediate interventions that can be delivered in the short-term to assist towns and villages to adapt to COVID-19.

Full details of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2020 can be found at [www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/01125e-town-and-village-renewal-scheme/](http://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/01125e-town-and-village-renewal-scheme/).

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.

The Restart Grant gives direct grant aid to micro and small businesses to help them with the costs associated with reopening and reemploying workers following COVID-19 closures. The Grant will be available to businesses with a turnover of less than €5m and employing 50 people or less, which were closed or impacted by at least a 25% reduction in turnover out to 30 June 2020. The grants will be equivalent to the rates bill of the business in 2019, or a minimum grant of €2,000, whichever is the higher, with a maximum grant of €10,000. Businesses who are in arrears or have not yet paid their 2019 rates bill will still be eligible to apply for the grant.

Trading online is a very important route for retail businesses to trade throughout the pandemic and grow and improve their business in the current crisis and will be an important element in their recovery over the longer term.

My Department has intensified its digitalisation supports to retail and other businesses to better position them for the omnichannel world and increase their productivity through an expansion of the Trading Online Voucher Scheme (TOVS) for micro-businesses and the dedicated Online Retail Scheme for retailers with 10 or more employees. Both Schemes are experiencing unprecedented high levels of demand.

I recognise the impact that this pandemic is having on businesses right across the country. My Department contributed to the considerations around the phased re-opening of sectors and I will work within Government to secure further details and clarity for businesses as we progress through the phases outlined in the Roadmap.

For a full list of supports for business please see <https://dbej.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

Finally, it is important that all businesses check [www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/](http://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/) for the latest information, public health advice and guidelines from Government in relation to Covid-19.

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

347. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason small businesses which were employing two or three persons and are reopening now as a start up on a self-employed basis with no employees are not eligible for the restart grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12709/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varad-**

**kar):** 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 and re-connecting with employees and customers.

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.

In that context, a company with no employees who pays commercial rates and meets the other criteria as outlined above is eligible to apply for the Restart Grant. 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.

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.

The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection on 25 June announced that the Department's Enterprise Support Grant will be made available to assist self-employed recipients who are exiting the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) scheme with a once-off grant of up to €1,000 to re-start their business. This will provide business owners with a once-off grant of up to €1,000 to re-start their business. A fund of €12m has been allocated for the extension of this grant. The grant will be payable to self-employed micro enterprises which employ fewer than 10 people, have an annual turnover of less than €1 million and are not eligible for support from the COVID 19 Business Restart Grant or other similar business reopening grants.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

348. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if he will review a case (details supplied); if the business can reopen on 30 July 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12734/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** On 19th June, the Government, having considered the expert public health advice provided by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), approved the rephrasing of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. Apart from some exceptions, most sectors have been brought forward to Phase 3, which began on Monday 29 June.

Cinemas are among the businesses permitted to reopen on 29th June, subject to the Phases 3 and 4 restrictions on numbers for public gatherings and other important public health advice. Full details are available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/news/58bc8b-taoiseach-announces-roadmap-for-reopening-society-and-business-and-u/>

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 workers 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 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/>.

As we move forward on reopening of society and business, it is important to note that all decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of the remaining restrictions will be informed by the public health advice at the time.

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

349. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if he will outline a plan of supports for business owners that cannot reopen their businesses owing to social distancing requirements; if there are financial supports for such business owners towards redundancy costs and other winding-down costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12799/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Government has introduced a €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. Full details on all COVID19 supports for business are available at: <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

This package is a significant step-up in the supports available for all businesses in all sectors at this very difficult time. The measures have been developed to meet the varying needs of

Irish enterprise and they are very specifically targeted by size, sector and need and are targeted at vulnerable but viable companies.

As an immediate measure I would encourage all businesses to apply for the Government's Restart Grant. The grant is available through all local authorities. Grants of between €2,000 to €10,000 are available based on a simple online application form and funds are being transferred electronically directly to businesses.

In addition, there are a number of loan schemes which have been put in place to assist businesses. The Covid-19 Working Capital Scheme open to eligible SMEs and small mid-caps (businesses of up to 499 employees) is operated by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and is supported by the InnovFin SME Guarantee facility.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme is open to eligible SMEs and small mid-caps currently makes loans available with a term of 8-10 years and is operated by (SBCI) through participating lenders.

The new €2 billion COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme to aid SMEs is a further development of the existing Credit Guarantee Scheme already available. The Scheme will be available to all SME sectors. The implementation of this Scheme will require primary legislation, the drafting of which has commenced.

In addition to this new package of liquidity measures, the full range of Enterprise Ireland, IDA, 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.

Any eligible business, including the self-employed, can apply for the following supports. The most appropriate support will depend on the characteristics of the business.

- MicroFinance Ireland can provide loans of up to €50,000 as an immediate measure to specifically deal with exceptional circumstances that micro-enterprises – (any business -Sole Trader, Partnership or Limited Company with less than 10 full time employees and annual turnover of up to €2m)- are facing.

- Local Enterprise Offices have moved training programmes, workshops and networking meet-ups online, covering areas such as cash management in a crisis, leading your business through COVID-19 and advice for employers impacted by the crisis. Training programmes are free of charge and places can be booked online, through your Local Enterprise Office.

- For existing companies and potential start-ups that meet eligibility criteria (such as employing 10 or fewer people with the potential for growth and job creation), Local Enterprise Offices can also offer financial supports to help manage current market challenges such as Business Priming Grants, Business Expansion Grants, Feasibility Study Grants and Technical Assistance for Micro-Exporters Grant.

The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, announced on 25 June announced that her Department's Enterprise Support Grant will be made available to assist self-employed recipients who are exiting the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) scheme with a once-off grant of up to €1,000 to re-start their business. This will provide business owners with a once-off grant of up to €1,000 to re-start their business. A fund of €12m has been allocated for the extension of this grant. The grant will be payable to self-employed micro enterprises which employ fewer than 10 people, have an annual turnover of less than €1 million

and are not eligible for support from the COVID 19 Business Restart Grant or other similar business reopening grants.

In these challenging times unfortunately, companies are being forced to consider restructuring in a bid to have leaner cost structures and in some cases, to survive and for some the prospect of redundancy has become a reality. The Local Enterprise Office website provides an Information Bulletin which outlines the tax implications from both an employee and employer perspective, information available here: <https://www.localenterprise.ie/DublinCity/Start-or-Grow-your-Business/Knowledge-Centre/Tax-and-Your-Business/Tax-Implications-of-Redundancy/>

Further information on Redundancy Payments Schemes and be found here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/24814a-redundancy-further-information/>

I am working with my colleagues across Government and with all stakeholders, to examine all such appropriate business supports to assist enterprises, including self-employed service providers, impacted by Covid-19.

I will keep the supports provided under review and continue to support businesses as they work through the challenges facing them.

My colleague, Minister Heather Humphreys T.D., Minister for Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands, may be able to provide more specific guidelines in relation to your query.

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

350. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the support schemes planned for pubs owners that are not serving food and are now placed at a significant disadvantage to their competitors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12848/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Government has introduced a €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. Full details on all COVID19 supports for business are available at: <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

This package is a significant step-up in the supports available for all businesses in all sectors at this difficult time. The measures have been developed to meet the varying needs of Irish enterprise and they are very specifically targeted by size, sector and need and are targeted at vulnerable but viable companies.

The Government's Restart Grant is available through all local authorities. Grants of between €2,000 to €10,000 are available based on a simple online application form and funds are being transferred electronically directly to businesses.

In addition, there are a number of loan schemes which have been put in place to assist all businesses. The Covid-19 Working Capital Scheme open to eligible SMEs and small mid-caps (businesses of up to 499 employees) is operated by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and is

supported by the InnovFin SME Guarantee facility.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme open to eligible SMEs and small mid-caps currently makes loans available with a term of 8-10 years and is operated by (SBCI) through participating lenders.

The new €2 billion COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme to aid SMEs is a further development of the existing Credit Guarantee Scheme already available. The Scheme will be available to all SME sectors. The implementation of this Scheme will require primary legislation, the drafting of which has commenced.

Any eligible business, including the self-employed, can apply for the following supports. The most appropriate support will depend on the characteristics of the business.

MicroFinance Ireland can provide loans of up to €50,000 as an immediate measure to specifically deal with exceptional circumstances that micro-enterprises – (any business -Sole Trader, Partnership or Limited Company with less than 10 full time employees and annual turnover of up to €2m)- are facing.

Local Enterprise Offices have moved training programmes, workshops and networking meet-ups online, covering areas such as cash management in a crisis, leading your business through COVID-19 and advice for employers impacted by the crisis. Training programmes are free of charge and places can be booked online, through your Local Enterprise Office.

For existing companies that meet eligibility criteria (such as employing 10 or fewer people with the potential for growth and job creation), Local Enterprise Offices can also offer financial supports to help manage current market challenges such as Business Priming Grants, Business Expansion Grants, Feasibility Study Grants and Technical Assistance for Micro-Exporters Grant

Fáilte Ireland has published Guidelines for the Reopening of Pubs (which include pubs, gastro pubs and bars). These guidelines are intended to provide clarity to businesses so that they can reopen safely on June 29th. Fáilte Ireland has consulted the industry to develop this set of detailed and practical guidelines to prepare pubs to re-open safely. All of the principles in these guidelines are underpinned by advice made available from the HSA, HSE, FSAI, WHO and other relevant bodies.

Fáilte Ireland guidelines are living documents which means as Government restrictions and Public Health guidelines evolve, these documents will also evolve to reflect new Government advice and changes to protocols when they emerge. The operational guidelines will be regularly updated in line with Government public health advice as and when this advice evolves. This includes any further guidance that is given following work by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre & National Public Health Emergency Team on the application of the existing social distancing requirements in specific, defined and controlled environments in the hospitality industry during periods of low incidence of the disease.

The former Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty on 25 June announced that her Department's Enterprise Support Grant will be made available to assist self-employed recipients who are exiting the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) scheme with a once-off grant of up to €1,000 to re-start their business. This will provide business owners with a once-off grant of up to €1,000 to re-start their business. A fund of €12m has been allocated for the extension of this grant. The grant will be payable to self-employed micro enterprises which employ fewer than 10 people, have an annual turnover of less than €1 million and are not eligible for support from the COVID 19 Business Restart Grant or other similar

business reopening grants.

I can assure the Deputy that I will continue to work with my colleagues across Government and with all stakeholders, to examine all such appropriate business supports to assist enterprises, including self-employed service providers, impacted by Covid-19. I will keep the supports provided under review and continue to support businesses as they work through the challenges facing them.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

351. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when live music in pubs and venues will be permitted again; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12869/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** On 19 June, the Government, having considered the expert public health advice provided by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), approved the rephrasing of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. Apart from some exceptions, most sectors have been brought forward to Phase 3, which began on Monday 29th June.

Pubs and hotel bars operating as restaurants can open from 29th June, subject to the Phases 3 and 4 restrictions on numbers for public gatherings and other important public health advice. Full details are available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/news/58bc8b-taoiseach-announces-roadmap-for-reopening-society-and-business-and-u/>

I should also explain that on Tuesday 16th June 2020, the Government announced €25 million in extra supports to help the Arts and Culture sector recover from the COVID-19 Emergency. The funding will include bursaries and commissions to artists and arts organisations, and resources for museums and culture workers as they prepare for the re-opening of society. The funding is on top of funding previously allocated to the sector. A total of €20 million will be allocated to the Arts Council bringing its allocation this year to €100 million. A further €5 million will be available for other measures, including securing the future of key cultural and museum spaces and facilities throughout Ireland, and the production of high-quality digital art and on-line performances.

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).

### **Trading Online Voucher Scheme**

352. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 288 of 9 June 2020, if a further reply will

issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13085/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Deputy will be aware that the Trading Online Voucher scheme is delivered by the 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) on behalf of the former Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment as part of the national digital strategy. On 8 April, the then Government announced amendments to the scheme, to address the challenges posed by Covid 19, intended to boost the numbers of businesses seeking to engage in online trading. The support is available to cover 90% (previously 50%) of the costs of an online initiative and recipients can claim, under certain circumstances, up to €5,000 in two vouchers worth €2,500 each.

There has been an unprecedented demand for the TOV Scheme with up to five years level of applications since the outbreak of Covid 19 and therefore, due to extremely high volumes of applications, the LEOs may not be able to process applications within their normal turnaround times.

In relation to the specific case raised by the Deputy, under the prescribed terms of the scheme, approved by the then Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, retrospective expenditure is ineligible and expenditure incurred prior to receiving Voucher approval is not supported under the scheme's terms of conditions.

Nevertheless, the LEO is eager to work with the particular business in terms of any future planned expenditure and would encourage the promoters to work with one of the LEO approved mentors to draft a digital plan, which it would be happy to consider for grant support under a new TOV application.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

353. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if a health and safety liability to employers arises in instances in which it has instructed staff to work from home only during Covid-19 restrictions [13208/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 employers have specific duties to ensure the safety, health and welfare at work of all employees. These duties include the employee's workspace where employees are required to work from home and includes managing and conducting all work activities to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare those employees.

Employees also have duties and responsibilities while working from home and must take reasonable care of themselves and other people who may be affected by the work they are doing. This duty includes co-operating with their employer and following instructions and procedures put in place by their employer.

The Health and Safety Authority has produced a detailed FAQ document for employers and employees in relation to home-working on a temporary basis during COVID-19 restrictions (see <https://www.hsa.ie/eng/topics/covid-19>) which employers and employees should refer to for further information and guidance.

### **IDA Ireland**

354. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and

Innovation if his attention has been drawn to the case of an IDA property (details supplied) in County Tipperary which has been left idle for a number of years with no effort to bring to market by the IDA; his views on whether the IDA has some responsibility for the future of the site in view of the fact as a leasehold property the IDA still holds the title on the land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13301/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I understand that the Deputy is referring to a site that was sold - on the basis of a 999-year lease - by IDA Ireland to Continental Promotion International Limited in 1998. The company subsequently constructed a building on the site before it was dissolved in January 2016. The IDA retain the underlying residual freehold title of this site which attracts a nominal annual ground rent.

I have been informed by the Agency that the site is being actively marketed to prospective investors. I also understand, from the IDA, that there are no dealings showing as pending against the property and no notifications of a claim have been received by the Property Registration Authority of Ireland.

More broadly, the outlook for foreign direct investment remains positive in County Tipperary with over 100 net new jobs added by IDA client companies in 2019. I am determined, together with the IDA, to attract further investment there in the time ahead, particularly as we seek to recover from the economic impact of COVID-19.

### Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

355. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation his plans to provide a grant similar to the Covid-19 restart grant for the taxi sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13335/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Government has introduced a €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. Full details on all COVID19 supports for business are available at: <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

This package is a significant step-up in the supports available for all businesses in all sectors at this very difficult time. The measures have been developed to meet the varying needs of Irish enterprise and they are very specifically targeted by size, sector and need and are targeted at vulnerable but viable companies.

The former Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty on 25 June announced that her Department's Enterprise Support Grant will be made available to assist self-employed recipients who are exiting the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) scheme with a once-off grant of up to €1,000 to re-start their business. This will provide business owners with a once-off grant of up to €1,000 to re-start their business. A fund of €12m has been allocated for the extension of this grant. The grant will be payable to self-employed micro enterprises which employ fewer than 10 people, have an annual turnover of less than €1 million and are not eligible for support from the COVID 19 Business Restart Grant or other similar business reopening grants.

The new €2 billion COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme to aid SMEs is a further develop-

ment of the existing Credit Guarantee Scheme already available. The Scheme will be available to all SME sectors. The implementation of this Scheme will require primary legislation, the drafting of which has commenced.

In addition to this new package of liquidity measures, the full range of Enterprise Ireland, IDA, 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.

Any eligible business, including the self-employed, can apply for the following supports. The most appropriate support will depend on the characteristics of the business.

MicroFinance Ireland can provide loans of up to €50,000 as an immediate measure to specifically deal with exceptional circumstances that micro-enterprises – (any business -Sole Trader, Partnership or Limited Company with less than 10 full time employees and annual turnover of up to €2m)- are facing.

Local Enterprise Offices have moved training programmes, workshops and networking meet-ups online, covering areas such as cash management in a crisis, leading your business through COVID-19 and advice for employers impacted by the crisis. Training programmes are free of charge and places can be booked online, through your Local Enterprise Office.

For existing businesses that meet eligibility criteria (such as employing 10 or fewer people with the potential for growth and job creation), Local Enterprise Offices can also offer financial supports to help manage current market challenges such as Business Priming Grants, Business Expansion Grants, Feasibility Study Grants and Technical Assistance for Micro-Exporters Grant

I can assure the Deputy that I will continue to work with my colleagues across Government and with all stakeholders, to examine all such appropriate business supports to assist enterprises, including self-employed service providers, impacted by Covid-19. I will keep the supports provided under review and continue to support businesses as they work through the challenges facing them.

My colleague, the Minister for Transport may be able to provide more specific guidance on supports designed to assist businesses in the transport sector, such as taxi providers.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

356. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if he will amend the relevant regulations to ensure that workplace acquired Covid-19 diagnosis will be considered as a workplace acquired injury or condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13437/20]

359. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason Covid-19 is not classified as an occupationally acquired illness under health and safety legislation. [13514/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 356 and 359 together.

COVID-19 is already a reportable disease under various statutes. In the first instance, it was

included as a notifiable disease under the Infectious Diseases (Amendment) Diseases Regulations 2020. Any infectious disease pandemic is first and foremost a matter of public health, for which a legal basis already exists in Irish law under public health legislation and specifically under Infectious Diseases Regulations.

In addition, notifiable infectious diseases are statutorily reportable under the Infectious Diseases Regulations 1981 to the Medical Officer of Health for their investigation and control.

The reporting of COVID-19 incidents among healthcare workers is also a statutory requirement, reportable to the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

In relation to the reporting of COVID-19 related workplace absences to the Health and Safety Authority, there is no provision in occupational health and safety legislation for the reporting of cases of occupationally acquired COVID-19. Employers are not necessarily in a position to assess or attribute occupational disease or illness from COVID-19 with a degree of reliability since COVID-19 can be acquired in either a community or a workplace setting. Neither is there an obligation on employees to provide detailed confidential medical information to their employer. Any requirement on employers to capture occupational diseases and illnesses would have GDPR implications and would breach an individual's right to the privacy of their medical information in terms of the relationship with their employer.

The Health and Safety Authority is fully aware of all occupational health and safety risks, including COVID-19, in healthcare settings and is engaged with the Health Service Executive, individual employers and places of work in this regard. The reporting of an accident to the Health and Safety Authority under current statutory reporting requirements does not necessarily result in an investigation. However, I would also say that any employee in any workplace who has a serious concern on an occupational health and safety matter can bring this to the attention of the Health and Safety Authority. Also, the Health and Safety Authority can also access necessary information needed to identify and investigate relevant cases in any sector and has legislative powers to request data from any employer, if and as needed.

As part of its role in promoting the prevention of risks to safety, health and welfare at work the Health and Safety Authority continues to provide resources, advice and support to employers and workers through its website and other means, including the operation of a confidential helpline for workers, employers and others.

Separately I would like to point out that it is the SARs-COV-2 (the virus that causes the disease COVID 19) that was included in the recent amendment to the Biological Agents Directive and not the disease COVID-19. The recent inclusion of SARs-COV-2 in the Biological Agents Directive provides that where the nature of the work poses an occupational exposure health risk to the virus, such as in laboratories, healthcare settings, etc, employers are required to ensure that an appropriate Biological Agents Risk Assessment is carried out. The existing Code of Practice for Biological Agents will be updated to include SARs-COV-2 and in the interim, the Health and Safety Authority has information available on its website ([www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie))

I understand that the Health and Safety Authority will be reviewing the statutory requirements for the reporting of workplace injuries over the coming weeks and will forward a report on the matter to my Department for consideration.

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

357. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the supports available or being considered for new start-up businesses in a post-

Covid-19 economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13477/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) will continue to be the ‘first-stop-shop’ for advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports for anyone intending to start or grow a business. The LEOs provide a ‘signposting’ service in relation to all relevant State supports available through agencies such as Enterprise Ireland, Revenue, the Department of Social Protection, Education and Training Boards, the Credit Review Office and Microfinance Ireland. The LEOs can also offer advice and guidance in areas such as Local Authority rates, Public Procurement and other regulations affecting business.

I would urge anyone considering starting or wishing to grow their own business to first contact their Local Enterprise Office (LEO’s).

The LEOs will continue to offer direct grant aid to microenterprises (up to 10 employees) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sector and have developed their processes to deliver these supports while following public health advice. Subject to certain eligibility criteria, the LEOs can provide financial assistance within three main categories:

- Feasibility Grants (investigating the potential of a business idea)
- Priming Grants (to part-fund a start-up)
- Business Development grants for existing businesses that want to expand.

For further information on eligibility criteria see the LEOs Website [www.localenterprise.ie](http://www.localenterprise.ie).

In addressing the challenges of Covid 19, the LEOs have moved their traditional ‘soft’ supports in the form of training or mentoring onto an online platform and are carried out by phone, email or video call such as:

- The Mentor Programme which is designed to match up the knowledge, skills, insights and entrepreneurial capability of experienced business practitioners with small business owner/managers who need practical and strategic one to one advice and guidance.

- The LEO Management Development programmes which provide the owner-manager with the management, leadership, business skills and knowledge to achieve sustainability and growth in their business.

- LEAN for Micro which is a targeted programme for Local Enterprise Office clients to help small businesses boost competitiveness, increase performance and profitability as well as building resilience within their companies.

A wide range of free training for business owners, managers and staff are now being delivered in the form of free webinars available through the LEO’s Facebook page and YouTube Channel.

Examples of the training programmes delivered by webinar include:

- Open your Business Safely Post Lockdown
- Financial Action Planning Post Lockdown
- How to Re-Open Your Business Safely Post COVID 19 Lockdown
- COVID-19 / Selling Through Online Channels

- Business Continuity During & Post COVID19
- COVID19 Return to Work: Key Practical Steps for Business Webinar
- Getting back to Business - Webinar for Retail
- Re-Opening your Hair or Beauty Salon after Covid-19
- Re-Opening your Cafe or Restaurant after Covid-19
- Social Media Tactics During Lockdown
- HR Employment Law - Managing Staff During Covid 19
- Covid-19 Re-Opening & Operating Safely

Currently, any business (Sole Trader, Partnership or Limited Company) with less than 10 full time employees and annual turnover of up to €2m may apply to Microfinance Ireland for funding from €5,000 – €50,000 where the business is not in a position to avail of finance from Banks and other commercial lending providers. The loan incurs 0% interest for the first six months and Zero repayments. Thereafter a reduced interest rate of 4.5% APR applies to loans applied for through the Local Enterprise Office.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

358. **Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the safety measures needed for beauticians to reopen their premises and resume business; if they will be allowed to touch faces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13496/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The National Return to Work Safely Protocol is the primary 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 response to their requests, my predecessor, Ms Heather Humphreys, T.D., Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation met with members of the hairdressing and beauty industry via teleconference on 7th May, 20th May and 16th June. The Minister requested that, where sectors are developing return to work protocols or guides, they should work together to align this work.

On 5th June the Irish Hairdressing Federation submitted their protocol to the Minister who duly forwarded it to the then Minister for Health and to the HSE, for consideration. The document, which was developed and supported by the Irish Hairdressers Federation, the Hair and Beauty Industry Confederation (HABIC), the Hairdressing Council of Ireland, Synergy Hair Group and the Barber Society of Ireland, was drawn up with reference to the National

## Return to Work Safely Protocol.

On June 19, the Government, having considered the expert public health advice provided by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), approved the rephrasing of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. Apart from some exceptions, most sectors have been brought forward to Phase 3, which began on Monday 29th June.

Under the rephased Roadmap, hairdressers, barbers, nail and brow salons, beauty salons, spas, make-up application services, tanning, tattooing and piercing services can reopen on 29th June. Full details are available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/news/58bc8b- taoiseach-announces-roadmap-for-reopening-society-and-business-and-u/>

As we move forward on reopening of society and business, it is important to note that all decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of the remaining restrictions will be informed by the public health advice at the time.

*Question No. 359 answered with Question No. 356.*

## Departmental Staff

360. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if his Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13541/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** My Department's HR policies and practices are governed by Circulars and guidance set centrally by the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform (DPER), including employment terms and conditions, and also Circular 4 of 2003 which promotes e-working in the Civil Service.

During the current Covid-19 pandemic my Department is closely following the guidance that all those who can work from home should do so. As the Country moves through a phased return to work, my Department will continue to implement work practices which are in line with public health and safety, and DPER's guidelines on 'Working from Home during COVID-19 – Guidance for Civil Service Organisations' will also assist my Department as long as necessary to address the health and safety risks of COVID-19.

## Workplace Safety

361. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the options available to an employee if they are of the view their workplace is failing to comply with public health guidelines in relation to reopening; the actions they should take if they are of the view the workplace is not in compliance; the agency and or body they should contact; if a confidential hotline number is available to them; if not, the reason; if a response will be available in terms of assessment and enforcement; if additional staffing resources have been allocated for these purposes; if penalties and sanctions are planned for employers that fail to comply with public health guidelines; his plans to have a public health campaign on these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13655/20]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Health and Safety Authority has responsibility for the occupational health and safety of workers and those who may be affected by a work activity. The Authority is the lead agency

in relation to the Return to Work Safely Protocol and in encouraging and checking compliance with the Protocol.

In addition, as part of the whole of Government approach and to supplement the efforts of the HSA inspectors, 500 other inspectors from across the system are now monitoring the application of the Protocol as part of their normal inspection duties. These resources are being drawn from the Workplace Relations Commission, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Environmental Health Officers employed by the Health Service Executive (HSE). These additional inspectors are supporting the Health and Safety Authority in carrying out checks on compliance with the Protocol as part of their normal inspections. Furthermore, 7 Staff from my Department have been seconded to the Workplace Contact Unit of the Health and Safety Authority to assist in managing phone and email queries about the Return to Work Safely Protocol

If an employee has concerns about a workplace compliance with the Protocol they can contact the Health and Safety Authority Workplace Contact Unit (WCU) on a confidential basis at 1890 289 389 or by sending an email to [wcu@hsa.ie](mailto:wcu@hsa.ie). If following such a complaint, there are serious concerns about a particular workplace, the Health and Safety Authority or another agency or organisation tasked with inspecting workplace compliance with the Protocol, will follow-up as appropriate. Where businesses have not fully complied with the Protocol, any matters that need to be addressed are the subject of the inspection report and are followed up so as to ensure compliance.

It should be noted that Health and Safety Authority carries out inspections and manages complaints on a confidential basis. In order to achieve compliance with the Protocol the Health and Safety Authority can use its full range of powers. Any initial engagement with an employer is with the aim of achieving the required outcomes through consensus and collaborative agreement e.g. advice, Reports of Inspections (ROI). However a failure to comply with a ROI is an offence.

In addition, the Health and Safety Authority has produced checklists and templates to support implementation of the Protocol which have now been downloaded over 130,000 times and feedback on these from a range of employer and employee groups has been very positive. The Health and Safety Authority has noted a high level of compliance with the Return to Work Safely Protocol to date during Phases 1 and 2.

The running of Public Health campaigns would be a matter for the Department of Health which has overall responsibility for public health matters.

### **Covid-19 Tests**

362. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the number of prisoners tested for the Covid-19 virus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13055/20]

363. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the number of prisoners that refused to be tested for the Covid-19 virus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13056/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 362 and 363 together.

As this is an operational matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

## Covid-19 Tests

364. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the location in which samples taken from prisoners for the Covid-19 virus were analysed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13057/20]

365. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if each prisoner tested for the Covid-19 virus was informed of the result of their test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13058/20]

366. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if the consent of prisoners tested for the Covid-19 virus was obtained prior to carrying out the test; the way in which the consent was obtained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13059/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 364 to 366, inclusive, together.

As this is an operational matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

## Health Services Provision

367. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health when treatment for a person (details supplied) will recommence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13243/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

### **Dental Services**

368. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 565 of 23 June 2020, the number of dentists operating the dental treatment services scheme that have been supplied with PPE by the HSE from 1 April to 24 June 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13711/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) provides dental care free of charge to medical card holders aged 16 and over. These services are provided by independent dental practitioners who have a contract with the HSE. Fees paid to dentists under the DTSS are set out in the Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Registered Dentists) Regulations 2009 and the Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Registered Dentists) Regulations 2012.

I understand that there are reports that medical card holders may have been refused access to treatment by a small number of dentists with DTSS contracts. The Chief Dental Officer in my Department is urgently pursuing the matter with the HSE National Oral Health Office to seek to ensure that no patients are left without a service.

I am aware that a number of dental contractors have given notice of their intention to withdraw from the DTSS but I would hope that those dentists would continue to honour their ethical and contractual obligations to patients during the notice withdrawal period to either provide a service or ensure that patients are referred to a neighbouring dentist who will provide a service.

I would also expect due process to be followed in respect of any withdrawal from the terms of a DTSS contract, in particular regarding an appropriate period of notice.

The cost of PPE should not be a key determinant in decisions on the treatment of patients. The Dental Council advises that dentists should take a case by case assessment when deciding if additional PPE is warranted. The Health Protection Surveillance Centre has advised that regular PPE, which has always been used, is generally sufficient for routine dentistry.

My understanding is that a small number of dentists had applied to the HSE for PPE until early May when the volume of requests increased. My Department, in conjunction with the HSE, is examining the issue of the provision of PPE across all parts of the health service, including health service contractors. I am not aware of any agreement between the HSE and the Irish Dental Association in this regard.

In order to support small, medium and larger businesses that are negatively impacted by COVID-19 a suite of Government measures is in place. These include a Restart grant for which application can be made online to local authorities and a Return to Work Safely Protocol 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.

### **Dental Services**

369. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 565 of 23 June 2020, the PPE agreement, including the costs, between the HSE

and an association (details supplied) on 8 May 2020 for dentists operating the dental treatment services scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13716/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) provides dental care free of charge to medical card holders aged 16 and over. These services are provided by independent dental practitioners who have a contract with the HSE. Fees paid to dentists under the DTSS are set out in the Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Registered Dentists) Regulations 2009 and the Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Registered Dentists) Regulations 2012.

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## Dental Services

370. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 565 of 23 June 2020, the plans in place by the HSE to ensure that medical card holders that are no longer being treated by their registered dentist under the dental treatment services scheme can continue to receive treatment in view of the large number of dentists withdrawing from the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13717/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) provides dental care free of charge to medical card holders aged 16 and over. These services are provided by independent dental practitioners who have a contract with the HSE. Fees

paid to dentists under the DTSS are set out in the Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Registered Dentists) Regulations 2009 and the Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Registered Dentists) Regulations 2012.

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## **Dental Services**

371. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 565 of 23 June 2020, his plans to engage with dentists on the dental treatment services scheme contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13718/20]

455. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Health his plans to engage with an organisation (details supplied) on a review of the DTSS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13077/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 371 and 455 together.

Smile agus Sláinte, the National Oral Health Policy, which was published in April 2019, provides the groundwork to transform oral health services over the next eight years.

The Policy has two key goals:-

- to provide the supports to enable every individual to achieve their personal best oral health.
- to reduce oral health inequalities across the population, by enabling vulnerable groups to access oral healthcare and improve their oral health.

The Policy includes proposals for the introduction of packages of oral healthcare for adult medical card holders (i.e. over 16 years) at different intervals during their life course. The packages will focus on prevention and will include examinations, advice, and preventive therapies such as scale and polish, fissure sealants, and fluoride therapy as well as one filling. Routine care including additional fillings and complex care will continue to be available in addition to the preventative packages of care.

The Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS), which currently provides a range of dental treatments to medical card holders will need to be revised in order to align it with modern evidence on oral health needs and provision of dental services. My Department is committed to reviewing the provision of dental care for those eligible for public services and will engage with the Irish Dental Association in this regard.

### **Dental Services**

372. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health if an order tracking history (details supplied) associated with a PPE order will be provided; and when the order will be completed [12689/20]

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

### **Disability Support Services**

373. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Health when day services for persons with intellectual and physical disabilities will be reopened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12691/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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. A national group for the resumption of day services representative of service users

and families, service providers and the HSE is working together to prepare for the resumption of day service supports in line with COVID-19 guidance. The Framework for the Resumption of Adult Disability Day Services and Action Plan for resumption of services have been completed. The national group are currently developing guidance to support the day service sector to reopen within the parameters of public health advice.

Community Healthcare Organisations are working with service providers to ascertain the current level of service provision and innovative practises that have developed over the last number of months. The collation and analysis of this data will provide a current national picture which will enable the resumption group to address the challenges of reopening day service locations.

The resumption group plan to have completed the above strands of work shortly, following which a timeframe for the phased reopening of adult day services will be planned in cooperation with HSE disability services and service providers. In the meantime, service providers continue to contact day service users regarding their support needs and are providing those supports in different ways. Some supports continue to be provided in a number of ways, for example by telephone, online communication and responses to address emergency needs.

The HSE and disability service providers, where identified, will continue to communicate with school leavers and their families to plan and organise for a transition to day services in line with public health guidance.

The safety of service users and staff is of critical importance therefore the attendance at locations will be determined by public health guidance, which may result in some reduction of capacity.

An information leaflet for service users and their families was developed by the national group and distributed widely to all stakeholders on June 9th.

It is expected that a clearer picture will emerge shortly as to when day services are likely to be reinstated and how the service will be delivered taking account of Public Health Guidance and COVID-19 restrictions.

The Framework for Resumption of Adult Disability Day Services and the information leaflet “What’s Happening” is available on the New Directions website: [www.hse.ie/newdirections](http://www.hse.ie/newdirections)

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

374. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Health if there has been an inspection at a meat factory (details supplied); if so, if workers were tested for Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12692/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is an operational matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Policy**

375. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health if a contrasting document will be produced to highlight the differences between the new Sharing the Vision - a Mental Health Policy for Everyone 2020-2030 and A Vision For Change documents [12694/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The national mental health policy, *A Vision for Change*, ended its ten-year term in 2016, having been the cornerstone of mental health policy in Ireland since its publication in 2006. The Department of Health led the review of this policy, with a view to the development of a successor document which would continue the process of modernising mental health services and effectively promoting mental health.

The terms of reference for the refresh did not assume the need for a whole new policy document or a complete examination of policy from first principles, but rather to build on the good foundations of *A Vision for Change*, particularly given that many of its principles remained valid in terms of good practice, and simply required updating and extending to reflect the best of current thinking and evolving practices in the sector.

Preparations for a review and update of the policy commenced with the commissioning in February 2017 of an Expert Evidence Review by the Work Research Centre (WRC) to inform the parameters of the planned refresh of mental health policy in Ireland. The approach encompassed a stock-take of recent success in mental health and a review of international developments, innovation, evidence and good practice. The review had a broad brief covering the various dimensions of the mental health terrain that might have relevance for informing the refresh of mental health policy in Ireland.

The key priorities that emerged out of the review were:

- The prioritisation of mental health in Ireland as a major societal issue
- The importance of primary prevention and positive mental health
- A requirement to focus on social inclusion and recovery
- Expansion of mental health services to address the spectrum of conditions and needs
- Development of governance and financing to include research, evaluation and quality assurance

The WRC completed a supplementary paper to build on the work in the External Evidence Review, which identified specific policy changes for which a requirement may have arisen since *A Vision for Change* was drafted. The review identified policy themes that might require attention in the refresh such as the identification of vulnerable groups and associated actions not mentioned in the previous policy. The report also sought to consider new policy areas including a wider focus on education and prevention, and the wider use of accredited digital health interventions. In addition, the report sought to evaluate each recommendation from the previous policy and to rate progress to date on what actions were implemented, what relevant actions remained and what actions were no longer needed. Both WRC reports assisted in identifying priority areas for the newly formed Oversight Group to consider as they drafted their report for the Department of Health. Both reports will be made available on the Department of Health website.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

376. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when an announcement will be made in relation to the timing of the lifting of the quarantine arrangements for those coming here to afford certainty to persons planning to come here for work and pleasure and those intending to go abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12701/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the number of indigenous cases here

declines and Ireland eases restrictions, the relative importance of the risk of importation of cases from overseas increases.

The public health advice for passengers arriving into the State from overseas is to self-isolate for 14 days. Self-isolation is not a legal requirement of persons entering the State from overseas. 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.

From 9 July it is intended that there will be a gradual opening up of international travel, through a Roadmap for Safe Overseas Access, as announced by the Government. It is intended that reciprocal travel arrangements (air bridges) will be established with a number of countries with broadly comparable epidemiological situations to Ireland's, based on an agreed EU method for comparing countries. Work on developing the Roadmap is to be taken forward by relevant Government departments, in consultation with stakeholders.

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

377. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has not had their waiting time backdated [12728/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Dental Services**

378. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter in relation to dentists turning away medical card holders due to the additional expenses relating to Covid-19 social distancing guideline management and PPE cost (details supplied); the measures which will be put in place to protect medical card holders in such instances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12729/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) provides dental care free of charge to medical card holders aged 16 and over. These services are provided by independent dental practitioners who have a contract with the HSE. Fees paid to dentists under the DTSS are set out in the Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Registered Dentists) Regulations 2009 and the Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Registered Dentists) Regulations 2012.

I understand that there are reports that medical card holders may have been refused access to treatment by a small number of dentists with DTSS contracts. The Chief Dental Officer in my Department is urgently pursuing the matter with the HSE National Oral Health Office to seek to ensure that no patients are left without a service.

I am aware that a number of dental contractors have given notice of their intention to withdraw from the DTSS but I would hope that those dentists would continue to honour their ethical and contractual obligations to patients during the notice withdrawal period to either provide a service or ensure that patients are referred to a neighbouring dentist who will provide a service.

I would also expect due process to be followed in respect of any withdrawal from the terms of a DTSS contract, in particular regarding an appropriate period of notice.

The cost of PPE should not be a key determinant in decisions on the treatment of patients. The Dental Council advises that dentists should take a case by case assessment when deciding if additional PPE is warranted. The Health Protection Surveillance Centre has advised that regular PPE, which has always been used, is generally sufficient for routine dentistry.

My understanding is that a small number of dentists had applied to the HSE for PPE until early May when the volume of requests increased. My Department, in conjunction with the HSE, is examining the issue of the provision of PPE across all parts of the health service, including health service contractors. I am not aware of any agreement between the HSE and the Irish Dental Association in this regard.

In order to support small, medium and larger businesses that are negatively impacted by COVID-19 a suite of Government measures is in place. These include a Restart grant for which application can be made online to local authorities and a Return to Work Safely Protocol 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.

### **Home Help Service**

379. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health when regular home help hours curtailed during Covid-19 restrictions will be restored. [12731/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Health Services Provision**

380. **Deputy Joe Flaherty** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expand care in the community to provide mobile treatment services for chemotherapy and dialysis as is the practice in the UK and other European countries (details supplied). [12733/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Chemotherapy, or Systemic Anti-Cancer Therapy (SACT), is delivered in 26 hospitals across the country. There are also a number of community SACT services, including:

- the HSE's National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) community oncology nursing programme which trains community nurses to become competent to deliver some aspects of care to oncology patients in the community;

- community infusion clinics providing services for oncology patients such as low-risk infusions, pre-SACT blood tests, nursing assessments and supportive care for patients delivered by Community Intervention Teams (CITs); and

- the provision of SACT directly to patients by third party/private providers under contract with the hospitals/HSE

These community SACT services operate under clear governance structures and the patient remains under the care of their medical oncology or haematology acute hospital team. Policies, procedures, protocols and guidelines (PPPGs) are in place and include an evaluation process to ensure that the care is delivered safely, and that patients are continuously monitored.

The NCCP advises that enhancing these services and exploring the possibility of using some of the 29 community hubs, for example in oral anticancer medication management, would be a more appropriate option than the use of mobile facilities at this time.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

381. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a case (details supplied); if the business can reopen on 30 July 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12736/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Deputy is aware, on 19 June 2020, the Taoiseach, on behalf of the Government, announced the restrictions that would be eased and the measures that will be in place in Phase 3. On Thursday 25th June the Government confirmed the move to Phase 3 of Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business from Monday, 29 June 2020. Information and advice about the restrictions that have been eased as part of Phase 3 and the measures that are now in place are available on the Government website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d06271-easing-the-covid-19-restrictions-on-29-june-phase-3/>

The Government also agreed to bring forward actions in the remaining phases of the Roadmap and plan for four phases rather than the five originally indicated. This will be subject to continued progressive improvements in the health indicators identified in the Framework for Future Decision-Making described in the Roadmap

I wish to clarify to the Deputy that cinemas are included in these measures and may reopen subject to the Phase 3 and 4 restrictions on numbers for public gatherings and other important public health advice and specific requirements. The numbers for public gatherings can be found on the Government website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d06271-easing-the-covid-19-restrictions-on-29-june-phase-3/#social>. The specific requirements can be found on the Government website at <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/77452/39d51b02-5633-4e2f-a070-4551a3521081.pdf#page=7>.

I would also wish to draw the Deputy's attention to the Return to Work Safely Protocol which was published by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation on Saturday 9 May last. This detailed guidance document was developed to assist employers and employees in the coming period and is available at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html>. The Protocol is mandatory, and it applies to all workplaces right across the economy. Specific sectors may need to introduce additional safeguards, but this document sets out the standard set of measures required in every workplace.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

382. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health when SI No. 181 of 2020, Health Act 1947 (Section 31A – Temporary Requirements) (Covid-19 Passenger Locator Form) Regulations 2020 expires; his plans to extend it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12737/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** SI No. 181 of 2020, Health Act 1947 (Section 31A – Temporary Requirements) (Covid-19 Passenger Locator Form) Regulations 2020 will expire on 9th July.

From 9 July it is intended that there will be a gradual opening up of international travel,

through a Roadmap for Safe Overseas Access, as announced by the Government. It is intended that reciprocal travel arrangements (air bridges) will be established with a number of countries with broadly comparable epidemiological situations to Ireland's, based on an agreed EU method for comparing countries. Work on developing the Roadmap, including considerations on the passenger locator form, is to be taken forward by relevant Government departments, in consultation with stakeholders.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

383. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment to have a MRI will be granted to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12738/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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 Procedures**

384. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Health when elective surgery will resume at University Hospital Galway for a person (details supplied) who is currently awaiting a procedure which has time constraints for optimum outcome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12742/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

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

### **Cancer Services**

385. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health his plans to eliminate the wait for cancer patients as a result of the reorientation of the public and private health services during the Covid-19 crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12748/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The National Action Plan on Covid-19 identified the continued delivery of urgent cancer care as a priority through ensuring the delivery of national specialities and maintaining urgent activity (including Rapid Access Clinics). Cancer services continued following the consideration of the risk:benefit ratio of treatment of individual patients, the prioritisation of time-sensitive treatment and the ongoing review of the location of the delivery of cancer services across all cancer clinical programmes:

- Medical oncology services continue with the relocation of day wards where necessary. Physical distancing requirements will challenge the return of patients to pre-Covid numbers;

- Radiation oncology services continue with provisions made for physical distancing and intensified cleaning regimes for the linac machines;

- Maintaining urgent surgical oncology services is a priority with many services relocating to private hospitals. Less urgent surgery was deferred at the outset and this is beginning to be addressed now:

- Rapid Access Clinics for breast, lung and prostate cancers continue. E-referrals to these clinics, compared to the pre-Covid months, are back to normal for breast patients (largest numbers attend breast clinics), but are still lower for lung (in particular) and prostate;

- Symptomatic services for other cancers also continue to operate, in line with NCCP guidance documents for treating patients during the Covid-19 pandemic. Patients are being triaged in advance of their appointments, and virtual/telephone clinics are in operation where possible.

Cancer services across all clinical programmes are currently seeking to return to activity levels to meet the increasing service demand. This will include the diagnosis and treatment of patients triaged as non-urgent who may not have presented, or who had their treatment delayed or deferred, during the Covid-period. The HSE's National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) advises that it will be a challenge to get the numbers back to where they were while implementing physical distancing and associated precautionary measures. The challenges arising will be exacerbated by the number of patients who would normally have presented earlier coming forward in the next few months, on top of the increasing numbers arising more generally in line with an increasing and an ageing population.

My Department is continuing to engage closely with the NCCP and others in regard to cancer services and work is underway to establish the requirements to sustainably provide for the demand. The focus is on facilitating cancer services to return to pre-COVID levels, as far as possible, and on how this can be done in a safe and effective way. Planning will include for any revised arrangements with private hospitals.

### **Tobacco Control Measures**

386. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Health if he will request a formal investigation by the EU Commission independent advisory panel on characterising flavours in tobacco products into the continued sale of menthol-style products in view of his comments that some tobacco companies are undermining the menthol cigarette ban that came into force in May 2020; if he will consider issuing a prohibition order on the products while the investigations by the HSE are ongoing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12751/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Health Service Executive, as a competent authority for the EU Tobacco Products Directive, is responsible for enforcement of the prohibition on the sale of menthol flavoured cigarettes and tobacco products which came into effect on 20 May 2020. The HSE is monitoring compliance with the ban and will pursue all necessary measures, be they at national or EU level, to ensure that prohibited products are removed from the market.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

387. **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. [12755/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

### **Health Products Regulatory Authority**

388. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health his plans to prevent the banned substance MMS from entering the market here and being sold illegally to parents of autistic children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12756/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) conducts ongoing monitoring activities for the supply of the product known as ‘Miracle Mineral Solution’ (MMS) in Ireland. This includes monitoring of the Internet and online platforms for the promotion of unauthorised medicinal products, including MMS. The HPRA also engages with social media platforms to require removal of any advertisements and offerings that contravene medicinal products legislation, as well as taking enforcement actions against suppliers for offences in relation to manufacture and supply of the product, where necessary.

Currently the HPRA does not have any evidence that MMS is being supplied by any website or other outlet in Ireland. This is not to suggest that such supply of this product, or other unauthorised medicinal products offered to treat autism spectrum disorder, will not appear in the future. It is also possible that information relating to and promotion of the treatment is happening via word of mouth, the dark web, or other relatively difficult-to-detect methods. The HPRA is vigilant in this area and will continue to monitor for, and investigate, such matters, including co-operating and working with An Garda Síochána, Revenue’s Customs Service and other State agencies as appropriate.

The regulations in relation to medicinal products cover their placing on the market, manufacture, wholesale and retail supply and advertising. The unauthorised medicinal product known as Miracle Mineral Solution (MMS) is governed by these regulations. Penalties for breaches of regulations are provided for by the Irish Medicines Board Acts 1995 and 2006. On summary

conviction, a person may face fines not exceeding a class B fine (€4,000) and, or imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year; on conviction on indictment, fines not exceeding €100,000 and, or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years, and in the case of a second or subsequent offence on indictment, fines not exceeding €250,000, and, or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years.

### HSE Properties

389. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the status of the land at the entrance to an estate (details supplied); if it is under the control of the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12768/20]

396. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the status of the land (details supplied) at a location; and if it is still under the control of the HSE. [12809/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 389 and 396 together.

As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the management of the public healthcare property estate, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

### Chronic Disease Management Programme

390. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 572 of 16 June 2020, the way in which the chronic disease management programme will be rolled out over the next three years to 2023; the categories of patients that will be added to those already commenced in the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12773/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** In line with the terms of the 2019 GP Agreement, the Chronic Disease Management (CDM) Programme which commenced at the end of January 2020 is to be rolled out on a phased basis to adult GMS and GP visit card patients over a 4-year period, starting with those aged 75 years and over. The programme will be extended to eligible patients aged 65 – 74 years from 2021 and to those aged 45 – 64 years from 2022.

Patients with an existing diagnosis of one of the specified conditions (Type 2 Diabetes, Asthma, COPD, and Cardiovascular Disease), those who are assessed by their GP on an opportunistic case finding basis, as well as those identified as high risk, will benefit under the programme.

The programme is expected to help over 400,000 patients to better manage their conditions through regular programmed contacts with their GP, resulting in the most effective use of healthcare resources and a decrease in reliance on acute hospital attendance.

Due to the COVID-19 public health emergency and in line with clinical advice, temporary changes have been agreed between the HSE and the IMO to the operation of the CDM Programme. These will allow for greater use of remote consultations and will increase the number of patients benefiting from the Programme in the current year. The revised Programme will be a combination of teleconsultations and in-surgery visits at the GP's discretion and dependent on patient clinical requirements. In addition, the Programme will be extended to include all medical card and GP visit card patients over the age of 70.

## **Disability Services Funding**

391. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of funding for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12779/20]

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

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

## **HSE Complaints Procedures**

392. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12786/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

## **Public Sector Pay**

393. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if HR circular 037/2019 has been fully implemented; if not, when it will be; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12796/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** My Department issued policy direction in relation to the application of the pay adjustments under the Public Service Pay and Pension Act 2017 on the 17 December 2019 to the totality of the public health sector via Department of Health circular 16/2019.

In relation to the operational application of these adjustments, I have asked the HSE (whose circular is 037/2019) to respond directly to the Deputy.

## **Public Sector Allowances**

394. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if HR circular 027/2019 has been fully implemented; if not, when it will be; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12797/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I have requested the HSE respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

## **National Children's Hospital**

395. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the current schedule for the

construction of the National Children's Hospital; the delays that are expected; if he will confirm that construction is reconvened as planned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12803/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I am aware that construction work on the new children's hospital stopped on 31 March 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

I understand that since the commencement of the easing of restrictions on 18 of May, the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) has been engaging with the main contractor in relation to the earliest possible reopening of the site. I have been informed that some matters remain unresolved at this time and that construction has not recommenced.

I am anxious that the hospital be completed as quickly as possible on behalf of children, young people and their families. The NPHDB has statutory responsibility for planning, designing, building and equipping the new children's hospital and I have referred your question to the NPHDB for direct reply.

*Question No. 396 answered with Question No. 389.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

397. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if nursing home staff being tested for Covid-19 will have their results relayed to them directly and not to their managers, in view of the fact that this was the case previously when there was mass testing of nursing home staff. [12811/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the HSE has responsibility, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

### **Patient Transfers**

398. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be investigated; and the reason they have not been transferred to a particular nursing home in view of the circumstances. [12812/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services**

399. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health if he has requested the HSE to examine the finances of an organisation (details supplied); if so, the reason for the examination; when the examination will be concluded; if the results will be made public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12813/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The HSE has worked with Pieta House to ensure continued provision of its key services during and after Covid-19. The HSE has committed to provide cash flow support on a monthly basis, to begin when the Government payment schemes have ceased, with the position to be reviewed after each quarter. The provision of supplementary resources to Pieta House is linked to Action 4 in the National Action Plan in

Response to Covid-19, which is focused on caring for at risk or vulnerable people and outlines the need to roll out and expand supports related to Covid-19.

The HSE is in regular communication with Pieta House to ensure that services provided to clients are in line with the revised service level agreement (SLA). As part of the agreement, Pieta House will provide financial information giving a clear outline of service delivery and associated costs before, during and after Covid-19.

I have referred this parliamentary question to the HSE for direct reply, to furnish you with further information on the revised SLA between the HSE and Pieta House, including financial monitoring and any financial examination.

### **Mental Health Services**

400. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the delays in the commencement of the mental health service for deaf adults; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that a consultant was appointed to the service in October 2019 but no patients have been seen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12817/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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**

401. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health if versatis pain patches are prescribed under the GMS scheme for conditions other than shingles; the other conditions these patches are prescribed for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12832/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicinal products under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

Following a review, the HSE introduced a new system for the reimbursement of the lidocaine 5% medicated plaster (Versatis), which is licensed only for the localised relief of post-shingles pain in adults.

Patients are reviewed by the Medicines Management Programme (MMP) for reimbursement approval, on foot of an application by the patient's clinician, through the HSE online system.

In exceptional circumstances, the product may be approved for supply for unlicensed uses.

If an application is refused, the clinician may make an appeal, making a clear clinical case for the patient to the MMP at [mmp@hse.ie](mailto:mmp@hse.ie).

This process ensures the appropriate use of the patch and that post-shingles patients, and other patients as clinically appropriate, can continue to have this treatment.

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

402. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health when employees of a service

(details supplied) will receive computer devices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12837/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Ambulance Service**

403. **Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health when the €350,000 allocated to the ambulance base in County Carlow will be provided; when he expects works to begin; when County Carlow will have an ambulance base that is fit for purpose; and his views on whether it is unacceptable for a town the size of Carlow to not have its own ambulance base. [12842/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

### **Dental Services**

404. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some dentists are telling patients that they are not accepting medical card patients due to the increased cost of PPE in delivering care and the failure of his Department and the HSE to help them with such costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12851/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) provides dental care free of charge to medical card holders aged 16 and over. These services are provided by independent dental practitioners who have a contract with the HSE. Fees paid to dentists under the DTSS are set out in the Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Registered Dentists) Regulations 2009 and the Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Registered Dentists) Regulations 2012.

I understand that there are reports that medical card holders may have been refused access to treatment by a small number of dentists with DTSS contracts. The Chief Dental Officer in my Department is urgently pursuing the matter with the HSE National Oral Health Office to seek to ensure that no patients are left without a service.

I am aware that a number of dental contractors have given notice of their intention to withdraw from the DTSS but I would hope that those dentists would continue to honour their ethical and contractual obligations to patients during the notice withdrawal period to either provide a service or ensure that patients are referred to a neighbouring dentist who will provide a service.

I would also expect due process to be followed in respect of any withdrawal from the terms of a DTSS contract, in particular regarding an appropriate period of notice.

The cost of PPE should not be a key determinant in decisions on the treatment of patients. The Dental Council advises that dentists should take a case by case assessment when deciding if additional PPE is warranted. The Health Protection Surveillance Centre has advised that regular PPE, which has always been used, is generally sufficient for routine dentistry.

My understanding is that a small number of dentists had applied to the HSE for PPE until

early May when the volume of requests increased. My Department, in conjunction with the HSE, is examining the issue of the provision of PPE across all parts of the health service, including health service contractors. I am not aware of any agreement between the HSE and the Irish Dental Association in this regard.

In order to support small, medium and larger businesses that are negatively impacted by COVID-19 a suite of Government measures is in place. These include a Restart grant for which application can be made online to local authorities and a Return to Work Safely Protocol 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.

### **Health Services Staff**

405. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if all non-consultant hospital doctors currently working in the health service or that had previously worked in the service that were dealing with Covid-19, will be offered full-time contracts to stay working in the health service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12852/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy on this matter.

### **Health Services**

406. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health his plans to deal with the rat infestation in north-western areas of Dublin; and the role of the HSE in this regard. [12860/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** This is a matter for the HSE therefore I have referred the question to the HSE for attention and direct reply.

### **Physiotherapy Services**

407. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health when the intensive physiotherapy department will reopen at Our Lady's Hospital, Cashel, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12862/20]

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

### **Hospital Charges**

408. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if a series of matters will be clarified in relation to the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12863/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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

409. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if cervical testing has been restored to normal levels of activity; if there is a backlog of appointments; if it is normal for patients to be waiting for six months or more; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12865/20]

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

## Disability Services Provision

410. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health when a place will be allocated to a person (details supplied). [12873/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

## Dental Services

411. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health when dental services for children with special needs will resume in St. Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny (details supplied). [12894/20]

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

## Respite Care Services

412. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health the status of the home share respite project in the south-east; and if the project is on schedule in view of indications by the head of HSE disability services for the south-east. [12895/20]

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

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

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

### **Respite Care Services**

413. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a decision on an application for respite by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [12903/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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**

414. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the average estimated economic loss to the health service for each hour of delay in time-to-theatre for emergency surgery patients in tabular form; if this data is not available, the reason no such economic analysis has taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12914/20]

415. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the average estimated economic loss to the health service of a delay in outpatient surgery if the surgery is delayed by 3, 6, 12, 15 and more than 18 months, respectively in tabular form; if this data is not available, the reason no such economic analysis has taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12915/20]

416. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the average estimated economic loss to the health service of a delay in a patient's inpatient and day case surgery if the surgery is delayed by 3, 6, 12, 15 and more than 18 months, respectively in tabular form; if this data is not available, the reason no such economic analysis has taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12916/20]

417. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the average estimated economic loss to the health service of a delay in a patient's outpatient appointment if the appointment is delayed by 3, 6, 12, 15 and more than 18 months, respectively in tabular form; if this data is not available, the reason no such economic analysis has taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12917/20]

418. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the average estimated economic loss to the health service of a delay in a patient's inpatient day case appointment if the appointment is delayed by 3, 6, 12, 15 and more than 18 months, respectively in tabular form; if this data is not available, the reason no such economic analysis has taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12918/20]

419. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the average estimated economic loss to society of a delay in a patient's outpatient surgery if the surgery is delayed by 3, 6, 12, 15 and more than 18 months, respectively in tabular form; if this data is not available, the reason no such economic analysis has taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12919/20]

420. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the average estimated economic loss to society of a delay in a patient's inpatient day case surgery if the surgery is delayed by 3, 6, 12, 15 and more than 18 months, respectively in tabular form; if this data is not available, the reason no such economic analysis has taken place; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [12920/20]

421. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the average estimated economic loss to society of a delay in a patient's outpatient appointment if the appointment is delayed by 3, 6, 12, 15 and more than 18 months, respectively in tabular form; if this data is not available, the reason no such economic analysis has taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12921/20]

422. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the average estimated economic loss to society of a delay in a patient's inpatient day case appointment if the appointment is delayed by 3, 6, 12, 15 and more than 18 months, respectively in tabular form; if this data is not available, the reason no such economic analysis has taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12922/20]

423. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if an evaluation or research has been conducted into the social loss in cases in which surgery or treatment is delayed; if so, if details of such analysis will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12923/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 414 to 423, inclusive, together.

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 National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), 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.

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.

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 a total of 203,510 virtual outpatient consultations took place from March to May, representing 36% of all OPD activity over the three months.

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.

Evaluating the impact of delayed treatment forms part of two significant research programmes my Department is funding and participating in. In terms of the individual level impact, my Department is a co-investigator of an interim-wave TILDA COVID-19 survey which will seek to understand the experience of delayed healthcare due to the COVID-19 crisis. This

project aims to examine the long-term impacts of the public-health led response to COVID-19 on the older population and will collate data on unmet healthcare needs. Findings will be prepared between October and end-January.

With regard to the system level impact, as part of the Department's Joint Research Programme in Healthcare Reform with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), work is underway to produce a publication by year-end which assesses the potential effects of COVID-19 on acute hospital expenditure projections that are currently being developed. One aspect of this report will investigate the scale of additional hospital activity required to reduce post-COVID waiting lists and maintain them at manageable levels.

Both of the aforementioned work will be published when complete, and therefore will be publicly available.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Substance Misuse**

424. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health if he will instruct the HSE to include information on nitrous oxide under the solvent's category on drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12931/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) in the USA considers nitrous oxide as an inhalant which covers solvents, aerosols and gases found in household products.

On the drugs.ie website, nitrous oxide has its own page in the sedative section as technically it is categorised as sedative/dissociative anaesthetic. A link to the nitrous oxide page has been added to the solvents page.

Some drugs, particularly newer trends, can fall into many categories. The drug category system on Drugs.ie is being reviewed and will be replaced with an a-z list of drugs.

The HSE alerted young people about the danger of using nitrous oxide through a media release in January. It has updated Drugs.ie outlining the effects and risks associated with nitrous oxide use, and produced an advice booklet for parents on how to talk to young people about the risks associated with drug and alcohol use.

Nitrous oxide is a dangerous substance that may lead to serious health effects. It is important that we increase awareness of the health risks associated with nitrous oxide misuse among young people, parents and youth organisations.

### **Midwifery Services**

425. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a review is being carried out in relation to the midwife-led unit in Cavan General Hospital; if so, the terms of reference for the review; the time frame for its completion; and the details of the persons undertaking the review. [12932/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** My Department has requested, and is awaiting, a full report from the National Women & Infants Health Programme regarding the Midwifery Led Unit in Cavan. The Programme has advised that a review is underway within

the RCSI Hospital Group, led by the Group Clinical Director for Maternity Services in conjunction with the Directors of Midwifery from Our Lady of Lourdes, Drogheda and the Rotunda Hospitals.

Accordingly, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply to the Deputy directly in relation to the details of that review.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

426. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the plan that was put in place to deal with the health needs of persons on the islands during Covid-19; if a copy of the plan will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12934/20]

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

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

427. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to water shortages for persons on the islands and the difficulties this poses for their health needs during Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12935/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. The Minister for Health has no function in relation to this matter.

### **Health Services**

428. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Health the protocol for Dublin City Council to contact the HSE pest control unit. [12937/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** These are matters for the HSE therefore I have referred the questions to the HSE for attention and direct reply.

### **Health Services**

429. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Health the approved contractors used by the HSE for pest control. [12938/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** These are matters for the HSE therefore I have referred the questions to the HSE for attention and direct reply.

### **Health Services**

430. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE pest control unit will not sanction the use of bait boxes for use in the Dublin City Council area in view of

the fact it does so in other Dublin local authority areas; the person that makes the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12939/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** These are matters for the HSE therefore I have referred the questions to the HSE for attention and direct reply.

### **Health Services Provision**

431. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure sufferers of Parkinson's disease have access to the necessary services to treat their condition; if he will address concerns outlined in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12949/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

In general services for people with Parkinson's Disease are delivered within the context of Primary Care, with referrals into secondary care for specialist interventions, where appropriate. However, people with Parkinson's Disease may also benefit from specialist disability services.

The HSE provides a range of assisted living services including Personal Assistant and Home Support Services to support individuals to maximise their capacity to live full and independent lives.

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.

### **Health Services Staff**

432. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the vacancy for registrar position in St. Mary's Health Centre, Thurles; and his plans for the position to be filled. [12954/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Medical Cards**

433. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health when he will be increasing the medical card gross income limits for those over 70 years of age which were due to be introduced in July 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12963/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** On 25 June, the Government gave approval for the publication of the Health (General Practitioner Service and Alteration of Criteria for Eligibility) Bill 2020. This Bill provides, amongst other things, for the necessary legislative amendments to increase the weekly gross medical card income limits for those aged 70 or older

to €550 (currently €500) for individuals and €1,050 (currently €900) for couples. Publication of the Bill is now being arranged in preparation for its passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

### **Disability Support Services**

434. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the supports available to a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if the person is in receipt of the maximum level of support available under the HSE personal assistant service; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that additional personal assistant support is the appropriate support in this case and that the application has the full support of organisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12965/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances**

435. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when an appropriate wheelchair will be made temporarily available to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12977/20]

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

### **Medical Cards**

436. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will be issued in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12983/20]

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

### **Respite Care Services**

437. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if new initiatives have been provided with respect to respite care in the context of Covid-19 in view of the loss of school time which provided a type of respite for full-time carers of children with disabilities; if he has considered initiatives with the Minister for Education and Skills; if so, the initiatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12990/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** In line with Public Health advice, individual respite, except in emergency cases, has ceased on a temporary basis. Some in-house support is being provided based on priority need.

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.

Following extensive engagement between my Department, the Department of Education & Skills and the HSE a cross sectoral summer programme for children with complex needs and children in DEIS schools was announced on 12th June.

The Summer Provision 2020 will involve a number of strands with a range of options available for families and schools. These will include;

- A school based or home based programme provided by teachers and Special Needs Assistants, similar to the normal Department of Education and Skills July Provision Programme but with wider eligibility;

- A summer camp type programme for DEIS schools;

- And a HSE led, activity based respite / summer camp programme for prioritised children with complex needs.

The Department of Education and Skills have invited schools to express their interest in participating in the various programmes. Depending on the availability of school premises and Special Needs Assistants, the HSE and its children's disability service providers will aim to provide a "summer camp" type programme in each community healthcare network.

Under this programme it is proposed that

- Respite sessions for a child will be limited to 3 hours;

- Each centre will accommodate a maximum of 16 children at any time;

- Each classroom will accommodate a maximum of 4 children at any time;

- Drop off and collection of children would be staggered over a 30-minute period.

It is intended that staff in children's disability services will provide direction and support for Special Needs Assistants to deliver the programme. The input of these teams will ensure that the activities are tailored to the needs of the children.

The ultimate goals of the Summer Camp Programme are to:

- Provide short respite breaks for families;

- Facilitate children with complex needs to begin the transition from their homes to re-engaging with their communities and schools;

- Provide safe opportunities for children with complex needs to engage with their peers.

I trust that this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

## Cancer Services

438. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Health when cancer services, including BreastCheck, will resume; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12999/20]

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

## Hospital Facilities

439. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Health the status of the new 50 bed unit at Portiuncula Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13000/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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

440. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health when a report into a hospital (details supplied) will be completed and made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13004/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** A report was recently requested from Mr Paul Reid, 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.

A report has now been received from Mr Reid. The report covers the Covid-19 planning undertaken at Mayo University Hospital as part of the overall work of the Saolta Hospital Group, the considerable challenges faced at the outset and the actions taken to address these challenges. The report goes on to outline extensive measures implemented as the numbers of patients presenting with Covid-19 increased.

The report details the 121 positive Covid-19 patients in Mayo University Hospital, and states that all cases of patients and staff where hospital acquired status has been identified will be managed via the incident management system. The report refers to an increase in the number of patients and staff with confirmed Covid-19 in April, and indicates that the hospital undertook a focused response. A report is currently being finalised in relation to this outbreak.

As is the case across hospitals, Mayo University Hospital has adjusted how care is delivered to patients, as well as continuously implementing updated national advice. The report indicates that Saolta Hospital Group is assured that the appropriate control measures are currently in place in Mayo University Hospital in relation to the management of Covid-19. Saolta Executive, Microbiology and Infectious Diseases personnel have inputted to the management of Covid-19 in the hospital. In line with good practice, the hospital also had direct input from the HSE's Public Health Specialist service.

Importantly, the report also outlines learning identified, and issues that need to be addressed going forward. It indicates that the Saolta Hospital Group is assured that the appropriate con-

trol measures are currently in place in Mayo University Hospital in relation to the management of Covid-19.

The Covid-19 pandemic involved a previously unknown virus that put severe pressure on health facilities in Ireland and worldwide. The report submitted by the CEO of the HSE provides reassurance that a concerted effort was made to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic in Mayo University Hospital.

### **Medicinal Products**

441. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of efforts to licence the drug patiserin in the treatment of hereditary amyloidosis. [13006/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

I am advised by the HSE that it has received an application for the reimbursement of Patrisiran (Onpattro®) for the treatment of hereditary transthyretin-mediated amyloidosis (hATTR amyloidosis) in adult patients with stage 1 or stage 2 polyneuropathy.

In January 2019, a full health technology assessment was commissioned by the HSE. This assessment was completed in February 2020 with the NCPE recommending that patrisiran (Onpattro®) is not considered for reimbursement unless cost-effectiveness can be improved relative to existing treatments.

The HTA report will be an important input into the decision making processes of the HSE. The HSE is currently reviewing the report received and has recently met with the applicant company to discuss this.

Once negotiations between the HSE and the applicant company are complete, this application must then be formally considered by the HSE Drugs Group. The HSE Drugs Group is the national committee which the HSE has in place to make recommendations on the pricing and reimbursement of medicines. The decision making authority in the HSE is the HSE Executive Management Team.

### **Cancer Services**

442. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will again provide community cancer screening services despite Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13019/20]

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

### Maternity Services

443. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Health the stage the HSE plans to allow fathers to be allowed back into HSE pregnancy scans with their pregnant partners; when fathers will be permitted to access the maternity ward during a pregnancy for longer than a one hour duration; if face masks will help the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13020/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply to you directly.

### Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

444. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Health the plans in place to assist expecting parents with classes online in the absence of physical antenatal class appointments being offered due to Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13021/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply to you directly.

### Disability Services Provision

445. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Health when services will resume for a child (details supplied). [13030/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### Abortion Services Provision

446. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will report to Dáil Éireann by 30 June 2020 on the number of unborn babies aborted under the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 during 2019, which is a legal requirement under section 21(4) of the Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13034/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Under section 20 (1) of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, a notification of each termination of pregnancy carried out under the legislation must be notified to the Minister for Health within 28 days of it being carried out.

Section 20, subsections (3) and (4), require the Minister to prepare a report on the notifications received in a given year not later than 30 June the following year and thereafter to lay it before the Houses of the Oireachtas. This report may then be published.

### Primary Care Services

447. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the range of services that will be provided at the new primary care centre in Athy, County Kildare; the HSE agencies that will operate a service from the building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13035/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

### **Primary Care Services**

448. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will continue to operate services from a health centre (details supplied) in County Kildare; if so, the list of services that may continue there; and if new services will be provided at the centre [13036/20]

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

### **HSE Properties**

449. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the number of the 16 apartments the HSE leases in a location (details supplied) that are lying vacant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13060/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **HSE Properties**

450. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the length of time each individual apartment in the HSE lease in a location (details supplied) has been lying vacant by month in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13061/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **HSE Properties**

451. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health his plans to bring the vacant units among the 16 apartments the HSE leases in a location (details supplied) back into productive use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13062/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **HSE Properties**

452. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the cost per month of the 16

apartments the HSE leases in a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13063/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **HSE Properties**

453. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE has had engagement with or contact from other public bodies in relation to bringing the vacant units among the 16 apartments the HSE leases in a location (details supplied) back into productive use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13064/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Dental Services**

454. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Health when his Department and the HSE will provide PPE and a range of other supports required by dental practices nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13076/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) provides dental care free of charge to medical card holders aged 16 and over. These services are provided by independent dental practitioners who have a contract with the HSE. Fees paid to dentists under the DTSS are set out in the Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Registered Dentists) Regulations 2009 and the Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Registered Dentists) Regulations 2012.

I understand that there are reports that medical card holders may have been refused access to treatment by a small number of dentists with DTSS contracts. The Chief Dental Officer in my Department is urgently pursuing the matter with the HSE National Oral Health Office to seek to ensure that no patients are left without a service.

I am aware that a number of dental contractors have given notice of their intention to withdraw from the DTSS but I would hope that those dentists would continue to honour their ethical and contractual obligations to patients during the notice withdrawal period to either provide a service or ensure that patients are referred to a neighbouring dentist who will provide a service.

I would also expect due process to be followed in respect of any withdrawal from the terms of a DTSS contract, in particular regarding an appropriate period of notice.

The cost of PPE should not be a key determinant in decisions on the treatment of patients. The Dental Council advises that dentists should take a case by case assessment when deciding if additional PPE is warranted. The Health Protection Surveillance Centre has advised that regular PPE, which has always been used, is generally sufficient for routine dentistry.

My understanding is that a small number of dentists had applied to the HSE for PPE until early May when the volume of requests increased. My Department, in conjunction with the HSE, is examining the issue of the provision of PPE across all parts of the health service, including health service contractors. I am not aware of any agreement between the HSE and the

Irish Dental Association in this regard.

In order to support small, medium and larger businesses that are negatively impacted by COVID-19 a suite of Government measures is in place. These include a Restart grant for which application can be made online to local authorities and a Return to Work Safely Protocol 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.

*Question No. 455 answered with Question No. 371.*

### **Occupational Therapy**

456. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if an occupational therapist will be appointed for the areas of Rathmore, Gneeveguilla and the entire surrounding area in view of the fact there has not been one for the past six months (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13083/20]

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

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

457. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13092/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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 dis-

ease 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 Appointments Status**

458. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13093/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

459. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the protocols in place in the event of the categories of passengers that on arrival at air or sea ports are required to fill in a form and self-isolate for two weeks having a return ticket within those two weeks; if the return

date on the ticket will be automatically checked; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13095/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The public health advice for passengers arriving into the State from overseas is to self-isolate for 14 days. Passengers do not need to remain in the country for 14 days but should follow this public health advice for the time that they are in Ireland.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

460. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the resources he has made available regarding the enforcement of the terms and conditions attached to the locator form; the procedures in place to track and engage with persons that are non-compliant; if gardaí have arresting and or supervisory powers in relation to the locator form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13096/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** On behalf of my Department, the Border Management Unit of the Department of Justice oversees the collection and processing of COVID-19 Passenger Locator forms. The BMU also conducts a system of follow up phone calls to verify that the information provided on the form is accurate. The data provided on the form may also be used for the purposes of contact tracing in the event there is a suspected or confirmed case on board a flight or ferry.

The Health Act 1947 (Section 31A – Temporary Requirements) (COVID-19 Passenger Locator Form) Regulations 2020 provides for offences related to the COVID-19 Passenger Locator Form which are enforceable by An Garda Síochána.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

461. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to increase compliance with mask wearing in public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13108/20]

569. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Health if regulations will be published that make the wearing of face coverings mandatory on public transport and in certain settings, such as hairdressers, in circumstances in which social distancing guidelines cannot be met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13676/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 461 and 569 together.

The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) provided guidance in relation to face coverings in its advice to Government in relation to Phase 2 of the Roadmap for Reopening Business & Society on 4 June.

The NPHE advice sets out circumstances under which the wearing of a non-medical face covering is recommended. These are when using busy public transport, when in indoor public areas including retail outlets, by people visiting the homes of those who are cocooning, by people who are being visited in their homes by those who are cocooning, all visitors to residential care facilities and in indoor work environments where it is difficult to maintain a two-metre distance. The wearing of face coverings in other environments should accommodate individual judgement or preference or where it is difficult to maintain a 2-metre distance.

It is important to emphasise that the wearing of face coverings is an additional hygiene measure and should not take the place of good hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and other personal protective public health measures. Face coverings should be used properly, in line with the guidance and to wash hands before putting them on and taking them off.

NPHET, at its meeting on Thursday 11 June, recommended that the focus in the first instance should be on increasing compliance with the current recommendations on the use of face-coverings, through the development and implementation of a national communications campaign.

On the 15th June, the Government and the National Transport Authority launched a national communications campaign which outlines best practice for the use of face coverings in retail outlets, on public transport and in other public locations in which it is difficult to maintain social distancing or where this distance cannot be guaranteed, and will communicate to the public about:

- who should wear face coverings
- in what settings, and
- how to wear and remove face coverings correctly.

Guidance on how to make and safely use face coverings is available on [gov.ie/facecoverings](http://gov.ie/facecoverings) and the HSE website.

The Government has agreed to the mandatory use of face coverings mandatory on public transport and the development of Regulations in this regard is underway.

The NPHET keeps the position on the wearing of face coverings under continual review.

### **Home Help Service**

462. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has had their home help hours reduced from ten to five hours and then to three hours; if the hours will be increased again; the reason there has been such a delay in commencing the home help; when a person will be assigned to provide the home help; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13111/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances**

463. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be provided with the special bed for their home due to their long-term illness; when it will be delivered to the home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13112/20]

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

### **General Practitioner Services**

464. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some general practitioners in County Carlow are charging for the taking of blood samples; the steps he will take to enforce the provisions of the Health Act 1970 to ensure that persons covered by the general medical services scheme are not being incorrectly charged for routine phlebotomy services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13114/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Persons who are eligible for GP care without charge under the Health Act 1970 are not subject to any co-payments or other charges in respect of such services. There is no provision under the GMS GP contract for persons who hold a medical card or GP visit card to be charged for routine phlebotomy services provided by their GP which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition and the HSE has advised GPs accordingly. I am aware that some GPs are charging GMS patients for phlebotomy services in some circumstances. I understand also that this issue was discussed during GP contract negotiations in 2019 but that it did not prove possible to achieve agreement that no charges for blood tests would be applied in any circumstances. The GP chronic disease management programme which is being phased in from this year will involve the ongoing monitoring of patients' condition and any blood tests required in this context will be covered by the fees payable for this care.

However it remains a matter of concern to me that a GMS and GP visit card patient might be charged for blood tests which are clinically necessary and I have asked my officials to discuss with the HSE what further solutions to this issue may be possible. If a patient who holds a medical card or GP visit card believes he or she has been incorrectly charged for routine phlebotomy services by his or her GP, then that patient should report the matter to their HSE Local Health Office.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

465. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when those providing complementary therapies, such as reflexology, will be given a definitive indication as to when they can begin to see patients and resume professional activity; if he will communicate with an organisation (details supplied) in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13119/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Deputy is aware, on 19 June 2020, the Taoiseach, on behalf of the Government, announced the restrictions that would be eased and the measures that will be in place in Phase 3. On Thursday 25 June, the Government confirmed the move to Phase 3 of Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business from Monday, 29 June 2020. Information and advice about the restrictions that have been eased as part of Phase 3 and the measures that are now in place are available on the Government website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d06271-easing-the-covid-19-restrictions-on-29-june-phase-3/>

The Government also agreed to bring forward actions in the remaining phases of the Roadmap and plan for four phases rather than the five originally indicated. This will be subject to continued progressive improvements in the health indicators identified in the Framework for Future Decision-Making described in the Roadmap.

I wish to clarify to the Deputy that complementary therapies are included in these measures and may now recommence under Phase 3 of the Roadmap. As public health restrictions are lifted, and there are no longer detailed rules in place imposed by the State, everybody in society will now need to exercise their own judgement and take personal responsibility for decisions that they make about the risk of infection to themselves and to others in different situations. A risk assessment framework or Public Health Checklist has been drafted by the National Public

Health Emergency Team and agreed by Government to assist businesses in making decisions about how to assess the risk of different activities and take actions to lower the risk of spreading infection. It is important that there is continued commitment across society from all arms of the State, organisations, employers, businesses and individuals to work together to collectively promote, support and encourage everyone in the community to adhere to the core public health principles as effectively as possible, as often as possible, and in as many situations as possible for the benefit of all.

The Public Health Checklist which refers to health and well-being services under Phase 3 of the Roadmap can be found on the Government website at <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/77452/39d51b02-5633-4e2f-a070-4551a3521081.pdf#page=9>

I would also wish to draw the Deputy's attention to the Return to Work Safely Protocol which was published by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation on Saturday 9 May last. This detailed guidance document was developed to assist employers and employees in the coming period and is available at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html>. The Protocol is mandatory, and it applies to all workplaces right across the economy. Specific sectors may need to introduce additional safeguards, but this document sets out the standard set of measures required in every workplace.

## HSE Funding

466. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 753 of 3 June 2020, the breakdown of the HSE 2020 allocation of €774 million of capital funding by project in tabular form. [13120/20]

542. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 753 of 3 June 2020, if he will provide a breakdown of the projects being undertaken under the HSE'S 2020 allocation of capital funding; and if he will outline the projects, inclusive of their timelines of start and completion dates in tabular form. [13502/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 466 and 542 together.

The Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery and management of healthcare infrastructure.

All capital development proposals must be approved by the relevant Hospital Group or Community Health Organisation (CHO) before being forwarded to the relevant HSE Directorate for support/approval and prioritisation. The proposal is then submitted to the HSE National Capital and Property Steering Committee. The committee comprises of officials from the acute care and community care directorates, along with HSE Finance and the Estates Office. The role of the National Capital and Property Steering Committee is to prioritise projects and recommend them for inclusion in the HSE's multi-annual Capital Plan, subject to funding availability.

The HSE has developed a draft Capital Plan for 2020 having regard to the available funding, the number of large national capital projects currently underway, and the cashflow requirements and priorities attaching to each project. All projects are considered as part of this process.

It is important to recognise that all capital development proposals must progress through a number of approval stages, in line with the Public Spending Code, including detailed appraisal, planning, design and procurement before a firm timeline or funding requirement can be established.

The final decision to proceed with the construction of a project cannot be made until the tender process has been completed and the costings reviewed to ensure that the proposal delivers value for money and remains affordable, and that sufficient funding is available to fund the project to completion, including equipping and commissioning costs.

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

The HSE actively manages the capital programme in order to ensure it has flexibility to progress as many projects as possible within the available funding, particularly in the event of any project not progressing as anticipated.

At present the draft Capital Plan 2020 is being reviewed and revised to take account of the impact of Covid-19, which resulted in delays on many projects and the funding of an emergency Covid-19 programme of works. Once the HSE has finalised its Capital Plan for 2020, it will then be submitted to me for consideration.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

467. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans and the plans of the HSE for restarting healthcare; if this will be delegated to hospital and local level; if there will be a HSE plan which will be followed at acute and primary care level; the details of the plan including timelines and services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13121/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Covid-19 pandemic has led to an unprecedented interruption to normal health services both in the community and acute hospitals. While many vital services were maintained or restructured to respond more appropriately to Covid-19 related risks and evolving needs, other services were suspended or delivered on a reduced basis.

To ensure services are re-introduced in a safe, clinically aligned and prioritised way, the HSE have published a Strategic Framework for 'Service Continuity in a Covid Environment' on 8 June. The document can be found at the following link <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/service-continuity-in-a-covid-environment-a-strategic-framework-for-delivery.pdf> .

The implementation of the Framework will ensure service resumption is done in an integrated and phased manner. It will consolidate new ways of working and build on international knowledge.

While not all services can return to previous levels immediately, many health services have already resumed, particularly for priority cases. The HSE are currently developing a Service Continuity Roadmap for the resumption of services across the health system.

### **Health Services**

468. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his Department and the HSE will raise awareness of a card (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13122/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As Minister for Health, I have no functions relating to the provision of, or access to, public toilets or those situated in private busi-

nesses and the services described in the Deputy's questions are not matters within the remit of my Department. The provision of public facilities, where they exist, is a matter for Local Authorities which are under the remit of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage

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

469. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if provisions are being made for frontline health workers that have been forced to use up their annual leave for childcare purposes and are facing a situation in which they no longer have time to take off despite fronting the national effort to overcome Covid-19. [13126/20]

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

### **Mental Health Services**

470. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons employed in June 2018, 2019 and 2020 in community psychiatry, community psychology and community CAMHS areas in County Kildare by area; and the positions recruited since January 2020 in County Kildare in these sectors. [13134/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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 Expenditure**

471. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent on the new National Rehabilitation Hospital, Dún Laoghaire; and if this project is the subject of conciliation between parties. [13135/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

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

472. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full-year cost of increasing the number of child and adolescent mental health teams to 88. [13136/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Hospital Staff**

473. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if the necessary funding will be provided for the recruitment of a consultant anaesthesiologist with a special interest in paediatric complex pain management in Children's Health Ireland at Crumlin and Temple

Street; and when this post will be filled. [13137/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Funding has been provided in 2020 to develop the paediatric complex pain management service in Children's Health Ireland, including recruitment of consultant anaesthesia/pain specialist, occupational therapist, psychologist, physiotherapist and advanced nurse practitioner.

In regard to the specific detail on timing of recruitment, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Health Services Staff**

474. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if doctors (details supplied) have been told that there is no work for them after their three-month short-term contract is up; and the number of doctors that have returned to the medical register since 10 March 2020. [13151/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I have asked the HSE to reply to the Deputy concerning the first part of the question.

With regard to the second part, the Medical Council has advised that the first restorations to the Medical Council Register via the COVID 19 route were on Thursday 19 March 2020. There are currently 397 doctors who have restored to the register via the COVID route. In addition to this 91 doctors have restored their names to the register via the normal restoration route since 10 March 2020.

### **Health Services Staff**

475. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses and midwives returned to their medical register from 10 March 2020. [13158/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland restored 1,097 nurses and midwives to the register between the 10th March and the 24th June, 2020

### **Mental Health Services**

476. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Health the funding supports available for community-based mental health charities which provide counselling services and are operated by local volunteers. [13162/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Medical Cards**

477. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will be issued to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13167/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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**

478. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health the length of time he plans to operate a temporary field hospital in the university area gymnasium at University of Limerick; if the field hospital will now be wound down earlier than initially expected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13174/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply to you directly.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

479. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the details of the reopening plan for the health service in view of the fact hairdressers and so on are reopening but cancer screening and other services have not been given a date for reopening. [13181/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Covid-19 pandemic has led to an unprecedented interruption to normal health services both in the community and acute hospitals. While many vital services were maintained or restructured to respond more appropriately to Covid-19 related risks and evolving needs, other services were suspended or delivered on a reduced basis.

To ensure services are re-introduced in a safe, clinically aligned and prioritised way, the HSE published a Strategic Framework for 'Service Continuity in a Covid Environment' on 8 June. This document can be found at the following link

*<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/service-continuity-in-a-covid-environment-a-strategic-framework-for-delivery.pdf>* .

The implementation of the Framework will ensure service resumption is done in an integrated and phased manner. It will consolidate new ways of working and build on international knowledge.

While not all services can return to previous levels immediately, many health services have already resumed, particularly for priority cases. The HSE are currently developing a Service Continuity Roadmap for the resumption of services across the health system.

In relation to the restart of screening services, this has been a priority for the National Screening Service (NSS). The NSS have now finalised their plans for a phased restart and the programmes will restart as follows:

- CervicalCheck will begin sending invites and reminders to participants in its cervical screening programme on July 06.

- Diabetic RetinaScreen will also resume screening in July.

- BreastCheck will resume screening in September/October.

- BowelScreen will resume in September/October.

The recommencement of screening is underpinned by the assumption that there will be no

worsening of the COVID-19 situation and restrictions will continue to ease. Provided all key conditions remain safe for participants and staff, on a monthly basis invitations will be sent to individuals overdue a routine screening.

### **Disability Services Provision**

480. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health when the local centres that cater to adults with disabilities are reopening. [13182/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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. A national group for the resumption of day services representative of service users and families, service providers and the HSE is working together to prepare for the resumption of day service supports in line with COVID-19 guidance. The Framework for the Resumption of Adult Disability Day Services and Action Plan for resumption of services have been completed. The national group are currently developing guidance to support the day service sector to reopen within the parameters of public health advice.

Community Healthcare Organisations are working with service providers to ascertain the current level of service provision and innovative practises that have developed over the last number of months. The collation and analysis of this data will provide a current national picture which will enable the resumption group to address the challenges of reopening day service locations.

The resumption group plan to have completed the above strands of work shortly, following which a timeframe for the phased reopening of adult day services will be planned in cooperation with HSE disability services and service providers. In the meantime, service providers continue to contact day service users regarding their support needs and are providing those supports in different ways. Some supports continue to be provided in a number of ways, for example by telephone, online communication and responses to address emergency needs.

The HSE and disability service providers, where identified, will continue to communicate with school leavers and their families to plan and organise for a transition to day services in line with public health guidance.

The safety of service users and staff is of critical importance therefore the attendance at locations will be determined by public health guidance, which may result in some reduction of

capacity.

An information leaflet for service users and their families was developed by the national group and distributed widely to all stakeholders on June 9th.

It is expected that a clearer picture will emerge before shortly as to when day services are likely to be reinstated and how the service will be delivered taking account of Public Health Guidance and COVID-19 restrictions.

The Framework for Resumption of Adult Disability Day Services and the information leaflet “What’s Happening” is available on the New Directions website: [www.hse.ie/newdirections](http://www.hse.ie/newdirections)

### **General Practitioner Services**

481. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to doctors in general practice charging parents the same amount for a telephone appointment and assessment as they do for a face-to-face assessment in their surgery; his views on whether this is an acceptable practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13183/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, patient in-person contact with GPs has been curtailed as much as possible to help prevent the spread of the virus. Nurse and doctor advice is provided over the phone where appropriate, and only patients who are clinically assessed as requiring a face to face consultation with a doctor are referred for an appointment.

GPs are reimbursed by the HSE for medical services provided to medical card or GP visit card holders, while patients who do not hold a medical card or GP visit card access GP services on a private basis. I have no role in relation to the fees charged by individual GPs for private consultations, as the fees charged by GPs for services to private patients are a matter of private contract between the clinician and their patient.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

482. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health when a disability service (details supplied) can reopen; if the reopening of the service will be delayed; if interim measures can be put in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13184/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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. A national group for the resumption of day services representative of service users and families, service providers and the HSE is working together to prepare for the resumption of day service supports in line with COVID-19 guidance. The Framework for the Resumption of Adult Disability Day Services and Action Plan for resumption of services have been completed. The national group are currently developing guidance to support the day service sector to reopen within the parameters of public health advice.

Community Healthcare Organisations are working with service providers to ascertain the current level of service provision and innovative practises that have developed over the last number of months. The collation and analysis of this data will provide a current national picture which will enable the resumption group to address the challenges of reopening day service locations.

The resumption group plan to have completed the above strands of work by the end of June following which a timeframe for the phased reopening of adult day services will be planned in cooperation with HSE disability services and service providers. In the meantime, service providers continue to contact day service users regarding their support needs and are providing those supports in different ways. Some supports continue to be provided in a number of ways, for example by telephone, online communication and responses to address emergency needs.

The HSE and disability service providers, where identified, will continue to communicate with school leavers and their families to plan and organise for a transition to day services in line with public health guidance.

The safety of service users and staff is of critical importance therefore the attendance at locations will be determined by public health guidance, which may result in some reduction of capacity.

An information leaflet for service users and their families was developed by the national group and distributed widely to all stakeholders on June 9th.

It is expected that a clearer picture will emerge before end of June as to when day services are likely to be reinstated and how the service will be delivered taking account of Public Health Guidance and COVID-19 restrictions.

The Framework for Resumption of Adult Disability Day Services and the information leaflet “What’s Happening” is available on the New Directions website: [www.hse.ie/newdirections](http://www.hse.ie/newdirections)

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

483. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is waiting so long for a procedure; the further length of time they can expect to wait for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13185/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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 Appointments Status**

484. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is waiting so long for a procedure; the further length of time they can expect to wait for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13186/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

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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.

### **Home Help Service**

485. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if home help will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13187/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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**

486. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to allow residents in community houses to leave the houses and travel to and from home; when the families and community houses will be given an indication of timelines for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13188/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I note that the Deputy has clarified that her question relates in this instance to residential settings for people with a disability, and where the residential setting is the person's primary residence.

It is recognised that the impact of COVID-19 on society in general and especially those with a disability living in community houses has been considerable. Residential settings are people's homes as well as places where health and social care are provided. The introduction of physical distancing, isolation and restricted contact with family and loved ones has changed the usual dynamic of social interaction. During these times there has been a particular emphasis on retaining a holistic view of the wellbeing of residents, remaining person-centred, being cognisant of their rights as citizens, and being vigilant that in seeking to shield them from infection that these rights are not infringed upon in to an extent, or in a manner, that is disproportionate.

As the disease is becoming more suppressed in the community the National Public Health Emergency has advised that the gradual reintroduction of usual activities while taking public health precautions should commence. This advice is reflected in the latest Cocooning and visiting guidance. Detail of this guidance is set out by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre at: <https://www.hpsc.ie>

Families are encouraged to talk to the support staff at the person's residence, to make arrangements for visits and other activities that can be facilitated within the current public health guidance. While it is appropriate in line with the public health cocooning guidance for activities outside the home to commence it is important to balance the risk involved in prolonged periods of time outside the home. These risks will continue to be reviewed in line with the disease progression and guidelines will be updated. The Department of Health is very much aware of how difficult the current restrictions on visiting are for residents and their families, and we very much hope that this can be safely facilitated soon.

## Disability Support Services

487. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when a facility (details supplied) will resume services; and when services and support facilities for children and or adults with intellectual disabilities will resume services. [13189/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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. A national group for the resumption of day services representative of service users and families, service providers and the HSE is working together to prepare for the resumption of day service supports in line with COVID-19 guidance. The Framework for the Resumption of Adult Disability Day Services and Action Plan for resumption of services have been completed. The national group are currently developing guidance to support the day service sector to reopen within the parameters of public health advice.

Community Healthcare Organisations are working with service providers to ascertain the current level of service provision and innovative practises that have developed over the last number of months. The collation and analysis of this data will provide a current national picture which will enable the resumption group to address the challenges of reopening day service locations.

The resumption group plan to have completed the above strands of work by the end of June following which a timeframe for the phased reopening of adult day services will be planned in cooperation with HSE disability services and service providers. In the meantime, service providers continue to contact day service users regarding their support needs and are providing those supports in different ways. Some supports continue to be provided in a number of ways, for example by telephone, online communication and responses to address emergency needs.

The HSE and disability service providers, where identified, will continue to communicate with school leavers and their families to plan and organise for a transition to day services in line with public health guidance.

The safety of service users and staff is of critical importance therefore the attendance at locations will be determined by public health guidance, which may result in some reduction of capacity.

An information leaflet for service users and their families was developed by the national group and distributed widely to all stakeholders on June 9th.

It is expected that a clearer picture will emerge before end of June as to when day services are likely to be reinstated and how the service will be delivered taking account of Public Health Guidance and COVID-19 restrictions.

The Framework for Resumption of Adult Disability Day Services and the information leaflet “What’s Happening” is available on the New Directions website: [www.hse.ie/newdirections](http://www.hse.ie/newdirections)

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

### Third Level Education

488. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will engage with the Minister for Education and Skills and work with third-level universities to expand the number of medical training places for students applying through the Central Applications Office system to help increase the number of doctors nationally. [13191/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Given its statutory functions, I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy on this matter.

### Covid-19 Pandemic

489. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if care workers visiting the homes of sick, elderly or disabled persons will be tested fortnightly for Covid-19 in line with the testing of care workers in nursing homes every two weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13206/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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 the 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.

### **Dental Services**

490. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will outsource dental appointments for children in order that waiting times to have urgent dental work undertaken can be significantly reduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13212/20]

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

### **Pension Provisions**

491. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 608 of 3 June 2020, if the matter will be directed to another office (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a number of persons are seeking information on their entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13221/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** On making enquiries with the HSE, I have been advised that the individual concerned left St Patrick's, Kilkenny at the end of August 2002. They became entitled to their preserved pension benefits in March 2019.

The HSE has confirmed that the Pensions Management Unit, Manorhamilton received the person's application for pension entitlements from St Patrick's, Kilkenny on the 9 June 2020. The application remains in progress.

The HSE is not in a position to comment on any other cases without further details.

### **Hospital Facilities**

492. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Health when the necessary works will be carried out in Belmullet District Hospital, County Mayo to enable patients to be admitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13226/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **HSE Staff**

493. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Health when the recommendations (details supplied) of the Labour Court will be implemented; when the additional four staff will be put in place as recommended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13227/20]

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

### **Hospital Transfers**

494. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the contract previously awarded to a company (details supplied) for transfers at University Hospital Kerry considered a request by hospital management to select a specific third party due to the complex nature of transferring dialysis patients. [13247/20]

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

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

495. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to roll out a campaign to highlight the appropriate use of face masks, similar to the campaign rolled out for hand washing and hand hygiene; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13250/20]

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

### **Disability Support Services**

496. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the additional resources and supports that will be implemented through Sláintecare to assist persons living with Parkinson’s disease and their families. [13253/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The HSE National Clinical Programme for Neurology Model of Care provides a framework for neurology services, including for Parkinson’s Disease patients, using international best practice and describes care provision using an integrated service approach. The model is fully aligned with the objectives of Sláintecare and proposes a hub and spoke model, with services provided as close to home as possible but with access to specialist services where required. The HSE has clarified in the Model of Care for Neurology, it is intended that multidisciplinary services will be provided to Parkinson’s Disease patients using an outreach model.

The enhancement of community care, the further integration of care and the establishment of multidisciplinary teams for those with chronic conditions such as Parkinson’s disease is a key vision of Sláintecare. As part of Budget 2020, Sláintecare has been allocated €10 million in 2020 (rising to €60 million in 2021) for a Sláintecare Enhanced Community Care Fund. We know that our hospitals are under too much pressure and the way the system is currently set up doesn’t work for staff or for patients, particularly those with chronic disease. Moving care to the community setting allows us to reduce pressure on hospitals and support our healthcare professionals to do what they do best – provide world-class care for patients.

The Enhanced Community Care Fund is committed to delivering up to 1,000 community workers. Specifically, this fund will support initiatives such as:

1. The hiring of additional dementia advisors and therapists in the community. This includes the recruitment of Speech & Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, Dieticians etc., who will provide much needed treatment to those suffering with chronic conditions such as Parkinson’s Disease;

2. Prioritisation of initiatives that will have a positive impact on waiting lists, and in the first instance on community waiting lists. The reduction of waiting times for access to community therapists will be targeted to deliver more timely care for patients with chronic conditions such as Parkinson's Disease; and

3. Maintaining and scaling successful Integration Fund projects into 2021, which will likely include initiatives that will improve the care for older persons and people with chronic disease.

A HSE business plan, setting out a model for a reformed approach to primary and community care, has been issued to the Department of Health. As we move towards service recovery, it is intended to finalise the Enhanced Community Care business case to ensure that recruitment of staff can be in place before year-end.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

497. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when he expects more normal visitations with physical contact to resume for residents of public and private nursing homes and their families that have experienced long periods of loneliness and lack of physical contact with their loved ones; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13258/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** In line with the Government's Roadmap for the re-opening of Society and Business, the National Public Health Emergency Team has agreed that a phased approach to the recommencement of visiting to long term residential centres would be appropriate at this time. The advice is that a co-ordinated and standard national approach to the recommencement of visiting is taken.

In light of the above, and on the basis that the COVID-19 disease status in the country remains in its current stable condition, the NPHE recommended that from 15th of June, the phased resumption of indoor visiting of residents in residential care facilities may commence in accordance with guidance issued by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre. The guidance which is published and available on the HSPC's website advises that indoor visiting in residential care facilities where there is no ongoing COVID-19 outbreak will be permissible from 15th of 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.

I am aware of how difficult the restrictions on visiting have been for both nursing home residents and their families. Therefore this phased approach is much welcomed as it will both facilitate visits to loved ones across the country, whilst also keeping some of our most vulnerable members of society protected during this challenging time.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

498. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health when guidelines will be issued regarding the reintroduction of services and supports for persons with dementia; the reason consideration in the phases and roadmaps has not included such persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13269/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** My Department and the HSE have ensured that there has been a continued focus on meeting the needs of people living with dementia throughout the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the Dementia Understand Togeth-

er Campaign, led by the HSE and working with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI), a range of initiatives and resources have been developed, to ensure that people living with dementia stay safe, well and connected, during this time of crisis. This includes a collection of online resources, at-home activities and a weekly activity planner, which can be found at <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

In addition, as part of the Government response to the Covid-19 crisis, local authorities have established a Covid-19 Community Call Forum. Each local forum works with State agencies and community and voluntary groups to provide supports or services to any vulnerable person or person at a higher risk of getting Covid-19 who needs such supports. The forum brings together different organisations to provide important services such as collection and delivery of essential items such as food, “Meals on Wheels”, household items, fuel or medicine (in line with guidance) and support for those experiencing social isolation. More details on the Forum can be found at <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/5fd9fe-view-the-covid-19-community-call-forum-dashboard>

As the Deputy will be aware, community services such as day care play an important role in enabling people with dementia to continue living in their communities. My Department 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 and the ‘Return to work safely’ protocol. 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.

### **Dental Services**

499. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to orthodontic practices implementing a surcharge on patients of up to €6 per visit for PPE; his views on whether this is an acceptable practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13277/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The HSE provides orthodontic treatment free of charge to children who have the greatest level of need once assessed and referred for treatment before their 16th birthday.

My Department has no role in the setting of fees charged by private dentists to their private patients. The Dental Council has a Code of Practice relating to the display of private fees in dental practices.

The Dental Council advises that dentists should take a case by case assessment when deciding if additional PPE is warranted. The Health Protection Surveillance Centre has advised that regular PPE, which has always been used, is generally sufficient for usual orthodontic procedures.

### **Hospital Complaints Procedures**

500. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health the options available to a public hospital patient to make a complaint; the role of agencies outside the HSE and his Department such as the Ombudsman; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13291/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The public health services recognise and value that it is the right of service users to comment, compliment or complain about any of the services provided by the HSE and its funded bodies. Responding effectively to comments, compliments and complaints received and learning from them is key to providing high quality customer focused services.

Outlined below is a short summary of the options available to patients of public hospitals. More detailed information can be found on [www.healthcomplaints.ie](http://www.healthcomplaints.ie), <https://www2.hse.ie/services/hse-complaints-and-feedback/your-service-your-say.html> ,

### **Complaints options for public hospital patients**

For nearly all types of complaint, you should complain locally as a first step. The hospital is responsible for your care and treatment.

#### **Option 1: Complain locally**

All publicly funded hospitals have produced complaints procedures which are available in the hospital or on their website. All public hospitals' complaints procedures follow the same procedures as those outlined in the HSE's complaints procedure called Your Service Your Say, <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/qavd/complaints/ysysguidance/ysys2017.pdf> .

#### **Option 2: Request a review**

If you are unhappy with the initial response, you can request an internal review from the Complaints Officer in the hospital or take your complaint directly to the Ombudsman or the Ombudsman for Children.

#### **Option 3: Complain to the Ombudsman or the Ombudsman for Children**

The Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children are independent organisations which can investigate complaints about services provided by or on behalf of the Health Service Executive (HSE) or agencies, such as charities and voluntary bodies, that deliver health and social services on behalf of the HSE. If you were treated as a public patient and you are not happy with how the service is handling your complaint, you should contact the Ombudsman or the Ombudsman for Children.

#### **Option 4: Contact a regulator**

Regulators have responsibility for protecting the quality and safety of health and social care services. Regulators can regulate different things, for example, they can be responsible for health professionals, for health service quality or for medicines.

You may wish to make a complaint to a professional regulator if you are concerned about the behaviour, conduct, practice or health of a registered professional. Professional regulators include the Medical Council, The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland, the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) and CORU. Most of the regulators can take a complaint from a member of the public, but there are restrictions on how some of the regulators can handle that complaint.

Service quality regulators include the Mental Health Commission (MHC) and the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA). Medicines and healthcare product regulators include the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI). HIQA and MHC cannot investigate individual complaints. However, if you have a concern about a particular service, you can contact HIQA or the MHC to alert them to an issue.

**Option 5:** Get legal advice

If you feel your complaint is particularly serious, you may wish to get legal advice on your complaint. It is recommended to always get legal advice before you begin legal action.

**Support for people who wish to make a complaint about the care or treatment they received**

The Patient Advocacy Service was established by the Department of Health in 2019 and is an independent, free and confidential service that provides information and support to people who want to make a formal complaint about an experience they have had in a HSE-funded public acute hospital.

For those needing assistance in making a formal complaint about the care they have experienced in a public hospital, the service has more information on its website; provides an online contact form and can also be contacted by phone at 0818 293003.

**General Practitioner Services**

501. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if medical card holders should not be charged by their general practitioners for blood tests; and the steps persons that have been incorrectly charged should take. [13295/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Persons who are eligible for GP care without charge under the Health Act 1970 are not subject to any co-payments or other charges in respect of such services. There is no provision under the GMS GP contract for persons who hold a medical card or GP visit card to be charged for routine phlebotomy services provided by their GP which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition and the HSE has advised GPs accordingly. I am aware that some GPs are charging GMS patients for phlebotomy services in some circumstances. I understand also that this issue was discussed during GP contract negotiations in 2019 but that it did not prove possible to achieve agreement that no charges for blood tests would be applied in any circumstances. The GP chronic disease management programme which is being phased in from this year will involve the ongoing monitoring of patients' condition and any blood tests required in this context will be covered by the fees payable for this care.

However it remains a matter of concern to me that a GMS and GP visit card patient might be charged for blood tests which are clinically necessary and I have asked my officials to discuss with the HSE what further solutions to this issue may be possible. If a patient who holds a medical card or GP visit card believes he or she has been incorrectly charged for routine phlebotomy services by his or her GP, then that patient should report the matter to their HSE Local Health Office.

**Dental Services**

502. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason County Kerry does not have emergency dental cover at weekends (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13303/20]

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

## Hospital Waiting Lists

503. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if children awaiting hospital procedures that had surgery cancelled due to Covid-19 and have turned 16 years of age during this period will still be treated under the child health services and maintain their position on the waiting list such as in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13305/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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 National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), 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> ).

Children's Health Ireland (CHI) advise that, patient, family and staff safety is paramount to CHI as they respond to the challenges of COVID-19. CHI have advised that they regret cancellations of any in-patient and day case procedure that patients and their families have had to endure due to national guidance on COVID-19.

Children are booked firstly by clinical prioritisation and then chronologically for completion of in-patient and day case procedures. All surgical procedures are booked as a result of an outpatient consultation with the appropriate clinical team. CHI can advise that where a young person has turned 16 years of age during the COVID-19 pandemic they continue to be booked for completion of their procedure in CHI, following the above standardised criteria at the earliest opportunity. Parents/Guardians will be contacted with scheduled dates by CHI as soon as they are available.

A post-operative review will then be scheduled at which time a clinical decision will then be taken as to whether the young person can be discharged or if they require transition to the relevant adult services and families will be advised of this.

Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide

a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

### **HSE Expenditure**

504. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied that the HSE has been achieving value for money on medicines through the agreement with an association (details supplied) and bilateral negotiations with biopharmaceutical companies over the past two years. [13310/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The current Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines, signed in July 2016 between the Department, the HSE, and the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA) is due to expire at the end of July 2020.

This Framework Agreement is a key cornerstone in this country's national pharmaceutical policy, and it has been instrumental in helping to support sustainable access to medicines for patients. The savings provided for under the agreement are essential in creating headroom for new medicines.

Between 2016 and 2019 the Agreement is estimated to have delivered savings in the order of €600 million.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has disrupted the planned business of the Department and the HSE for 2020, including preparations for a successor Agreement. In the circumstances, my Department and the HSE are in discussions with IPHA on a potential extension of the duration of the current Agreement.

### **Health Services Staff**

505. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 439 of 9 June 2020, the reason the HSE is refusing to give permanent contracts to all fully qualified staff working in the health service; if the issue will be addressed; his views on a situation in which fully qualified staff working in the health service are not being given the option of permanent employment; and his further views on whether the refusal to employ these persons on a permanent basis represents a lost opportunity to properly staff the health service into the future. [13311/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** It remains difficult to quantify what the public health sectors permanent workforce requirements will be going forward, as we are still in the process of managing the crisis. As such, temporary employment contracts being utilised for the management of the pandemic may be reviewed at a later date as per the needs of the public health service, once the full impact the pandemic is having on the healthcare system

is understood. The service requirements and available resources will determine the extent to which permanent contracts can be offered for required roles.

### **Hospital Facilities**

506. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the action taken or arrangements put in place following the submission by the management of Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown on the urgent need to increase capacity in the intensive care unit due to the experience of Covid-19 on the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13314/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a matter for the Health Service Executive in the first instance, I have asked them to respond directly to the Deputy.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances**

507. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hearing aid for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13318/20]

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

### **Maternity Services**

508. **Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if provision will be made for expectant and new fathers to be able to visit their partners in hospital after they have given birth; if uniform rules will be implemented for such visits across hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13328/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply to you directly.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

509. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13329/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

510. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health when non-essential travel to France will be permitted by which travellers will not have to quarantine on their return. [13360/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the number of indigenous cases here declines and Ireland eases restrictions, the relative importance of the risk of importation of cases from overseas increases.

The public health advice for passengers arriving into the State from overseas is to self-isolate for 14 days. Self-isolation is not a legal requirement of persons entering the State from overseas. 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.

From 9 July it is intended that there will be a gradual opening up of international travel, through a Roadmap for Safe Overseas Access, as announced by the Government. It is intended that reciprocal travel arrangements (air bridges) will be established with a number of countries with broadly comparable epidemiological situations to Ireland’s, based on an agreed EU method for comparing countries.

### **Cancer Services**

511. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health when screening services such as CervicalCheck, BreastCheck and BowelScreen will resume; if there is a timeline in place for same; if so, if the detail of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13370/20]

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

### **Respite Care Services**

512. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that the testing of service users under the testing mechanism for all service users as part of respite care packages for service users returning for respite care to take place 72 hours before they avail of respite will be carried out in their own homes; and if the results will be confirmed to the families to share with the facility in order that these vulnerable persons do not have to travel to a hospital or testing centre to have their Covid-19 test carried out. [13372/20]

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

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

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

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

513. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if the roll-out of instructions supposedly being given to drivers on public transport by management to allow family groupings to sit together on buses creates health concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13375/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Deputy is no doubt aware public transport should only be used for essential journeys and it is advisable to avoid peak-time travel whenever possible. It is also important to note that you should not use public transport if you are experiencing any symptoms of Covid19. You should self-isolate and contact your GP immediately.

The Deputy may wish to note that when travelling on public transport with people who are not from the same household, current public health measures such as keeping 2 metres apart from other people when boarding, alighting and while on board and observing proper cough and respiratory etiquette should be adhered to. When travelling on public transport with people from the same household, however, it is not considered feasible that the 2 metre physical distancing measure be observed.

On 15 June, the Government and the National Transport Authority launched a national communications campaign which outlines best practice for the use of face coverings in retail outlets, on public transport and in other public locations in which it is difficult to maintain social distancing or where this distance cannot be guaranteed, and will communicate to the public about:

- who should wear face coverings
- in what settings, and
- how to wear and remove face coverings correctly.

Guidance on how to make and safely use face coverings is available on [gov.ie/facecoverings](https://gov.ie/facecoverings) and on the HSE website <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/face-masks-disposable->

*gloves.html*

Further information on public transport and Covid19 is available on the Department of Tourism, Transport & Sport at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ed29dc-irelands-response-to-covid-19-transport-measures/#public-transport-rail-and-bus> and from the National Transport Authority's website <https://www.nationaltransport.ie/news/covid-19-service-information-update/>

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

514. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason Ireland has one of highest Covid-19 infection rates among health workers in the world; if a lack of personal protective equipment and lack of clear guidance on mandatory wearing of face masks in the early days of the crisis has contributed to the huge rates of infection amongst healthcare workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13379/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Data on cases in healthcare workers is published by the HPSC and is available here: [https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/surveillance/covid-19casesinhealthcareworkers/COVID-19\\_HCW\\_weekly\\_report\\_19062020\\_v1.0%20for%20website.pdf](https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/surveillance/covid-19casesinhealthcareworkers/COVID-19_HCW_weekly_report_19062020_v1.0%20for%20website.pdf)

The Irish Epidemiological Modelling Advisory Group has developed a methodology to determine the recovery rate by considering the number of hospitalisations, ICU admissions, deaths and the dates of confirmation for each case. They have advised the Department that as of 3rd June, our recovery rate in healthcare workers is 93%. This is a higher recovery rate than in the general population, because relatively few healthcare workers have been hospitalised and very few admitted to ICU.

It is worth noting that Ireland, in contrast with many other countries, maintains a very wide definition of a healthcare worker for surveillance purposes and hence international comparisons should be interpreted with caution. In Ireland, a healthcare worker is anyone who works in any area of healthcare across community and hospital settings. It includes, for example, administrative staff, catering, maintenance, IT etc whereas in many other countries it is a considerably narrower definition of frontline workers or even just doctors and nurses. Our very broad definition of healthcare worker along with extensive testing contribute to our proportion of all COVID-19 infections that have been in healthcare workers.

There have been several studies worldwide of healthcare worker COVID-19 infection rates which have shown an infection rate of 5 to 10% of HCWs, whereas in Ireland this rate is close to 3-4% of HCWs based on estimates from the CSO Labour Force Survey of between 225,000 and 250,000 people working in Ireland who would identify as healthcare workers or as working in a healthcare setting.

In an article published by Hunter et al in the Lancet, on 2nd of May 2020 referred to a study in Newcastle (UK) on the 10th and 11th of March, where a random sample of hospital healthcare workers were tested and 5% were COVID-19 positive. This random sample testing was repeated on the 30th and 31st of March and 20% of healthcare workers were COVID-19 positive.

In a Dutch study (Eurosurveillance, Reuskin et al, 26/03/2020), 400 healthcare were tested between the 27th of February and the 6th of March 2020 and 2.5% were positive for COVID-19. Between the 6th and the 8th of March 2020, 1,100 HCWs were tested and 4.1% were COVID-19 positive.

As such, it would not appear that the rates of infection among Irish healthcare workers are out of line with the experiences of comparator countries.

### **Patient Deaths**

515. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if the case of the death of a person (details supplied) in a nursing home will be examined; and if a person will be contacted in relation to the matter. [13382/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I would like to thank the Deputy for bringing this to my attention and I would be grateful if the Deputy would pass on my deepest condolences to the family. I would like to reassure the Deputy that I have referred the matter to the HSE for direct reply to both him and the family.

### **Home Help Service**

516. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when the three hours of home help support will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13383/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Maternity Services**

517. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health when partners and spouses will be able to resume visiting maternity hospitals before and after the delivery of their children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13389/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply to you directly.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances**

518. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Health if he will release the findings of the Review of the FreeStyle Libre glucose monitoring system undertaken by his Department in 2019; and if he will consider extending the availability of the FreeStyle Libre to all persons with Type 1 diabetes [13403/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The review referred to by the Deputy was undertaken by the HSE. Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Dental Services**

519. **Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health if dental patients

on medical cards can access the National Treatment Purchase Fund to have pressing procedures undertaken; the waiting list time in the HSE schools programme for children under 16 years of age awaiting approved braces or HSE dental procedures; and if a breakdown of the procedure is unavailable, the timeline for these procedures to take place in view of the Covid-19 restrictions by county on waiting list numbers. [13406/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) works with public hospitals, as opposed to with patients directly, to offer and provide the funding for treatment to clinically suitable long waiting patients who are on an inpatient/day case waiting list for surgery in an acute hospital, having been referred on to such a list following clinical assessment by a consultant/specialist at an outpatient clinic.

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

As the waiting list times for the HSE schools programme for children is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Legislative Measures**

520. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the national research ethics committees Bill; the persons or bodies consulted during the drafting of the Bill; if input from patient advocate groups or representatives was sought; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13426/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The General Scheme of the National Research Ethics Committees Bill was approved for formal drafting by the government on 25 July 2019. At the same meeting, the government approved the drafting of an amendment to the Clinical Trials of Medicinal Products Regulations 2004 (as amended) (S.I 190 of 2004) to similarly reform the REC structure for such clinical trials.

The reason for the twin track parallel legislative process was that the clinical trials of medicinal products legislation derives from an EU Directive and the reform of the Research Ethics Committee (REC) system in that area was, therefore, most appropriately retained with the 2004 Regulations which deals with all aspects of those clinical trials, for example authorisation to carry out the trial by the Health Products Regulatory Authority.

The government also decided, in terms of drafting, that priority should be afforded to amending SI 190 because of new EU legislation in that area that is expected to take effect in 2021 that necessitates the type of REC reform envisaged.

As a result of the need to deal with urgent COVID-19 related legislation, drafting of the above measures has been temporarily paused in the Office of Parliamentary Counsel. However, I am committed to progressing them and in that regard wish to assure the Deputy that there will be engagement on the Bill with patient groups.

### **Cancer Research**

521. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he has engaged with Beaumont Hospital and a company (details supplied) regarding the publicity campaign for the extended brain tumour study opt-out period; if a new deadline has been confirmed; if the company

will be required to carry out a more robust campaign to ensure patients and family members are informed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13427/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I can confirm that my Office made contact with the office of the CEO of Beaumont Hospital and the hospital subsequently issued a statement that, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the study opt-out period and associated publicity campaign is extended from June 12th, to September 14th.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

522. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to a scheme by which vulnerable or elderly persons can avail of a badge type identification for use at retail and other outlets during the Covid-19 pandemic which would make such persons easily identified for priority access and additional support when required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13442/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I have no plans to introduce a scheme of the type described.

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

523. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Health the position of a person (details supplied) on the waiting list for services within the child development team; when the person will be allocated with the supports they need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13443/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Primary Care Services**

524. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health the range of services that will be provided in the primary care centres in Grange and Drumcliffe, County Sligo. [13447/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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**

525. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health further to his response to the contribution in Dáil Éireann of 11 June 2020 by this Deputy, when the number of days since a positive Covid-19 will be released by county and if possible, by electoral division; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13451/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I have no plans to start publishing data in the manner requested by the Deputy at this time. As the numbers of confirmed cases is low, and while it remains so, it is possible that publishing data as cases arise in the manner described could potentially lead to identification of individual patients and to raise concerns relating to

patient confidentiality.

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. In the context of cases arising now, the Deputy will be aware that the HSE is able to respond rapidly and trace known contacts of newly confirmed cases to ensure appropriate action is taken as a matter of urgency.

Aggregated data are published on an ongoing basis by my Department, available on the Department's website, and by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre and on the website of the HPSC, [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie). Furthermore, comprehensive national statistics, information and data about COVID-19 in Ireland is published on a daily basis on the Covid-19 Data Hub and Dashboards which can be accessed at <http://www.gov.ie/covid19dashboard/> .

### Hospital Equipment

526. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the details of the contracts which the HSE has with medical device companies; the devices covered under the contract; when the contract commenced; the duration of the contract; the value of the contract if possible; if the company or supplier is still in business; and if not, when they ceased operating in tabular form. [13457/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy.

### Hospital Equipment

527. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to instances in which the HSE has contracts with medical device companies that went out of business, but due to the nature of the contract hospitals cannot acquire new medical devices and have to persevere with devices which are obsolete, damaged or pay disproportionate amounts of money for their repair which often ends up being well in excess of the cost of a new device or machine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13458/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy.

### Hospital Services

528. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of scoliosis surgeries relating to children carried out in 2020; and the way in which this compares with 2018 and 2019, in tabular form. [13459/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Improving access to scoliosis services is a key commitment of government. In recent years there has been increased investment in paediatric orthopaedics and scoliosis services, which has improved access to surgery and outpatient appointments. In 2018 Children's Health Ireland (CHI; previously the Children's Hospital Group) was provided with an additional €9 million in funding to address paediatric orthopaedic waiting lists, including the provision of scoliosis services. As a result of this additional funding since 2018, CHI advise that there have been many improvements in paediatric scoliosis service-

es, with increased activity and improved waiting times to access appointments and procedures.

CHI advises that it continues to develop sustainable solutions to reduce waiting times for children attending its orthopaedic and scoliosis services. The additional investment from the HSE in recent years and the implementation of the Scoliosis 10 Point Action Plan has increased orthopaedic activity levels across CHI. My Department continues to engage with both CHI and the HSE in relation to paediatric scoliosis services.

In relation to the particular queries raised and the specific breakdown of information requested, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Services**

529. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for scoliosis surgery; and the length of time they have been waiting for surgery by 3, 6, 12, 15, 18, 24, 32 and more than 48 months in tabular form. [13460/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Improving access to scoliosis services is a key commitment of government. In recent years there has been increased investment in paediatric orthopaedics and scoliosis services, which has improved access to surgery and outpatient appointments. In 2018 Children's Health Ireland (CHI; previously the Children's Hospital Group) was provided with an additional €9 million in funding to address paediatric orthopaedic waiting lists, including the provision of scoliosis services. As a result of this additional funding since 2018, CHI advise that there have been many improvements in paediatric scoliosis services, with increased activity and improved waiting times to access appointments and procedures.

CHI advises that it continues to develop sustainable solutions to reduce waiting times for children attending its orthopaedic and scoliosis services. The additional investment from the HSE in recent years and the implementation of the Scoliosis 10 Point Action Plan has increased orthopaedic activity levels across CHI. My Department continues to engage with both CHI and the HSE in relation to paediatric scoliosis services.

In relation to the particular queries raised and the specific breakdown of information requested, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Services**

530. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the plan being put in place to ensure that children with scoliosis will have access to surgery and care over the course of 2020 to ensure children have access to timely scoliosis care; if a plan has been put in place for children with scoliosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13461/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Improving access to scoliosis services is a key commitment of government. In recent years there has been increased investment in paediatric orthopaedics and scoliosis services, which has improved access to surgery and outpatient appointments. In 2018 Children's Health Ireland (CHI; previously the Children's Hospital Group) was provided with an additional €9 million in funding to address paediatric orthopaedic waiting lists, including the provision of scoliosis services. As a result of this additional funding since 2018, CHI advise that there have been many improvements in paediatric scoliosis services, with increased activity and improved waiting times to access appointments and procedures.

CHI advises that it continues to develop sustainable solutions to reduce waiting times for

children attending its orthopaedic and scoliosis services. The additional investment from the HSE in recent years and the implementation of the Scoliosis 10 Point Action Plan has increased orthopaedic activity levels across CHI. My Department continues to engage with both CHI and the HSE in relation to paediatric scoliosis services.

In relation to the particular queries raised and the specific breakdown of information requested, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Facilities**

531. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Health the capital expenditure projects planned for Mayo University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13469/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Health Service Executive has advised that there are a number of capital developments both in progress or under consideration for delivery at Mayo University Hospital. The following is a brief summary of the status of these projects.

**Electrical Upgrade Works at Mayo University Hospital** - A Design Team was appointed for the project in May 2019 and the design of the electrical and civil works has progressed in the intervening period. The project includes the provision of a new energy centre in the general proximity of the existing energy centre at the hospital. It includes the installation of new switchboards and the segregation of electrical load between two new transformers along with installation of additional generator capacity and associated civil engineering and building works. A planning permission application has been submitted to Mayo Co. Council and a decision is expected imminently.

**HSSD (Hospital Sterile Services Department) Reconfiguration & Upgrade** - A feasibility study has been completed for the reconfiguration of the HSSD Department at Mayo University Hospital and detailed design is now being progressed for the project. The current facility was constructed circa 2000 as part of Phase two works and requires upgrading. The scope of works includes the replacement of the existing autoclave equipment and building reconfiguration works to achieve compliance with the latest decontamination standards. The existing HSSD facility will need to be kept operational during the duration of the upgrade works.

**ED Expansion & Reconfiguration at Mayo University Hospital** - A proposal has been developed to provide a new extension in the courtyard area at Mayo University Hospital. This extension would primarily facilitate the expansion and reconfiguration of the emergency department at ground floor level, while the Medical Assessment Unit could be relocated to first floor level. The exact scope of this proposal is currently being finalised with a view to being in a position to progress approval of the project and the subsequent procurement of a design team subject to funding availability and overall project prioritisation in 2020.

**Bed Capacity at Mayo University Hospital** - The options of the provision of single room en-suite bed capacity at Mayo University are currently being reviewed and appraised with a view to preparing a formal capital investment proposal.

**Ward Quality at Mayo University Hospital** - A proposal has been developed to address a number of identified quality issues with regard to the current inpatient ward accommodation namely to upgrade en-suite facilities and ward bathrooms along with a window replacement programme for the wards. Progression will be subject to both funding availability and the ability to vacate areas prior to the winter period.

**Interim Modular Treatment Space at Mayo University Hospital** - A proposal for temporary treatment/assessment rooms is current being scoped as part of potential further Covid-19 emergency works at Mayo University Hospital to support the segregation of patients during the forthcoming winter period at the hospital.

### Hospital Facilities

532. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed extension to the emergency department at Mayo University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13470/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I am advised by the HSE Estates that a proposal is being developed for the expansion and reconfiguration of the Emergency Department in Mayo University Hospital, with the Medical Assessment Unit possibly relocating to first floor level. This proposal is at an early stage with the scope of any development to be finalised in advance of its further consideration for approval before design work could commence.

### Covid-19 Pandemic

533. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Health the alternative mechanisms CORU and the Social Care Workers Registration Board plan for students of social care that have been unable to complete full placement hours to complete course requirements due to the outbreak of Covid-19 and the associated restrictions (details supplied). [13471/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** One of CORU's key functions as our Regulator of Health and Social Care Professionals is to assess education courses and provide assurance to the public that graduates of those courses meet the minimum regulatory standards and are safe to practise.

Each registration board at CORU has set a minimum hours' practice placement requirement for a student to meet the standards of proficiency for registration. In that context, CORU advise that the education providers have flexibility to determine what constitutes a placement. CORU issued guidance to the education sector in this regard on 13 March 2020 and continue to engage with education providers to ensure the timely and safe graduation of this year's cohort of students.

CORU advise that many education providers are availing of this flexibility regarding Placement Criteria and are implementing other mechanisms to ensure placement hours are met, without compromising the standards of proficiency required for the profession. CORU have informed me that they have been made aware of many students who are successfully completing their placements.

CORU advise students to stay in close contact with their education providers who can best advise them as to the changes they are making to their programmes to ensure they graduate with the appropriate training and qualifications.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Disability Support Services

534. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health when therapeutic horse-riding may resume for children and adults with disabilities which involves an instructor standing closer than the advised social distancing two metre rule; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13475/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Cancer Services**

535. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the status of the restart of smear tests and other cancer screening programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13480/20]

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

### **Sports Events**

536. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if large darts tournaments involving as many as 600 persons will be permitted in November 2020; the way in which event organisers can best prepare for these events in line with public health guidance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13482/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Deputy is no doubt aware, on 25 June 2020, the Taoiseach, on behalf of the Government, confirmed that it is safe for Ireland to proceed to Phase 3 of the Roadmap for Reopening Business and Society from Monday, 29 June 2020. Under Phase 3 and from 29 June 2020, the measures and public health advice that are in place are described at <http://www.gov.ie/phase3/>.

The Deputy may also wish to note that during Phase 3 indoor gatherings of up to 50 people and outdoor gatherings of up to 200 people when conducted in line with public health advice are permissible. If the presence of the COVID-19 virus remains low, this will rise to 100 people indoors and 500 people outdoors in Phase 4 from 20 July 2020, subject to Government approval.

The exact numbers of persons which can attend events and mass gatherings in the future has not been determined in advance. As with all other decisions, this will be informed, at the time that the decision is being made by the Government, by the public health advice received from the National Public Health Emergency Team.

### **Legislative Measures**

537. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the current policy regarding the issuing of exhumation licences; if a condition is imposed on exhumation licences prohibiting the cremation of unidentified remains or remains for which there is no death certificate; and if so, when the policy was implemented. [13487/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I have been advised by the HSE that exhumations are carried out under licence granted under Section 46 of the Local Government

(Sanitary Services) Act, 1948 (as amended by the Local Government Act 1994) or pursuant to an order of the Minister for Justice under section 15 of the Coroners (Amendment) Act 1927.

The policy and legislation regarding exhumations is not a matter for my Department. The granting of such licences is a function of Local Authorities.

Where Local Authorities engage with the HSE in advance of issuing the licence, the Environmental Health Service would consider the licence application solely on the grounds of public health. Such consideration would ordinarily include the reason for the exhumation, length of time of the present interment, location of the grave, soil type, etc. This information is ordinarily provided to the HSE by the Local Authority.

A death certificate is not normally sought by the HSE and would not be a pre-requisite for the HSE in providing its final advice to the Local Authority.

### **Mental Health Policy**

538. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if an association (details supplied) was consulted when developing the Sharing the Vision mental health policy; and if not, if he and his officials will meet with the organisation to discuss the policy. [13488/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The national mental health policy, A Vision for Change, ended its ten-year term in 2016, having been the cornerstone of mental health policy in Ireland since its publication in 2006. The Department of Health led the review of this policy, with a view to the development of a successor document which would continue the process of modernising mental health services and effectively promoting mental health.

The terms of reference for the refresh did not assume the need for a whole new policy document or a complete examination of policy from first principles, but rather to build on the good foundations of A Vision for Change, particularly given that many of its principles remained valid in terms of good practice, and simply required updating and extending to reflect the best of current thinking and evolving practices in the sector. PNA staff would have offered vital input into this original A Vision for Change consultation process.

The Oversight Group consisted of volunteers, many of whom had full time responsibilities in their own organisations. The Oversight Group agreed to engage in a national public consultation process where over 1,200 participants including service users, family members, carers, peer workers, clinical staff, HSE management and the NGO sector who would offer input. This way of collecting feedback was considered the most efficient method of gathering data from most people. The stakeholder meetings were open to all, including staff affiliated with the PNA.

The Oversight Group collected information from submissions, including a submission from the PNA, to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Mental Healthcare in Ireland and incorporated relevant recommendations into the refreshed policy.

In addition, the chair of the Oversight Group, Mr Hugh Kane, met with members of the PNA and input its views to the work of the Oversight Group in developing the policy.

The policy proposes that a National Implementation and Monitoring Committee (NIMC) be established to oversee implementation of the policy. The Committee will be mandated to drive reconfiguration, monitor progress against outcomes and deliver on the commitments made in this policy. It is expected that the Committee will work with partners to evaluate performance against the key performance indicators, check overall progress guided by research and learning

from best practice, and gather information on examples of both good and bad practice.

It is envisaged that the NIMC will be fully representative of those stakeholders principally involved in ensuring effective delivery of the policy recommendations, including strong service user, service provider and voluntary sector representation. All input received during the consultation on the policy, and any other stakeholder views, will be taken into account in establishing the NIMC. The NIMC will meet regularly and will publish progress reports on the implementation status of Sharing the Vision.

### **Mental Health Services**

539. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health when he will publish a roadmap for the reopening of dementia services; if the roadmap will include guidelines for the reintroduction of services and supports for persons with dementia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13489/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** My Department and the HSE have ensured that there has been a continued focus on meeting the needs of people living with dementia throughout the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the Dementia Understand Together Campaign, led by the HSE and working with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI), a range of initiatives and resources have been developed, to ensure that people living with dementia stay safe, well and connected, during this time of crisis. This includes a collection of online resources, at-home activities and a weekly activity planner, which can be found at <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

In addition, as part of the Government response to the Covid-19 crisis, local authorities have established a Covid-19 Community Call Forum. Each local forum works with State agencies and community and voluntary groups to provide supports or services to any vulnerable person or person at a higher risk of getting Covid-19 who needs such supports. The forum brings together different organisations to provide important services such as collection and delivery of essential items such as food, “Meals on Wheels”, household items, fuel or medicine (in line with guidance) and support for those experiencing social isolation. More details on the Forum can be found at <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/5fd9fe-view-the-covid-19-community-call-forum-dashboard>

As the Deputy will be aware, community services such as day care play an important role in enabling people with dementia to continue living in their communities. My Department 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 and the ‘Return to work safely’ protocol. 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.

### **Cancer Services**

540. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the date that the BreastCheck, BowelScreen and CervicalCheck screening programme appointments respectively, will be reintroduced in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13492/20]

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

### **Maternity Services**

541. **Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if provision will be made for expectant new fathers to be able to visit their partners in hospital after they have given birth; if uniform rules will be implemented for such visits across hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13500/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply to you directly.

*Question No. 542 answered with Question No. 466.*

### **Maternity Services**

543. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health when women will have access to full prenatal, maternity and postnatal services; and when family visits to maternity hospitals will resume. [13503/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply to you directly.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

544. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health his views on advising local authorities to ensure that public toilets are kept open and regularly maintained to ensure people have access to hand-washing facilities. [13504/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The services described in the Deputy’s questions are not matters within the remit of my Department. The operation of public facilities such as those described is a matter for Local Authorities which are under the remit of the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

### **Nursing Staff**

545. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health the number of additional ICU nurses employed in each hospital group between March and June 2020, in tabular form. [13505/20]

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

### **Mental Health Policy**

546. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health if representatives from a college were invited to the launch of Sharing the Vision - a Mental Health Policy for Everyone; and if not, the reason therefor. [13506/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The revised policy, Sharing the Vision – A Mental Health Policy for Everyone, was launched on Wednesday 17 June, by Minister for Mental Health and Older People Jim Daly.

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 and the final draft was agreed by cabinet Social Policy Committee in December 2019.

Once a date was confirmed, an invitation was issued to all email contacts on an Eventbrite stakeholder consultation list the evening before the launch as this list would reach over 300 individuals and organisations who had registered for mental health events previously. The list may have missed several organisations who were not on previous Eventbrite invitations. The lack of invitation is unfortunate, but the department was bound by an extremely tight turn-around time. Many individuals associated with the member organisations named would have received an invitation.

### **Hospital Facilities**

547. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health when the proposed additional accommodation will be provided in view of the increasing demand on facilities at Cavan General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13523/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

### **Departmental Staff**

548. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13539/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** In line with the current Government directive, my Department has arranged that the majority of staff are working from home, except for those employees who are essential in the workplace.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is due to issue central guidelines for civil service organisations (Working from Home during COVID-19 - Guidance for Civil Service Organisations) which will assist all Departments in our implementation and management of remote working during the pandemic.

In the longer term, we are collaborating with our colleagues in other Government Departments and with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the central development of a formal remote working policy in the civil service.

### **Midwifery Services**

549. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Health the status of the Cavan-Monaghan unit; if no downgrading of the unit will take place; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [13557/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Firstly, I would like to be clear that, as evidenced in the Programme for Government, this Government is fully committed to the implementation of the National Maternity Strategy.

The Strategy outlines a new model of care for maternity services with three care pathways - Supported, Assisted and Specialised - ensuring that women receive the right care, from the right professional, at the right time in the right place. In line with that model of care, pregnant women deemed to be at normal risk will be offered, and encouraged to avail of, care in the Supported Care pathway. Key to realising this goal is the development and expansion of community midwifery services, as recommended in the Strategy. In that context, any cessation or diminution of midwifery led services is not in line with the recommendations of the Strategy.

My Department has requested, and is awaiting, a full report from the National Women & Infants Health Programme regarding the MLU in Cavan. The Programme has advised that a review is underway within the RCSI Hospital Group, led by the Group Clinical Director for Maternity Services in conjunction with the Directors of Midwifery from Our Lady of Lourdes, Drogheda and the Rotunda Hospitals. My Department has sought assurances that any proposals, emanating from the RCSI review, will serve to ensure the future of the MLU in Cavan and that it will operate in line with the National Maternity Strategy.

Once the full report has been received, my Department will work with the National Women & Infants Health Programme to ensure that any additional supports which are required to secure the future of community midwifery services in Cavan, will be put in place. This will ensure that the choice of the Supported Care pathway remains available to women attending Cavan General Hospital for maternity services.

### **National Maternity Strategy**

550. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation on the National Maternity Strategy; his views on whether implementation is being carried out within the original timeframe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13558/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Ireland's first National Maternity Strategy - Creating a Better Future Together 2016 - 2026 was published in January 2016. It represents a significant development in the delivery of national maternity policy that will fundamentally change how maternity care is delivered.

The National Women & Infants Health Programme was established in the HSE to lead the management, organisation and delivery of maternity, gynaecology and neonatal services across primary, community and acute care. As implementation of the Strategy is being driven by the Programme, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply to you directly with the specific information requested.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

551. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health if he will intervene in the developing situation with nursing and midwifery staff of Midlands Regional Hospital, Mullingar that are due to return from maternity leave having utilised all of their other leave entitlements and are now being forced to consider leaving their careers due to the lack of available childcare.

[13588/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I understand that the HSE has circulated the Guidance and FAQs for Public Service Employers during COVID-19 in relation to working arrangements and temporary assignments across the Public Service prepared by DPER to all public health sector managers advising that staff with caring responsibilities should be facilitated to attend work and/or work from home in a flexible manner to the greatest extent possible.

HSE management are providing a range of additional flexible work patterns, changes to rosters, remote working, changes to parental leave arrangements and other adjustment measures to staff.

The HSE has provided additional clarification to managers in relation to working arrangements for those with caring responsibilities by way of circular. This circular clearly sets out that if employees cannot work outside the home and cannot perform their current role remotely, the employee is still to be considered as actively on duty and available to work from home, and may be assigned work outside the employee's usual core duties.

I have asked the HSE to revert to the Deputy directly in relation to this issue.

### **Cancer Services**

552. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in County Longford that have had cancer screening appointments cancelled due to Covid-19; and the additional resources which will be made available to ensure these vital and potentially lifesaving programmes can adequately deal with the additional numbers on their waiting lists. [13590/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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**

553. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in County Westmeath that have had cancer screening appointments cancelled due to Covid-19; and the additional resources which will be made available to ensure these vital and potentially lifesaving programmes can adequately deal with the additional numbers on their waiting lists. [13591/20]

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

554. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) must wait for an appointment. [13598/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

### **Cancer Services**

555. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if the criteria will be revised for funded access to pembrolizumab in view of the fact that many of those diagnosed with cancer have been medically advised to access the drug are being informed they are unable to do so due to the stage of their illness [13600/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

Section 19 (4) of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 prohibits the HSE from making a relevant decision except in accordance with the criteria specified in Schedule 3 of the Act. In that respect the HSE is required to have regard to the following criteria:

1. the health needs of the public
2. the cost effectiveness of meeting health needs by supplying the item concerned rather than providing other health services,
3. the availability and suitability of items for supply or reimbursement, or both, under Section 59 of the [Health] Act of 1970,
4. the proposed costs, benefits and risks of the item or listed item relative to therapeutically similar items or listed items provided in other health service settings and the level of certainty in relation to the evidence of those costs, benefits and risks,
5. the potential or actual budget impact of the item or listed item,
6. the clinical need for the item or listed item,

7. the appropriate level of clinical supervision required in relation to the item to ensure patient safety,

8. the efficacy (performance in trial), effectiveness (performance in real situations) and added therapeutic benefit against existing standards of treatment (how much better it treats a condition than existing therapies) and,

9. the resources available to the Executive.

In line with the 2013 Health 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. Marketing authorisations specify the particular formulation, the route of administration, the dosage, the indications for use, any contraindications, detailed warnings and information on the known safety profile, including adverse reactions associated with use of the product. The conditions of the marketing authorisation are laid down in the Summary of Product Characteristics (SmPC) which accompanies and forms part of the marketing authorisation.

Pembrolizumab has been granted marketing authorisation for a number of indications and is included on the HSE reimbursement list for some of those indications. In addition, a number of other indications are currently being assessed for reimbursement.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Government decision of 11 May 2018 put in place a package of support measures for the women and families affected by the issues related to Cervical-Check. Those measures included medicines which might not be approved for reimbursement including Pembrolizumab, once they are prescribed by the treating clinician.

The establishment of such a comprehensive support package reflected the impact of the lack of disclosure of the result of clinical audit and the ensuing controversy on individual women and their families.

Following that decision, concerns were raised regarding the provision of Pembrolizumab to other cervical cancer patients on the same basis as encompassed by the Government decision of 11 May 2018. In the light of those concerns, following discussions between the Department and the HSE, the HSE has put in place arrangements, on an exceptional basis, to facilitate access to Pembrolizumab for cervical cancer patients on a case-by-case basis in public hospitals, when a treating clinician determines that this is in the patient's best interests. It is important to note that all prescribing decisions will be entirely a matter for the treating clinician, in line with patient safety protocols and the Medical Council Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics.

Clinical trials for various immunotherapies, including pembrolizumab, are ongoing globally for a range of other possible indications which may receive marketing authorisation in the EU over the next number of years. Each of those indications will be considered for reimbursement as market authorisations are granted and applications received.

## **Mental Health Services**

556. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health when a facility (details supplied) closed since March 2020 will reopen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13601/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** My Department and the HSE have ensured that there has been a continued focus on meeting the needs of people living with dementia throughout the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the Dementia Understand Together Campaign, led by the HSE and working with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI), a range of initiatives and resources have been developed, to ensure that people living with dementia stay safe, well and connected, during this time of crisis.

Community services such as day care play an important role in enabling people with dementia to continue living in their communities. My Department 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 and the 'Return to work safely' protocol. 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.

As the specific issue raised relates to a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Eating Disorders**

557. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding allocated for the clinical programme on eating disorders in 2018, 2019 and 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13608/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **National Children's Hospital**

558. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if he has a concern that work on the National Children's Hospital site beside St. James's Hospital has all but ceased and that scaffolding is being removed by contractors; the updated position regarding this flagship project aside from the Covid-19 restrictions; the reason for the delay; and if these continuous problems will impact on the final cost of the project. [13619/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I am aware that construction work on the new children's hospital site beside St. James's Hospital stopped on 31 March 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

I understand that since the commencement of the easing of restrictions on 18 of May, the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) has been engaging with the main contractor in relation to the earliest possible reopening of the site. I have been informed that some matters remain unresolved at this time and that construction has not recommenced.

I am anxious that the hospital be completed as quickly as possible on behalf of children, young people and their families. The NPHDB has statutory responsibility for planning, designing, building and equipping the new children's hospital and I have referred your question to the NPHDB for direct reply.

## Covid-19 Pandemic

559. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the reason churches and other places of worship irrespective of size are being restricted to allowing only 50 attendees over the coming weeks; the reason the number allowed does not relate to the size of the church and to general social distancing rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13631/20]

573. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when churches and places of worship will be allowed to reopen in the context of easing Covid-19 restrictions; the specific guidelines which need to be adhered to in respect of public health advice by the NPHET; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13706/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 559 and 573 together.

As the Deputy is aware, on 19 June 2020, the Taoiseach, on behalf of the Government, announced the restrictions that would be eased and the measures that will be in place in Phase 3 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business. On Thursday 25th June the Government confirmed the move to Phase 3 of the Roadmap from Monday, 29 June 2020. Information and advice about the restrictions that have been eased as part of Phase 3 and the measures that are now in place are available on the Government website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d06271-easing-the-covid-19-restrictions-on-29-june-phase-3/>

The Government also agreed to bring forward actions in the remaining phases of the Roadmap and plan for four phases rather than the five originally indicated. This will be subject to continued progressive improvements in the health indicators identified in the Framework for Future Decision-Making described in the Roadmap.

The Deputy will may wish to note that religious buildings and places of worship may now be reopened. Further detail on the precise arrangements that are intended to apply to their operation during this period will be made available as soon as possible.

## Hospital Data

560. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the average weekly bed occupancy rate in each of the 19 private hospitals covered by the deal with the State, for each of the weeks from 1 May 2020; and the number of patients treated weekly in each case. [13640/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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.

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.

My Department has been advised by the HSE that as of June 22, 11,531 patients had been discharged from private hospitals having undergone an inpatient procedure since the arrangement between the HSE and private hospitals came into force. In the same period 46,298 day-case procedures took place in private hospitals, as well as 71,967 diagnostic appointments and 44,865 outpatient appointments. Utilisation rates show that as of 22nd June 2020, 53% of private inpatient beds were in use, up from 43% at the start of May.

In relation to the more detailed breakdown requested concerning the average weekly bed occupancy rate in each of the 18 private hospitals covered by the deal with the State, for each of the weeks from 1 May 2020; and the number of patients treated weekly in each case, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

561. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the detail of the public health guidance provided to hospitals in relation to health and safety and infection control in both emergency departments and in outpatient clinics; the arrangements in place to ensure adherence to this guidance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13641/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is an operational matter, the Question has been referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

562. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in publishing the roadmap for the recommencement of non-Covid-19 health services which was promised three weeks ago; and when it will be published. [13642/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Covid-19 pandemic has led to an unprecedented interruption to normal health services both in the community and acute hospitals. While many vital services were maintained or restructured to respond more appropriately to Covid-19 related risks and evolving needs, other services were suspended or delivered on a reduced basis.

To ensure services are re-introduced in a safe, clinically aligned and prioritised way, the HSE have published a Strategic Framework for 'Service Continuity in a Covid Environment'. This document was published on June 8th and can be found at the following link <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/service-continuity-in-a-covid-environment-a-strategic-framework-for-delivery.pdf> .

The implementation of the Framework will ensure service resumption is done in an integrated and phased manner. It will consolidate new ways of working and build on international knowledge.

While not all services can return to previous levels immediately, many health services have already resumed, particularly for priority cases. The HSE are currently developing a Service Continuity Roadmap for the resumption of services across the health system.

### Covid-19 Pandemic

563. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide each of the advices and directions from the expert advisory group to NPHEt in relation to the original Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, the accelerated roadmap, the one metre versus two metre social distancing advice, travel and quarantine restrictions and the wearing of face coverings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13647/20]

564. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if each of the minutes from the expert advisory group to NPHEt for May and June 2020 will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13648/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 563 and 564 together.

The Deputy may wish to note that the Expert Advisory Group minutes up to mid-May and all Expert Advisory Group advices to the NPHEt for the same period have been made available on the Department of Health's website.

Further minutes and advices will be published on an ongoing basis and work is underway to facilitate publication of the next batch of Expert Advisory Group documentation as soon as possible.

### Covid-19 Pandemic

565. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the plans in place for a second wave of Covid-19 in the view of the fact that a number of major hospitals are now working at 100% capacity and that the health service should only be running at 80% to provide for surge capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13649/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The initial focus for acute hospital preparedness for Covid-19 was on building up surge capacity to ensure the maximum possible number of critical care and general acute beds were available to cope with the predicted number of Covid-19 cases requiring hospitalisation.

The acute hospital system and critical care service coped, largely due to the success of public health measures in flattening the curve and the fall-off in non-Covid care. The additional demand for critical care was met by surge ICU capacity, with clinical staff redeployed from other hospital services and locations. However, this was in the context of low levels of care being provided in other areas of the hospital.

The need to increase critical care capacity is a key learning of the pandemic response. Accordingly, consideration is being given to permanent strategic critical care capacity requirements, and the Department and the HSE are currently engaging in this regard.

On 8 June 8 the HSE published a Strategic Framework for 'Service Continuity in a Covid Environment'. The document can be found at the following link <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/service-continuity-in-a-covid-environment-a-strategic-framework-for-delivery.pdf> .

In the framework document the HSE outline the key actions for delivery to protect surge capacity. The key actions include;

1. Complete a service review and assessment of additional capacity / alternatives for service provision e.g Private hospitals, field hospitals, Community Assessment Hubs.
2. Develop continuity plans, including risk stratification, for the reintroduction and reduction of services within hospital groups and CHOs, to prepare for a potential COVID surge.
3. Develop and implement pathways and support services across community and acute settings in order to promote hospital avoidance.

The implementation of the Framework will ensure service resumption is done in an integrated and phased manner. It will consolidate new ways of working and build on international knowledge.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

566. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase capacity permanently across the health service in order to ensure that in the event of a second wave of Covid-19, there will be immediate availability for Covid-19 patients to be separately cared for to other patients; his plans for emergency departments and for Covid-19 specific hospitals in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13650/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Health services must strive to deliver a safe service in all circumstances. In order to mitigate the spread of Covid 19 in health settings public health guidelines in relation to social distancing must be followed.

The Programme for Government, Our Shared Future, commits to the provision of more health services in the community, increases in capacity, including bed, ICU and critical care capacity. It recognises that even before the impact of COVID-19 on our health service, significant additional capacity was required across all aspects of care to provide access to quality services and to meet the needs of our growing population. It specifically commits to continue to invest in healthcare infrastructure and equipment, together with the recommendations of the Capacity Review, in line with Project Ireland 2040 and to ensure capacity for a COVID-19 rapid response, including bed and ICU capacity and for non-COVID emergencies into the longer term, by utilising some private hospital capacity, if necessary.

The Capacity Review found that the net requirement, in a reform scenario, is for an additional 2,590 hospital beds by 2031 (inpatient, day case, critical care) with an immediate requirement for 1,290 beds to address overcrowding and to ensure hospitals operated at 85% occupancy in line with other OECD countries. Approximately 770 of these beds have been provided. The National Development Plan provides for the full 2,590 beds by the earlier date of 2027.

The initial focus for acute hospital preparedness for Covid-19 was on building up surge capacity to ensure the maximum possible number of critical care and general acute beds were available to cope with the predicted number of Covid-19 cases requiring hospitalisation.

The acute hospital system and critical care service coped, largely due to the success of public health measures in flattening the curve and the fall-off in non-Covid care. The additional demand for critical care was met by surge ICU capacity, with clinical staff redeployed from other hospital services and locations.

The need to increase critical care capacity is a key learning of the pandemic response. Accordingly, consideration is being given to permanent strategic critical care capacity requirements, and the Department and the HSE are currently engaging in this regard.

There are no plans for Covid 19 specific hospitals at the present. Hospitals have put in place Covid and non Covid patient pathways, in emergency departments and other areas, to mitigate the risk of infection for patients and staff.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

567. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the current permanent ICU and critical care capacity in the health service; the additional amount that was available during the peak of the Covid-19 crisis; if this capacity fluctuated or reduced in recent weeks; if there are plans to further increase the permanent ICU and critical care capacity; if so, the way this would breakdown between the public health system and the private system; the arrangements that will exist between the public and private systems in relation to this capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13651/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** In early 2020, baseline permanent adult critical care capacity in Ireland was reported by the National Office of Clinical Audit (NOCA) to be 255 beds. Funding for a further 40 adult critical care beds, and two paediatric critical care beds, was provided as part of the response to Covid-19 in March 2020. Daily situational reports provided by the HSE during recent months have reported potential critical care beds, including surge capacity, to be in the region of 500, with the number open on any given day subject to fluctuation in respect of available staff. Training was provided to over 1,500 nursing staff to allow them to provide support to critical care as required.

The acute hospital system and critical care service has coped effectively during recent months, and this reflects the success of public health measures in flattening the curve. The additional demand for critical care was met by surge ICU capacity, with clinical staff redeployed from other hospital services and locations.

My Department and the HSE are currently engaging in regard to critical care capacity requirements in the public hospital system.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

568. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Health if NPHET will be requested to consider preparing new guidelines for residential centres that allow for the differentiated risk level between nursing homes and social care homes during the next phase of the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13675/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** It is recognised that the impact of COVID-19 on society in general as well as on those living in long term residential care setting has been considerable. The introduction of physical distancing, isolation, reduced social activities and restricted contact with family and loved ones has changed the accustomed daily routine and usual dynamic of social interaction for residents of those settings. The focus on interrupting the transmission of the virus is part of a wider requirement to prioritise the wellbeing of residents of disability centres, remain person-centred, be cognisant of their rights as citizens, and to be vigilant that in seeking to prevent infection that these rights are not infringed upon to an extent, or in a manner, that is disproportionate.

People living in long-term residential care facilities are particularly vulnerable populations in the context of Covid-19 and have been identified by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to be at a higher risk of being susceptible to infection from this disease and for subsequent ad-

verse outcomes.

The actions and measures we have taken in Ireland to support long term residential care facilities and their residents have evolved on foot of epidemiological data and guidance from the WHO and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). These measures have been both society wide as well as focused specifically on residential facilities.

NPHET advice focused on all LTRC settings and its recommended actions were relevant for all residential care services - older people, disability and mental health.

NPHET established the NPHET Vulnerable Peoples Subgroup, which has broad membership from across Government Departments, Agencies and key stakeholders. This Subgroup was established 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. The specific needs of vulnerable groups, including those with a disability, are being considered at a national level with representation from all Government Departments with responsibility for disability issues as part of an integrated cross government response. The Subgroup held its first meeting on 6th March and across Government Departments such as Education and Justice, the HSE and Disability Federation Ireland the interests of people with disabilities on the group were represented.

The HSE continues to plan the re-establishment of vital non-COVID-19 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. Plans have to comply with guidance as set out by the National Public Health Emergency Team as well as Public Health specialists in the HSE.

*Question No. 569 answered with Question No. 461.*

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

570. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be investigated in order to provide a satisfactory resolution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13677/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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 dis-

ease 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.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

571. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Health when chiropody and podiatry services will resume under the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13678/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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)) podiatrists (also known as chiropodists) 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).

### **Health Services Provision**

572. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the HSE to review the suite of services available to persons with Parkinson's disease, in particular those with other conditions such as diabetes to ensure the latest occupational treatments and advice are available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13679/20]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the issue raised are service delivery matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy.

*Question No. 573 answered with Question No. 559.*

### **Dental Services**

574. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 565 of 23 June 2020, the number of dentists that have given notice to withdraw from the dental treatment services scheme as of 24 June 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13710/20]

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

### **Common Agricultural Policy**

575. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if CAP funds will be limited to €60,000 for corporate farm enterprises and wealthy landowners (details supplied). [13234/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The CAP post-2020 legislative proposals set out a number of measures relating to distribution of payments. These include a proposal to implement a mandatory overall cap of €100,000, as well as degressivity, or gradual reductions, for payments above €60,000. The capping proposal would apply to all farmers and not just those who may choose to operate as a company.

Ireland has previously indicated its willingness to implement capping. Under the current CAP regulations, Ireland has already applied the maximum level of degressivity allowable for basic payments over €150,000.

My Department is carefully considering all aspects of the CAP proposals to assess their potential impact on applicants. While the different elements of the capping proposal are part of the draft CAP proposals, the issue of its mandatory application to direct payments is being considered as part of the overall budgetary discussions under the Multiannual Financial Framework. These negotiations are ongoing and are running in parallel to the CAP post-2020 negotiations.

We still have some way to go before agreement is reached on both sets of proposals. I will continue to work effectively with my European colleagues, with the Commission and with the European Parliament, to shape these proposals into an effective new CAP and secure the best possible outcome for the Irish agri-food sector.

### **Common Agricultural Policy**

576. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he has taken to change the proposed objective in the new CAP 2021-2027 relating to GAEC2 from appropriate protection of wetland and peatland to retention and maintenance of the area of permanent grassland on farmed peatlands and wetlands, in view of the definition of strictly protected areas and the proposed quantity of them as outlined in the EU biodiversity strategy published on the 20 May 2020 and the definition of strict nature reserves in the International Union for Conservation of Nature categories; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12702/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The CAP post-2020 proposals are detailed and complex, and negotiations are ongoing. While significant progress has been made, decisions on a number of key issues have still to be made, particularly when it comes to the proposed CAP Strategic Plan Regulation. One of these issues is the proposed new green architecture, which is aimed at achieving a higher level of climate ambition.

With regard to wetlands, Ireland already provides strict and rigorous protection to wetlands through our planning legislation. Under the proposed CAP Strategic Plan Regulation, a new conditionality is introduced with a number of standards in relation to keeping land in good agricultural and environmental condition (GAEC), including a new GAEC2 aimed at protecting wetland and peatland ecosystems. As negotiations are still ongoing, this text is still subject to change. Ireland has requested clarification of the meaning of “protection”, and this will help to inform the implementation of measures at farm level.

As regards links to the EU Biodiversity strategy, the strategy aims to increase the protected areas of land and sea across Europe to 30%. However, these are European-wide rather than

individual Member State targets, and further clarity is awaited as to how these targets will be met by Member States.

The International Union Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is the global authority on status of nature and its conservation and works in support of the Ramsar convention on wetlands. Ireland is a signatory to the convention. In 2010 the Irish Ramsar wetlands committee was set up by the government to assist Ireland in meeting its commitments as a signatory. Membership of this committee is drawn from a range of relevant Departments, agencies, scientific and technical institutions, regional and local authorities and non governmental organisations.

My Department is in broad consultation with all relevant stakeholders regarding preparation of the CAP Strategic Plans. The recent publication of the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy and Biodiversity Strategy will have an impact on the future CAP, and the targets and actions set within them will need to be reflected in Member States' CAP Strategic Plans. My Department officials and I will continue to actively participate in the CAP post 2020 process both at national and European level to secure the best possible outcome for the Irish agri-food sector, including the continued protection of wetlands and peatlands.

### **Beef Industry**

577. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of the 78,000 of beef farmers that are finishers. [12720/20]

578. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which small beef farmers will benefit from the recent announcement that €50 million will be allocated to support beef finishing farms in view of the fact many small beef farmers are not finishers. [12721/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 577 and 578 together.

The €50 million Beef Exceptional Aid package is targeted towards beef finishers in recognition of the fact that they have borne the most immediate and severe economic impact arising from the market disturbance arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Supporting finishers will have a positive impact on suckling and store buying enterprises, as it will help to maintain the market into which these operators sell, primarily in the autumn.

In terms of supports specifically for suckler farmers; in addition to the €300 million Beef Data and Genomics Programme, which is the core Rural Development Programme support targeted at suckler farmers, and other supports such as the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme which is very significant to suckler farm incomes, the 2020 Beef Environmental Efficiency Programme - Sucklers (BEEP-S) is targeted specifically at suckler farmers and aims to enhance the operational, economic and environmental efficiency of suckler enterprises.

My Department, having consulted with farming stakeholders, is currently working out the detailed terms and conditions for the scheme, which will be published in due course.

The economic rationale which underpins the scheme will be published in due course in the notification to the EU Commission for inclusion of the measure under the COVID temporary state aid framework.

In 2019 approximately 57,500 farmers sold one or more finished bovine animals for slaugh-

ter.

### Felling Licences

579. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a felling licence for persons (details supplied). [12778/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** An application for a tree felling licence was received from the person named in January, 2020. 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 application, it was determined that 13 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 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.

### Land Issues

580. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason Ireland does not use the land parcel definition of permanent grazing under established local practices which is used in other EU countries; when this decision was taken; the reason for this position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12789/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** My Department has, since the outset of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) in 2015, included PG-ELP (Permanent Grassland, Established Local Practices) in the definition of permanent grassland as allowed under Article 4(1)(h) of Regulation 1307/2013.

This specific option relates to the eligibility of permanent grassland where grasses and other species do not predominate. In an Irish context this primarily relates to heather dominated pastures used for extensive grazing of livestock, typically sheep and cattle.

The Guide to Land Eligibility booklet sent to all applicants at the outset of the BPS scheme sets out the characteristics of permanent grassland, including PG-ELP, for it to be deemed eli-

gible for payment.

### **Basic Payment Scheme**

581. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a penalty by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12791/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** Under the Terms and Conditions of the Basic Payment Scheme, an applicant, as well as meeting the scheme criteria, must comply with EU regulatory requirements relating to Cross Compliance.

A report detailing findings of a check carried out by my Department's Agri Environment Structures Division on 29 March 2019 was referred to my Department's Cross Compliance Unit for attention. This report detailed breaches relating to the cross compliance requirements in respect of Statutory Management Requirement (SMR) 1, which relates to Nitrates.

The breaches resulted in a 20% penalty being applied against the 2019 Direct Schemes payments. The person named was notified of this decision on 9 August 2019 and of their right to seek a review of the findings. A review was sought and the outcome was to uphold to the original decision. The person named was notified of this decision by letter on 15 June 2020.

If the person named is dissatisfied with the outcome of this review, the decision can be appealed to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office, within 3 months of the date of the review outcome letter.

### **Forestry Grants**

582. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive a response to a broadleaf forestry grant and licence application that was submitted in October 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12849/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** Two applications for the Afforestation Grand and Premium Scheme, were received from the person named in November, 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 the applications, it was determined that the proposed sites for both applications are proximate to 11 designated sites. The possibility that the proposed afforestation 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 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 assessment of the application.

Once this work 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.

### **Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme**

583. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a matter will be clarified for a person (details supplied) who was unable to source cattle to meet the stocking rate; if they still qualify for the ANC payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12882/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The Terms and Conditions of the 2020 Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme require applicants to meet minimum stock retention and stocking density requirements.

Changes to the terms and conditions of the scheme were introduced for the 2020 scheme year whereby donkeys could only account for 50% of an applicant's stocking requirements under the scheme. With effect from 2020, applicants are required to use other livestock to fulfil the other 50% requirement.

The introduction of this change was detailed in the 2019 Terms and Conditions of the scheme which issued to applicants in February 2019. This was to ensure that applicants had sufficient time to make the necessary adjustments to their farming practices to meet the amended requirements coming into effect for the 2020 scheme year. In order to meet the remaining 50% of their stocking density applicants can use sheep, goats, horses, or deer.

All applicants to the scheme in 2020 must comply with all requirements as set out under the scheme terms and conditions in order to be eligible to receive payment under the ANC scheme in 2020.

In line with previous scheme years, applicants who encounter specific issues relating to their individual circumstances may submit an appeal in writing to my Department, providing any relevant supporting documentation.

### **Fishery Harbour Centres**

584. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a case (details supplied) will be finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12900/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** Killybegs Fishery Harbour Centre is a designated Fishery Harbour Centre (FHC) which is owned, operated and maintained by my Department under statute.

The case referred to is a complex one involving more than one interested party and has been prioritised by my Department. A number of complicated legal issues have now been resolved,

with the assistance of the Chief State Solicitor's Office who have been in correspondence with the solicitors for the persons referred to by the Deputy.

My Department is now awaiting the return of recently exchanged legal documents with the parties involved so that matters can now be brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

### **Forestry Grants**

585. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if grant funding is available to farmers that wish to replant felled forestry in their ownership with native broadleaf saplings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12930/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** In general, there are no reforestation grants available on clearfell, as the realisation of the timber asset is considered more than adequate to cover the cost of replanting. However, under certain conditions replanting grants are made available as part of the Native Woodland Conservation Scheme. Under this scheme the conversion of existing conifer forests to native woodland are eligible for grants of up to €5,000 per hectare. Private forest owners are also eligible for an annual premium payment of €350 per hectare for 7 years.

In order to receive this funding the conifer forest must be adjoining a sensitive watercourse, where native woodland establishment can contribute to the protection of water quality and aquatic habitats and species. Water sensitive areas include Freshwater Pearl Mussel catchments, fisheries sensitive areas, Acid Sensitive Areas, and high status waterbodies identified under the Water Framework Directive. Where a marketable quantity of timber is realised from the felling operation, the quantity (in cubic metres) of timber must be documented and details submitted to my Department, together with evidence of timber-related income (including invoices and receipts). My Department may reduce the grant payable accordingly, reflecting the value of the timber realised and (where relevant) the normal costs associated with standard replanting.

Applications under the Native Woodland Conservation Scheme must be made before clearfelling takes place and applicants must ensure that a valid felling licence is in place for any felling carried out under the scheme.

### **Horticulture Sector**

586. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an analysis has been conducted on the impact on the horticultural sector following a decision by Bord na Móna decision to suspend all peat harvesting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13016/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The extent of any commercial impact on the horticulture sector arising from a decision by Bord na Mona to suspend all peat harvesting will depend initially on the level of domestic stocks of horticultural peat on hand, alternative suppliers of peat and the development of alternative growing mediums.

The amenity, soft fruit and mushrooms sectors are the most reliant on milled horticulture grade peat. My Department is participating in a cross-departmental working group led by the former Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht which is evaluating the use of peat in the commercial horticulture sector. Future options around the role and use of peat in the horti-

culture sector are currently under discussion in the working group.

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

587. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ensure that the €50 million announced for those farmers severely impacted by the economic effects of Covid-19 goes to the beef farmer that fattens the cattle and not the agents or marts; if funding will also be provided for suckler cow farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13053/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The €50 million Beef Exceptional Aid package is targeted towards beef finishers in recognition of the fact that they have borne the most immediate and severe economic impact arising from the market disturbance arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Supporting finishers will have a positive impact on suckling and store buying enterprises, as it will help to maintain the market into which these operators sell, primarily in the autumn.

In terms of supports specifically for suckler farmers; in addition to the €300 million Beef Data and Genomics Programme, which is the core Rural Development Programme support targeted at suckler farmers, and other supports such as the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme which is very significant to suckler farm incomes, the 2020 Beef Environmental Efficiency Programme - Sucklers (BEEP-S) is targeted specifically at suckler farmers and aims to enhance the operational, economic and environmental efficiency of suckler enterprises.

My Department, having consulted with farming stakeholders, is currently working out the detailed terms and conditions for the scheme, which will be published in due course.

### **Beef Environmental Efficiency Scheme**

588. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address the case of persons (details supplied) regarding BEEP 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13074/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The objective of the Beef Environmental Efficiency Programme – Suckler is to further increase economic and environmental efficiency in the suckler herd through better quality data on herd performance, supporting decision making on farm and support of best practice in welfare management.

The closing date for receipt of applications for this programme was 15 May 2020. Applications could only be made via my Department's online application system at [www.agfood.ie](http://www.agfood.ie). Travel restrictions would not have prevented the persons named from submitting an application and accordingly a late application cannot be accepted in this case.

### **Beef Industry**

589. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider including Northern Ireland as part the Bord Bia protected geographical indication application for Irish grass-fed beef from the European Commission; and if not, the reason for the position. [13127/20]

590. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the engagement he has had with his Northern Ireland counterpart regarding the Bord Bia protected geographical indication application for Irish grass-fed beef from the European Commission. [13128/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 589 and 590 together.

I have not had any discussions with my Northern counterpart on this issue.

I am informed that the application referred to by the Deputy for Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status for “Irish Grass Fed Beef” is being made by Bord Bia on behalf of the Irish beef sector. PGI status requires products to be produced in accordance with a particular technical specification and producers are required to meet that specification. This is in addition to the legal requirements applying to food production in EU Member States.

I understand that the draft application proposes that the controls already in place for the Bord Bia Sustainable Beef and Lamb Assurance Scheme (SBLAS) will be used as part of the control regime to verify production of ‘Grass Fed Irish Beef’. Beef farmers in Northern Ireland are not members of the SBLAS.

### **Felling Licences**

591. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a felling licence application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13150/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** An application for a tree felling licence was received from the person named. 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 the application it was determined that the proposed site is within the Slieve Felim and Silvermines Mountain SPA, which is designated for Hen Harrier. There is a possibility that the proposed tree felling operations could affect the hen harrier, particularly during the nesting season. The person named has submitted a Natura Impact Statement, which has been forwarded to my Department’s Ecology Unit for examination. I have asked that the application is prioritised.

Once this work 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.

## Agriculture Schemes

592. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if consideration has been given to providing grants for farmers and growers that adopt hydroponic or vertical farming; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13153/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine provides grant aid for the horticulture sector through the scheme of investment aid for the development of the commercial horticulture sector.

This scheme grant aids capital investments in specialised plant and equipment as well as emerging technologies specific to commercial horticulture production, including hydroponics and vertical farming. Under this scheme, aid at a rate of 40% (or a maximum rate of 50% in the case of young farmers) is payable on the accepted cost of approved capital investments or equipment. For 2020 €6 million has been allocated to this scheme, which is 100% funded by the Irish Government and operates on a competitive basis, based on the availability of funds and the ongoing priorities for each sector within the industry as well as the quality and scale of the proposals.

## Forestry Grants

593. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a forestry application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13216/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** An application for the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme was received on behalf of the person named in November 2019. The application is complex as the proposed site is close to designated sites, including Castlemaine Harbour SAC and a stretch of the Gweestin River, which is a high-status watercourse. The site also contains or is near to archaeological features and artefacts.

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.

The possibility that the proposed afforestation may have an impact on the designated sites cannot yet be excluded. Therefore, officials of my Department will complete the Appropriate Assessment report and determination. It is also open to the person named to have a Natura Impact Statement (NIS), completed by a suitably qualified person at their own expense and submit it for review by my Department's Ecology Unit which can 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.

**GLAS Issues**

594. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount paid in GLAS payments by county in 2019; the number of farmers in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13222/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** There are currently 48,443 active participants in the GLAS scheme. 97.7% of 2019 scheme year payments have been made to date.

My Department continues to work with both farmers and their advisors to ensure that any issues are resolved, and outstanding payments are made as quickly as possible.

GLAS 2019 scheme year payments (including GLAS plus) to date by county are as follows:

County	GLAS 2019 scheme year payments (including GLAS plus) to date
Carlow	€ 2,204,186.55
Cavan	€ 7,761,658.03
Clare	€ 13,328,113.40
Cork	€ 16,271,995.92
Donegal	€ 16,324,449.19
Dublin	€ 368,603.98
Galway	€ 23,776,444.82
Kerry	€ 14,426,477.64
Kildare	€ 1,732,597.03
Kilkenny	€ 3,402,737.33
Laois	€ 3,242,916.46
Leitrim	€ 8,184,319.44
Limerick	€ 7,491,100.21
Longford	€ 4,871,699.68
Louth	€ 1,202,181.46
Mayo	€ 21,742,841.46
Meath	€ 3,527,236.41
Monaghan	€ 4,001,407.45
Offaly	€ 4,396,140.12
Roscommon	€ 11,460,010.43
Sligo	€ 7,150,078.95
Tipperary	€ 8,996,059.91
Waterford	€ 2,500,784.04
Westmeath	€ 4,912,096.94
Wexford	€ 5,568,236.50
Wicklow	€ 2,974,053.95
TOTAL	€ 201,818,427.30

**GLAS Issues**

595. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Ma-

rine the amount paid for measures in 2019 (details supplied) nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13223/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The table below shows GLAS payments for scheme year 2019 in respect of the GLAS actions requested by the Deputy:

Action	-
Bat Boxes	€2,660,778.55
Bird Boxes	€1,213,347.55
Commonage	€19,817,952.13
Coppicing of Hedgerows	€5,330,468.22
Farmland Habitat (private natura )	€6,031,550.67
Laying of Hedgerows	€1,941,868.70
Low-emission Slurry Spreading	€2,225,891.90
Low-input Permanent Pasture	€67,176,878.06
Planting New Hedgerows	€5,594,105.71
Traditional Dry Stone Wall Maintenance	€5,250,149.21
Traditional Hay Meadow	€17,704,338.97
Wild Bird Cover	€15,828,418.77

### Forestry Data

596. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of commercial forests, woodlands and parklands under the operation of Coillte nationwide by location; the locations accessible by entry fees only; the revenue raised by entrance fees in each of the past three years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13236/20]

597. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the revenue raised by entrance fees to Donadea forest park in the past two years to date; the reason for entry fees to some management land maintained by Coillte and not others; the use made of revenue raised from entry fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13237/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 596 and 597 together.

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 questions raised to Coillte for response and direct reply to the Deputy.

### Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme

598. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter in relation to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13307/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The per-

son named submitted a payment claim under The Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme of TAMS II on 22 April 2020. The payment claim is currently being processed and the local office concerned will be in direct contact with the above named when processing is complete.

### **Environmental Policy**

599. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the remuneration available to owners of callow land along the Shannon catchment area. [13316/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** My Department implements a number of financial support schemes for farmers, including those farmers who own callow land in the Shannon catchment area. For example, farmers in the Shannon callows are eligible to avail of the financial support paid out under the €1.2bn annual Basic Payment Scheme and the €250m annual Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme. In addition, support is available for farmers participating in the GLAS agri-environment scheme as is support for capital investment projects under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS).

The National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) also operate farm plan scheme, to trial and test new approaches to farming for nature. Currently, there are three NPWS farm plans in the Shannon Callows, focussing on breeding waders (namely Curlew, Snipe, Lapwing and Redshank). Applications for new farm plans were recently requested and 12 applications were successful in the Shannon Callows. NPWS is currently procuring the services of a farm planner to engage with the applicants, with a view to designing farm plans, which both NPWS and the farmers in question will consider to take forward.

### **Forestry Grants**

600. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if approval and financial support will be provided for a forestry road in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13319/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** An application for the Forest Road Works Scheme was received on behalf of the person named in April, 2020.

All applications for forestry licences, must be carefully assessed for their potential impacts on the surrounding environment and countryside. As part of this assessment process, applications may be referred to public bodies, including the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and others. The application was referred to the NPWS on 19 May and they have until the middle of July to respond.

Following that, the application will be referred to the Forestry District Inspector, who will examine the application for its potential impacts on its own or in combination with other plans and projects in the area. The proposed site is near to nine designated sites and it is not possible at this time, to rule out any impact the proposed operations may have on those sites.

When the assessment of the application is complete, the person named and their registered forester will be notified of the decision.

### **Fishing Industry**

601. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of funding allocated for grants under the fisheries local area group development 2016-2023 for 2020; the actual amount of funding allocation that has been issued to date; and the remaining amount for 2020. [13387/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** Our seven Fisheries Local Action Groups have been allocated a total of €12 million to disperse to their FLAG territories over the course of the EMFF Programme. The seven FLAGs were established in 2017 and by end 2019 had paid out some €6.6 million in grants. BIM anticipates that beneficiaries will draw down further funds in 2020 from existing outstanding grant awards, while I expect to announce the first grant awards of 2020 in the coming weeks. Figures are not yet available in respect of those new grant awards. The FLAG scheme will continue to operate in 2021 until its full €12 million allocation is exhausted.

My Department is at present in the process of developing the next Programme for the 2021 to 2027 period under the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund, which is still being negotiated by the EU Co-legislators. I anticipate that FLAGs will again have an important role in that next Programme.

### Agriculture Schemes

602. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the work undertaken to commence a pilot scheme in 2020 modelled on the rural environment protection scheme; the estimated number of farmers that will participate in such a pilot scheme; the estimated funding to be allocated to the pilot scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13431/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** As consideration of the next CAP is ongoing, Ireland has pressed for the earliest possible adoption of regulations to facilitate the operation of schemes during the transitional period. This is to provide some certainty until such time as CAP regulations and associated funding arrangements are agreed. Ireland has pressed for early agreement on these issues so that my Department can plan for the transitional period with legal and financial certainty and consequently provide clarity to farmers and rural communities as soon as possible.

In parallel, my Department will begin to work now on measures to meet its commitments under a new Programme for Government, including those in relation to a new environmental scheme. This will be priority work for me and my Department over the coming months and the stakeholders will continue to be updated on developments.

### Beef Industry

603. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers that will be eligible for the emergency beef fund scheme by county in tabular form; the criteria that will be applied to applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13432/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The €50 million Beef Exceptional Aid package is targeted towards beef finishers in recognition of the fact that they have borne the most immediate and severe economic impact arising from the market disturbance associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The details requested by the Deputy are not yet available as my Department, having consulted with farming stakeholders, is currently working out the detailed terms and conditions for the scheme, which will be published in due course.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

604. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will introduce a scheme to support farmers that are affected by a shortage of straw in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13433/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** Whilst there is concern that the reduced level of winter crop sowings and the recent dry spell impacting on spring sown crops will result in lower volumes of straw this year, it is premature to be definitive in terms of straw demand versus availability, in particular given that harvest 2020 has not commenced. Notwithstanding this, 2019 produced an abundance of straw which carried over into this year and will help in offsetting some of the likely demand.

However, both I and my officials will continue to closely monitor the situation.

### **Beef Industry**

605. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason he decided to exclude suckler beef farmers from the €50 million emergency beef fund; if he will publish the advice and analysis that led to this decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13434/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The €50 million Beef Exceptional Aid package is targeted towards beef finishers in recognition of the fact that they have borne the most immediate and severe economic impact arising from the market disturbance arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Supporting finishers will have a positive impact on suckling and store buying enterprises, as it will help to maintain the market into which these operators sell, primarily in the autumn.

The economic rationale which underpins the scheme will be published in due course in the notification to the EU Commission for inclusion of the measure under the COVID temporary state aid framework.

In terms of supports specifically for suckler farmers; in addition to the €300 million Beef Data and Genomics Programme, which is the core Rural Development Programme support targeted at suckler farmers, and other supports such as the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme which is very significant to suckler farm incomes, the 2020 Beef Environmental Efficiency Programme - Sucklers (BEEP-S) is targeted specifically at suckler farmers and aims to enhance the operational, economic and environmental efficiency of suckler enterprises.

### **Trade Relations**

606. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of his interactions with the European Commission regarding the ongoing free trade deal negotiations with New Zealand, particularly in relation to the tariff free sheep meat quotas; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [13435/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** On 21 June 2018, Trade Commissioner Malmstrom and Trade Minister Parker officially launched negotiations for a comprehensive and ambitious trade agreement between the EU and New Zealand. Eight rounds of negotiations have been completed, the most recent of which took place from 8-19 June 2020.

During the course of these negotiations, Ireland has, as with all such negotiations, insisted that they are handled appropriately and in a manner that safeguards the interests of our agri-food sector, particularly our most sensitive sectors.

Prior to the most recent round of negotiations, the European Commission circulated a “draft second market access offer” for Member States’ consideration. This offer included more sensitive lines, such as beef, dairy and sheepmeat, which were absent from the EU’s initial market access offer. Ireland and other Member States expressed concerns to the Commission in relation to the sheepmeat offer in particular through the Trade Policy Committee in early June, which was attended (virtually) by officials from both my Department and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. In response, the Commission revised the proposed offer significantly downwards.

My Department will continue to monitor these and other negotiations closely, with a view to continuing to protect the interests of the Irish agri-food sector.

### Sheepmeat Sector

607. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of lambs that were imported for processing in each of the years 2015 to 2019 and to date in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13436/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** Intra EU movement of animals is recorded on the Trade Control and Expert System (TRACES). The following data extracted from the TRACES database represents sheep of all ages imported into Ireland for all movement purposes. 2020 data is available for Quarter 1 only.

Year	Quantity (Head)
2020 (YTD 01/04/20)	108,853
2019	461,522
2018	521,798
2017	492,776
2016	432,354
2015	331,795

### Departmental Staff

608. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of staff employed and the grade of each at Davitt House, Castlebar, County Mayo; his plans to expand the offices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13465/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** In response to the Deputy, the table below lists the grade and number of staff employed at Davitt House,

Castlebar, Co. Mayo. There are no plans to either increase or decrease the number of staff in this office.

Grade	Number of Staff
Assistant Agricultural Inspector	5
Clerical Officer	14
District Superintendent	4
Executive Officer	3
Forestry Inspector	1
Higher Executive Officer	2
Superintending Veterinary Inspector	1
Supervisory Agricultural Officer	6
Technical Agricultural Officer	16
Veterinary Inspector	4
Grand Total	56

### Seafood Sector

609. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on running a promotional campaign to urge consumers and restaurants to purchase seafood from Irish fishermen and women to help offset the economic impact of Covid-19. [13507/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The promotion of Irish seafood on the domestic and international markets is a statutory function of Bord Bia – the State Body of my Department charged with such matters. Decisions on individual promotion and marketing campaigns of Irish food, drink, horticulture and seafood are an operational matter for that organisation and as such the Deputy can contact them at [info@BordBia.ie](mailto:info@BordBia.ie)

I wish to advise the Deputy that Bord Bia as a publicly funded State Body is prohibited by EU state aid rules from advertising and promotion solely on the grounds of national origin. This is on the basis that such advertising in any Member State could create unfair competition and a barrier to the free movements of trade, goods and services within the Single Market.

However, I am pleased to inform the Deputy that Bord Bia are currently completing a series of Ireland Market Promotions, which have been ongoing since late March. These activities are spanning TV, radio and social media, and encourages consumers to use a range of quality assured food products, including Irish whitefish, to create healthy and comforting meals at home, during this time. This current promotional and advertising campaign for the seafood and meat sectors on our national media are category based, and are situated within the legal permissions of the Bord Bia Sustainable Quality Assurance Logo, where the national origin is very much in a secondary capacity.

This campaign is just one of the responses designed by Bord Bia as part of the whole of Government response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Farm Safety

610. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on increasing the provision of farm safety education through practical skills training and

continuous professional development. [13509/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** With 14 fatal farm incidents to date this year, farm safety is a key priority and one of critical importance for the agriculture sector. It should be remembered that it is the Health and Safety Authority that has responsibility for safety across all workplaces including on farms.

My Department works closely with the HSA in the promotion of farm safety and farm safety training. To this end all applicants under the structural investment scheme or ‘TAMS’, are required to complete a farm safety training course before they can be paid any funding. Additionally, all participants in the Knowledge Transfer schemes were required to attend farm safety meetings and complete annual farm safety plans. Beyond this, over the last three years both the Agricultural Science Leaving Certificate Syllabus and the third level ‘Green Cert’ have been updated in respect to the training of young people in farm safety.

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to ‘ Invest in enhanced farm safety and well- being measures under the next CAP’. This confirms our commitment to prioritising farm safety as a critical issue of importance to the sector in the period ahead.

### Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

611. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of fishermen and women that have availed of the Covid-19 tie-up payment by each category of the scheme and in absolute and relative terms to the estimate total eligible number of boats. [13510/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** In line with Government policy to maintain food supply chains throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic, from the outset Government classified fishermen as essential workers and kept our fishery harbours open. However, our fishermen have faced difficult market conditions over recent months with market access very difficult and prices for many species depressed. We are now in a transition period where, with the re-opening of economies and societies in Europe and elsewhere worldwide, market conditions and prices are improving. However, we still have a volatile market situation and to assist with stabilising the market for our fishermen during this transition period the Voluntary Fleet Tie-up Scheme is available, so that those vessel owners who consider that it is not economically viable for them to fish can voluntarily tie-up in port for a one or two month period over the three months June to August. The Tie-up Scheme is intended as an additional safety net to complement the income supports available from Government for fishermen in that situation and is providing aid to cover the fixed costs of those vessels that choose to tie-up.

In its first month of operation, June 2020, some 67 vessels out of 1,984 vessels in the fleet chose to voluntarily tie-up. This meant that it was pleasing to see that the vast majority of our fleet considered markets had improved to the extent that fishing was considered more economically viable than recourse to this safety net scheme. .

The breakdown by size category for June requested by the Deputy is set out below. For July, the deadline for applications was 19 June and BIM is still examining these applications to determine eligibility under the Scheme. The Scheme is still open for applications for August.

Size Category	Vessels voluntarily tying up	Vessels in this category
less than 6m	10	592
6 less than 8m	11	512

Size Category	Vessels voluntarily tying up	Vessels in this category
8 less than 10m	20	372
10 less than 12m	11	229
12 less than 15m	7	68
15 less than 18m	0	20
18 less than 24m	6	78
more than 24m	2	113

### Beef Data and Genomics Programme

612. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a BDGP herd payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13528/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) provides for six years of payments to participating farmers for completion of actions which deliver accelerated genetic improvement in the Irish national herd and improvement of its environmental sustainability.

The application under the 2019 programme year for the person named has recently been finalised and payment will issue shortly.

### Departmental Staff

613. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13540/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** It is my understanding that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has developed guidelines for civil service organisations (Working from Home during COVID-19 – Guidance for Civil Service Organisations), which is intended to assist civil service organisations as long as necessary to address the health and safety risks of COVID-19. These guidelines issued to HR Divisions across the Civil Service recently.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has also commenced work on the development of a remote working policy which will address remote working in the longer term for the Civil Service.

Policies with respect to remote working for my Department will be framed in the context of these guidelines and policies, whilst taking into account all the experience and innovation captured internally during the course of the current COVID 19 pandemic. This learning will be assessed for its applicability to a more broadly based remote working policy that is consistent with the Department's overall HR Strategy and the People Strategy for the Civil Service.

### Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

614. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when funds will be released related to the TAMS II scheme; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [13579/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The indicative budget for the TAMS II measures over the full course of the Rural Development Programme is €395m, which is spread over a suite of seven measures which are available under TAMS II. Tranche 17 of TAMS II closed for applications on 5 June 2020. The applications received under this tranche are currently being processed and applicants will be notified in due course regarding their application.

### Tuberculosis Eradication Programme

615. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of bovine animals found to have failed the TB eradication test in each of the past five years to date in respect of both the dairy herd and the beef herd. [13703/20]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen):** The information requested is set out in the table below.

Herd Type	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
BEEF	1,664	1,568	1,838	1,990	1,802
DAIRY	7,021	8,964	8,580	9,186	8,813
OTHER	371	351	337	395	347
SUCKLER	6,300	6,077	6,590	5,976	5,841
Total	15,356	16,960	17,345	17,547	16,803

### Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

616. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will introduce a bin fee waiver in view of Covid-19 in particular for households on low incomes (details supplied). [12997/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The waste management market in Ireland is serviced by private companies, where prices charged, including any service charges, are a contract matter between those companies and their customers. In an effort to ensure that all waste collections, both household and commercial, continue during the Covid-19 pandemic my Department established a Covid-19 High Level Waste Advisory Group consisting of key stakeholders from industry, the local authority sector and regulatory bodies. This Group, in cooperation with all elements of the waste industry, has helped to ensure that there have been no interruptions to waste collection services to date and ensuring that most civic amenity sites have remained open to the public for those without a household collection service.

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

## Waste Management

617. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will begin the process of remunicipalisation of waste collection services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13538/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Local authorities are responsible for municipal waste collection within their functional areas. The obligations on local authorities in relation to collecting household waste are set out in section 33 of the Waste Management Act 1996, as amended. In summary, it provides that each local authority shall collect, or arrange for the collection of, household waste within its functional area. The obligation to collect or arrange for the collection of household waste shall not apply if: - an adequate waste collection service is available in the local authority's functional area,

- the estimated costs of the collection of the waste would, in the opinion of the local authority, be unreasonably high, or

- the local authority is satisfied that adequate arrangements for the disposal of the waste concerned can reasonably be made by the holder of the waste.

It is open to any local authority to re-enter the waste collection market as direct service providers if they so choose. Under section 60(3) of the Waste Management Act 1996 I am, as Minister, precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance by a local authority, in particular circumstances, of a statutory function vested in it. However, I will soon be bringing forward an ambitious new waste policy which will include new measures to reform and strengthen waste collection, while enhancing the position of the consumer.

## Electrical Contractors

618. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding pass through charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12732/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As the Deputy points out, there are a number of pass through costs that are applied to customer's bills and these are set out in detail in a recent Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) information paper at:- <https://www.cru.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/CRU19116-Pass-Through-Costs-for-Business-Electricity-Customers-20192020.pdf>.

Addressing in turn each specific pass through cost raised by the Deputy, network charges pass through elements are applied for the use of the electricity transmission and distribution systems and designed to recover the total costs involved in operating, maintaining and developing the transmission and distribution networks. These charges are regulated by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and are entirely a matter for the CRU as independent regulator under the regulatory legislative framework. I have no function in relation to these charges.

The Public Service Obligation (PSO) levy has been in place since 2001 and is the overall support mechanism for various national policy objectives, particularly focussed on the development of renewable electricity. It is designed to compensate electricity suppliers for the additional costs they incur by purchasing electricity generated by these producers. The PSO levy has been vital in enabling significant progress to be made on the 2020 40% national target for

renewable electricity and will continue to be so for the 70% target in the Climate Action Plan. Over the years, increases in the total amount of the PSO being passed through annually to electricity consumers have been associated with increasing renewable electricity generation, which is national policy, as well as resulting on occasion from lower wholesale electricity prices.

The Electricity Regulation Act 1999 (Public Service Obligations) Order 2002 provides that the calculation of the PSO is a matter for CRU and also sets out the manner in which CRU is to calculate it. CRU has recently published for consultation its proposed decision on the 2020/2021 levy, with its calculation of the levy for that year amounting to €480.11 million. This proposed decision is available at:-

<https://www.cru.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-21-PSO-Proposed-Decision.pdf>. Its final decision is due by 1st August 2020.

More broadly, responsibility for the regulation of the electricity market is solely a matter for the CRU, which was assigned this responsibility following the enactment of the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999, and subsequent legislation. The CRU is solely accountable to a committee of the Oireachtas for the performance of its functions, including its functions relating to the pass through charges set out above, and not to the Minister.

As regard the pass through of the electricity tax, it is an excise duty charged on all supplies of electricity and levied within the framework of the EU Energy Tax Directive. It is accordingly entirely a matter for the Minister for Finance, and not the Minister for Climate Action, Communications Networks and Transport.

## National Broadband Plan

619. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will intervene in the process of extending the broadband connection to the remaining houses in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12780/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie), shows the areas in Castlough 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 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 County Tipperary part of a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017.

The activities of commercial operators delivering high speed broadband within BLUE and LIGHT BLUE areas are not planned or funded by the State and my Department has no statutory authority to intervene in that regard.

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. The Government is committed to delivering high speed broadband to every home, farm, business and school in Ireland and my Department continues to engage with NBI to explore the feasibility of accelerating aspects of this rollout to establish the possibility of bringing forward premises which are currently scheduled in years 6 and 7 of the current plan to an earlier date. 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. 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.

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 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.

### **Post Office Network**

620. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if consideration will be given to the measures outlined by a group (details supplied) to save the post office network. [12928/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** An Post is a commercial State body with a mandate to deliver a postal delivery service and a viable post office network. Government remains fully committed to a sustainable post office network as a key component of the economic and social infrastructure in both rural and urban areas. An Post's social value has been particularly evident during the current Covid crisis.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, An Post has played a valuable role in its commitment to rural communities and to the elderly and vulnerable in our society. The company has provided a swift and sustained response to the crisis in the introduction of a number of initiatives, which were implemented with good will and efficiency throughout the country.

In response to the structural challenges facing the postal sector generally and An Post, the company put in place a Strategic Plan for the medium-long term future of the company. The Plan covers the period 2017 – 2021. In order to implement the Plan, the cost of which was estimated to be in the region of €150m, the Minister for Finance provided a loan of €30m to the company in December 2017 to support the renewal of the post office network (€15m) and the continued fulfilment of a 5 day per week mails delivery service (€15m).

An Post is continuing to undergo vital transformation as part of the delivery of its strategic plan which has seen the company split into two distinct business units, An Post Mails and Par-

cels and An Post Retail.

An Post is transforming its retail network by delivering new products and new formats. This includes, among other things, diversifying and growing the financial services products it provides for individuals and SMEs to include loans, credit cards and more foreign exchange products; local banking in association with the major banks and a full range of State Savings products. Two new dedicated sub-brands, An Post Money and a new business-to-business brand, An Post Commerce, were launched. Investment by An Post of €50 million in the network is about getting communities to use the enhanced services in their local post office.

In line with the relevant legislation, operational matters relating to the Post Office Network, including plans for individual post offices, are a matter for the Board and management of An Post and not one in which I, as Minister, have a statutory function.

### **Broadcasting Sector**

621. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the monthly updated account for the Broadcast Authority of Ireland sound and vision fund from May 2019 to May 2020 will be provided in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12941/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) is responsible for the administration of the Broadcasting Fund which includes the Sound and Vision Scheme. Part 10 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 sets out the mechanism by which the BAI shall provide funding for programmes. The Sound and Vision financial accounts are published yearly in the BAI's Annual Report, which has not yet been published in respect of 2019. Details of all Sound and Vision rounds are available on the BAI website <http://www.bai.ie/en/>

In 2020, a special funding round has been made available under the Sound and Vision Scheme to support the independent commercial radio sector in its provision of public awareness and understanding of COVID-19. In total, €2.5m has been allocated to commercial radio stations and an additional round for community radio will take place over the summer.

### **Broadcasting Sector**

622. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he will take to ensure that the ratio of funds awarded from the sound and vision fund in 2020 to screen content and radio content remains at the agreed ratio of 85:15, in view of his decision to create a special radio only Covid-19 round of the fund in May 2020 at a cost of €3.25 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12942/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** My Department provides funding of 7% of net TV Licence fee receipts to the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) for the administration of the Broadcasting Fund which includes the Sound and Vision and Archiving Schemes.

BAI is responsible for the administration of the Sound and Vision scheme and the approved scheme provides that BAI monitor the current ratio of 85:15 during the lifetime of the scheme and adjust as appropriate. It is a matter, therefore, for the BAI to decide what proportion of funds are allocated to TV and radio.

## **Broadcasting Sector**

623. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will use his power under section 156(3) of the Broadcasting Act 2009 to ensure that the sound and vision fund can award another round of funding in September 2020 at a minimum to screen content and radio content, respectively as per the sound and vision 4 scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12943/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Broadcasting Fund, which is administered by the BAI, is funded by 7% of net licence fee receipts and supports the Archiving and Sound and Vision schemes. €7m of funding was allocated earlier this year in round 34 of Sound and Vision to 126 projects. In addition, the BAI agreed to put in place a Covid 19 funding round (Round 35) under the Sound and Vision Scheme of €2.5m for commercial radio stations. 32 applications were received from independent commercial radio stations and evaluated according to the COVID-19 Fund assessment criteria. All 32 applications are being allocated funding. The BAI expect that most of these awards will be paid by the end of June.

The BAI will operate a round specifically for community radio stations of €750,000 over the summer months (Round 36), with funding expected to be in place by early September.

Later this year, a separate round 37 for the commercial and community television broadcasters and public service broadcasters, including RTÉ radio services will be launched and it is envisioned this will also be funded by 7% of net licence fee receipts. Details of this round will be announced by the BAI in due course.

## **Bord na Móna**

624. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of his Departments engagement with Bord na Móna prior to and after its decision to suspend all peat harvesting and commence work on its enhanced peatland rehabilitation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13013/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Bord na Móna announced, on 16 June, its intention to suspend peat harvesting activities for 2020 while its substitute consent application is under consideration by an Bord Pleanála and to put in place an enhanced peatlands rehabilitation scheme as a key component of Bord na Móna's move away from peat. The Government is committed to supporting Bord na Móna to deliver an extensive programme of rehabilitation of the company's land bank. This commitment was reaffirmed most recently in its response to the progress report of the Just Transition Commissioner, published on 22 May. That response confirmed that the Department and Bord na Móna are progressing the necessary measures to facilitate the advanced rehabilitation of a further 33,000 hectares of Bord na Móna bog previously harvested for peat used in electricity generation, commencing this year.

My Department has had intensive engagement with the company over recent months as part of the development of this scheme. Most recently, in advance of Bord na Móna's announcement, my Department wrote to the company on 12 June confirming a number of further specific steps that will now need to be undertaken as a matter of urgency to finalise the design of the proposed scheme. This work is ongoing between Bord na Mona and the Department.

## Just Transition Fund

625. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the drawing up of a territorial plan for the midlands region which is the first step in securing new EU just transition funding under the coal regions in transition platform; when he expects such funding to become available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13014/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As part of the EU Green Deal package, the European Commission published a proposal for an EU Just Transition Fund, funded under the EU Multiannual Financing Framework (MFF), in January 2020. The Fund is intended to provide support to the economies, people and the environment of territories facing serious socio-economic challenges deriving from the transition process towards the EU's 2030 climate targets and a climate-neutral economy by 2050. Under the European Commission's Next Generation EU package, published on 28 May, it is proposed that the budget for the EU Just Transition Fund would increase from €7.5 billion to €40 billion over the period 2021 to 2027. The proposed allocations to all Member States would increase as a result, with that for Ireland increasing from €29.9 million to €176 million, subject to the outcome of negotiations on the MFF.

The legislative proposal for the EU Just Transition Fund continues to be negotiated at EU level and Ireland is actively participating in these negotiations.

Investments in Member States under the EU Just Transition Fund must be underpinned by a Territorial Just Transition Plan, covering the period 2021 to 2027, which must be approved by the European Commission and implemented within the framework of the EU's cohesion policy programmes. Work on this plan has commenced in my Department, and this work will also be supported by technical assistance under the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Programme.

Separately, the EU Platform for Coal and Other Carbon Intensive Regions in Transition, of which the Midlands Region is a member, works as an open forum, convening relevant local, regional and national governments, businesses and trade unions, NGOs and academia, to promote knowledge sharing and exchanges of experiences between EU coal and carbon-intensive regions to enable regions to identify and respond to their unique contexts and opportunities.

While the Platform does not provide funding, membership enables regions to participate in multi-stakeholder dialogue on policy frameworks and financing for successful transformation of the included regions, to share best practice and to avail of support, in the form of technical assistance, for the development of strategies and projects for local regions, focusing in particular on the employment challenges faced by workers affected by decarbonisation. The Platform was re-launched on 29 June as the Just Transition Platform.

The Platform has been providing technical assistance to the Midlands Region, through its Secretariat Technical Assistance for Regions in Transition (START), to undertake a series of preparatory actions and engagements with communities during the course of 2020, including the registration of projects for potential funding under my Department's Just Transition Fund. The second stage of this call was launched by my Department on 19 June. Applications for funding must be received by 17 July and evaluations of submitted proposals will commence shortly afterwards.

## National Broadband Plan

626. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the provision of fibre broadband to a property (details supplied). [13022/20]

627. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when broadband will be made available to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13203/20]

632. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a location (details supplied) will have access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13340/20]

634. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a location (details supplied) will have access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13342/20]

638. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a location (details supplied) will have access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13346/20]

641. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a location (details supplied) will have access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13349/20]

642. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a location (details supplied) will have access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13350/20]

643. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a location (details supplied) will have access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13351/20]

645. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the provision of broadband for a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13518/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 626, 627, 632, 634, 638, 641 to 643, inclusive, and 645 together.

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).

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. The Government is committed to delivering high speed broadband to every home, farm, business and school in Ireland and my Department continues to engage with NBI to explore the feasibility of accelerating aspects of this rollout to establish the possibility of bringing forward premises which are currently scheduled in years 6 and 7 of the current plan to an earlier date. Further information

on deployment activities associated with the rollout can be found on the NBI website <http://www.nbi.ie>. I understand that some of the premises referred to are close to premises that are passed by eir's fibre network. eir's rural deployment of high speed broadband is a commercial undertaking and, as such, decisions regarding the areas and premises served are made by eir. My Department has no role in the matter and has no statutory authority to intervene in decisions of commercial operators, as to where they build infrastructure and provide services.

Throughout rural Ireland, eir's fibre deployment is primarily focussed on towns and villages and the premises on their outskirts. Where that network ends is where the National Broadband Plan in effect commences to ensure that nobody is left behind. I appreciate the frustration of the Deputy's constituents when they are living so close to a fibre network but cannot get a connection to that network, particularly given the heightened importance of connectivity during the Covid-19 pandemic and the individual circumstances referred to. The NBP will ensure that in all such cases a future proofed high speed broadband network will be built to serve these premises and work to deliver on this commenced earlier this year.

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.

### **National Broadband Plan**

628. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to plans to complete the roll out of fibre broadband in the Rathmore area of County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13267/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie), shows the areas in County Kerry 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 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 Kerry, 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
Rathmore Electoral District	28% (272)	72% (710)	Less than 1% (5)

The NBP network will offer those premises within the AMBER area, 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. Further information on deployment activities associated with the rollout can be found on the NBI website <http://www.nbi.ie>. The Government is committed to delivering high speed broadband to every home, farm, business and school in Ireland and my Department continues to engage with NBI to explore the feasibility of accelerating aspects of this rollout to establish the possibility of bringing forward premises which are currently scheduled in years 6 and 7 of the current plan to an earlier date.

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 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.

There are 9 public access BCP's planned at present for Kerry, with a further 3 planned for schools. 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 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

629. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will consider accelerating the roll out of broadband to ten areas most adversely effected by the closure of Bord na Móna. [13288/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie), shows the areas in the Midlands 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 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, as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017

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. The Government is committed to delivering high speed broadband to every home, farm, business and school in Ireland and my Department continues to engage with NBI to explore the feasibility of accelerating aspects of this rollout to establish the possibility of bringing forward premises which are currently scheduled in years 6 and 7 of the current plan to an earlier date. 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, including those across Midlands Counties, to quickly get free public access to high speed broadband in advance of the main NBP deployment. 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.

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 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.

I would draw the Deputy's attention to the 2020 Just Transition Fund which is now open for applications. This is a key pillar of the just transition plan for the Midlands region. A 2020 fund of €11 million will be available for projects, focusing on retraining workers and proposals to generate sustainable employment in green enterprise in the region, and supporting communities to transition to a low carbon economy. The Fund could potentially support projects to develop/expand regional and local co-working hubs to facilitate remote working.

## Electric Vehicles

630. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will make a roadmap available indicating the plans in place to roll out vehicle charging points to small and medium-sized rural towns aside from large urban centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13331/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** There are currently over 650 standard public charge points and almost 100 fast charge stations (the majority of which are operated by the ESB) in Ireland. An interactive map showing ESB charger locations can be found at [www.esb.ie/ecars](http://www.esb.ie/ecars). The Government is investing, in

a sustained way, in electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure right across the country. The measures that have been put in place are providing significant support for the development of Ireland's charging network, both public and private. The Government is committed to increasing this network in the years to come so as to ensure good accessibility across a well-developed and modern charging network.

Already €10 million has been committed from the Climate Action Fund to assist the ESB in expanding their charging network and this has leveraged another €10 million investment from ESB. This intervention alone will result in:

- 90 additional high power chargers (150kW chargers), each capable of charging two vehicles
- 52 additional fast chargers (50kW charger), which may replace existing 22 kW chargers
- 264 replacement standard chargers (22kW chargers) to more modern technology and with each consisting of two charge points.

The fast charging infrastructure will be mainly concentrated on or near national roads and motorways to enable longer journeys to be completed. The first two multi charger sites have been delivered in Galway (M6) and Kildare (M9) with additional fast charger installation having already taken place in Dublin, Cavan, and Meath. Further plans are in place for a number of other sites in Galway, Kerry, Louth, Sligo and Westmeath.

EV infrastructure will be deployed in a fundamentally different way compared to fossil fuel infrastructure. Charging while at home accounts for around 80% of EV charging in Ireland and it is best practice, internationally, to promote home charging as the most is a convenient and cost-effective common and cheapest form of charging. The Government will seek to maintain this home charging level to 2030. On street charging will also be provided by Local Authorities (government supports already in place), and as the market develops, it will increasingly be provided by private enterprise also.

Managing this complex charging mix will require close cooperation across Central Government, Local Government and private enterprise. In this regard the Government will continue to review national charging needs, and will further develop its EV infrastructure accordingly with a view to ensuring that its policies promote a charging network that meets demand across both urban and rural locations.

### National Broadband Plan

631. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a location (details supplied) will have access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13339/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The area referred to in the Question is located within the BLUE 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). However, I note that the map was published prior to the construction of the Clonlara development and therefore this individual premises does not currently appear on the NBP High Speed Broadband Map. BLUE areas represent those areas where commercial operators are already providing high speed broadband or have indicated future plans to do so. My Department defines high speed broadband as a connection with minimum speeds of 30Mbps download and 6Mbps upload. As the premises is located in the BLUE areas, it is my Department's understand-

ing that it will be served by existing commercial operators.

*Question No. 632 answered with Question No. 626.*

### **National Broadband Plan**

633. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a location (details supplied) will have access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13341/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Question refers to a premises which is located in the intervention area to be served by the network to be deployed under the National Broadband Plan (NBP) State led Intervention, the contract for which was signed in November last with National Broadband Ireland (NBI). 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. The Government is committed to delivering high speed broadband to every home, farm, business and school in Ireland and my Department continues to engage with NBI to explore the feasibility of accelerating aspects of this rollout to establish the possibility of bringing forward premises which are currently scheduled in years 6 and 7 of the current plan to an earlier date. Further information on deployment activities associated with the rollout can be found on the NBI website <http://www.nbi.ie>. I understand that premises referred to the Question is very close to premises that are passed by eir's fibre network. eir's rural deployment of high speed broadband is a commercial undertaking and, as such, decisions regarding the areas and premises served are made by eir. My Department has no role in the matter and has no statutory authority to intervene in decisions of commercial operators, as to where they build infrastructure and provide services.

Throughout rural Ireland, eir's fibre deployment is primarily focussed on towns and villages and the premises on their outskirts. Where that network ends is where the National Broadband Plan in effect commences to ensure that nobody is left behind. I appreciate the frustration of those who are living so close to a fibre network but cannot get a connection to that network, particularly given the heightened importance of connectivity during the Covid-19 pandemic. The NBP will ensure that in all such cases a future proofed high speed broadband network will be built to serve these premises and work to deliver on this commenced earlier this year.

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, busi-

ness information events and other SME supports are organised.

*Question No. 634 answered with Question No. 626.*

### **National Broadband Plan**

635. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a location (details supplied) will have access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13343/20]

637. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a location (details supplied) will have access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13345/20]

640. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a location (details supplied) will have access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13348/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 635, 637 and 640 together.

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). 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. The Government is committed to delivering high speed broadband to every home, farm, business and school in Ireland and my Department continues to engage with NBI to explore the feasibility of accelerating aspects of this rollout to establish the possibility of bringing forward premises which are currently scheduled in years 6 and 7 of the current plan to an earlier date. Further information on deployment activities associated with the rollout can be found on the NBI website <http://www.nbi.ie>.

I understand that premises referred to these Questions are very close to premises that are passed by eir's fibre network. eir's rural deployment of high speed broadband is a commercial undertaking and, as such, decisions regarding the areas and premises served are made by eir. My Department has no role in the matter and has no statutory authority to intervene in decisions of commercial operators, as to where they build infrastructure and provide services.

Throughout rural Ireland, eir's fibre deployment is primarily focussed on towns and villages and the premises on their outskirts. Where that network ends is where the National Broadband Plan in effect commences to ensure that nobody is left behind. I appreciate the frustration of the Deputy's constituents when they are living so close to a fibre network but cannot get a connection to that network, particularly given the heightened importance of connectivity during the Covid-19 pandemic and the individual circumstances referred to. The NBP will ensure that in all such cases a future proofed high speed broadband network will be built to serve these premises and work to deliver on this commenced earlier this year.

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.

### **National Broadband Plan**

636. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a location (details supplied) will have access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13344/20]

639. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a location (details supplied) will have access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13347/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 636 and 639 together.

The premises referred to in the Questions are located in the BLUE 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).

BLUE areas are not included in the State intervention area covered by the National Broadband Plan as commercial operators are already providing high speed broadband or have indicated future plans to do so. My Department defines high speed broadband as a connection with minimum speeds of 30Mbps download and 6Mbps upload. The activities of commercial operators delivering high speed broadband within BLUE areas are not planned or funded by the State and my Department has no statutory authority to intervene in that regard.

There may be a choice of operators offering this service in the area referred to and further information in this regard is available at [www.comreg.ie/compare/#!/services](http://www.comreg.ie/compare/#!/services).

*Question No. 637 answered with Question No. 635.*

*Question No. 638 answered with Question No. 626.*

*Question No. 639 answered with Question No. 636.*

*Question No. 640 answered with Question No. 635.*

*Questions No. 641 to 643, inclusive, answered with Question No. 626.*

### **National Broadband Plan**

644. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the situation in which workers have to work in their cars in a church carpark in Bandon, County Cork due to poor broadband in areas close to Bandon (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13517/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I am very much aware of the difficulties facing people across the country as a result of poor broadband availability. These challenges have been magnified by the Covid 19 crisis and the need for so many to work remotely. The contract to deliver the NBP State led intervention was signed in November last with National Broadband Ireland (NBI). 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. The Government is committed to delivering high speed broadband to every home, farm, business and school in Ireland and my Department continues to engage with NBI to explore the feasibility of accelerating aspects of this rollout to establish the possibility of bringing forward premises which are currently scheduled in years 6 and 7 of the current plan to an earlier date. 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. 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.

*Question No. 645 answered with Question No. 626.*

### **Departmental Staff**

646. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13543/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** My Department is committed to facilitating and supporting more sustainable ways of working, including e-working, across a range of policy areas. The introduction of an e-working policy for the Department itself was identified through the employee engagement process and was also an action under the Department's Resource Efficiency Action Plan (2019), which recognises the positive impact e-working can have on reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transport. An e-working policy has been in place in this Department since 2019. Up to March of 2020, 28 staff had availed of e-working.

Since 16 March 2020 all staff have been working remotely due to the Covid 19 pandemic and continue to do so in line with Government recommendations and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform guidance on working from home. A number of supports have been put in place to assist employees when working remotely including a remote working handbook, eLearning modules, wellbeing initiatives, resources from the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service and guidance on cyber security and data protection when working from home.

I understand that Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will shortly be issuing further guidelines on working from home during Covid-19 and has also commenced work on the development of a remote working policy for use in the civil service in the longer term.

### **Just Transition Fund**

647. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason Ballivor, County Meath is excluded from the midlands engagement process and the first call for proposals under the €11 million just transition fund that ended on 1 June 2020, in view of the relation of the town and hinterland with Bord na Móna (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13563/20]

648. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if County Meath will be included as part of the target group for the midlands engagement process; if it can retrospectively apply to be involved in the first call for proposals under the €11 million just transition fund despite the deadline for initial project proposal having passed on 12 June 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13564/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 647 and 648 together. 647 and 648 together.

I am informed by Bord na Móna that a number of company employees based at the Ballivor operation in County Westmeath are based in County Meath, and are involved in bog operations in both Counties Meath and Westmeath, principally to supply Bord na Móna's horticulture business.

In light of Bord na Móna's decision to suspend peat harvesting activities for 2020, while its substitute consent application is under consideration by an Bord Pleanála and to put in place an enhanced peatlands rehabilitation scheme as a key component of the company's move away from peat harvesting, these employees are currently engaged in ancillary activities associated with milled peat that has already been harvested, including consolidating existing and newly harvested stockpiles, covering/protecting stockpiles and maintenance of equipment.

The 2020 call for proposals from my Department's Just Transition Fund is open to suitable projects from East Galway, Kildare, Laois, Longford, North Tipperary, Offaly, Roscommon and Westmeath. This is in line with the approach set out in the first progress report of the Just Transition Commissioner, Mr Kieran Mulvey.

The first stage in this call for proposals launched on 22 May with an invitation for organisations to register details of potential projects with the START engagement process through the Midlands Regional Transition Team. This stage concluded on 12 June. The second stage, inviting funding proposals to be submitted to my Department, opened on 19 June.

As the Bord na Móna Ballivor operations includes County Westmeath, I am satisfied that Ballivor is covered by the scope of the 2020 call for proposals from the Just Transition Fund.

Interested parties, that meet the criteria set out in the call Information Booklet published on <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ed10d-just-transition-fund>, may submit applications not later than 4pm on Friday 17 July. Any questions concerning eligibility of projects may be directed in advance of this deadline to my Department at [JTF@dcae.gov.ie](mailto:JTF@dcae.gov.ie).

### **Waste Tyre Disposal**

649. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of operators that are licensed waste tyre disposal entities but are not registered with an organisation (details supplied) in counties Longford and Westmeath [13594/20]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** My Department does not collate the type of data sought by the Deputy. However, information on waste collection permits is available from the National Waste Collection Permit Office (NWCPO). The NWCPO website contains a search facility for waste collection permits, <https://www.nwcpo.ie/permitsearch.aspx>. Repak Elt operate the approved compliance scheme for dealing with waste tyres under the Waste Management (Tyres and Waste Tyres) Regulations 2017, S.I. No 400/2017. A list of Repak Elt registered collectors is available on their website <https://repakelt.ie/collectors/>.

### **Roads Maintenance**

650. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when funding will be provided to Kerry County Council to carry out repairs on the road at Dromature, Ballyheigue, County Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12690/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads (RLR) is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from Councils' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The selection and prioritisation of road repair works to be funded is also a matter for the Council.

It is important to reiterate that the role of Exchequer grants for regional and local roads is to supplement local authorities in their spending in this area and it is open to the Council to fund works from its own resources.

As the Department does not select or prioritise the roads scheduled for repairs each year, under the Restoration Maintenance, Restoration Improvement or Discretionary Grant programmes, I would suggest that contact is made with Kerry County Council directly in order to establish the details of its prioritised projects.

### **Transport Policy**

651. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if builders will be instructed to have caps fitted on the revolving drum of all cement trucks in order to prevent spillages (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12908/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I would like to in-

form the Deputy that regulation 96(4) of the Road Traffic (Construction, Equipment and Use of Vehicles) Regulations, 1963 (S.I. No. 190 of 1963) prohibits a load from being carried on a public road in such a manner that part of the load is liable to fall on the road, so as to cause damage to the road or other endanger other road users.

Please note that the enforcement of road traffic legislation is a matter for the Garda Síochána.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

652. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the guidelines for pubs and restaurants relating to Covid-19 social distancing measures include outside spaces which may be used for seating. [12913/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Fáilte Ireland's detailed sector specific guidelines are designed to assist tourism and hospitality businesses reopen and operate in line with the Return to Work Safely protocol and based on the latest health advice. The suite of guidelines comprises nine documents in total – a general overview document plus more detailed guidelines for each of eight sectoral strands (including one for restaurants and cafés; and another for pubs). All the guidelines are available on the Fáilte Ireland website.

The comprehensive operational guidelines cover a range of important matters, such as putting together a business response and action plan; employee and customer health; employee responsibilities; physical distancing; cleaning products and protocols; technical and maintenance services; front and back of house; and the kitchen area; as well as guidelines for suppliers of goods and services.

Fáilte Ireland's guidelines for tourism businesses do not, however, address issues around the use of outdoor areas for the provision of seating. In the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic, I believe such matters are likely taken into consideration by local authorities when considering street furniture licences and appeals in line with the relevant provisions of planning legislation and relevant public health and health and safety advice. This is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

### **Driver Test**

653. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the HSE has liaised with the RSA regarding the resumption of car driving lessons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13235/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** 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.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

654. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when driver lessons will resume; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12693/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As outlined in the revised Roadmap announced by Government, driver testing has resumed from 29 June on

phased basis.

The resumption of driver testing means that driving instruction will also need to resume. On 22 June, the Road Safety Authority wrote to all Approved Driving Instructors advising them of the planned reopening of driver testing services from 29 June and the health protocols being applied.

It is up to each driving school and individual self-employed driving instructor to ensure that they are able to resume their businesses safely in compliance with the National Return to Work Safety Protocol.

### Electric Vehicles

655. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if electric scooters are legal to use; if so, the locations in which they can be used; his plans to make electric scooters legal; the timeline for legislation in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12695/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** It is my intention, in accordance with Programme for Government, to introduce new legislation to regulate the use of e-scooters

### Air Traffic Control Services

656. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding air traffic control fees for military flights using Irish airspace and airports here; if fees are waived for military aircraft; if so, the cost of waived fees in each of the years 2010 to 2019; and the cost waived for each individual military body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12698/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The practice of exempting en-route charges for certain specified classes of airspace users, including military aircraft, derives from the exclusion of State aircraft from the scope of the 1944 Chicago Convention establishing the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). While the application of the exemption from charges is at the discretion of the State concerned, the policy and general practice at international level is to exempt such flights from charges. Ireland, in common with the vast majority of Eurocontrol's 41 member states, subscribes to this practice.

The cost incurred by the Irish Aviation Authority in providing exempt en-route services for such flights is reimbursed by my Department.

The breakdown of the amounts reimbursed for military flights is not held by my Department, however the aggregate figures for exempt services payments to the Irish Aviation Authority are available and are shown in the below table.

Year	Exempt services payment (€)
2010	2.8m
2011	2.9m
2012	2.7m
2013	2.3m

Year	Exempt services payment (€)
2014	2.4m
2015	2.5m
2016	2.6m
2017	2.4m
2018	2.0m
2019	1.9m

### Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

657. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if financial assistance will be put in place for self-employed taxi drivers in view of the impact of Covid-19. [12699/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I recognise that from the onset of the COVID-19 Emergency and the introduction of restrictions as part of the necessary public health response, passenger demand for taxis and other small public service vehicle (SPSV) services fell considerably and many operators stopped working.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) - the agency under my aegis which regulates the taxi industry - took action to reduce the immediate financial burden on SPSV operators and to make it easier for them to return to the industry when circumstances change. These actions included licence extensions and the waiver of late licence renewal fees. The NTA has also engaged with the motor insurance industry to facilitate a suspension of SPSV insurance for those SPSV operators who decided to temporarily stop working and suspend their licences. Operators who suspended their licences will be able to either reduce their monthly premium or receive a refund from their insurer, depending on their individual arrangements with their insurer.

In recognition of the challenges facing businesses, the Government also put in place a range of measures to assist businesses during the current COVID-19 pandemic, including the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme, the COVID-19 Restart Grant, and a waiver of commercial rates. Self-employed owner operators of SPSVs may also avail of the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment of €350 a week that was introduced.

At the present time, given the range of financial supports available, I do not see the need for additional supports for the SPSV industry. However, noting that the Pandemic Unemployment Payment is scheduled to end on 10 August 2020, this question will be kept under continual review by Government. In addition, my Department is in regular contact with the NTA to monitor the impact the reopening of the economy in line with the Government's Roadmap to Reopening Society and Business is having on demand for SPSV services and to ensure that SPSV operators who have temporarily stopped working are well placed to return to work.

### National Car Test

658. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason persons that attended for the NCT before the Covid-19 lockdown and could not get the lift test done at the time due to the failure of the NCT company to provide it are now being charged €28 for the lift test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12710/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As the Deputy will

be aware, on Monday 8 June 2020, in line with the commencement of Phase 2 of the Government's Roadmap for easing Covid 19 restrictions, the National Car Test (NCT) resumed on a phased basis.

Members of the public who presented their vehicle for an NCT test before the suspension of the service but could only complete a partial inspection due to the vehicle lift issue are now required to return to a test centre to complete their NCT. If the vehicle has travelled more than 5,000km since the partial test, they will also have to undergo a brake and suspension test. This is being carried out free of charge for the vehicle owner

If a vehicle failed its initial NCT inspection and is required to undergo a re-test as a result of that failure, the usual re-test fee of €28 applies.

### **National Car Test**

659. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a person (details supplied) was charged €28 for the NCT lift test in view of the fact it could not be taken originally due to faulty NCT equipment and having passed the rest of the NCT they could not rebook the test within 30 days of the original test due to Covid-19 lockdown measures; the steps he will take to rectify the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12711/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The operation of the National Car Test (NCT) service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no role in individual cases. I have therefore referred the question 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

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

660. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason there is no representative from the ground transport and scheduled services sector on the tourism recovery taskforce in view of the centrality of the sector to the tourism sector here. [12715/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Tourism Recovery Taskforce was established 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 members were selected 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. The individuals appointed will work together 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.

The Taskforce may establish working groups to carry out specific tasks and has undertaken a widespread stakeholder consultation process whereby all sectors and interested parties provided constructive inputs and innovative ideas on how this vital sector to our economy can adapt and recover in a meaningful and sustainable way. The consultation process finished on June 28 and the Taskforce is considering the results.

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

661. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered extending financial support or waiving State fees that are imposed on scheduled coach services or bus tour operators, such as NCT fees, CVRT fees and vehicle licensing. [12716/20]

663. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered extending grant payments to bus and coach operators in respect of vehicle insurance in view of the impact of Covid-19 on the sector. [12718/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 661 and 663 together.

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.

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.

On the 25th of June, Government announced changes to the existing public transport social distancing restrictions. It has been agreed to move from 2 metres social distancing on public transport to 50% capacity. This will help to underpin public transport during these unprecedented times for the sector, with a view to safeguarding public transport capacity in Phases 3 and 4 of the of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. The Government also decided to legally require the mandatory wearing of face coverings on public transport, with the exception of those who cannot do so for health reasons or due to age (under 13). These measures will protect both passengers and staff and significantly help ease the pressure on operators by reducing the gap between public transport supply and demand.

Further, on the 25th of June Government agreed new temporary funding supports, in accordance with EU and national legislation, will be introduced for the licensed bus sector. Licensed

operators provide essential transport services for people who need to get to work and are vital to ensure economic recovery. These supports are aimed at ensuring the continued operation of essential licensed bus services for a period of up to six months. The package will be restricted to operators where a clear public interest justification supports such intervention and will be targeted at compensating the gap between specified costs and revenues generated on the services. The National Transport Authority (NTA), as the public transport licensing agency, will administer the support package through the establishment of contracts between the NTA and the relevant operators.

Furthermore, the Government previously introduced a €12bn package of supports for impacted businesses of all sizes, which include: 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.

Concerning vehicle testing fees - the cost of a Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Test (CVRT) is set by regulation 14 of the Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness (Vehicle Testing) (No. 2) Regulations 2013 (S.I. No. 347/2013) as amended. I do not intend to make further amendments to this legislation at present.

Furthermore, there are no plans currently to amend motor tax legislation to provide for waivers from motor tax (vehicle licensing). I do 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, using the following declaration <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4df54e-declaration-of-non-use-of-a-vehicle/>

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.

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

**662. Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered automatically extending vehicle licences for coach and bus tour operators for a period of 12 months in view of the impact of Covid-19 on the sector. [12717/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I understand the Deputy is referring to the licensing of Large Public Service Vehicles.

An Garda Síochána has over-arching responsibility regarding Public Service Vehicle licensing and testing, which is carried out by the Carriage Office for the purpose of ensuring that the vehicles are both safe and suitable for the carriage of passengers for hire or reward, under the Road Traffic (Public Service Vehicles) (Licensing) Regulations, 1978.

An Garda Síochána has recently advised my Department that LPSV licensing and examinations are being conducted as normal throughout this period. The office hours of the Carriage Office have been extended, and the office is currently open from 9.30am–4.30pm. The Carriage Office is operating in line with all relevant Covid-19 safety procedures, including adherence to current social distancing guidelines and, as a result, only 1 person is permitted in the office at a time to allow for this.

Given that the Carriage Office has continued to operate effectively in the provision of all services regarding LPSV licensing, there are no plans to provide for an extension to the periods of validity of LPSV licences at this time.

*Question No. 663 answered with Question No. 661.*

### **Rail Network**

664. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No.1069 of 13 May 2020, if a timeline will be provided in relation to the release of the latest rail review report on the western rail corridor commissioned in 2019, in view of the fact the publication of the report is already delayed by more than six months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12719/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As the Deputy is aware from the reply received on 13 May 2020, Iarnród Éireann commissioned a financial and economic appraisal of a proposed reopening of Phases 2 and 3 of the Western Rail Corridor, and, in late 2019, submitted a draft 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.

I will release the report as soon as is practical.

### **Driver Licences**

665. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the legislation in place governing the sale of cars to underage drivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12761/20]

666. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the legislation in place governing the sale of cars to unlicensed drivers or drivers in possession of learner permits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12762/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 665 and 666 together.

In accordance with Section 30 of the Road Traffic Act 2004, it is illegal to supply a mechanically propelled vehicle to a to a person who is under the age of 16 years. Furthermore, it is illegal to supply a mechanically propelled vehicle to a person who has attained the age of 16 but is under the age of 17, other than a vehicle in respect of which the person is entitled to hold a driving licence to drive from the age of 16.

Once they reach the minimum age requirements for the respective driver licence category, there is nothing wrong with a person who is unlicensed buying/owning a car, as long as they do not drive it. For example an elderly person might own a car which someone else drives for them. Likewise there is nothing wrong with a learner driver owning a car, provided they do not drive it unaccompanied.

## **Road Projects**

667. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected start date and construction time for the north Cork link road. [12763/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days

## **National Car Test**

668. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review and clarify the policy surrounding the NCT and licence extensions in the wake of the Covid-19 public health emergency (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12781/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Regulation 3(5) of the Road Traffic (National Car Test) Regulations, S.I. No. 415 of 2017, determines the first NCT test due date for small public service vehicles (SPSVs).

If an application is made for an SPSV licence within 90 days of the vehicle being registered with the Revenue Commissioners and if the vehicle has travelled less than 3,000 km, the NCT test due date is the anniversary of the SPSV licence application date. However, if an application for an SPSV licence is made after this 90-day period has elapsed, the NCT test due date is the date of the SPSV licence application.

Accordingly, if an SPSV licence application is made when a vehicle is over 3 months old, that vehicle must have a valid NCT certificate in order to satisfy the SPSV licence application process.

## **Taxi Licences**

669. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a matter regarding the skills development certificate will be clarified (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12784/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including SPSV licencing, 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.

## **Motor Tax**

670. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the consideration given to a rebate of motor tax payments for persons that have been cocooning due to Covid-19, have been off the road for this period and that have received a refund in respect of motor insurance for this period; his views on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12792/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The legislation which sets out the circumstances for refunds of motor tax provides for a refund of motor tax 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.

There are no plans currently to amend the legislation to extend the grounds for the granting of a refund.

The Deputy should note that there is a facility in place to declare a vehicle off the road if a vehicle is not going to be in use. 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 using the following form:

*<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4df54e-declaration-of-non-use-of-a-vehicle/>*

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.

### **Bus Services**

671. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding bus cancellations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12798/20]

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

The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with

Bus Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Traffic Management**

672. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the locations in Dublin city that have cameras to catch motorists breaking red lights as a result of the NTA trial; the number of prosecutions in the post-trial period issued as a result of these cameras; if no cameras are operational, his plans to introduce same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12841/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with An Garda Síochána, who are primarily responsible for prosecuting traffic offences.

Accordingly, 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.

### **Sports Facilities**

673. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when a decision will be made on appeals to the large-scale capital programmes; and if he will review an appeal by Westmeath County Council for a regional sports centre. [12845/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The National Sports Policy was published in 2018 and provided for a new Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF). The aim of the fund is to provide Exchequer support for larger sports capital project where the Exchequer investment is greater than the maximum amount available under the Sports Capital Programme. The first grants under the new scheme were announced in January of this year.

Westmeath County Council submitted an application for funding towards the design of a regional sports centre in Mullingar. The total funding applied for under the scheme significantly exceeded the funding available and the application in question did not score sufficiently highly to warrant a provisional allocation.

All unsuccessful applicants were given the opportunity to appeal the Department's decision. All appeals have now been assessed by officials who were not involved in the initial assessment process and a final decision on the appeals will be made shortly.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

674. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when driver instruction can take place once again. [12846/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As outlined in the revised Roadmap announced by Government, driving tests and instruction may resume from this week starting 29 June.

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.

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.

In light of this, I understand that, while driving instructors are responsible for their own compliance with the National Return to Work Safely Protocol, the RSA are advising Authorised Driving Instructors (ADIs) of their plans for resumption, including the protocols they are using, to assist ADIs in their work.

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 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**

675. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when driver tests will resume. [12857/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** 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.

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 am happy to be able to report that driver testing is now being reopened on a phased basis from 29 June. This begins with driver testing for trucks, buses, and motorbikes. It is also planned that tests for cars, vans (category C1) and minibuses (category D1) will commence on a phased basis before 20 July taking account of lessons learned from the already resumed tests.

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**

676. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered using private bus providers to combat the issue of limited capacity on public transport; and if this suggestion will be examined. [12859/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** 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.

On the 25th of June, Government announced changes to the existing public transport social distancing restrictions. It has been agreed to move from 2 metres social distancing on public transport to 50% capacity. This will help to underpin public transport during these unprecedented times for the sector, with a view to safeguarding public transport capacity in Phases 3 and 4 of the of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. The Government also decided to legally require the mandatory wearing of face coverings on public transport, with the exception of those who cannot do so for health reasons or due to age (under 13). These measures will protect both passengers and staff and significantly help ease the pressure on operators by reducing the gap between public transport supply and demand.

Further, on the 25th of June Government agreed new temporary funding supports, in accordance with EU and national legislation, will be introduced for the licensed bus sector. Licensed operators provide essential transport services for people who need to get to work and are vital to ensure economic recovery. These supports are aimed at ensuring the continued operation of essential licensed bus services for a period of up to six months. The package will be restricted to operators where a clear public interest justification supports such intervention and will be targeted at compensating the gap between specified costs and revenues generated on the services. The National Transport Authority (NTA), as the public transport licensing agency, will administer the support package through the establishment of contracts between the NTA and the relevant operators.

## **Road Projects**

677. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of works on the Cork to Limerick M20; and the timelines involved. [12877/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days

## **Driver Test**

678. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has sought advice from NPHEA regarding the resumption of driver tests. [12902/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The safety of the public is of paramount importance at this time and as in all aspects of the Covid-19 crisis and my Department continues to be guided by National Public Health Emergency Team and the relevant national experts in relation to the resumption of services.

The RSA has been working, in consultation with my Department and the relevant health authorities, 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 has raised 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.

In line with the revised Government Roadmap for Reopening, which was based on the latest advice from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), I am happy to be able to report that driver testing is now being reopened on a phased basis. This began as of yesterday with driver testing for trucks, buses, and motorbikes. Tests for cars, vans (category C1) and minibuses (category D1) will be phased in at a later date, taking account of lessons learned from the already resumed tests.

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**

679. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when driver test centres will reopen in view of the fact there are many persons waiting to be called for their test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12956/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** 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.

The resumption of driver testing has raised 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 am happy to be able to report that driver testing is now being reopened on a phased basis under Phase 3 of revised Roadmap, which commenced 29 June. This begins with driver testing for trucks, buses, and motorbikes. It is planned to resume tests for cars, vans (category C1) and minibuses (category D1) on a phased basis in July and before Phase 4 commences on 20 July, taking account of lessons learned from the already resumed tests.

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.

*Questions - Written Answers*  
**Sports Capital Programme**

680. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the various applicants to which sports capital grants were awarded will have the time within which they are required to complete their respective projects extended by approximately 18 months in order to facilitate the restoration of their voluntary fundraising activities which were impacted by Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12980/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** 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. A flexible approach to allowing grantees sufficient time to drawdown their grants has always been adopted. Grantees are given a minimum of 2 years to draw down grants and extensions are routinely given where genuine efforts are being made to progress projects.

My Department understands the difficulties that may be encountered by certain clubs as a result of COVID 19. Accordingly, any club requiring an extension to the timeframe to draw-down funding should contact the Sports Capital Programme division of the Department and I expect any such reasonable requests will be accommodated.

### **Rail Network**

681. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeline for electrification of the rail line to Maynooth and beyond thereby contributing to reduction of emissions and increase efficiency of the transport network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12981/20]

682. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which preparations are in hand to improve the frequency and capacity of the commuter rail service serving north County Kildare on both lines; when the extra carriages required are likely to be delivered; the expected increase capacity arising in addition to emission reductions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12982/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 681 and 682 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area including implementation of the DART Expansion Programme which includes matters such as electrification and capacity enhancements as raised by the Deputy.

Separately the Deputy will also be aware of Government's approval last year of the proposed purchase of 41 additional carriages to the ICR fleet, which will increase capacity across both the Maynooth and Kildare Lines. Under the Public Spending Code, the NTA is the Approving Authority in relation to this project and Iarnród Éireann is the Sponsoring Agency.

Noting the NTA's responsibilities in the matters raised, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

### **Public Transport**

683. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has engaged public transport operators regarding contingency plans as public transport usage increases due to further easing of restrictions; the protocols in place in case of overcapacity or antisocial behaviour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12989/20]

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

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 both public and commercial operators and their staff for their continued dedication to providing this vital service in such challenging times. A number of measures have been introduced across the system, guided by public health advice, to ensure the continued operation of services during the pandemic, including enhanced cleaning regimes and social distancing measures across the network.

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 addition, the safety and security of public transport passengers and staff, including arrangements to deal with anti-social behaviour, are important matters that, first and foremost, must be managed by every public transport company, in conjunction with An Garda Síochána, where appropriate. It is vital that all public transport companies continue their strong and close working relationship with An Garda Síochána to address incidents of anti-social behaviour.

### **Ports Policy**

684. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the publication of the Rosslare Europort masterplan; when it will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12991/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport in Ireland. Rosslare Europort is operated on a commercial basis as a division of Iarnród Éireann. As such, the issue raised is an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Football Association of Ireland**

685. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of meetings and or telephone and or video calls he or the Minister of State with special responsibility for Sport has had with Sport Ireland in the past six months to date regarding an organisation (details supplied); the number of meetings and or telephone or video calls they have had with the organisation in the past six months to date regarding governance and resuming funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12992/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I understand that neither the former Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Mr. Shane Ross, nor the former Minister of State with responsibility for sport, Mr. Brendan Griffin TD, have had any meetings or video calls with Sport Ireland in the last six months in relation to this organisation's governance or with the organisation itself.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

686. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when driver tests, driving lessons, NCT, NDLS and theory test services will resume under the revised Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13003/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I am happy to be able to remind the Deputy that the NCT, NDLS, and driver theory test all resumed service on a phased basis as of 8 June.

The NCT is undergoing a phased reopening after the recent CoVID-19 (Coronavirus) crisis. 15 NCTS centres reopened on June 8th, with the remaining centres opening in phases in line with the Government's Roadmap. It is anticipated that all test centres will be operating by July 20th.

Both the driver licence centres and driver theory test centres have reopened, with clients being seen by appointment only, and operating to strict guidelines.

Driving lessons are expected to open after 29th June, as detailed in the revised Roadmap to which the Deputy refers. Approved Driving Instructors (ADIs) have been advised by the RSA of their plans for resuming driving tests, including the protocols for driving tests. As private enterprises it is a matter for them to satisfy themselves that they have implemented protocols to ensure that they are operating within guidelines to safeguard themselves, their employees and their customers. These businesses are subject to inspection by the Health and Safety Authority.

The resumption of car 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 am happy therefore to be able to tell the Deputy that driver testing for trucks, buses and motorbikes is beginning again as of today. This will be done on a phased basis. It is planned to resume car driving tests, and also tests for category C1 (vans) and D1 (minibuses) on a phased basis in July.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

687. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a query previously submitted to his Department and to the Covid-19 query line will be responded to (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13007/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I am acutely aware how critical the work of the supply chain is during the COVID-19 pandemic and that every element of it is a vital link in ensuring a continuous flow of essential goods. However, the issue you have raised regarding Certificates of Fitness to Resume Work following periods of

absence is an employee relations matter and not a matter for to my Department.

The Return to Work Safely Protocol is designed to support employers and workers to put measures in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. A link to the protocol is available here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/22829a-return-to-work-safely-protocol/>

In response to the COVID-19 restrictions introduced by the Government on 27 March 2020, I am pleased to tell you that Regulations were signed which extend the period of validity for all driving licences due to expire between March and June for a further four months. No action is required of licence holders whose licences had been due to expire within this time period.

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 the 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 (NDLS) centres from 8 June 2020, 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 NDLS 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).

### **Driver Licences**

688. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered allowing persons over 70 years of age to renew their driver licence online in view of the ongoing threat of Covid-19. [13008/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Applicants over 70 years may be able to avail of the online service to renew their driving licence, if they have a Public Service Card.

The Road Safety Authority continues to work on expanding the online facility to accommodate all driving licence and learner permit application types.

Further information is available at <https://www.ndls.ie/how-to-apply.html#to-renew-a-driving-licence> and <https://www.rsa.ie/en/RSA/Licensed-Drivers/Driving-licence/>

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

689. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the late renewal charge usually levied on those renewing PSV licences will be waived in all circumstances or in limited Covid-19 circumstances, for example, illness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13009/20]

690. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered extending full or partial fee waivers to PSV licence applicants owing to the impacts of Covid-19 on PSV drivers. [13010/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 689 and 690 together.

The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including regulatory measures in response to 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.

### **Driver Test**

691. **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. [13027/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I am happy to be able to inform the Deputy that driver testing for trucks, buses and motorbikes resumed yesterday. It is planned that tests for cars, minibuses and vans will resume on a phased basis during this Phase before July 20. Final dates for resumption of car tests remain under discussion and are dependent on continued positive progression of the country against the overall Government roadmap.

Dates for the resumption of driving tests, and any special arrangements which will need to be put into place to allow for the provision of the service, will be determined in consultation with the relevant health authorities.

The RSA is working on plans to deal with the backlog of candidates awaiting testing at the moment.

In relation to driving lessons, I can confirm that the RSA issued guidelines to all approved driving instructors last week with a view to them reopening their business on or after 29 June in line with the Government's acceleration of Phase 3 of the National Return to Work Safety Protocol as developed by NPHE in consultation with national experts..

It must be noted that as private businesses, driving schools must ensure that they can comply with the necessary public health requirements, before they reopen their business.

### **Sport Ireland**

692. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has allocated €70 million to Sport Ireland to distribute to national governing bodies and sports initiatives; the way in which it will access the funds; if the fund is to be drawn down by increments or in one lump sum; the date on which it will have access to the funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13032/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** A funding package of up to €70 million was announced on Friday 19th June to support the sport sector, which has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

This funding package includes;

- Funding of up to €40m for the three main field sports organisations – the FAI, the GAA and the IRFU.

- a Resilience Fund of up to €10m to support the National Governing Bodies of Sport,

- a Sports Club Resilience Fund of up to €15m to support clubs, and
- a Sports Restart and Renewal Fund of up to €5m.

Along with the Roadmap accelerations also announced on 19th June, this funding package will ensure the survival of our vibrant sport sector, particularly the network of clubs throughout the country.

This additional funding will be invested through new grant schemes which will be developed by Sport Ireland and my Department and administered by Sport Ireland. The precise terms of each of the new grant schemes will be announced by Sport Ireland in due course.

Sport Ireland will announce an open invitation to applications from funded bodies for assistance under the grant schemes.

The funding will be allocated to Sport Ireland from my Department's Vote. My officials are currently engaging with Sport Ireland on the design of the grant schemes and will agree the timing and procedure for drawdown of the funding with Sport Ireland, which will be consistent with financial procedures for the provision of funding to State agencies.

### **Football Association of Ireland**

693. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if an organisation (details supplied) will have access to a portion of the recent €70 million fund for sports he announced on 19 June 2020; if all outstanding issues have been sufficiently addressed in order for it to receive public funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13033/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The additional funding package of up to €70 million which was announced on 19 June for the sports sector includes an amount of up to €40 million to support the three main field sports organisations, i.e. the GAA, the IRFU and the FAI.

It is not possible at this stage to provide a further breakdown of the €40 million funding for the main field sport organisations. The amounts to be allocated will be subject to an application and assessment process to be conducted by Sport Ireland.

Sport Ireland remains in communication with the organisation mentioned by the Deputy on matters relating to its governance and financial management. Certain firm commitments were provided by the organisation in a Memorandum of Understanding agreed with the then Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport on 30 January 2020. Sport Ireland has established a process to oversee and review adherence by the organisation to the commitments given in the MOU.

The organisation has committed to implementing certain priority recommendations on governance reform and Sport Ireland expects to be in a position to restore funding to the organisation when these commitments are verifiably honoured.

### **Road Projects**

694. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of the N4 upgrade; the justification for this spend; his views on whether it would be a better use of public finances to widen the current N4 and reroute the at grade access points; the stage to which the scheme is funded and contracted, respectively; and if there is a cost-benefit analysis

report showing the need for the N4 upgrade. [13072/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the operation and upgrading of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Roads Maintenance**

695. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the landscaping maintenance of level crossing gates (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13084/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding of public transport.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Infrastructure Manager Multi-Annual Contract (IMMAC) provides the funding framework for the maintenance and renewal of our railway infrastructure. Such funding is provided to the Infrastructure Manager division of Iarnród Éireann. Accordingly, the maintenance of the rail network, including level crossings, is a matter for Iarnród Éireann in the first instance. I understand that though this line is closed to passenger and freight traffic for some years, Iarnród Éireann do retain certain obligations.

In view of Iarnród Éireann's responsibility in this matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

696. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when guidance will be available for driving instructors on a safe return to work; when driver tests will resume; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13107/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Last week, the RSA updated Approved Driving Instructors (ADIs) in relation to their plans for resuming driver testing services in line with the revised Government Roadmap for Reopening, including a series of Frequently Asked Questions for ADIs and also details of the protocols being followed for driving tests.

However, it must be noted that, as a private business, driving instructors must ensure that they can comply with the necessary public health requirements before they can reopen their businesses. Furthermore, those which are employers should ensure that they fully comply with their legal responsibilities under Health and Safety codes. In all case, the National Return to Work Safely Protocol agreed by employers and worker representatives should be followed.

I understand that any business 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.

In line with Phase 3 of the Government Roadmap, driver testing for trucks, buses and motorcycles resumed on a phased basis from 29 June, with testing for cars, vans and minibus due to resume in July before Phase 4 commences on 20 July. Final dates for service resumption remain under discussion and are dependent on continued positive progression of the country against the overall Government roadmap.

### **Aviation Industry**

697. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will engage with the management of an airline (details supplied) and the workers and their trade unions to help prevent the loss of 500 jobs at the airline. [13115/20]

698. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport her plans to ensure that the management at an airline (details supplied) engage with workers and their trade unions regarding industrial relations matters at the airline. [13116/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 697 and 698 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. My Department continues to engage regularly with airlines, airports, regulators and all relevant stakeholders during the COVID-19 Pandemic with regard to its impact.

Industrial relations are a matters for the airlines, their employees and the trade unions, and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has no role. The industrial relations machinery of the State would be available to assist all parties to reach agreement, should the need arise.

### **Sports Funding**

699. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the breakdown of the €70 million in extra funding for the sporting sector; and the areas the funding will be directed toward. [13123/20]

700. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the breakdown of the €40 million to be split between organisations (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13124/20]

701. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there is an indicative amount of the €40 million to be split between organisations (details supplied) which is due to be distributed to a league and its football clubs via the governing body; the amount of this due to go to the league; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13125/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 699 to 701, inclusive, together.

A funding package of up to €70 million was announced on Friday 19th June to support the sport sector, which has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

This funding package is broken down as follows:

- Funding of up to €40m for the three main field sports organisations – the FAI, the GAA and the IRFU.

- a Resilience Fund of up to €10m to support the National Governing Bodies of Sport,

- a Sports Club Resilience Fund of up to €15m to support clubs, and

- a Sports Restart and Renewal Fund of up to €5m.

This additional funding will be invested through new grant schemes which will be developed by Sport Ireland and my Department and administered by Sport Ireland. The precise terms of each of the new grant schemes will be announced by Sport Ireland in due course.

It is not possible at this stage to provide a further breakdown of the €40 million funding for the main field sport organisations. The amounts to be allocated will be subject to an application and assessment process to be conducted by Sport Ireland.

Sport Ireland will announce an open invitation to applications from funded bodies for assistance under the grant schemes.

### **Bus Services**

702. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the time frame by route for the roll out of a 24-hour bus services in Dublin. [13143/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with the relevant bus operators 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.

### **Rail Network**

703. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the income received by Iarnród Éireann from advertising in each of the years 2017 to 2019 and to date in 2020, in tabular form. [13144/20]

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

The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

704. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration has been given to extending the time period for taxi drivers to renew their licences in view of Covid-19 causing delays in NCT and suitability tests which in the contention of many taxi drivers, is forcing them off the road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13152/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including regulatory measures in response to the present COVID-19 pandemic, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013. I am aware that the NTA has made arrangements with the National Car Testing Service (NCTS) to put a priority system in place for SPSVs. I also understand that no late renewal fees will be charged as a result of any delays experienced by licence holders due to a delay in securing an NCT appointment.

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.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

705. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure greater passenger capacity on rail lines nationally in order to facilitate social distancing of passengers as phase 3 of the easing of lockdown restrictions approaches; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13157/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** On the 25th of June, Government announced changes to the existing public transport social distancing restrictions. It has been agreed to move from 2 metres social distancing on public transport to 50% capacity. This will help to underpin public transport during these unprecedented times for the sector, with a view to safeguarding public transport capacity in Phases 3 and 4 of the of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. In support of this change, from the 29th of June it has also been made mandatory to wear a face covering when using public transport, with the exception of those who cannot do so for health reasons or due to age. These measures will significantly help ease the pressure on operators and reduce the gap between public transport supply and demand.

### **Sports Funding**

706. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding sources available for sports clubs for measures such as CCTV to combat antisocial behaviour and vandalism. [13161/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** 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.

As the SCP is always oversubscribed, priority is given to facilities and equipment that focus on increasing participation in sport. The programme funds a wide variety of works including security fencing and while it does not normally fund CCTV systems, it is open to any applicant to make a case as to why such measures are required. It is expected that a new round of the Programme will open later this year and the full terms and conditions will be published in advance.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

707. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the

action being taken by his Department to aid the recovery of the aviation sector which has been impacted by the Covid-19 crisis; the extent to which proposed redundancies in an airline (details supplied) can be prevented by EU Covid-19 related supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13163/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport 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.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

708. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has been consulted by or has offered guidance to the Department of Education and Skills in relation to Covid-19 guidance for school transport services for the 2020-2021 academic year. [13172/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The School Transport Scheme comes under the remit of my colleague the Minister for Education. Bus services outside that scheme are part of the overall public transport sector.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) is working with public transport operators (both public and private) who are implementing public health advice in relation to issues such as cleaning regimes and social distancing measures designed to limit the risk of spreading Covid-19. The public health advices apply across all public transport including school transport.

The 'Return to Work Safely Protocol' sets out the steps and processes employers and workers must take to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace. The Protocol was published by Minister Humphreys on 9 May 2020 and is a living document which will evolve with changing Public Health advice. The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is the lead agency in overseeing compliance with the Protocol in the workplace.

### **Departmental Reviews**

709. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review the grounds on which persons taking medication are not allowed to drive vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13175/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The minimum standards of physical and mental fitness for driving a power-driven vehicle are set out in Directive 2006/126/EC on driving licences therefore the criteria are set at EU level.

An application by a person for a driving licence or learner permit must be accompanied by a report by a registered medical practitioner if the applicant is suffering from any illness or disease which requires the regular use of medications likely to affect their ability to drive safely.

The Road Safety Authority, the licensing authority for Ireland, together with the National Office of Traffic Medicine, have developed medical fitness to drive guidelines. The information in these Guidelines is intended to assist doctors and other healthcare professionals in advising their patients on fitness to drive, requirements for reporting to the National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) and guidance on review of stability, progression or improvement of these conditions. The guidelines focuses on long-term health and disability-related conditions and their associated functional effects that may impact on driving. The latest version of the guidelines can be found here:

*<https://www.rcpi.ie/traffic-medicine/>*

The guidelines are based on the current available scientific and medical evidence and expertise and I do not consider it appropriate or proportionate to interfere.

### **National Car Test**

710. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the charges for NCT tests at the test centre in Ennis will be waived at the time of next testing to reflect the fact that the undercarriages and chassis of many vehicles have not been inspected in recent months due to a non-working vehicle lift at the facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13194/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As the Deputy will be aware, on Monday 8 June 2020, in line with the commencement of Phase 2 of the Government's Roadmap for easing Covid 19 restrictions, the National Car Test (NCT) resumed on a phased basis.

Members of the public who presented their vehicle for an NCT test before the suspension of the service but could only complete a partial inspection due to the vehicle lift issue are now required to return to a test centre to complete their NCT. If the vehicle has travelled more than 5,000km since the partial test, they will also have to undergo a brake and suspension test. This is being carried out free of charge for the vehicle owner

If a vehicle failed its initial NCT inspection and is required to undergo a re-test as a result of that failure, the usual re-test fee of €28 applies.

### **Rail Network**

711. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the numerous accidents that have occurred at the Kilnageer railway crossing between Belcarra and Breaffy outside Castlebar, County Mayo; if he will request the automation of the level crossing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13228/20]

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

The issue raised is an operational matter for the Commission for Railway Regulation (CRR), in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann. I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to

the CRR for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Bus Services**

712. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration will be given to an extension of a bus route to Carrignavar and Whitechurch, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13252/20]

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

The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Bus Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

713. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if clarity will be provided regarding the return of driving schools and testing as announced in the revised reopening plan to commence on 29 June 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13257/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Due to the closure of services provided by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak, Regulations to extend the validity of number of documents, including the learner permit, were put in place. Any learner permits which were due to expire from 1 March 2020 to 30 June 2020 inclusive have had their period of validity extended by 4 months.

The resumption of car 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 am happy to be able to inform the Deputy that the resumption of driver testing services on a phased basis began yesterday, 29 June. At present, in line with Phase 3 of the Government Roadmap, driver testing for trucks, buses and motorcycles is being rolled out, with testing for cars, vans and minibuses to start in July before Phase 4 commences on 20 July. Final dates for service resumption remain under discussion and are dependent on continued positive progression of the country against the overall Government roadmap.

Dates for the resumption of driving tests, and any special arrangements which will need to be put into place to allow for the provision of the service, including the wearing of facemasks, will be determined in consultation with the relevant health authorities.

In relation to driving lessons, I can confirm that the RSA issued guidelines to all Approved Driving Instructors last week, with a view to them reopening their businesses on or after 29 June, in accordance with the Government's acceleration of Phase 3 of the National Return to Work Safely Protocol as developed by NPHET in consultation with national experts.

However, it must be noted that 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.

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.

### **Bus Éireann**

714. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department keeps records of attacks, verbal or physical, on Bus Éireann bus drivers; and if there have been discussions between her Department, Bus Éireann and trade unions representing drivers regarding the installation of protective screens on Bus Éireann buses as there are on Dublin Bus vehicles. [13279/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The safety and security of passengers and staff, including arrangements to deal with anti-social behaviour, are matters for the transport operators, in conjunction with, as appropriate, An Garda Síochána.

I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to Bus Éireann for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

### **Bus Services**

715. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if matters raised in submissions by an organisation (details supplied) with regard to the bus and coach sector will receive a response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13280/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Firstly I would like to advise that officials in my Department are engaging directly with the Coach Tourism & Transport Council of Ireland on a regular basis.

On the 25th of June the Government approved temporary funding supports, in accordance with EU and national legislation, for the licensed bus sector. Licensed operators provide essential transport services for people who need to get to work and are vital to ensure economic recovery. The support package is aimed at ensuring the continued operation of essential licensed bus services for a period of up to six months. The package will be restricted to operators where a clear public interest justification supports such intervention and will be targeted at compensating the gap between specified costs and revenues generated on the services.

The National Transport Authority (NTA), as the public transport licensing agency, will administer the support package through the establishment of contracts between the NTA and the relevant operators.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

716. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if support is available to voluntary community sporting organisations to assist them in the purchase of hand sanitiser and protective equipment and for the sanitising of facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13293/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** A funding package of up to €70 million was announced on Friday 19th June to support the sport sector, which has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

This funding package includes;

- Funding of up to €40m for the three main field sports organisations – the FAI, the GAA and the IRFU.

- a Resilience Fund of up to €10m to support the National Governing Bodies of Sport,

- a Sports Club Resilience Fund of up to €15m to support clubs, and

- a Sports Restart and Renewal Fund of up to €5m.

Along with the Roadmap accelerations also announced on 19th June, this funding package will ensure the survival of our vibrant sport sector, particularly the network of clubs throughout the country.

This additional funding will be invested through new grant schemes which will be developed by Sport Ireland and my Department and administered by Sport Ireland. The precise terms of each of the new grant schemes will be announced by Sport Ireland in due course.

Sport Ireland will announce an open invitation to applications from funded bodies for assistance under the grant schemes.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

717. **Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when driver tests will return in order to facilitate frontline workers that had provisional licences prior to the Covid-19 pandemic to graduate to a full licence; if special arrangements exist for emergency driver licence tests for persons in such circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13353/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Due to the closure of services provided by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak, regulations to extend the validity of number of documents, including the learner permit, were put in place. Any learner permits which were due to expire from 1 March 2020 to 30 June 2020 inclusive have had their period of validity extended by 4 months.

The resumption of car 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 am pleased to be able to inform the Deputy that driver testing services resumed yesterday on a phased basis, in line with Phase 3 of the Government Roadmap. At present, driving tests are available for trucks, buses and motorcycles, with testing for cars, vans and minibus due to resume in July before Phase 4 commences on 20 July. Final dates for service resumption remain under discussion and are dependent on continued positive progression of the country against the overall Government roadmap.

The Road Safety Authority has always reserved a number of driving test slots each week for candidates who need a full driving licence urgently, and this service will continue after the

resumption of the driving test service.

Any special arrangements which will need to be put into place to allow for the provision of the service, including the wearing of facemasks, are being determined in consultation with the relevant health authorities.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

718. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the latest advice or direction for travel agents regarding cancelled holidays and ticket exchange requests from customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13354/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** On 19 June, legal provisions were introduced to provide State backing for a new, temporary form of voucher called a Refund Credit Note, which can be issued by Irish licensed travel agents and tour operators to their customers where a booking has been cancelled due to Covid-19 travel restrictions.

Whilst consumers are entitled to a full cash refund under the Package Travel Directive in circumstances where a package holiday has to be cancelled because of Covid-19 restrictions, customers can also agree to accept a Refund Credit Note instead of cash. If they do, which helps stem the immediate cash drain being experienced by the sector, then the State will stand over the cash value of that Note in the event that the issuer goes out of business. Consumer protections are therefore safeguarded. All relevant information is available on the Department's website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1ae3d-refund-credit-note/>

Further guidance on the right of travellers to terminate package travel contacts due to the unavoidable and extraordinary circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak is available at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/40f0d7-guidance-on-the-right-of-travellers-to-terminate-package-travel-cont/>

### **National Car Test**

719. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a NCT appointment can be made by telephone for persons that are not online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13357/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The operation of the National Car Test (NCT) service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the question 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.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

720. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if driving instructors are permitted to return to work on 29 June 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13358/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** There are no pro-

visions under Road Traffic law in relation to permission for driving instructors to work. The Road Safety Authority (RSA), which has oversight of the sector, did advise Approved Driving Instructors (ADIs) to protect themselves, their families and communities by following the official Government and HSE guidelines on hygiene and social distancing. In addition, like all enterprises and persons, ADs are subject to the relevant public health regulations.

Last week, the RSA updated ADIs in relation to their plans for resuming driver testing services in line with the revised Government Roadmap for Reopening, including a series of Frequently Asked Questions for ADIs and also details of the protocols being followed for driving tests.

However, it must be noted that, as a private business, driving instructors must ensure that they can comply with the necessary public health requirements before they can reopen their businesses. Furthermore, those which are employers should ensure that they fully comply with their legal responsibilities under Health and Safety codes. In all case, the National Return to Work Safely Protocol agreed by employers and worker representatives should be followed.

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.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

721. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to compensate or require an airline (details supplied) to compensate passengers that did not catch their flights during the Covid-19 lockdown; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the airline is offering no refunds or vouchers and the only option passengers have is to reschedule their flights at their own expense; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13361/20]

726. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will engage with airlines to ensure that passengers here that had flights cancelled during the Covid-19 pandemic receive refunds without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13446/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 721 and 726 together.

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 flight cancellations. 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, without further charge.

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 will raise directly with the two main Irish airlines at the earliest opportunity. 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.

### **Driver Test**

722. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if emergency or prioritised driver test appointments will be provided for persons that are essential carers and or essential workers and that urgently need to do a test in order to be able to drive legally but whose planned tests were cancelled due to Covid-19, in view of the planned lifting of many of the Covid-19 restrictions on 29 June 2020. [13368/20]

732. **Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when driver tests will return in order to facilitate frontline workers that had provisional licences prior to the Covid-19 pandemic being able to graduate to a full licence; if special arrangements exist for emergency driver licence tests for persons in such circumstances.

[13501/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 722 and 732 together.

The resumption of car 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 am pleased to be able to inform the Deputy that driver testing has resumed on phased basis, beginning yesterday, 29 June. At present tests are being made available for trucks, buses and motorcycles,. It is planned to introduce testing for cars, vans and minibuses in July before Phase 4 commences on 20 July, in line with the Government’s revised plan for reopening the country.

The Road Safety Authority has always reserved a number of appointment slots for those in urgent need of a driving test, and will continue to do so when the driver testing service resumes.

Any special arrangements which will need to be put into place to allow for the provision of the service, including the wearing of facemasks, are being determined in consultation with the relevant health authorities.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

723. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the guidelines set out to the Road Safety Authority and or driving schools as to the way in which testing and lessons are meant to take place, in view of the fact driving schools can reopen from 29 June 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13371/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** On 22 June the Road Safety Authority issued letters to all Approved Driving Instructors, advising them of the plans for resuming driver testing services. The letter included the protocols to be observed in driver testing, with a view to Driving Schools reopening their businesses on or after 29 June, in accordance with the Government’s acceleration of Phase 3 of the National Return to Work Safely Protocol as developed by NPHE in consultation with national experts.

As the oversight of Approved Driving Instructors, including communications in relation to the resumption of services, is a matter for the Road Safety Authority, I am referring your question to the RSA for further direct reply. If you do not reply within 10 days, please contact my Office.

### **Driver Licences**

724. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the process by which a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can renew their driver licence; the reason their attempts to do so failed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13405/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Road Safety Authority has operational responsibility for the driver licensing service, and will respond directly on this matter.

Please contact my office if a response has not been received within 10 working days.

### **Aviation Industry**

725. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a report of his interactions with an airline (details supplied) concerning the future of same and the protection of the Dublin based pilots at the company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13445/20]

734. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the efforts made to date to resolve the impasse between pilots and a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13568/20]

735. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will work to protect the jobs and livelihoods of those in the airline industry here when an airline (details supplied) exits examinership. [13578/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 725, 734 and 735 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. My Department continues to engage regularly with airlines, airports, regulators and all relevant stakeholders during the COVID-19 Pandemic with regard to its impact.

Industrial relations are a matters for the airlines, their employees and the trade unions, and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has no role. The industrial relations machinery of the State would be available to assist all parties to reach agreement, should the need arise.

*Question No. 726 answered with Question No. 721.*

### **Cycling Policy**

727. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider introducing mandatory helmet legislation for young cyclists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13466/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** International evidence is that mandatory helmet legislation acts as a major disincentive to cycling such that the net impact of the legislation on public health is significantly negative. Therefore I do not propose to introduce such legislation.

### Departmental Funding

728. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the operational expenditure and capital expenditure funding for a facility (details supplied) from 2010, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13467/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Unfortunately I am not in a position to respond to the Deputy as I have not received from the Deputy the details of the facility in question

### Road Safety Authority

729. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of staff employed and the grade of each at the Road Safety Authority offices in Ballina, County Mayo; his plans to expand the offices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13468/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** 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.

### Cycling Facilities

730. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress of the proposed national velodrome at Abbotstown, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13476/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport, increasing participation at all levels and raising standards, including the development of the Sport Ireland National Sports Campus at Abbotstown.

The National Development Plan 2018-2027 included a commitment to develop a National Velodrome and Badminton Centre at the National Sports Campus in 2020 and 2021. The proposal at that time comprised a 250-metre cycling track, 12-16 Badminton Courts in the in-track area, spectator seating and ancillary facilities including office space.

A review of the original design scheme for the project was undertaken by Sport Ireland in 2019 to assess the suitability and fitness of the design for present and future purposes. The review, which was completed in October 2019, proposed a number of design changes.

Sport Ireland submitted a revised business case for the project to my Department in May. This is currently being examined by my officials in line with the requirements of the Public Spending Code.

Any decision on this project will be subject to Ministerial approval and the availability of

funding.

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

731. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the financial supports available or planned for those in the bed and breakfast sector that have suffered losses due to Covid-19 restrictions and that are not eligible for the restart grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13479/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** 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 were 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 of 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.

Fáilte Ireland unveiled its new national domestic marketing campaign, 'Ireland, make a break for it', to the tourism and hospitality industry last week and it has since gone live across all media this weekend. This is a major drive to encourage people to take domestic breaks this summer. They have also launched a new COVID-19 Safety Charter initiative designed to boost public confidence in the safety of businesses as the tourism sector reopens from 29th June.

To assist tourism businesses reopening in line with the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, Fáilte Ireland 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.

As the Deputy is aware, the Tourism Recovery Taskforce was established on 20th 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. A dedicated page has been set up on the Gov.ie website which gives regular updates on the status of the Tourism Recovery Taskforce and includes minutes from meetings and documentation relating to the work of the

Taskforce. The Taskforce presented an initial report last week which will inform Government thinking on the recovery in the sector.

*Question No. 732 answered with Question No. 722.*

### **Departmental Staff**

733. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13555/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has an established “working from home” policy or e-working policy that has been in effect since January 2015. The policy outlines the circumstances and the employees who are permitted to work from home, along with the frequency and the environment under which e-working can be undertaken with the approval of the individual employee’s manager or Head of Function.

However, due to the restrictions imposed in March in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, immediate adaptations to this policy were required as the majority of staff in my Department moved to working from home. The roadmap for reopening society and businesses is clear that remote working should continue for all those who can do so. My Department is engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and other Government Departments on the development of guidelines to underpin these arrangements. The further adaptation of my Department’s working from home or e-working policy will take account of the experience with working from home in the context of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and any further principles or guidelines developed centrally.

*Questions Nos. 734 and 735 answered with Question No. 725.*

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

736. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the support mechanisms available to assist commercial bus operators that are currently operating services at reduced capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13580/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** On the 25th of June, Government announced changes to the existing public transport social distancing restrictions. It has been agreed to move from 2 metres social distancing on public transport to 50% capacity. This will help to underpin public transport during these unprecedented times for the sector, with a view to safeguarding public transport capacity in Phases 3 and 4 of the of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. The Government also decided to legally require the mandatory wearing of face coverings on public transport, with the exception of those who cannot do so for health reasons or due to age (under 13). These measures will protect both passengers and staff and significantly help ease the pressure on operators by reducing the gap between public transport supply and demand.

Further, on the 25th of June Government agreed new temporary funding supports, in accordance with EU and national legislation, will be introduced for the licensed bus sector. Licensed operators provide essential transport services for people who need to get to work and are vital to ensure economic recovery. These supports are aimed at ensuring the continued operation of

essential licensed bus services for a period of up to six months. The package will be restricted to operators where a clear public interest justification supports such intervention and will be targeted at compensating the gap between specified costs and revenues generated on the services. The National Transport Authority (NTA), as the public transport licensing agency, will administer the support package through the establishment of contracts between the NTA and the relevant operators.

Furthermore, the Government previously introduced a €12bn package of supports for impacted businesses of all sizes, which include: 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.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

737. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the work of the Tourism Recovery Taskforce; if the impacts of Covid-19 on the events industry and business tourism sectors have been considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13582/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Tourism Recovery Taskforce was established 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. A dedicated page has been set up on the Gov.ie website which gives regular updates on the status of the Tourism Recovery Taskforce and includes minutes from meetings and documentation relating to the work of the Taskforce. The Taskforce presented an initial report last week which will inform Government thinking on the recovery in the sector.

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 members were selected 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. The individuals appointed will work together for the good of Irish Tourism as a whole.

### **Sports Facilities**

738. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the additional financial supports which can be provided for local authority sports centres that are facing considerably increased financial costs (details supplied) but wish to continue providing their services to the marginalised, older persons, socially disadvantaged and disabled users they serve; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13583/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Overall responsibility for local authority policy and finance rests with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

In relation to my Department's responsibilities, the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP), provides capital funding for the construction of swimming pools. This programme is for capital purposes only however, and has never provided current funding for operational costs associated with these pools.

Sport Ireland, which is the statutory body for the development of sport, supports a network of Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) throughout the country. My Department, through Sport Ireland, supports LSPs as a model for collaboration between Sport Ireland and the local authorities with the purpose of delivering sports and physical activity programmes in local facilities, including local authority sport centres.

The additional funding package for the sport sector announced on 19 June includes a Sports Restart and Renewal Fund of up to €5m. A proportion of this funding, which will be administered and disbursed by Sport Ireland, will be channelled to the network of LSPs for new programmes at a local level over the coming months. While funding at local level may be provided to swimming programmes, funding will not be provided to swimming pool operators. This is a matter for the pool owners, including local authorities.

More generally, the Government is committed to ensuring as many businesses as possible survive this challenging period, and it will continue to look at how we can support businesses that have been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. In recent months a substantial and wide range of financial supports and guidance to help businesses impacted by the Covid 19 crisis have been put in place. Details of these are available on the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation website at the following link <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

### Driver Test

739. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the waiting list figures for counties Longford and Westmeath by testing centre and number of persons awaiting driver tests in tabular form. [13584/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** 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.

### Driver Test

740. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the additional resources which will be put in place in counties Longford and Westmeath to reduce the backlog of persons waiting for their driver tests [13585/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** This is an operational matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the Question 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.

### Tourism Funding

741. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the additional campaigns and resources that will be made available to Fáilte Ireland to encourage tourism and staycations in Ireland's Ancient East and Hidden Heartlands regions for the remainder of 2020. [13599/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Funding for the

tourism agencies is the subject of the annual estimates discussion with the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform.

The development and delivery of any campaigns to encourage tourism and staycations in the Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' regions is an operational matter for Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's Question to that agency for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

### Greenways Provision

742. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application by Galway City Council for funding under the carbon tax 2020 fund for the Galway Bearna greenway; the closing date for the applications; when a decision will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13603/20]

743. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of applications received for funding under the carbon tax 2020 fund by local authority area; the number of applications for which a decision has been made; the number awaiting a decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13604/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 742 and 743 together.

The Carbon Tax Fund call for Greenway proposals was announced in January 2020. The aim of the funding call was to support feasibility, design and planning costs of Greenway projects so that my Department would have a pipeline of projects that would be sufficiently progressed in time for the next round of construction funding. The deadline for receipt of applications was 31st January of this year and 40 applications were received as follows:

County	No of Applications Received
Carlow	1
Cavan	1
Clare	1
Cork - County	1
Donegal	5
Fingal	1
Galway City Council	1
Galway County Council	3
Kerry	2
Kildare	1
Leitrim	1
Limerick City & County Council	2
Longford	1
Louth County Council	1
Mayo County Council	1
Meath	1
Monaghan	1
Offaly	3
Roscommon	1

County	No of Applications Received
Sligo	1
Tipperary County Council	1
Waterford City and County Council	2
Waterways Ireland (Limerick & Clare)	1
Wexford County Council	4
Wicklow	2
Total number of Applications Received	40

I expect that a decision on funding to be provided will be made in the near future.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

744. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the NTA will be instructed to extend the validity of travel wide annual Dublin Bus tickets purchased prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13684/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport in Ireland. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the regulation of fares in relation to public passenger transport services. The NTA issued a press statement on the 1st May which provides an outline as to how customers of the TaxSaver monthly and annual public transport tickets are to be accommodated.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

745. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if NPHEAT will be requested to provide detailed guidelines on recommended measures driving instructors should take to reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13685/20]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As outlined in the revised Roadmap announced by Government, driving tests will resume from this week starting on the 29 June on a phased basis. With the resumption of driving tests, driving instruction will also need to resume.

The RSA wrote to Approved Driving Instructors on 22 June, informing them of the imminent resumption of driver testing. The Authority included a series of Frequently Asked Questions, which provided details of the protocols being applied to driver testing in order to comply with health requirements in line with Government's Protocol on Returning to Work Safely. These protocols may assist driving instructors in taking the necessary measures resuming their business safely.

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.

### **Child Safety**

746. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will be requesting a review of child safety measures and welfare in an organisation (details supplied) in view of an allegation of retrospective child abuse within the organisation being deemed founded by Tusla; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13374/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** Where an organisation or individual have reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected it is their duty to contact Tusla’s local child protection social work department. If a referrer is unsure if they have reasonable grounds for concern they can contact Tusla staff who will offer guidance and support to the referrer as appropriate.

I am aware that Tusla’s Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit engaged with St. John’s Ambulance earlier in 2019 and it was deemed to have a compliant safeguarding statement.

The Principal Social Worker with responsibility for retrospective abuse referrals in this area has liaised with relevant social work staff across the Dublin Mid-Leinster Region and has reviewed records available to her. I am informed that she is satisfied that she has no information available to her at this time to suggest that there are any other allegations pertaining to persons associated with St. John’s ambulance. If there are any individuals with evidence to the contrary I would encourage them to come forward and air their concerns.

### **Childcare Services**

747. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if HSE guidelines for the reopening of childcare facilities from 29 June 2020 prevents parents visiting those childcare settings prior to the reopening on 29 June 2020; if he will allow parents to inspect the new arrangements of childcare facilities due to health and safety protocols implemented by the provider; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13569/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** The public health guidance which was published by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre on 29 May is based on two key principles:

- That services should take steps to ensure individuals with symptoms do not enter the service, and
- That services should take steps to reduce the chance of spread of the virus in case an infectious person, without symptoms, enters the building.

With these principles in mind, services should seek to restrict any unnecessary visitors to the service. Where a service considers it necessary for a parent or guardian to enter the service, e.g. to

help settle in a new child, social distancing between the parent/guardian and other adults

should be observed as far as possible.

The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) recommends the use of cloth face coverings in enclosed indoor settings where it is not possible to keep a distance of 2 metres from others. While it is generally not appropriate for childcare workers to apply this when caring for children or when engaging with parents in the presence of their children, the NPHE recommendation on use of masks is applicable for interaction between adults in childcare settings when not caring for children.

### Childcare Services

748. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if childcare staff can be forced by their employer not to wear a mask when they return to their place of employment on 29 June 2020. [13575/20]

753. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if guidelines have been issued to providers for staff wearing masks when childcare facilities reopen. [12878/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 748 and 753 together.

The guidance issued by my Department to providers of early learning and care and school-age childcare is based on the advice that the Health Protection and Surveillance Centre (HPSC) has published specifically for childcare settings. The HPSC advice is that additional PPE, over and above normal requirements for childcare services, is not required to be used by childcare practitioners while they are caring for children.

As per normal practice in early learning and care services, staff should wear disposable single-use plastic aprons, and non-powdered, non-permeable gloves when there is a risk of coming into contact with body fluids (such as when nappy changing). Supplies of these should be readily available in services.

The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) recommends the use of cloth face coverings in enclosed indoor settings where it is not possible to keep a distance of 2 metres from others. The HPSC has advised that it is generally not appropriate for childcare workers to apply this when caring for children or while engaging with parents in the presence of their children, but the NPHE recommendation on use of masks is applicable for interaction between adults in childcare settings when not caring for children.

The HPSC has advised that services should keep a small supply of surgical masks in a readily accessible place for use by a staff member who develops symptoms of COVID-19 or by staff members caring for a sick child if they feel they need to use them.

### Community Childcare Subvention Programme

749. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the procedure in place for registration of children on CCSP schemes that are scheduled to return to childcare from 29 June 2020; if they will they have to re-register; the way in which families will obtain supporting documentation from offices of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection closed due to Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12697/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** My Department, in conjunction with Pobal, the agency which administers the childcare funding schemes operated by my Department, has established a simplified registration system for children who are returning to childcare on or after 29 June, and who are availing of the Department funded CCSP scheme.

Childcare service providers have been asked to contact parents to ascertain the number of hours they require, which can be done via email or other electronic means. There will be no re-check of eligibility for children re-registering under the CCSP programme for the remainder of the 2019/20 programme year, therefore it will not be necessary for families to obtain supporting documentation from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

All service providers have received detailed guidance on how to register children.

My Department has ensured that the administrative overhead for providers is kept to the minimum necessary, whilst also ensuring that Exchequer funds are managed and deployed to best effect.

Pobal and the County Childcare Committees (CCCs) are available to provide support and guidance to service providers through this process.

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

750. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the additional supports that will be provided to childcare facilities that open before September 2020, in view of the fact they face additional costs (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12752/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I fully appreciate that the Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) sector faces significant challenges in reopening, and I acknowledge that this is not a normal return to business. In recognition of this, a number of supports have been put in place to assist the sector in reopening.

I recently announced a major funding package to facilitate the reopening of ELC and SAC services from 29 June, including a once-off capital grant of €14.2M. All registered centre based services re-opening between 29 June and the beginning of September can avail of this grant.

This grant can be used by services to help them to adhere to the reopening guidelines by improving hygiene facilities and outdoor play areas. It should be noted that the definition of a capital asset is an asset intended for use on a continuing basis with an expected life of more than one year. Therefore capital grants cannot be used to purchase PPE and other consumable items.

There is a high level of flexibility being allowed in respect of the items that may be purchased, in recognition of the fact that services will have very different needs depending on factors such as what they already have, what age groups they cater to, and the physical layout of their premises. A list of eligible categories of items has been shared with ELC and SAC services.

In addition to capital, the package of supports includes a re-opening grant of €18m to assist ELC and SAC services in meeting operational costs, including additional staffing costs. This may cover extra staff required to help with pick-up or drop-off times, or to provide cleaning to

meet hygiene standards. ELC and SAC services will be required to verify that the reopening support payment has been used to cover additional costs. Any overheads that are additional costs associated with reopening can be assigned to this purpose.

In addition the Revenue-operated Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) is continuing for employees of ELC and SAC services that reopen on 29 June, which will continue to provide support with staffing costs. There is a variety of conditions relating to the TWSS. Revenue update their guidance frequently and it is essential that services participating in the scheme are alert to these materials.

In developing this funding model I recognise that a reduced number of children are likely to attend ELC and SAC services in the initial weeks of reopening. This necessitates a tailored model, which will allow providers to operate with potentially less parental income. It will also ensure that ELC and SAC providers will not have to charge higher fees than they did pre-COVID-19, even though the costs of providing ELC and SAC may increase in some circumstances. This will benefit parents and children returning to services.

This suite of measures will run from 29 June to 23 August. Further details on all of these measures have been made available in FAQs that have been distributed to all ELC and SAC services.

My Department will review the operation of these measures in July and will then make further arrangements for services normally reopening in late August/early September. I acknowledge that the Deputy makes specific reference to this September in her question, but through these supports my Department is responding to the immediate need to reopen ELC and SAC services, in line with the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. As the Deputy will be aware, this plan for a phased reopening is under continuous assessment with regard to wider developments as they unfold. DCYA will continue to analyse the needs of the sector in the context of the country's phased reopening going forward.

### **Childcare Services**

751. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if school age children are permitted in day care and Montessori facilities from 29 June 2020. [12753/20]

760. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if crèches can reopen their afterschool facilities; the guidance issued to them on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13080/20]

762. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will consider the concerns raised by a healthcare worker that cannot access childcare (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13082/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 751, 760 and 762 together.

The Government Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business allows for the phased reopening of both Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare services from 29 June.

On Friday 5 June, my Department published 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: <https://first5.gov.ie/practitioners/re-opening>

As with services for pre-school children, school-age childcare services may reopen from 29 June. There is nothing in the Government Roadmap or in the guidance provided by my Department that limits services to reopen for children under the age of six only.

The resources available on the First 5 website include guidance to help support providers in managing allocation of places when services reopen where demand for places is greater than the capacity within a service. Where possible it is proposed that children should be enabled to return to the service they used pre-COVID-19.

On 10 June a major funding package was announced to facilitate the reopening of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare services from 29 June. This funding includes capital and reopening grants to support services reopening over the summer. All DCYA subsidy schemes will resume, as may the charging of fees to privately paying parents.

It must be noted that my Department is not the owner/employer of school-age childcare services; they are private businesses and specific decisions on whether, when and how to reopen are a matter for the individual service provider.

Parents are encouraged to discuss any concerns they may have with their service provider.

### Childcare Services

752. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the costs associated with the pilot meal programme being planned in early learning and care under First 5, the Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028; the settings that will be covered; the number of children that will be covered in the pilot; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12774/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman):** First 5, the Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 commits to piloting a meals programme in Early Learning and Care (ELC) settings. In 2019, as part of Budget 2020, funding was secured to pilot this initiative. The meals programme will be trialled in a sample of approximately 45 community, not-for-profit ELC settings. The focus of the pilot is for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the pilot was due to run for the full duration of the 2020/2021 ECCE programme year (i.e. 38 weeks from September to June). Pilot timelines have been altered due to the closure of ELC settings but it is intended to run the pilot from January 2021 to the end of June 2021.

A range of meals options will be piloted, including a hot meals option. Rates for meals will be based on the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection's School Meals Programme. A Working Group to oversee this pilot will soon be established to lead the development, roll-out of the pilot and the commission of services of an external evaluator. No decision has yet been made on how the settings will be selected.

Following the conclusion of the pilot and the evaluation, consideration will be given to extending this meals programme to a larger number of ELC settings and on a more a permanent basis.

*Question No. 753 answered with Question No. 748.*

### **Childcare Services**

754. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if early childcare facilities will have to re-register children post-Covid-19; and his views on whether it would be more appropriate and less time consuming if these facilities removed children that are not returning from their listings. [12896/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** My Department, in conjunction with Pobal, the agency which administers the childcare funding schemes operated by my Department, has established a simplified registration system for children who are returning to childcare on or after 29 June, and who are availing of the Department funded CCSP scheme.

My Department considered the option suggested by the Deputy of requiring childcare providers to deregister children who did not return to services immediately on reopening, but concluded that this option would cause a greater administrative burden for providers, as children who returned to a service after the day it reopened, would need to be deregistered and then registered again on the CCSP scheme. My Department rejected this option as it would cause an additional administrative burden for providers.

Pobal and the County Childcare Committees (CCCs) are available to provide support and guidance to childcare service providers through this process.

### **Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries**

755. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason he indicated on 20 May and 3 June 2020 that the report into Tuam Mother and Baby Home would be published on 26 June 2020, in view of the fact on 12 June 2020 it was announced the report would be delayed by a further six months; and if his attention was drawn to the fact on 20 May 2020 that the publication of the report would be delayed. [12897/20]

756. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a guarantee will be given that the publication of the Tuam Mother and Baby Home report will not be delayed further in view of several postponements to its publication, the most recent due to the Covid-19 crisis. [12898/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 755 and 756 together.

The information which my predecessor provided to the House on both 20 May and 03 June in response to parliamentary questions on the expected delivery of the final report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters by 26 June was correct and accurate.

Notably, the receipt of an update from the Commission on the 03 June was signalled in the response of the same date. My predecessor indicated that the correspondence would need to be considered in conjunction with her then Government colleagues. In its short Seventh Interim Report, which was subsequently published on 12 June, the Commission says its final report is very close to completion but it had encountered delays as a direct result of Covid-19 restrictions. For this reason, the Commission requested an extension to complete its work in accor-

dance with the provisions of the Commissions of Investigations Act 2004.

At its meeting on 12 June, the then Government agreed to amend the Commission's terms of reference to provide for the extension sought. The final report is now due to be delivered on 30 October 2020 at the latest, and not six months as indicated by the Deputy in her question.

In granting these extensions, the then Government considered that the public interest was best served by facilitating the Commission to produce an evidence based determination on what happened to vulnerable mothers and children in these institutions. The Commission has engaged with hundreds of former residents in its work and is attempting to comprehensively analyse information at a level beyond what has been possible to date. In agreeing to another extension of time the priority was to safeguard this substantial work so that the independent Commission can comprehensively address these crucial questions and conclude matters as expeditiously as possible in accordance with the legislative framework.

With regard to the nature of the guarantee sought by the Deputy, it is important to clarify that a Commission of Investigation is independent in the conduct of its investigations. It must of course operate within its terms of reference and the previous Government, in granting the extensions sought, had been satisfied that the Commission was using its best endeavours to conclude its report on this painful period in our history.

The Deputy should note that when a Commission submits its final report there are a number of procedural matters which must be addressed before the relevant Minister could seek the approval of Government to publish the report. For this reason there will always be a time interval between receipt of such reports and the separate arrangements for their publication.

I understand that many former residents and their families will have been deeply disappointed with the Commission's need for additional time. I know that they understand that this Commission is investigating personal and sensitive matters which happened over a period of more than 75 years. So there are multiple lines of inquiry being pursued in the course of this complex statutory investigation.

My Department will continue to use existing channels of communication to ensure that former residents, their families and supporters are the first to be know of any developments in respect of these matters. I share the wish of all interested parties to see the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matter to conclude its work as quickly as possible.

### **Childcare Services**

**757. Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if childminders can still apply for the childminding development grant; if so, the deadline for applications for the grant; if the grant has been replaced by the childminder reopening grant which is half the value; if other additional grants will be made available to childminders to help further develop or alter their service in view of Covid-19 restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12907/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman):** I can confirm that the Childminding Development Grant will continue to be available in 2020. The Childminding Development Grant scheme will be open for applications from 6 July 2020 until 14 August 2020. The Childminding Development Grant has not been replaced by the Childminding Re-opening Grant.

In light of the announcement on 25 June by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection of the extension of the Enterprise Support Grant for self-employed micro-enterprises that are re-opening their business and transitioning from the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment, the value of the Childminding Re-opening Grant has been increased in value from €500 to €1,000, which is the same value as the Childminding Development Grant. This change will ensure whole-of-Government consistency with supports provided for the re-opening of small businesses from the 29th June. Childminders who have already applied for the Childminding Reopening Grant will, if eligible for payment, be awarded €1,000, rather than the €500 applied for.

Childminders who are registered with Tusla and who were in contract to provide DCYA programmes on 12 March may be eligible for the Reopening Support Payment and the Covid-19 capital grant that are available to DCYA-funded providers.

### **Wage Subsidy Scheme**

758. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 904 of 16 June 2020, the spending which may be found to be in breach of spending rules under the Covid-19 subsidy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12926/20]

759. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the verification process under the temporary wage subsidy childcare scheme; the number of childcare providers that have been engaged with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12927/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 758 and 759 together.

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 the 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 TWSCS provides funding towards a portion of staff wages and a contribution towards 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 intended purposes: to meet employee pay costs in conjunction with the Revenue operated Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme and contribute towards ongoing overhead costs. As part of ensuring that the TWSCS is fully understood by participants, my Department and Pobal have provided extensive information on this scheme, including the administrative and verification requirements.

A verification process, which will involve Pobal communicating with a sample of scheme participants to verify the use of the funding provided under the scheme, will commence in the coming weeks. Funding provided under the wage top up element of the scheme must be used towards payroll in line with the requirements of the scheme. Funding provided under the overhead element of the scheme must be used to meet ongoing overhead costs. Pay costs, capital costs, and costs not related to childcare are examples of non-eligible expenditure under this scheme.

My Department will take a reasonable and supportive approach to assessing the use of funding provided to services in this difficult time. I hope that all participating providers will use the money provided under the scheme in the manner set out in the Funding Agreement. A wide variety of items qualify as eligible expenditure, and my Department's priority is to support services to reopen in line with public health advice.

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.

*Question No. 760 answered with Question No. 751.*

### **Childcare Services**

761. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he is considering measures to increase the availability of childcare for school aged children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13081/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** The Government Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business allows for the phased reopening of both Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare services from 29 June.

My Department continues to invest significant resources in the childcare sector generally. Over the last five Budgets investment in childcare has increased by 141%, which reflects the emphasis being placed on improving access to affordable, high quality services. A significant funding package is now available to support services, including school-age services, with reopening following Covid-19-related closures. The funding is expected to support the retention of capacity in the sector.

Under the National Childcare Scheme which opened for online applications on 20th November 2019, school-age childcare services who are registered with Tusla are able to avail of subsidies under the new scheme. The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Registration of School Age Services) Regulations 2018 came into force on 18th February, 2019, enabling school-age childcare services to register with Tusla and participate in the National Childcare Scheme.

The number of early learning and care and school-age childcare places in Ireland has doubled over the last 5 years, assisted by an annual programme of capital grants. In 2019, grants of up to €20,000 were available to school age childcare providers for the creation of new school age places where demand for these was clearly evidenced. In 2020 school-age services are able to avail of capital and reopening grants to support their reopening.

My Department also works in collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills to support access to school-age childcare places in the context of the inter-departmental Action Plan on School-Age Childcare. The Department of Education and Skills has published guidelines to assist school authorities on how their premises might be utilised for school-age childcare and other activities where it can be facilitated by the school patron/trustees.

*Question No. 762 answered with Question No. 751.*

### **Childcare Services**

763. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans to reopen childcare services which operate in schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13160/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** Guided by public health advice from the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC), early learning and care (ELC) and school-age childcare (SAC) services can resume from 29 June. On 10 June 2020, a €75m funding package was announced to facilitate the reopening of ELC and SAC services over the summer months. This substantial investment recognises the important role that the ELC and SAC sector plays in the societal and economic infrastructure of the country.

In relation specifically to the reopening of childcare services that operate on school premises, officials in my Department have been in contact with colleagues in the Department of Education and Skills.

The Department of Education and Skills have advised that the use of school facilities lies with the relevant school authority in consultation with the property owner, and that priority should be given to the interests of the school, teachers and pupils.

The Department of Education and Skills’ policy is to encourage the use of school facilities, where possible, for community, training and education-related activities. It encourages schools to facilitate requests wherever possible but on the basis that it would not impede capacity to cater for any proposed Department of Education and Skills’ summer programmes for students with special needs or from a disadvantaged background. The Department of Education and Skills advises that summer programmes should be given first priority for use of school facilities.

To assist schools in considering applications for use of their facilities, the Department of Education and Skills in consultation with representatives of schools has drafted guidelines on the use of school property outside of school hours which is available here

*<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/guidelines-on-the-use-of-school-buildings-outside-of-school-hours.pdf>*

These guidelines are not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive but are provided to assist schools in considering applications for the use of their facilities.

The use of school facilities should be managed at local level between the childcare service

provider and the school.

### National Childcare Scheme

764. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the actions being taken to ensure that first-time applicants for the universal subsidy under the national childcare scheme can still apply for the subsidy, notwithstanding the fact that online application via MyGovID appears to be halted due to the unavailability of appointments to obtain the public services card; if an alternative method for application has been established in view of the unavailability of such appointments; if applicants will be backdated from date of eligibility in view of the fact late application may occur through no fault of their own due to the circumstances outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13168/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** My Department is aware of the current situation with regard to the Public Service Card, however parents can still apply for the National Childcare Scheme without obtaining a Public Services Card. They can do so by completing a paper application form and returning by post. For information on how to apply by post, parents can contact the Parent Support Centre on 01 906 8530, Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

I would also note that parents who already hold a Public Services Card and a basic MyGovID account can still create a MyGovID verified account, and thereby complete an online application for the National Childcare Scheme. Details on how to do this can be found by logging into a MyGovID basic account, available at [www.mygovid.ie](http://www.mygovid.ie).

As such it is open parent to apply at the any stage for an NCS award through online or offline means.

Regarding the issue of backdating subsidies, it has always been communicated by my Department that subsidy awards are payable from the week they are claimed, and not the date of application. It is a key aspect of the scheme that all claims are paid in arrears based on the attendance of a child. As such, the child must be registered with a childcare provider and the provider must confirm that attendance. This is a key financial and governance control to ensure we are maximising the benefits of public monies and that the investment is following the child.

Further information and resources for parents are available at [www.ncs.gov.ie](http://www.ncs.gov.ie)

### Family Resource Centres

765. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the financial difficulties facing family resource centres nationwide as a direct result of Covid-19 restrictions (details supplied); the steps he has taken to address the difficulties; his views on the fact that many centres will struggle to remain open unless urgent assistance is provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13217/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** Tusla, the Child and Family Agency administers the Family Resource Centre (FRC) Programme. There are 121 Family Resource Centres currently in the FRC Programme. In 2020, Tusla is providing funding of some €18 million to the FRC Programme.

Tusla has maintained consistent contact with FRCs during the COVID-19 national emergency, and continues to provide core funding to FRCs to ensure that staff continue to receive an

income at this time. Tusla has advised my Department that it is aware of the concerns of FRCs regarding the loss of potential income, and has provided advice to services about additional resources and supports that may be available. This includes the Government's COVID-19 Stability Fund for community and voluntary organisations, administered by the former Department for Rural and Community Development, a package of some €35 million. The Restart Grant referred to is a matter for the former Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

Tusla has directed €70,054 towards assisting 23 FRCs respond to Covid-19 over the last few months. In addition to core funding, additional once-off funding of €618,000 is being made available in 2020 through the Dormant Accounts Fund to support maintenance costs in FRCs. Tusla is considering all applications for this Dormant Accounts fund at present and expects to advise FRCs of the outcome of their applications shortly.

### Childcare Services

766. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the management and owners of a childcare facility (details supplied) are asking parents if they want the facility to not comply with the public health requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13224/20]

767. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a childcare facility can disregard the childcare health requirements in the provision of the service; if so, the consequences of a childcare facility that disregards public health requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13225/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 766 and 767 together.

It would not be appropriate for my Department or Tusla, the independent statutory regulator for early years services, to comment on individual cases of this nature.

In line with the provisions of Regulation 23 of the Child Care Act, 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations, 2016, all registered pre-school service providers have a statutory obligation to take all reasonable measures to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of children attending their service. This includes measures to prevent and control the spread of infectious diseases, including Covid-19, within their service.

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 29 May. The guidance recommends, amongst other measures, the use of a “play pod” model to restrict 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.

Working in conjunction with the Health Surveillance Protection Centre, Tusla has also prepared and issued guidance and a self-assessment checklist to all registered providers to assist them with complying with their regulatory obligations in the safe reopening of their services in line with ongoing public health measures.

Regulatory inspections which had been suspended as a result of the recent public health restrictions, are due to recommence in early July. During the initial resumption of inspections, Tusla will assess the procedures put in place by providers to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in line with their self-assessment checklist.

Tusla will work with providers to address any identified non-compliance through the inspection process in the first instance. As statutory regulator, however, Tusla retains the power to escalate findings of non-compliance to enforcement actions where necessary, in order to safeguard the health, welfare and development of children in early years settings.

Any concerns regarding the operation of an early years service, including concerns about infection control measures, can be notified to the Unsolicited Information Office of Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate. All such concerns will be screened and assessed to determine if they fall within the remit of the Regulations. Such information will then be used to determine the focus and timing of inspections. Contact details for the Unsolicited Information Office are available on the Tusla website at: <https://www.tusla.ie/services/preschool-services/where-to-get-advice-if-i-have-a-difficulty-or-a-complaint-about-a-service/>

### **Child and Family Agency**

768. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a review of the case of persons (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will liaise with Tusla and the Ombudsman for Children in order to decide the type of review and enquiry necessary in relation to the matter. [13299/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** Thank you deputy for raising this important matter. I was very impressed by the strength of the women involved in coming forward to share the experience of the abuse they suffered at the hands of their father. Their courage is to be commended.

In looking at the question of an enquiry into the role of public officials in this matter, I have to bear in mind that not all court proceedings have concluded in this matter. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has engaged in a file review of children’s services, from files available to it the previous South Eastern Health Board and the HSE. They have confirmed there is evidence of family support and social work contact starting in the mid 1980’s. All efforts are being made to expedite this work. While findings from this work will help inform any further review/enquiry into this matter Tusla cannot account for role of Public Health Nursing, general HSE community services, teachers and AGS during this period.

I have asked to be kept informed of progress with the review.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education**

769. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will address an issue with regard to the second ECCE year for the coming term (details supplied). [13308/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I acknowledge that continuing uncertainty about the operation of the ECCE programme may be challenging for both service providers and parents. Decisions on the operation of the ECCE programme, including funding arrangements, will be announced in the coming weeks. The decisions to be made are complex and must balance a number of important issues.

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 early learning and care services.

Services are 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 when they reopen, subject to, for example, their space, room layout and staffing availability.

It must be noted that the Department is not the owner/employer of early learning and care services; they are private businesses and specific decisions on how to reopen are a matter for the individual service provider.

In saying that, my Department is working closely with the sector to address the many questions that exist in relation to reopening of services, including the issues around capacity and how the ECCE pre-school programme will operate when it recommences.

### **Child Protection**

770. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when Ireland will ratify the UN child protection protocol. [13315/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I understand that the Deputy’s intention was to refer to the Second Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. My Department has been working diligently to progress the ratification of this important treaty.

In 2019 the Department made a comprehensive submission to the Attorney General’s Office seeking confirmation as to whether Ireland was in a position to ratify the Protocol. The advice that we received stated that while Ireland is largely compliant with the terms of the Protocol, there are some outstanding issues that need to be resolved before the State can proceed to ratification.

My Department has been liaising closely with the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade since the issues fall within their remit. We hope to resolve the issues identified by the AGO as soon as possible and conclude this process by the end of 2020.

### **Child Abuse**

771. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of current and retrospective child abuse cases that have been deemed founded and unfounded, respectively by Tusla between May 2016 and June 2020, in tabular form; the number of the founded cases that have been notified to either him, An Garda Síochána or the Minister for Justice and Equality; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13376/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** The Deputy is referring to an operational matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have therefore referred the matter to Tusla, and asked that a direct response be provided to the Deputy.

## Child Safety

772. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a review of child safety measures and welfare in an organisation is requested if an allegation of retrospective child abuse within an organisation is deemed founded by Tusla; the evidence that would need to emerge to warrant such an investigation or review to be called for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13377/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** The statutory bodies with primary responsibility for child welfare and protection are Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and An Garda Síochána. Both have distinct functions, powers and methods of working. Tusla has a statutory duty under the Child Care Act 1991 to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection. If Tusla suspects that a crime has been committed and a child has been wilfully neglected or physically or sexually abused, it will formally notify AGS without delay.

Tusla assesses all child welfare and protection concerns that are reported to it. This includes assessing retrospective or historic allegations of abuse with regard to potential current risks to children. The Minister or Department is not generally notified in relation to the details or outcomes of these assessments.

Unfortunately we are aware of many examples of organisations not upholding high standards of child protection in Ireland in the past. However, a number of policy and legislative improvements have been made to child protection standards in recent years. In particular, the Children First Act 2015, which was fully commenced in 2017, provides for a number of key child protection measures, including improving child protection arrangements in organisations providing services to children.

The Act places an obligation on providers of relevant services to keep children safe from harm, to carry out a risk assessment and to develop a Child Safeguarding Statement (CSS) that outlines the policies and procedures that are in place to manage any risks identified. The Act also provides for Tusla to establish and maintain a register of non-compliance for providers who fail to provide a copy of the CSS to Tusla when requested to do so. Tusla has established a Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit (CSSCU) to support implementation of these provisions of the Act. The register of non-compliance is available on the Tusla website [www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie).

In addition, the Act provides for each Government Department to prepare a sectoral implementation plan which sets out the programme of measures either in place or planned to ensure compliance with Children First Guidance and legislation. The plans also apply to any organisation that provides a relevant service to children and receives funding from the relevant Department in that regard.

A request for any additional reviews of child protection measures in an organisation would depend on the circumstances involved and the governance relationships in place.

## Child Safety

773. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will be requesting a review of child safety measures and welfare in an organisation (details supplied) in view of an allegation of retrospective child abuse within the organisation being deemed founded by Tusla; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13378/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I refer you to your Parliamentary Question No. 746, reference number 13374/20, for the answer to this duplicate question.

### Childcare Services

774. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if childcare providers using the ECCE or the NCS schemes can avail of a separate stream of funding to cover the cost of renting a premises; and if not, if such costs should be met from their own revenue. [13381/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** My Department does not provide a funding scheme to cover rent and other business overheads of service providers, including those who provide the Department funded NCS and ECCE schemes. My Department provides subsidies to childcare care providers to reduce the fees charges to parents, or in the case of ECCE, to ensure that parents so not have to pay any fees.

Childcare is provided by private operators, 75% of whom are private sector entities, generally companies or sole traders, and 25% of whom are community based organisations. The cost of rent, staff costs and other overheads are a commercial matter for each provider.

### Childcare Services

775. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason a child (details supplied) in County Donegal was refused their after-school childcare place despite their enrolment prior to Covid-19 lockdown; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13404/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** While its not Departmental policy to comment on individual cases, I would like to bring to your attention my Department’s guidance for eligibility for childcare upon reopening, which I have included in full below.

#### Guidance on eligibility for childcare

The Government Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business allows for the phased reopening of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare services, including childminders, from 29 June. While the Roadmap initially indicated that services would resume only for the children of essential workers, this has now been widened.

It is important to note that, as Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare services are private businesses, and now that the Roadmap has extended eligibility for services, the allocation of places is a matter for the service provider. This guidance is provided to help support providers in managing allocation of places when services reopen in a situation where demand is greater than the supply available.

In the best interests of the child and families, children should, as far as possible, be enabled to return to the service they attended Pre-COVID-19. Services availing of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme (TWSCS) are contractually bound to retain places for families who used those places pre-COVID-19, until such time as the services reopen. There are significant benefits for children’s wellbeing and development in maintaining the link with their pre-COVID-19 providers of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare.

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.

If capacity is limited, services are asked to prioritise the children of health and social care workers and other frontline workers, where possible. Services are also encouraged to support:

- vulnerable children sponsored under the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) and children funded through legacy childcare schemes who are experiencing poverty, disadvantage or child welfare issues;

- children with disabilities who previously attended part or full-time early learning and care, including those preparing to start school in September; and

- children whose parents need access to childcare in order to return to work, including children of childcare practitioners.

Childcare service providers are private enterprises and therefore if there is a dispute between the parents of a child and a childcare service provider, unfortunately my Department cannot directly intervene. I would recommend that the parents in question get in contact with the provider to resolve this issue in the first instance. If a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached then I would recommend that the parents contact their local County Childcare Committee who may be in a position to provide some support with this.

### **Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries**

776. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes will be published. [13430/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman):** My predecessor received a Seventh Interim Report from the Commission of Investigation on 03 June 2020. In its short update the Commission says its final report is very close to completion but it has encountered delays as a direct result of Covid-19 restrictions. For this reason, the Commission requested an extension to complete its work in accordance with the provisions of the Commissions of Investigations Act 2004.

At its meeting on 12 June, the then Government agreed to amend the Commission's terms of reference to provide for the extension sought. The final report is now due to be delivered on 30 October 2020 at the latest.

The Deputy should note that when a Commission submits its final report there are a number of procedural matters which must be addressed before the relevant Minister could seek the approval of Government to publish the report. For this reason there will always be a time interval between receipt of such reports and the separate arrangements for their publication.

### **National Childcare Scheme**

777. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if parents that availed of subsidies under the national childcare scheme prior to Covid-19 closures will automatically qualify upon the reopening of childcare facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13438/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I am pleased to confirm that all DCYA-funded schemes, including both universal and targeted subsidies for parents, are available again to children attending Early Learning and Care (ELC) services from 29 June. This includes the National Childcare Scheme (NCS).

Therefore, ELC services that reopen from 29 June onwards will be able to facilitate the resumption of NCS subsidies for parents.

Families who already availed of NCS subsidies before the closure of services in March should contact their ELC service to make arrangements for a return to childcare. The provider can renew the registration once the level of service is agreed between the provider and the parent.

Most NCS awards last for a year and can be re-used when parents move providers or just return after a break in service. As such there is no “re-qualification” for subsidies for this group. Some award are limited to six months. There will be a small number of parents with 6 month awards who will need to apply to renew their award.

Families in possession of an NCS award, but have not yet registered their award with an ELC service should contact their service of choice to make arrangements for registering their child for a place with that service. If a family has not yet chosen an ELC service, the childcare search facility on the NCS website will be helpful with this. This can be accessed at: <https://ncs.gov.ie/en/childcare-search/>

Families who have not yet applied for the NCS or have an award that has expired will need to make an application to the NCS scheme administrator before they can register with their ELC provider. More information about this is available at: <https://ncs.gov.ie/en/application-form-guide/>

### **Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries**

778. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes has been granted an extension to complete its work due to Covid-19 restrictions; and if the disappointment of the survivors and their families arising from the latest delay to completion of the work of the Commission will be acknowledged. [13483/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** As the Deputy will see from the Commission of Investigation’s Seventh Interim Report, which my predecessor published on 12 June, the update received from the Commission highlights that its work, like every other activity in Ireland, has been affected by the restrictions imposed as a consequence of Covid-19. As a result, the Commission requested a revision of the timeframe for submitting its final report.

Shortly after my predecessor received the Report, she met with two of the Commissioners to discuss their request for additional time. Judge Murphy confirmed that the Commission had been working remotely in an attempt to complete the report by the end of June. Although the final report is well advanced, Judge Murphy advised that delays had been incurred due to the inevitable logistical challenges related to Covid-19.

At its meeting on Friday 12 June, the then Government agreed to amend the Commission’s terms of reference to provide for the extension sought. The Commission’s final report is now due to be submitted on 30 October 2020 at the latest. The Commission has engaged with hun-

dreds of former residents in its work and is attempting to comprehensively analyse information at a level beyond that ever been possible before. In agreeing to this further extension, the Government's priority is to safeguard this substantial work so that the independent Commission can comprehensively address and conclude these crucial matters as expeditiously as possible in accordance with the legislative framework. The Government considers that the public interest is best served by facilitating the Commission to produce an evidence based determination on what happened to vulnerable mothers and children in these institutions.

I know many former residents and their families are deeply disappointed with this delay. However, I also know that they will understand the overwhelming impact which Covid-19 and the associated public health restrictions have had on all our lives. My Department used existing channels of communication to ensure that former residents, their families and supporters were the first to be made aware of the new timeframe ahead of this information appearing in the media.

### **Childcare Services**

**779. Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if school age childcare will be given the same recognition as other preschool childcare services; if it will be recognised that the qualifications needed are different for preschool and early school childcare providers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13495/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman):** I fully recognise the value of both early learning and care and school-age childcare. While their roles differ, they are both of importance for children, families, society and the economy. Both pre-school and school-age services have for many years been able to take part in my Department's funding schemes, and both are included within the National Childcare Scheme. While regulations and minimum qualification requirements were introduced for pre-school services some years before their introduction for school-age services, school-age services are similarly on a journey of increasing support and progressive enhancements to quality requirements.

Since the 31st December 2016, all employees of a pre-school service who work directly with children must hold a full, major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at a minimum of Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), or a qualification deemed equivalent by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

While initial Regulations for school-age childcare came into force in February 2019, those initial Regulations did not include a minimum qualification requirement for work in school-age childcare.

First 5, the Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, includes a commitment that by 2028 all regulated school-age childcare staff will hold a minimum qualification.

The Workforce Development Plan, work on which began in mid-2019, has a number of objectives, including the identification of appropriate minimum qualification requirements for work in school-age childcare. A public consultation on school-age childcare, including on appropriate qualification requirements, was carried out in 2019. The public consultation included questions on whether different qualifications are required for practitioners working with pre-school and school-age children. Work on the Workforce Development Plan is ongoing.

## Domestic Violence Services

780. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that of the six family units in the one domestic violence emergency refuge in Cork city and county only two can operate due to social distancing; and the steps he is taking to provide additional emergency refugee spaces.

[13516/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** The Department is providing Tusla with €25.3m this year for some 60 organisations that deliver services for these victims of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence . This includes funding and coordinated supports for 21 services that provide emergency refuge and non-refuge accommodation to victims of domestic violence.

Tusla is aware of reduced capacity within some refuges, due to requirements to enforce social distancing or self-isolation measures, particularly where communal facilities may exist. To date, Tusla has provided additional funding of approximately €500,000 across DSGBV services since the commencement of the COVID-19 crisis in Ireland. To mitigate the impact of social distancing and isolation measures, an additional 49 refuge and non-refuge accommodation units for service users have been secured throughout the country.

As facilities, accommodation and arrangements are specific to each service, Tusla is working with individual organisations to address any challenges arising in maintaining essential service provision. I have requested Tusla to respond directly to the Deputy with regard to the provision of emergency refuge accommodation in the specific refuge referenced, and more generally in the Cork area.

## Domestic Violence Refuges Provision

781. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress in relation to the establishment of a refuge for victims of domestic abuse in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13526/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** Tusla currently provides support, coordination and funding to some 60 organisations around the country that deliver front line services to victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV). Tusla continues to provide funding to DSGBV service providers during the current pandemic, in line with agreed service arrangements.

Tusla has been in contact with funded organisations, including those in the Cavan/Monaghan region, in relation to a Strategic Review of Domestic Violence Accommodation to inform Tusla’s future commissioning of domestic violence emergency accommodation services, and to ensure that the evolving needs of service users are met. Tusla will carry out further engagements as the year progresses with a view to finalising the review. Future developments will be informed by the findings of the review and the recommendations of the Monitoring Committee of the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence.

Tusla emphasises that its key priority at all times is to ensure that the needs of victims are met in the best way possible, with due attention to the quality, accessibility, and outcome of services.

## Departmental Staff

782. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if his Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13542/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** My Department has worked with the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform to develop guidelines for civil service organisations (Working from Home during COVID-19 – Guidance for Civil Service Organisations), which is intended to assist civil service organisations as long as necessary to address the health and safety risks of COVID-19. These guidelines are due to issue shortly.

Officials in the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform have also commenced work on the development of a remote working policy which will address remote working in the longer term for the civil service.

## Childcare Services

783. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if his Department will reimburse parents from the first day their child attends crèche from 29 June 2020 onwards and until they are able to obtain a public services card once local Intreo offices re-open in view of the difficulties for parents obtaining MyGovIDs during the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13567/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** My Department is aware of the current situation with regard to the Public Service Card, however parents can still apply for the National Childcare Scheme without obtaining a Public Services Card. They can do so by completing a paper application form and returning by post. For information on how to apply by post, parents can contact the Parent Support Centre on 01 906 8530, Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

I would also note that parents who already hold a Public Services Card and a basic MyGovID account can still create a MyGovID verified account, and thereby complete an online application for the National Childcare Scheme. Details on how to do this can be found by logging into a MyGovID basic account, available at [www.mygovid.ie](http://www.mygovid.ie).

As such it is open parent to apply at the any stage for an NCS award through online or of-fline means.

Regarding the issue of backdating subsidies, it has always been communicated by my Department that subsidy awards are payable from the week they are claimed, and not the date of application. It is a key aspect of the scheme that all claims are paid in arrears based on the attendance of a child. As such, the child must be registered with a childcare provider and the provider must confirm that attendance. This is a key financial and governance control to ensure we are maximising the benefits of public monies and that the investment is following the child.

Further information and resources for parents are available at [www.ncs.gov.ie](http://www.ncs.gov.ie)

The closure of Intreo offices has no impact on parents availing of other childcare subsidy supports, namely the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and the Training and Employment Childcare Scheme (TEC). Subsidies are available to any family who was registered in the childcare service on March 12th from when they return to the service.

## Youth Services

784. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if youth services have been advised that their budgets are to be reviewed and funds carried over due to programmes not running during lockdown are to be recouped by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13571/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** The Deputy will be aware of the extraordinary cost to the Exchequer of the current crisis and the need for careful management of resources to maintain public services and minimise the medium to long term impact of this pandemic on the economy and on society as a whole.

Therefore, while reiterating previous assurances around the intention to continue funding to the youth sector in line with 2020 allocations, my Department wrote recently to all funded youth organisations to request their Boards and management undertake a review of their funding requirement for 2020 to identify areas where the requirement may have reduced in light of the current ongoing circumstances. In this communication it was indicated that there is no intention to apply general cuts to any youth services. The purpose of this financial review is to identify where legitimate savings are accruing due to shut downs or restrictions.

I am aware that similar reviews are being undertaken across the public service and that a number of youth organisations have already undertaken or commenced such reviews.

Specifically, my Department has asked that each youth organisation review its utilisation of State funding for 2020 to identify all instances where services are not being delivered for a period, or a reduced service is being delivered. In this context it is understood that many services are seeking to maintain full service delivery through alternate means and we have asked that this should be documented and detailed as part of this review. We are also aware that the phased resumption of full service provision may entail new costs associated with adhering to public health requirements and return to work protocols, and that these will need to be factored into any review of costs for the remainder of 2020.

In the event that any organisation considers that it has either not utilised its full allocation to date, or will require less funding for the coming period, then we are asking them to reduce Quarter 3 drawdown requests accordingly.

## Childcare Services

785. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when a crèche (details supplied) will open; the childcare arrangements made available to parents and frontline staff in particular until that time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13628/20]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** My Department does not provide early years learning and care services. Services are provided by private businesses or community organisations, and decisions on when to re-open are a matter for individual services.

I would encourage all services who have not yet reopened to contact the parents who had used their service before the Covid-19 closure and assess their demand for a service over the summer months, and to consider reopening. Services are being supported to reopen following the closure period through a €75million funding programme.

If any parents are having difficulty in accessing childcare, they should contact their local County Childcare Committees, who will provide them with advice and support. Their local CCC can be found at *myccc.ie*

### **Rural Regeneration and Development Fund**

786. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if a project (details supplied) will qualify for funding in view of its importance to the county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13038/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The second call for Category 2 applications for the Fund closed at on 28 February 2020 and there was an excellent response from all across the country, with 76 applications received.

On 25 June 2020, I announced details of 24 successful projects arising from this call. The successful projects have been allocated €13m in support from the Fund and will deliver a total investment worth €17m. To date, the Fund has now allocated €161 million in support for 134 projects across Ireland, worth a combined total of €229 million.

As part of the aforementioned announcement, the Athy Food, Skills and Drinks Hub project referred to by the Deputy was approved for funding of €476,250.

### **Rural Regeneration and Development Fund**

787. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of funding for a group (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12746/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The second call for Category 2 applications for the Fund closed on 28 February and there was an excellent response from all across the country, with 76 applications received.

On 25 June 2020, I announced details of 24 successful projects arising from this call. The successful projects have been allocated €13m in support from the Fund and will deliver a total investment worth €17m. To date, the Fund has now allocated €161 million in support for 134 projects across Ireland, worth a combined total of €229 million.

As part of the aforementioned announcement, the Cahersiveen Town Centre Regeneration Project referred to by the Deputy was approved for funding of €1,056,380.

### **Social Enterprise Sector**

788. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of social enterprises that received funding in each of the years 2016 to 2019 and to date in 2020; and the amount of funding that each received. [13103/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Since the establishment of my Department in 2017, specific supports for social enterprises have been provided through the Social Enterprise Measure of the Dormant Accounts Fund. These supports include small capital grants and funding to organisations to deliver training and mentoring

to social enterprises.

Small capital grants funding has been provided to approximately 300 organisations, while 14 organisations are being funded to deliver training and mentoring supports to up to 400 social enterprise participants. The total amount allocated under this Measure since 2017 is €6.555 million. Details of the organisations funded under the Measure are available on my Department's pages on the *Gov.ie* website.

Funding is also provided to social enterprises under for the Social Enterprise Development Fund, which was established in 2018 by Social Innovation Fund Ireland (SIFI) in partnership with Local Authorities Ireland. The Deputy received details of social enterprises supported under the Social Enterprise Development Fund in a reply to Parliamentary Question No. 940 on 16th June 2020 (Ref. 10596/20).

My Department's Community Services Programme (CSP) is based on a social enterprise model, whereby community companies and co-operatives are expected to generate a traded income from the delivery of services. This programme supports approximately 400 community companies and co-operatives at any given time. Further information on CSP and details of the projects which it supports are available on Pobal's website at <https://www.pobal.ie/programmes/community-services-programme-csp/>. The 2020 budget for CSP is approximately €46 million.

Social enterprises can also benefit from funding from my Department under a number of other programmes, including the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SI-CAP) and LEADER. These programmes are not exclusive to social enterprises so comprehensive data is not captured on their level of participation on these programmes. However, the information provided above should provide the Deputy with a good indication of the extent of funding provided to social enterprises by my Department.

### **Community Services Programme**

789. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the estimated amount it would cost in a full year if the current funding for the community services programme increased by 5%. [13285/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Departments Community Services Programme, or CSP, currently supports more than 400 community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. CSP funding is provided as a fixed annual contribution to the cost of an agreed number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions and a manager, where warranted. The CSP co-funding contribution towards employing each FTE is €19,033 per annum and €32,000 per annum for managers.

The CSP allocation for 2020 is €46.89m, an increase of 5% would cost an additional €2.34 million per annum and would result in a revised allocation of €49.23m.

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

790. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if support is available to voluntary community sporting organisations to assist them in the purchase of hand sanitiser and protective equipment and for the sanitising of facilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13294/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** 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 sporting organisations are funded from a range of different sources across different Government Departments and agencies.

My Department's Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) provides small capital grants to community groups. These grants typically fund improvements to facilities or the purchase of new equipment. The 2020 Programme was launched recently and community sporting organisations are eligible to apply. The CEP is administered by the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in each Local Authority area.

The Department gives flexibility to LCDCs to tailor the programme in each Local Authority area, so that it meets local priorities. It is recommended that applicants contact the LCDC in their area for further details.

### **Community Services Programme**

791. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when a decision will be made on a grant application made through Pobal by a community organisation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13380/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Community Services Programme, or CSP, supports community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model with funding provided as a contribution to the cost of an agreed number of full-time equivalent positions (FTEs) and a manager, where warranted.

Pobal, who manage the programme on behalf of my Department assessed the business plan from the organisation in question last year, and determined that the organisation required one-to-one business coaching to address specific issues such as financial projections, identification of need for the proposal and potential displacement issues. The organisation availed of the offer of business coaching and completed it over the 1st quarter of 2020.

The organisation in question has since submitted revised documentation to Pobal who will reengage with the organisation as soon as is practical with a view to reassessing their proposed business plan in light of social distancing requirements and the Government's Roadmap for reopening society.

Funding for new organisations is also considered in light of available resources.

### **Departmental Staff**

792. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if her Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13553/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Department of Rural and Community Development was established on 19 July 2017 to provide a renewed and consolidated focus on rural and community development in Ireland.

The Civil Service HR Division of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is currently finalising central guidance for the Civil Service on working from home. My Department

will be guided by this and will shortly finalise its own policy, in line with this central guidance.

Aside from this formal policy my Department has proactively issued guidance to all staff in relation to working from home protocols and health and safety obligations, as set out in guidance from the Health and Safety Authority and Civil Service Employee Assistance Service.

### **Social Enterprise Sector**

793. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if there is a plan in place for the survival and viability of social enterprise and funded community service programmes which provide essential services to the community, due to lost income and the added costs associated with the Covid-19 pandemic; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13709/20]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department is very much aware that many social enterprises, similar to other businesses, find themselves in financial difficulty as commercial activities have been curtailed due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. In recognition of this, my Department recently announced a number of specific support measures for social enterprises, along with community and voluntary organisations and charities. These supports, which are additional to other Government supports such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme, include:

- a €2.5 million fund to support community and voluntary groups, charities and social enterprises involved in the delivery of COVID-19 community response efforts, which was announced in April;

- a €35 million COVID-19 Stability Fund, administered by Pobal, to help organisations who saw their trading and/or fundraising income drop significantly during the crisis;

- a €5 million Government commitment to a Philanthropy Fund (Innovate Together), administered by Social Innovation Fund Ireland, which is focused on supporting responses to the crisis that require innovative and adaptive solutions.

The first tranche of funding under the Stability Fund was announced on 26th June and will provide over €10 million to 179 organisations. Further tranches will be announced over the coming weeks. Applications under the Innovate Together Fund are currently being assessed and successful applicants will be announced when this process is complete.

My Department continues to support the development of social enterprises in a number of ways, in line with the National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland (2019-2022). For example, the pilot Training and Mentoring programme announced last year is enabling 14 projects to support up to 400 social enterprise participants to enhance their capacities across a wide range of areas including leadership, marketing and business development. This pilot programme is even more important in the COVID-19 operating environment and my Department has adopted a flexible approach to ensure that the scheme meets the new challenges facing the sector.

The Community Services Programme (CSP), currently supports over 400 social enterprises and community organisations and my Department is fully committed to continuing to support those organisations. My Department put in place a 2020 Support Fund which provided an additional payment to many of these organisations for a 12 week period from 26th March 2020, ensuring that they could pay their full-time CSP supported employees a maximum of €350 net per week, with a proportionate amount for part-time CSP supported employees.

## **Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme**

794. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the eligibility criteria for the back to school allowance will be extended due to Covid-19 financial restrictions on households. [12904/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BSCFA) scheme provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the costs of clothing and footwear when children start or return to school each autumn. The scheme operates from June to September each year.

The allowance is payable in respect of eligible children between the ages of 4 and 17 in respect of whom a qualified child allowance is being paid and eligible children between the ages of 18 and 22 who are in full-time second level education and in respect of whom a qualified child allowance is being paid.

To qualify for BSCFA a person must meet a number of conditions namely:

- \* The child must meet the age criteria.
- \* The applicant must be in receipt of a qualifying payment and getting an increase in that payment for the qualified child (except in certain circumstances) in the period 1 June to 30 September.
- \* The assessable income for the household must be within prescribed limits.
- \* The applicant and the child (or children) in respect of whom the allowance is claimed must be resident in the State.

This year, the eligibility criteria for the BSCFA scheme has been extended to include the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment as a qualifying payment for the allowance.

Applications which are outside the terms of the BSCFA scheme will not qualify for payment under the BSCFA scheme. However, individuals who are refused a BSCFA payment may be considered for exceptional needs payments (ENP) under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme by the officers administering this scheme in the normal way.

Any persons who consider that they have an entitlement to an exceptional needs payment should contact the Department's Community Welfare Service.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

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

795. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if childcare providers that normally close their service during the summer months in view of the fact that they are ECCE-only should remain on the pandemic unemployment payment or revert to jobseeker's until they reopen in September 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13089/20]

832. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if childcare providers that normally close their service during the summer months and are doing so again in 2020 should remain on the pandemic unemployment payment or revert to jobseekers until they reopen in September 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

[13090/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):**

I propose to take Questions Nos. 795 and 832 together.

The COVID-19 pandemic unemployment payment was introduced as a time limited emergency measure in response to the pandemic and Government has approved the extension of this payment until 10th August. This payment is available to persons who were in employment prior to 13th March and lost their job as a result of the pandemic.

Recipients of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment can continue to receive this payment while they satisfy the conditions of the scheme, including that they remain available to take up employment, including alternative employment if it is available to them.

If a person's is unsure about their entitlement, they are advised to contact their local intreo centre to discuss their particular circumstances.

I trust that this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

### **Job Losses**

796. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she has been notified of the possible loss of jobs at an airline (details supplied); the engagement she has had with the airline; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13173/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):**

My sincere thoughts are with all employers and employees faced with the prospect of forced restructuring and redundancies at this difficult time. Many sectors and industries have been badly affected by the measures the Irish Government, like many other governments across the globe, has had to take in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is probably fair to say that sectors associated with travel, tourism and aviation have been affected more than most.

The Protection of Employment Act 1977 imposes a number of obligations on employers who are proposing collective redundancies, including an obligation under sections 9 and 10 to engage in an information and consultation process with employees' representatives and to provide certain information relating to the proposed redundancies. Section 11A of the Act provides that, where an employee believes the employer to be in breach of sections 9 or 10, they may pursue a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). It is an offence under the Act for an employer to fail to comply with sections 9 or 10.

There is also an obligation under section 12 which makes it mandatory on employers proposing a collective redundancy to notify the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection of the proposed collective redundancy. I received official notification of the proposed collective redundancies in CityJet in a letter dated 21st May 2020, which my officials inform me complied with the requirements under section 12 of the Protection of Employment Act 1977.

An employer is prohibited from issuing any notice of redundancy during the mandatory employee information and consultation period (required by the 1977 Act) and until 30 days have elapsed from the date on which the Minister has been notified. For the avoidance of doubt, the 30 day mandatory information and consultation process and the aforementioned 30 day period from the date of notification to the Minister may run concurrently.

Negotiations between employees and their employers are governed by the Industrial Relations Act 1990, which comes under the remit of my colleague the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

I do not have the legal authority to direct an outcome in the mandatory consultations between employers and employee representatives. The WRC is the organisation which is mandated to secure compliance with employment rights legislation. If employees have any concerns or complaints regarding their employment rights they should contact the Customer Service section of the WRC, who operate a telephone helpline at 1890 808090. They can provide further information in relation to employment, equality and industrial relations rights and obligations, and how to obtain redress where appropriate.

Finally, my Department's Intreo service is available to assist all workers of CityJet in terms of income supports and job-seeking over the coming weeks and months. The Department provides a detailed list of contact numbers for each Intreo centre on its website at [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

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

797. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the pandemic unemployment payment will be extended for seasonal workers and employers that did not have staff in employment during January, February or early March 2020 but would have had full staffing at present; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13265/20]

800. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if consideration has been given to the introduction of a pandemic employment payment for persons that can establish they have a pattern of seasonal work, particularly in the hospitality sector for the duration of the time they normally work each year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12700/20]

853. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the pandemic unemployment payment will be extended to those that have been consistently employed by the State Examinations Commission in recent years (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13473/20]

863. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if third-level students that had paid internships for the summer and contracts signed prior to 13 March 2020 are entitled to the pandemic unemployment payment if they have proof of a contract; and if not, her views on the steps that would remedy their financial situation and that of their families. [13622/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The COVID 19 pandemic unemployment payment was introduced as a time-limited emergency measure to meet the surge in unemployment which resulted from the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. Government has recently approved the extension of the payment up to 10th August.

The conditions for receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment 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. If a person was due to take up seasonal employment but they were not in employment immediately prior to 13th March they are not eligible to receive the pandemic unemployment payment. 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.

People who do not qualify for the emergency payment are eligible to apply for jobseekers benefit if they meet the social insurance contribution condition requirement otherwise they may apply for means tested jobseekers allowance.

Any person who is experiencing financial hardship may be eligible for financial support under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme which can include support under the exceptional or urgent needs payments.

The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Grant, payable by the Department of Education and Skills, represents the primary support for people pursuing third level education. The matter of supports for students for the forthcoming academic year should be referred to the Department of Education and Skills.

I trust this clarifies the position.

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

798. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there will be implications on pension contributions for those workers that have availed of the pandemic unemployment payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13441/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** In the exceptional circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is the intention of the Government to ensure that former employees entitled to receive the Pandemic Unemployment Payment do not have their social insurance contribution records interrupted or otherwise adversely affected. In this regard, the Department is in the process of developing legislative proposals for consideration by the Government in the near future.

I trust this clarifies the position at this time.

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

799. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if employees in receipt of the temporary wage subsidy scheme continue to accrue holiday entitlements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13682/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 sets out the key parameters around the taking of annual leave and payment of same. Section 19 of the Act provides that an employee shall be entitled to paid annual leave equal to:

(a) 4 working weeks in a leave year in which he or she works at least 1,365 hours (unless it is a leave year in which he or she changes employment),

(b) One third of a working week for each month in the leave year in which he or she works at least 177 hours, or

(c) 8 per cent of the hours he or she works in a leave year (but subject to a maximum of 4 weeks).

Under the terms of the Act, if an employee is in receipt of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (which is administered by the Revenue Commissioners), they accrue annual leave only in respect of the hours which they actually work.

The terms and conditions of individual employment contracts may provide additional specifics within those parameters such as stipulations in relation to the entitlement to extra days' leave above what is statutorily required by the Act.

An employee may present a complaint to the WRC if it appears that the employer has failed to provide the correct holiday entitlements to which the employee is entitled under the Act.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

*Question No. 800 answered with Question No. 797.*

### **Social Welfare Payments Waiting Times**

801. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the backlog in processing claims for and making non-Covid-19 related payments; her plans for dealing with this backlog; the timeline for resolving this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12739/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers, ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible.

There are no backlogs in most of the Departments scheme areas at present. All scheme areas are up to date on claim processing with the exception of the jobseekers scheme where there is a backlog, currently being worked down. It should be noted that most current applications for a jobseekers payment are already financially better off on the Covid-19 pandemic unemployment payment. Priority is being given to processing jobseeker claims for persons who are not entitled to the pandemic unemployment payment or whose circumstances are such that they are entitled to more than the €350 rate on a jobseeker's payment.

I wish to reassure the Deputy that claim processing is kept under active review, with all possible steps taken to ensure good customer service. This includes the assignment of additional resources, where available, and the review of business processes, to ensure the efficient processing of applications as required.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit**

802. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address the anomaly by which persons in receipt of a widow's pension can receive the emergency Covid-19 payment if they lose work due to restrictions but persons in receipt of a widow's pension cannot qualify for illness benefit. [12743/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment has been introduced as an 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 and Government has extended the pay-

ment until 10th August

The conditions for receipt of this emergency payment are that a person must be of working age between 18 and 66 years old, have been in employment immediately before 13th March and have lost their income from employment due to the pandemic. A self-employed person must have suffered a collapse of income and be available to take up other full-time employment if it was available, in order to qualify for the emergency payment

Some social welfare payments, for example the widow's pension scheme, make provision for people to work and remain in receipt of a full or partial payment. If a person on one of these payments, between the ages of 18 and 66, meets the condition of having lost employment, it will be possible to receive the Pandemic Unemployment Payment while continuing to receive the existing social welfare payments. The notable exceptions are Illness Benefit, Daily Expenses Allowance and Jobseeker Payments (with the exception of casuals who have lost their employment due to the pandemic and people in receipt of Short Time Work Support).

Illness Benefit is not payable if a person is also getting any of the following payments at the full rate:

- Widow's/Widower's and Surviving Civil Partners Pensions, which includes Occupational Widow's/Widower's Pension

- One-Parent Family Payment, which includes Deserted Wives Benefit, Deserted Wives Allowance and Prisoner's Wives Allowance

However, if a person is getting a reduced rate of any of the above payments, they may also get a reduced rate of Illness Benefit, so that the combined amount of both payments is not greater than the rate of Illness Benefit to which they are entitled.

I trust that this clarifies the matter.

### **Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme**

803. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the rationale for exclusively online applications for the 2020-2021 back to school allowance; and the way in which applicants with restricted literacy or no access to computers can apply for this payment. [12787/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BSCFA) scheme provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the costs of clothing and footwear when children start or return to school each autumn. The scheme operates from June to September each year.

The allowance is payable in respect of eligible children between the ages of 4 and 17 in respect of whom a qualified child allowance is being paid and eligible children between the ages of 18 and 22 who are in full-time second level education and in respect of whom a qualified child allowance is being paid.

Similar to previous years, the majority of customers are awarded BSCFA automatically. Award letters are currently issuing to these customers.

From 6 July, if customers have not received an award letter from BSCFA, the customer will need to apply for the allowance online on [www.mywelfare.ie](http://www.mywelfare.ie). If customers are experiencing issues applying online, they can contact the BSCFA section on 071 9193318 or 0818 11 11

13, where an officer can assist the customer to apply online or will issue an application form for the customer to complete.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit**

804. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason persons that are unable to work due to being high risk and are on an illness benefit payment cannot qualify for the higher rate of illness benefit of €350; and my attention has been drawn to the fact that an applicant can qualify for the higher rate of €350 for only two weeks before the payment reverts to the lower payment. [12788/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Under the Health (Preservation and Protection and other Emergency Measures in the Public Interest) Act 2020 (No. 1), 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.

The enhanced rate of Illness Benefit was brought in as a short-term public health measure and is not a long-term income support payment. It is payable for two weeks where a person is isolating as a probable source of infection of COVID-19 and up to ten weeks where a person has been diagnosed with COVID-19. Certification by a registered medical professional is required to support any claim for the special COVID-19 Illness payment.

In recognition of the concerns raised by individuals and support groups in relation to those cocooning on health grounds, the Department introduced a policy change in May. 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 completes a Certificate of Incapacity for Work. This may be paid for an extended period, depending on the person's continued eligibility.

People who are considered high risk under the HSE guidelines in relation to COVID-19 are not entitled to the enhanced Illness Benefit payment for any period unless they have been diagnosed with or informed that they are a probable source of infection of COVID-19. Where a person has been diagnosed with, or is a probable source of, infection of Covid-19, a Certificate of Incapacity for Work is completed by a medical practitioner with a specified set of codes showing the medical condition. A person who is a probable risk of infection will receive the higher rate of payment for two weeks. By the end of that period, if they have been diagnosed with Covid-19, they will be entitled to receive the higher payment for a maximum of ten weeks. However, if they have not been diagnosed with Covid-19 they will no longer be entitled to the

higher rate of payment. If they have a Certificate of Medical Incapacity after that time in respect of another condition they will receive the standard Illness Benefit payment.

The Return to Work Safely Protocol provides that if an at-risk or vulnerable worker cannot work from home and must be in the workplace, employers must make sure that they are preferentially supported to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres. However, employers should enable vulnerable workers to work from home where possible.

I trust that this clarifies the position.

### **State Pension (Contributory)**

805. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of plans to provide a top-up pension payment for those post-retirement age that are without a full social insurance record; if existing pensioners will be able to retrospectively avail of the proposed payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12854/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Further to clarification received by the Deputy's office, it appears that this query is in relation to a proposal mentioned in the draft Programme for Government. The proposals in the draft Programme for Government will need to be more formally defined before it is possible to comment on the detail of the proposals.

There is currently no provision for paying a top-up pension. The introduction of a such a payment and any related changes to the PRSI system would have to be considered in the overall policy and budgetary contexts. Any future policy decisions related to the state pension system will obviously reflect the policy priorities of the incoming Government.

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. 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.

The State Pension (Contributory) is a PRSI-based pension, financed by contributions made by current workers and their employers, and paid to pensioners, at a rate based upon their PRSI record when working. Those with few or no PRSI contributions paid over the years may alternatively qualify for the State Pension (Non-Contributory), which is a means-tested pension, financed by the Exchequer, and paid at up to 95% the maximum rate of the State Pension (Contributory). There are also significant disregards in the household means test for the State Pension (Non-Contributory). Alternatively, if their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an increase for a Qualified Adult (based on their own means), amounting up to 90% of a full rate State Pension (Contributory). The most advantageous payment for a pensioner will depend upon their individual circumstances.

Furthermore, it should be noted that there is no statutory retirement age in Ireland and the age at which employees retire is determined by the employment contract between the employer and the employee. Many such contracts may have been entered into in the context of previous state pension arrangements. However, a mandatory retirement age did not apply. Employers are legally entitled to increase the duration of the employee's employment for either one or two years, depending on when he or she plans to retire, if both parties agree. The Workplace Relations Commission has produced a code of practice on longer working, and The Irish Human

Rights and Equality Commission has also published guidance material for employees and employers who use fixed-term contracts beyond what was the normal retirement age of 65 years. Statistical data on long-term demographic changes indicate that people are living longer and healthier lives. Many of them may want to continue working after 65 and these resources can facilitate them in their choice.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

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

806. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider measures (details supplied) to inject life into the events and arts industries post Covid-19. [12875/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The COVID-19 pandemic unemployment payment was introduced as a time limited emergency measure in response to the pandemic and approval has been given to the extension of this payment until 10th August. The Government is aware that there are certain sectors which will be affected by business closures longer than others and the confirmation that this payment will be available until early August provides financial certainty to people affected at this time.

Where a person does not meet the conditions for receipt of the pandemic unemployment payment and they are unemployed for 4 days or more in a week they can apply for the social-insurance based jobseekers benefit or means tested jobseekers allowance.

A self-employed person who is continuing to operate their business at a reduced level may be eligible for support under the jobseekers allowance payment. Jobseekers Benefit for the self-employed, which I introduced last year, is a PRSI support available for self-employed people who have ceased trading. I have also recently announced the extension of the Enterprise Support Grant which will be made available to small business owners who transition from the Pandemic Unemployment Payment to re-open the business. The grant, of up to €1,000, will be payable to self-employed micro enterprises which employ fewer than 10 people, have an annual turnover of less than €1 million and are not eligible for support from the COVID 19 Business Restart Grant or other similar business reopening grants. The Department is developing the systems to put it into effect and will communicate how to access the grant in the coming weeks.

It should be noted that any person who is experiencing financial hardship may be eligible for other financial support under the means tested supplementary welfare allowance scheme including an Exceptional or Urgent needs payment.

My Department is primarily responsible for income support and many of the concerns raised in your submissions are relevant to my colleague the Minister for the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

I trust that this clarifies the position at this time.

### **Invalidity Pension**

807. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person can qualify for an invalidity pension in circumstances in which they are paying class S contributions and are self-employed; if they can continue in their work and obtain an invalidity pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12881/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Self-employed contributors have been eligible for the invalidity pension from December 2017. For the first time, this has given the self-employed access to the safety-net of State income supports if they become permanently incapable of work as a result of an illness or disability without having to go through a means test. When deciding to extend access to this benefit to the self-employed, Government wanted to ensure that it was on a similar basis to that of those in employment. This is a real advance in the level of cover available to the self-employed.

Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and for no other reason and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions. To qualify for IP a claimant must, inter-alia, have at least 260 (5 years) paid PRSI contributions since entering social insurance and 48 contributions paid or credited in the last or second last complete contribution year before the relevant date of their claim. Only PRSI classes A, E, H or S contributions are reckonable for IP purposes. Class S contributions are those paid by self-employed people.

A claimant must be regarded as permanently incapable of work, which is defined as:

incapacity for work of such a nature that the likelihood is that the claimant will be incapable of work for life

OR

an incapacity which has existed for 12 months prior to the date of claim, and where the Deciding Officer or an Appeals Officer is satisfied that the claimant is likely to be unable to work for 1 year from the date of claim.

A person in receipt of IP cannot engage in work. However, with prior written permission from the Department, a person may undertake light work for which no remuneration is or would ordinarily be payable. Should a person in receipt of IP wish to take up or resume open labour market employment, they may qualify for Partial Capacity Benefit, a social welfare scheme which allows a person to return to work or self-employment (if they have reduced capacity to work) and continue to receive a payment from the Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

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

808. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons on the pandemic unemployment payment due to have it reduced to €203 as a result of having previously earned less than €200 in wages, in receipt of child benefit. [12884/20]

811. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons on the pandemic unemployment payment due to have it reduced to €203 and in receipt of child benefit, that were not previously in receipt of another social welfare payment (details supplied). [12887/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 808 and 811 together.

I am advised that at this juncture it is not yet possible to report on the number of persons due to have their pandemic unemployment payment (PUP) adjusted from 7 July 2020. I will however provide the Deputy with the requested information as soon as it is available.

The number of people receiving the PUP continues to decrease week-on-week, and based on the payments issued on June 30th, there were 438,933 recipients. I am advised that approximately one-quarter of these recipients would have their payment reduced to €203, of which 20% would receive child benefit. Of those receiving child benefit and an expected €203 PUP, roughly three-quarters were not previously in receipt of any of the social protection payments mentioned by the Deputy. Note that this will be subject to further revisions once the payment data for 7th July 2020 becomes available.

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

809. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of women on the pandemic unemployment payment due to have it reduced to €203 as a result of having previously earned less than €200 in wages.; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12885/20]

810. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of women on the pandemic unemployment payment due to have it reduced to €203 that were not previously in receipt of another social welfare payment (details supplied). [12886/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 809 and 810 together.

I am advised that at this juncture it is not yet possible to report on the number of persons due to have their pandemic unemployment payment adjusted from 7 July 2020. I will however provide the Deputy with the requested information as soon as it is available.

The number of people receiving the pandemic unemployment payment continues to decrease week-on-week, and I am advised that based on the payments issued on June 30th, a total of 213,838 recipients were female. Approximately one-quarter of female recipients would have their payment reduced to €203 and the vast majority of these (90%) are not in receipt of the payments mentioned by the Deputy. Note that this will be subject to further revisions once the payment data for 7th July 2020 becomes available.

*Question No. 811 answered with Question No. 808.*

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

812. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of the pandemic unemployment payment to the end of 2020. [12888/20]

813. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of the pandemic unemployment payment if it were maintained at €350 for all those availing of the scheme to the end of 2020. [12889/20]

814. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated difference in cost of leaving the pandemic unemployment payment at current levels to the end of 2020, compared to reducing it to €203 for those previously earning less than €200 in wages from 29 June 2020. [12890/20]

815. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of the pandemic unemployment payment for July 2020. [12891/20]

816. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of the pandemic unemployment payment for July 2020 if it was maintained at €350 for all recipients. [12892/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 812 to 816, inclusive, together.

Following a recent Government Decision, the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) has been extended to week-commencing 10th August 2020. The performance of the labour market in the weeks and months ahead, including the capacity of employers to respond to the phased return to work following the Covid-19 lockdown, and the level of any resulting residual unemployment, remains uncertain.

These estimates are informed by the forecast for unemployment in the Stability Programme Update, published in April 2020. In that respect, they are subject to change as labour market and payment trends develop.

By week-ending Friday, 14th August 2020, the PUP scheme will have cost an estimated €3.3 billion.

The estimated cost of PUP in July 2020 is approximately €450 million. The cost of maintaining PUP payments at €350 a week for those earnings less than €200 a week is estimated at an additional €53 million in July.

The cost of PUP in the period between August and December 2020 will depend on the ongoing suppression of the Covid-19 virus and on progress in reopening the economy and society. Both of these factors will determine the extent of labour market recovery between now and the year-end and the approach that the Government will take with respect to what further changes, if any, may be made to the PUP. These are matters that will be considered during the coming weeks and the estimated cost of PUP to the year-end will be determined as part of that process.

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

817. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if declarations of income from cash tips will be accepted in assessing income for the purposes of the pandemic unemployment payment. [12893/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** On Friday 5th June the Government approved the extension of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment until 10th August and announced a two-level payment structure to link the payment to gross prior earnings. This change to the payment structure ensures that the rate is fair and targeted.

Where a person's gross weekly earnings were €200 or higher there will be no change to their rate of payment. If a person's gross weekly earnings were under €200 the rate of the pandemic unemployment payment will be adjusted to €203. This change will take effect in payments made from Tuesday 7 July.

Tips are treated as reckonable earnings and must be declared on tax returns to the Revenue Commissioners. The earnings details reported by the Revenue Commissioners will be used as the basis to determine the appropriate rate applicable for the Pandemic Unemployment Payment.

I trust this clarifies the position.

### Redundancy Payments

818. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount paid under the redundancy payment scheme and under previous similar schemes in each year of their operation in tabular form; and the amount recovered by her Department. [12940/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Entitlement to a redundancy payment is defined under the Redundancy Payments Act. It is the employer's responsibility to pay statutory redundancy payments to eligible employees.

In situations where an employer is unable to pay these entitlements due to financial difficulties or insolvency an application for payment under the Redundancy Payments Scheme may be submitted to the Department. The Department will make the statutory redundancy payment to eligible employees on behalf of the employer.

The Redundancy Payments Scheme is funded from the Social Insurance Fund (SIF). When such a redundancy payment is made from the fund, a debt is raised against the employer. The Department will engage with employers to establish their financial situation on a case by case basis and seeks to agree a debt recovery plan, including repayments by instalment, where appropriate. This ensures that the scheme takes into account both an employer's ability to pay redundancy payments and that the Social Insurance Fund can be reimbursed in due course.

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation administered the scheme up until 2011 when responsibility for same transferred to this Department. Up to 2011, the scheme provided a rebate of 60 per cent to employers who provided statutory redundancy payments to their employees. This was reduced to 15 percent in 2012 and abolished from 2013. Rebates to employer is included in total expenditure but rebates are not recoverable and the table below reflects the differences.

Expenditure and recoveries for the redundancy payments scheme from 2010 - 2018 as recorded in the Social Insurance Fund financial statements is as follows, the figures for 2019 are estimates:

Year	Total Expenditure	Expenditure Excluding Rebates	Recovered
2010	€469.96m	€40.86m	€3.24m
2011	€311.98m	€41.48m	€3.69m
2012	€301.76m	€134.32m	€4.09m
2013	€126.10m	€76.59m	€5.24m
2014	€ 64.61m	€58.51m	€7.93m
2015	€ 34.92m	€32.76m	€5.58m
2016	€31.02m	€30.99m	€8.28m
2017	€23.49m	€23.486m	€5.38m
2018	€18.91m	€18.91m	€7.36m
2019	€26.82m	€26.82m	€10.1m

### Disability Allowance

819. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12973/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this gentleman on 22 May 2020. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual disability allowance claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

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

820. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if high risk persons, that is, those cocooning on medical grounds, will no longer be eligible for the pandemic unemployment payment once their workplace reopens; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that this contradicts the stated health advice for such high risk persons to stay at home; her plans to rectify this anomaly; the status of her discussions with the Minister for Health on this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12974/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The overall approach to Covid-19 is the position as agreed at Government which involves discussion among all Government Ministers including the Minister for Health.

There are a range of income supports in place to support high risk persons that are cocooning and are in line with the stated health advice.

The enhanced illness benefit payment, payable to €350 per week, 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.

Where an employee is unable to return to the workplace as they are medically vulnerable and are considered very high risk or they need to cocoon for longer on the advice and certification 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 payable at €203 per week for a single person. Increases may also be paid for qualifying adults and children.

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. The government has encouraged employers to support workers with leave requests at this difficult time and clearly those with underlying conditions should be facilitated where possible. The Return to Work Safely Protocol provides that if an at-risk or vulnerable worker cannot work from home and must be in the workplace, employers must make sure that they are preferentially supported to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres. However, employers should enable vulnerable workers to work from home where possible.

Any person who is experiencing financial hardship may be eligible for financial support under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme which includes access to exceptional and

urgent needs payment.

I trust that this clarifies the position.

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

821. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when more than four weeks' outstanding pandemic unemployment payments will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12975/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My 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 to accurately calculate any arrears.

Unfortunately the current circumstances mean that it will be a number of months before my Department will be able to fully resolve the arrears issue. While this is not ideal I can assure you that all cases will be examined and where arrears arise they will be processed and applicants will be notified.

In the case of the person concerned there is no need for him to do anything further as my Department will contact him when his arrears are processed. Further updates will also be available on [www.gov.ie/deasp](http://www.gov.ie/deasp).

If the person concerned is experiencing financial difficulties in the interim, 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 contact details for this service are by phone at 01 6016360.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

### **Disability Allowance**

822. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 1066 of 3 June 2020, if, as already indicated a review of the applicant's means will be undertaken with a view to increasing their underpayment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12976/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Following a successful appeal the person concerned was awarded a reduced rate of disability allowance (DA) with effect from 11 November 2015.

A review can be requested by the person concerned by writing directly to the DA section outlining the reasons for the request. On submission of this request this lady's means will be re-examined.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance**

823. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if jobseekers allowance will be made payable to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12979/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** According to the records of my Department, the person concerned submitted an application for a jobseeker's allowance payment with effect from 30/3/2020. This application was awarded and the first payment was made available in the person's nominated bank account on 18/6/2020. This payment totalled included all arrears due for the period 30/3/2020-23/6/2020.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

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

824. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to extend Covid-19 payments to support high risk persons that must continue to follow public health advice and cocoon and stay at home until the official advice changes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12984/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** 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:

- (i) who is diagnosed with COVID-19, or
- (ii) who is a probable source of infection of COVID-19 and is self-isolating – such persons will have a certificate of incapacity from 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.

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.

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 provides a certificate of incapacity stating 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 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.

The Return to Work Safely Protocol provides that if an at-risk or vulnerable worker cannot work from home and must be in the workplace, employers must make sure that they are preferentially supported to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres. However, employers should enable vulnerable workers to work from home where possible.

In general, if people have additional expenses related to their illness or they are struggling financially, they can apply for Supplementary Welfare Allowance which is a means-tested payment.

I trust that this clarifies the position.

### **Carer's Allowance**

825. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of increasing the means test threshold for entitlement to carer's allowance in €50 intervals up to €950 per week in tabular form. [12985/20]

827. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of increasing the means test threshold for entitlement to carer's allowance in €50 intervals up to €950 per week in tabular form. [13044/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 825 and 827 together.

The Government acknowledges the crucial role that family carers play and is fully committed to supporting carers in that role. This commitment is recognised in both the Programme for Government and the National Carers' Strategy.

The main income supports to carers provided by my Department are Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit and the Carer's Support Grant. Combined spending on these payments to carers in 2020 is expected to exceed €1.3 billion.

The means test for Carer's Allowance is one of the most generous in the social protection

system. Currently €332.50 of gross weekly income is disregarded in the calculation of means for a single person; the equivalent for someone who is married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting is €665 of combined gross weekly income.

It has not been possible to provide all of the €50 incremental estimates as requested within the time-frame allowed for response to this PQ. Using the ESRI SWITCH microsimulation model it has been estimated that the cost of increasing the current disregard for a couple of €665 by €50 to €715 is €15.08 million. However, allowing for income tax offsets, net expenditure for this increase is estimated to be around €11.59 million per year.

The cost of increasing the couple disregard from €665 to €950 was also examined using the ESRI SWITCH model and estimated at total cost of €90.23 million per year. Allowing for income tax offsets, net expenditure for this increase is estimated to be around €67.97 million per year.

The remaining estimates requested will be supplied to the Deputy shortly.

Changes to schemes are considered in an overall budgetary and policy context and from an evidence based perspective. Some 86% of the current recipients of Carer's Allowance have no means or means of less than €7.60 per week and would not benefit by an increase in the disregard.

Carers who would benefit from an increased disregard would be in higher income households. Given the need to target available resources fairly and equitably to those in most need, I have no plans to change the means conditions for Carer's Allowance at this juncture. While I will continue to seek to improve the supports available for carers, any changes must be considered in an overall budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance**

826. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied). [13039/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Following a successful appeal, this lady has been awarded disability allowance (DA) with effect from 5 June 2019. The first payment will be made by her chosen payment method on 1 July 2020.

Arrears of payment due, will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments (if applicable).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

*Question No. 827 answered with Question No. 825.*

### **Death Certificates**

828. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the protocols for informing her Department following the death of a pension recipient; the persons from which her Department accepts this information from prior to the issuance of

a death certificate to the next of kin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13047/20]

829. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the regulations which govern the recouping of pension overpayments following the death of a pension recipient; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13048/20]

830. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the procedure followed by her Department for recoupment of pension overpayments following the death of a pension recipient; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13049/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 828 to 830, inclusive, together.

The Civil Registration Act 2004 places a legal obligation on the relatives, and other named parties in the absence of a relative, to register the death of a person and to do this within three months of the person dying. Once a death is registered, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is automatically informed of the death and any social welfare entitlements in payment will be stopped.

The deceased person's next of kin or personal representatives should also notify my Department of the death directly, by telephone or in writing, pending issuance of the death certificate. The person's payment can thus be suspended for review of the pension claim, not only to minimise potential overpayments of pension, but also to ascertain if further payments are due to the next of kin, where there may be uncollected payments at date of death or where there may be an entitlement to six weeks' payment after death to a surviving spouse, civil partner or cohabitant.

Every effort is made to ensure that overpayments do not occur but, where they occur, they are regarded as debts to the Exchequer and my Department is obligated to recover the amounts due. The Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended) makes provision for the recovery of amounts overpaid on any scheme, which remain outstanding at the time of their death, from the deceased person's estate. My Department does not apply interest or penalties on the amounts owing.

Sections 335(a) and (b) of the Act provide that any benefit or assistance overpaid is repayable and that this obligation extends to any other person to whom the benefit was paid on behalf of that person, or the personal representative of that person. In general, the personal representative or the solicitor of the deceased person's estate will contact my Department to arrange settlement of the outstanding overpayment. In every case the value of the estate is reduced by the funeral and legal expenses for which the estate is liable and recovery of the overpayment is then sought from the remaining assets. Where insufficient assets are available to repay the outstanding sums, my Department has powers to consider the write-off or write-down of the balance of the outstanding overpayment to reflect the circumstances.

Posthumous overruns of pension or other social welfare payments remain the property of my Department. Section 340 of the Act requires a financial institution to refund to my Department payments credited to the account of an intended beneficiary after date of death. On receipt of a written request from my Department, if the financial institution is unable to refund the full amount of the posthumous overpayment, the amount outstanding may be requested from the personal representatives of the deceased.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy. If he has a particular case in mind or if there are particular circumstances which he would like to bring to my attention, the matter can be fully investigated by my Department.

### Community Employment Schemes

831. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding community employment supervisors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13088/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Community Employment Scheme (CE) is an active labour market programme designed to provide eligible long-term unemployed people and other disadvantaged persons with an opportunity to engage in useful work within their communities on a temporary, fixed term basis.

The programme is delivered through independent CE sponsoring bodies. The contract agreement between the Department and the CE sponsoring body establishes their role as an independent contractor, responsible for all purposes and all persons recruited by them.

CE supervisors are not employed by the Department and have always been employees of CE sponsoring bodies which operate in the community and voluntary sector.

The Department provides funding for CE supervisor positions up until the State Pension age which is currently 66.

There are 50 CE supervisors who have reached, or will reach, the State Pension age of 66 during 2020. They are broken down by county as follows:

COUNTY	Number
CAVAN	1
CORK	5
DONEGAL	1
DUBLIN	9
GALWAY	5
KERRY	6
KILDARE	1
KILKENNY	2
LAOIS	1
LIMERICK	3
LONGFORD	2
LOUTH	3
MAYO	3
MEATH	1
OFFALY	2
TIPPERARY	2
WATERFORD	1
WESTMEATH	2
	50

*Question No. 832 answered with Question No. 795.*

### Widow's Pension

833. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a widows' contributory pension claim in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [13094/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The person concerned has been awarded a widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory) pension at the weekly rate of €202.90 with effect from the 29th May 2020. Payment of pension will commence at her nominated Post Office from the 3rd July 2020. She will also receive arrears of pension due from the 29th May 2020 on that same date at her nominated Post Office.

A decision letter to that effect has been posted to her home address.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

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

834. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the financial impact of old age pensioners unable to claim the pandemic unemployment payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13110/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment is a time limited payment available to people age between 18 and up to 66 years, and the age range is consistent with other jobseeker and social protection income supports paid to working age persons. People aged 66 years and over are provided for within the Social Protection income support framework through the State Pension, either the contributory State pension based on PRSI contributions or the non-contributory means tested pension.

A person in receipt of the State contributory pension can retain all of their State pension as well as their employment income and retain that pension payment if they lose employment income, thus guaranteeing an income support. 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. A person may also be entitled to an increase in respect of a qualified adult, subject to the means of the qualified adult. The

maximum weekly rate of payment for a State Contributory pensioner in a two person household with an adult dependent who is over 66 years is €470.80, significantly higher than the temporary Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment.

Persons in receipt of the non-contributory or 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 for 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. A person may be entitled to claim for an increase in respect of a qualified adult up to age 66 years depending on the specific circumstances. The maximum rate of payment for the non-contributory pension for a two person household is €393.60.

People aged over 66 may also be entitled to a range of ancillary supports that are aligned

to the particular circumstances of older people and are significantly more valuable than those generally available to the working age. These include free travel, fuel allowance, household benefits package (gas/electricity) and living alone allowance.

A person of any age who is experiencing financial hardship may access assistance under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme including Exceptional and Urgent Needs Payments.

I trust this clarifies the position.

### **Public Services Card**

835. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when face-to-face meetings for the public services card will resume for those applying for SUSI but do not have a card and cannot organise the face-to-face meeting to receive one; if there is an alternative in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13129/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** 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 PSC to get one.

My Department has been moving towards a resumption of the SAFE registration process on a phased basis in recent weeks and this is being done in accordance with all relevant HSE and Government guidelines to ensure the health and safety of the Department's customers and staff. I would expect that SAFE registration will re-commence in all Intreo Centres over the coming weeks.

While it is not currently possible for a student to obtain a PSC for the purpose of applying for a student grant to Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) via a verified MyGovID account, online applications for a grant can still be made by setting up a SUSI account on *www.susi.ie*.

Any student setting up a SUSI account will need to know their Personal Public Service Number (PPS Number) - this can be found on their Medical Card or GP Visit Card, European Health Insurance Card, Drugs Payment Scheme Card, payslips they may have received from their employer, if they are working, or on correspondence from the Revenue Commissioners or my Department.

Any student who cannot find their PPS Number can contact my Department at 1890 927 999.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Household Benefits Scheme**

836. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of increasing the electricity or gas allowance from €35 per month to €42 per month under the household benefits package. [13142/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):**

The household benefits package (HHB) comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free television licence. My Department will spend approximately €264 million this year on HHB for over 461,000 customers. The package is generally available to people living in the State aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to some people under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments.

The estimated full year cost of increasing the electricity and gas allowance element of the HHB package from €35 to €42 per month would be in the region of €39 million in 2021. This estimate is based on the increase being implemented from January 2021. Further increased costs would obviously also arise in future years, related to the numbers then receiving HHB.

Any decision to enhance the HHB package or to increase the electricity and gas aspect of the package would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

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

837. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if consideration has been given to providing income supports for taxi drivers that are returning to work as the lockdown comes to an end in the context of diminished demand for their services in the next few months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13154/20]

851. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if concerns (details supplied) raised in relation to the events industry will be addressed; if further supports will be made available for freelance and self-employed workers in the sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13423/20]

856. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will continue the pandemic unemployment payment into 2021 in circumstances in which certain seasonal sectors of the economy have passed their season; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13531/20]

867. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if artists will be allowed to take up short-term projects and work to remain on the pandemic unemployment payment in view of the fact the sector will not open properly until 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13708/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):**

I propose to take Questions Nos. 837, 851, 856 and 867 together.

The COVID-19 pandemic unemployment payment was introduced as a time limited emergency measure in response to the pandemic and approval has been given to the extension of this payment until 10th August. The Government is aware that there are certain sectors which will be affected by business closures longer than others and the confirmation that this payment will be available until early August provides financial certainty to people affected at this time.

Where a person does not meet the conditions for receipt of the pandemic unemployment payment and they are unemployed for 4 days or more in a week they can apply for the social-insurance based jobseekers benefit or means tested jobseekers allowance.

A self-employed person who is continuing to operate their business at a reduced level may be eligible for support under the jobseekers allowance payment. Jobseekers Benefit for the self-employed, which I introduced last year, is a PRSI support available for self-employed people who have ceased trading. I have also recently announced the extension of the Enterprise Support Grant which will be made available to small business owners who transition from the Pandemic Unemployment Payment to re-open the business. The grant, of up to €1,000, will be payable to self-employed micro enterprises which employ fewer than 10 people, have an annual turnover of less than €1 million and are not eligible for support from the COVID 19 Business Restart Grant or other similar business reopening grants. The Department is developing the systems to put it into effect and will communicate how to access the grant in the coming weeks.

It should be noted that any person who is experiencing financial hardship may be eligible for other financial support under the means tested supplementary welfare allowance scheme including an Exceptional or Urgent needs payment.

I trust that this clarifies the position at this time.

### **Social Welfare Overpayments**

838. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will review a decision to seek recovery of an alleged overpayment in the case of a person (details supplied) on the basis that the applicant did not fully understand the significance of their response to the questions regarding eligibility of payment; if this notice is acceptable grounds to appeal against the decision; if an oral hearing can be arranged in respect of the case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13164/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department wrote to the person concerned on 10/02/2020 and on 28/05/2020 in relation to a review of entitlement to jobseeker's allowance, requesting additional information in order to complete this review. A revised decision and assessment of an overpayment was issued on the 18/6/2020 on the basis of the information available to my Department. The person concerned was advised of her right to request a review of this decision and/or appeal the decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office outlining the grounds for her appeal and including any facts or evidence in support of her case.

It is open to the person concerned to appeal the decision in writing within 21 days of the date of the Deciding Officer's decision. On receipt of a request for a review/appeal my Department can begin the review/appeals process.

This notice cannot be accepted as an appeal on behalf of the person concerned. The person concerned has been supplied with an appeal form. This should be completed and returned to the Maynooth Branch Office or to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office, D'Olier House, D'Olier Street, Dublin 2. Oral hearings are a matter for the Social Welfare Appeals Officer to decide upon taking into account all the circumstances of the case.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

### **Carer's Allowance**

839. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which carer's allowance payment levels have been affected by the pan-

demographic support payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13166/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

Payment rates for Carer's allowance have not been affected by pandemic support payments. The number of people in receipt of CA at the end of May 2020 was 87,270. This number has increased from 81,831 at the end of May 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

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

840. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the updated Covid-19 payment for self-employed persons is not calculated over a two-year period similar to that used for PRSI workers (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13169/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** On 5th June the Government approved the extension of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment until 10th August. From 29th June a two-level payment structure was introduced to link the pandemic unemployment payment level to gross prior earnings or income. The majority of recipients will not be impacted by these changes as it is estimated that approximately three-quarters of recipients will continue to receive the €350 rate of payment until 10 August.

Where a person's previous gross weekly earnings were €200 or higher there will be no change to their rate of PUP payment. If a person's previous gross weekly earnings were under €200 the rate of their Pandemic Unemployment Payment will be adjusted to €203. This is equivalent to the full personal rate of Jobseeker Benefit.

For self-employed people their gross average weekly income for 2018 will be used to calculate the rate of the pandemic unemployment payment, which is the last tax year for which complete data on self-employed income is available.

I trust that this clarifies the matter.

### **State Pension (Contributory)**

841. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which a person (details supplied) that has total combined contributions here and in Germany that would yield a maximum State pension contributory here can lose out to the extent detailed; and her plans to alter the method of calculating such contributions to ensure such persons do not lose out in the future. [13193/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The person concerned applied for State pension (contributory) on 2 October 2018, in advance of reaching pension age in June 2019. According to the records of my Department, they have a total of 389 paid full-rate Irish social insurance contributions. Since their contributions fall short of the requisite 520 paid full-rate contributions, they do not qualify for standard State pension (contributory) based solely on their Irish social insurance record.

Under European Union regulations, the insurance records of other Member States can be combined to satisfy the 520-contribution condition and give entitlement to a proportional or pro rata pension. The person's Irish and EU (German and UK) contributions were combined to establish their entitlement to an EU pro rata State pension (contributory). They have 2,209 contributions and credits, composed of 389 Irish paid full-rate contributions, 36 Irish credited contributions, and 1,784 EU contributions.

The rate of entitlement is based on the proportion of Irish full-rate social insurance contributions to the person's total combined Irish and EU social insurance contributions. The greater the number of Irish contributions paid by a person, the higher their weekly rate of EU pro rata State pension entitlement. Conversely, a greater amount of full-rate EU contributions would yield a lower rate of pro rata pension.

The person's pension entitlement has been calculated correctly under the provisions of both Irish and European Union legislation. How their entitlements to pensions in Germany and the UK are calculated is a matter for the pension authorities in those countries.

The person concerned qualified for an EU pro rata State pension (contributory) at the current weekly rate of €47.80 and was notified in writing of this decision on 29 April 2019. They were provided with a copy of their social insurance record on which the decision was based. The person appealed this decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office. They will be notified in writing of the outcome of the Appeals Officer's review.

Social security provisions have existed in EU law for more than 30 years, and are contained in Regulations (EC) No 883/2004 and 987/2009. As such, Ireland and other EU Member States are bound to abide by these regulations as they are applied to pension payments. Social insurance contributions made in other EU countries may be used to determine eligibility for contributory pensions, but cannot be used to increase the rate of payment. Any changes to this system would have a significant impact on the Social Insurance Fund and consequently the Exchequer.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Benefits**

842. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her Department registers the number of self-employed musicians accessing welfare supports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13202/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The information sought by the Deputy in respect of the number of self employed musicians accessing welfare supports is not available to the Department.

### **Fuel Allowance**

843. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a fuel allowance application by a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13213/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Fuel allowance is a means-tested payment which aims to help householders on long-term social welfare payments with their heating costs during the winter season. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

The applicant must satisfy a number of eligibility conditions, which include being in receipt of a qualifying payment, satisfying a means test and living alone or only with other qualifying person(s). The fuel allowance means test is linked to the maximum rate of the state pension (contributory). The applicant and their spouse can have a combined weekly household income of €100.00 above the maximum rates for state pension (contributory) and Increase for qualified adult and still be eligible for a fuel allowance.

The person concerned applied for fuel allowance with their State pension (contributory). The claim was disallowed on means grounds. On review, it has been decided that the customer was entitled to fuel allowance.

The customer will receive their fuel allowance to their designated bank account in mid-July, fully backdated to their 66 birthday (25/3/2019).

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance**

844. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a review of the carer's allowance is planned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13240/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government acknowledges the crucial role that family carers play and is fully committed to supporting carers in that role. This commitment is recognised in both the Programme for Government and the National Carers' Strategy.

The main income supports to carers provided by my Department are Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit and the Carer's Support Grant. The projected expenditure on Carer's Allowance in 2020 is approximately €919 million. Combined spending on all payments to carers in 2020 is expected to exceed €1.3 billion.

I do not plan to carry out a review of the Carer's Allowance payment at this time. As part of the debate on the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2018, the then Minister agreed that the Department would carry out a review on the Carer's Allowance payment. Subsequently a comprehensive policy review of Carer's Allowance was prepared by my Department and laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 28 August 2019 and is available on the Oireachtas website ([here](#)).

In addition, on 15 August 2019 the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform also published a Spending Review of Carer's Supports, including Carer's Allowance. Among its key findings was that of the €1.04bn spent on Carer's Support Programmes in 2018, Carer's Allowance accounted for 77% of total support spend on carers.

I can assure the Deputy that the Government is very aware of the key role family carers play in society and will continue to keep the range of supports available to carers under review in order to provide support and recognition for carers.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

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

845. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive payment for four weeks of arrears for the pandemic unemployment payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13281/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Department is aware that many people may be due arrears for the pandemic unemployment payment. However, the circumstances in each case are different. As a result, considerable work and resources will be needed to deal with each of these. That can only begin once the payment processing we're currently engaged in takes less time and resources.

Unfortunately the current circumstances mean that it will be a number of months before the Department will be able to fully address the arrears issue.

The person concerned should contact their community welfare officer if they have a requirement for assistance.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance**

846. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision has been made on a review of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13306/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 4 June 2020. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 15 June 2020. The case was referred on 25 June 2020 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.

### **Data Protection**

847. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which data is protected in cases in which a recipient is switched from one payment to another, for example, from jobseeker's benefit to jobseeker's allowance and so on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13390/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department administers over 70 schemes and has the legal basis to collect and process personal data for the administration of these schemes.

The Department has also a legal basis to collect personal data for a specific reason and use it for another compatible purpose. This is because the Department provides a wide range of related services and it would be impractical for the Department, and inconvenient for the person, if customers were repeatedly asked for the same information.

An example of this is the information that may be supplied by a person for a Jobseekers claim. This information may be used to later provide education or training supports or supports such as the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance or the Fuel Allowance. In this way, the Department is better able to help the person with their income needs and to progress from dependency on a welfare payment into employment.

Another example is that information that may be provided by a person for a State Pension might be used to allow the customer to receive a free-travel pass or a household benefits package.

My Department takes data protection obligations very seriously. In order to protect the personal data of its customers across all the schemes, the Department has in place a set of corporate data protection policies, standards, procedures and guidelines governing the use of computer systems and customer data.

### Jobseeker's Benefit

848. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons aged 65 years of age that claimed jobseeker's benefit in each month of 2019 and in each month to date in 2020, in tabular form. [13417/20]

849. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons aged 65 years of age that claimed jobseeker's allowance in each month of 2019 and in each month to date in 2020, in tabular form. [13418/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 848 and 849 together.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of persons aged 65 years of age that claimed jobseeker's allowance and jobseeker's benefit in each month of 2019 and in each month to date in 2020 is detailed in the attached tabular statement.

#### Tabular statement attached/.....

The number of persons aged 65 years of age or over in receipt of a jobseeker's allowance and jobseeker's benefit payment in each month of 2019 and in each month to date in 2020.

	Jobseekers Allowance 2019	Jobseekers Allowance 2020	Jobseekers Benefit 2019	Jobseekers Benefit 2020
January	2,723	2,443	2,771	2,639
February	2,740	2,425	2,758	2,578
March	2,730	2,324	2,682	2,527
April	2,700	2,216	2,646	2,360
May	2,641	2,209	2,601	2,315
June	2,660		2,566	
July	2,632		2,695	
August	2,613		2,579	

	Jobseekers Allowance 2019	Jobseekers Allowance 2020	Jobseekers Benefit 2019	Jobseekers Benefit 2020
September	2,590		2,601	
October	2,578		2,604	
November	2,550		2,592	
December	2,530		2,581	

### JobPath Programme

850. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 810, 811 and 812 of 23 June 2020, when the report referenced will be finalised; and when it will be published or otherwise made available to members of Dáil Éireann. [13419/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department engaged with the consultants in December 2019 to assist in reviewing the existing public employment services and advise on the design and development of the future public employment services including the public tendering of contracted public employment services. Their draft report is expected to be finalised shortly.

Once finalised, the publication of the report will be dependent on the timing of any competitive procurement competition in relation to the provision of contracted public employment services to my Department.

*Question No. 851 answered with Question No. 837.*

### State Pension (Contributory)

852. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on an increase for a qualified adult State pension (contributory) application submitted by a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in making a decision on the application in view of the fact that this application is ongoing for at least one year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13462/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** An increase for qualified adult (IQA) is a means-tested increase which may be payable with the State pension (contributory). It can be awarded to a person whose spouse/civil partner/co-habitant is being wholly or mainly maintained by them, and where that qualified adult's personal means from any source do not exceed a means test income limit, based on the means held solely or jointly by the qualified adult.

The person concerned applied for the Increase for qualified adult on 17 May 2019. Additional information regarding means was requested on 14 August 2019. Since the information was not provided, the application was disallowed. Written notification of this decision issued to the person concerned on 18 October 2019.

The person concerned submitted a new application for IQA on 29 October 2019. Their claim was referred to a Social Welfare Inspector to establish their spouse's means.

IQA has now been awarded from 17 May 2019 at the maximum weekly rate payable for a qualified adult aged under 66 years with nil assessable means. Arrears and payment will issue

to the designated bank account for Friday, 3 July 2020.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 853 answered with Question No. 797.*

### **Carer's Allowance**

854. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the carer's allowance of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13481/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 14 October 2019.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that although a certain level of care was being provided the level involved did not amount to full-time care.

The person concerned was notified on 31 October 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. Following this review the decision remained unchanged.

The person concerned was notified on 10 June 2020 of the outcome of the review, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes**

855. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will reinstate funding for a community employment supervisor and 17 part-time employees at a project (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13491/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The sponsors of Belvedere Youth Club (BYC) Community Employment (CE) Scheme were previously in receipt of funding from my Department up to 08/02/2019. The CE Scheme had experienced ongoing difficulties in filling participant places, having a maximum of 3 participants in situ for a prolonged period of time.

Officials of my Department met with the BYC CE sponsoring board on a number of occasions and offered assistance to address their participant recruitment needs. When the CE scheme was not successful in increasing participant numbers, my Department offered to facilitate the retention of the existing participants within the CE scheme by the means of an amalgamation with another CE sponsor. Support was also offered to BYC in assisting the CE Supervisor to secure a position with alternative CE schemes. Both of these offers were declined by BYC.

To ensure the current BYC CE participants maintained their places on CE, my Department with the cooperation of BYC, arranged for their transfer to alternative CE schemes. The 3 remaining CE participants officially transferred to alternative CE schemes on 08/02/2019. It is the understanding of my Department that BYC secured alternative funding which assisted them in the employment of the Supervisor.

In order to re-qualify for Community Employment Programme funding and a CE Supervisory grant, a minimum of 15 CE participants is required for the scheme. If the sponsors wish to be reconsidered for funding they will be required submit a new 3 year application for the Community Employment Programme.

A copy of the 3 Year Application form, Guidelines for Completing of a New 3 Year Application form and the Community Employment Procedures Manual, can be issued to the Sponsors if required.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

*Question No. 856 answered with Question No. 837.*

### **State Pension (Contributory)**

**857. Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when she will facilitate women forced to leave their employment due to the marriage rule to avail of contributory pensions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13536/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The marriage bar describes a rule that existed in most of the public service, and some private sector employments, where women were required to leave their employment upon marriage. As it was a rule rather than law, married women could either return to work or take up other work, and many did.

Most public servants recruited prior to 1995 are not entitled to the State pension, regardless of gender and marital status. Therefore, the marriage bar would not generally have impacted on State pension entitlement, as they would not have qualified for that payment had they remained in public sector employment. The implications it had for public service pensions are matters for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

A person is required to have a minimum of 520 paid reckonable PRSI contributions in order to qualify for the State Pension (Contributory). The actuarial value of the State Pension is estimated at over €300,000 which requires people who claim a contributory pension to have made at least 10 years of paid contributions over 50 years of a working age life.

When the Interim Total Contributions Approach (TCA) was introduced in 2018 it included provision for the HomeCaring Periods Scheme which fundamentally changed the entitlement of many who spent time out of the workforce caring for others. It, for the first time, acknowledged home caring periods prior to 1994 and provides for up to 20 years of home caring periods to be considered. Those who have a 40 year record of paid and credited social insurance contributions, subject to a maximum of 20 years of credits / homecaring periods, qualify for a maximum contributory pension where they satisfy the other qualifying conditions for the scheme. Arising from this initiative, the Department reviewed over 94,000 cases resulting in over 38,000 receiving an increased pension payment. Since April 2019 all new State (Contributory) Pension applications are assessed under all possible rate calculation methods, including the Interim TCA, with the most beneficial rate paid to the pensioner.

It should be noted if a person does not satisfy those conditions, they may qualify for the means-tested State Pension (Non-Contributory), the maximum rate of which is over 95% that of the maximum rate of the State Pension (Contributory). Alternatively, if their spouse is a State pensioner and they have significant household means, their most beneficial payment may be an Increase for a Qualified Adult, based on their personal means, and amounting up to 90% of a full contributory pension.

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. 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 for the TCA model will need to be brought to Government for consideration and approval.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Departmental Staff**

858. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13547/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has developed and circulated guidelines for civil service organisations (*Working from Home during COVID-19 – Guidance for Civil Service Organisations*), which is intended to assist civil service organisations as long as necessary to address the health and safety risks of COVID-19 and has also commenced work on the development of a remote working policy which will address remote working in the longer term for the civil service.

### **Public Services Card**

859. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which parents can apply for a public services card to obtain a MyGovID required to apply to the national childcare scheme while her Department has temporarily postponed the appointment service for allocating the card; when departmental offices including Intreo and local offices will reopen for this purpose; if an alternative arrangement can be made for those in need of a card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13566/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** 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 PSC to get one.

My Department has been moving towards a resumption of the SAFE registration process on a phased basis in recent weeks and this is being done in accordance with all relevant HSE and Government guidelines to ensure the health and safety of the Department's customers and staff.

I would hope that SAFE registration will resume in all Intreo Centres in the coming weeks.

While it is not currently possible for a person to obtain a PSC for the purpose of applying online for the National Childcare Scheme (NCS), they can still apply for the NCS by post. Those who wish to apply for the NCS by post should contact the Parent Support Centre on 01 906 8530, Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

Any further queries in relation to the application process for the NCS should be directed to my colleague, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes**

860. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a group (details supplied) had its community employment scheme workers removed. [13592/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Community Employment (CE) programme is a community centred labour market initiative established to help long-term unemployed people and other vulnerable groups to enter the workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment. Under the CE Programme projects must not displace employment opportunities in the open labour market and, as such, the range of services delivered by these projects cannot cover the maintenance of dwelling houses or their related amenities as this would be contrary to the Department's role in the delivery of labour market activation services.

Following a review of work placements by the officials in the Department in January 2020, people who were placed by some CE sponsoring organisations to carry out maintenance work in residential housing estates in the Midlands were reassigned by their employers, to other work which is appropriate to the CE programme. There has been no reduction in the number of CE places with this sponsoring organisation, which are approved for funding by this Department.

I trust that this clarifies the matter.

### **School Meals Programme**

861. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if consideration will be given to continuing the school meals programme during the summer months to keep providing food parcels to children who are at risk of food poverty in view of the fact many summer projects are not operating as normal in 2020 due the Covid-19 emergency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13620/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** 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.

Funding under the school meals programme will remain available to schools to allow them

to continue to provide food during the summer period until the start of the new academic year 2020/2021.

I trust that this clarifies the position.

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

862. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if consideration will be given to proposals by an organisation (details supplied) for a temporary top-up payment to the poorest children during the Covid-19 emergency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13621/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department, as part of the overall response of the Department to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, continues to engage with a range of organisations including the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, in relation to the income support needs of all families during the ongoing crisis.

My Department provides financial supports to families and their children through the Increase for a Qualified Child, Working Family Payment, and Child Benefit payments, as well as increased supports for lone parents through the One-parent Family Payment and the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment. We have gone to great lengths to ensure those eligible for supports have been able to retain them during this difficult period. People who are not eligible for other Department schemes and who are experiencing financial difficulty may be eligible to apply for an exceptional needs payment.

Increases for a Qualified Child (IQCs) are paid as child-related supplements to most weekly social welfare payments in recognition of the need for greater incomes among benefit-dependent households with dependent children. The current full rate of payment is €40 per week in respect of each child over 12 years, and €36 per week in respect of each child under 12 years.

There are no plans to increase these rates at this time and any further increases to any social protection benefits would have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

*Question No. 863 answered with Question No. 797.*

### **Carer's Allowance**

864. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of carer's allowance recipients; the number in receipt of the half and full rate, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13645/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

Where a carer is in receipt of a social welfare payment (other than jobseeker payments or supplementary welfare allowance) or is being claimed as a qualified adult on their spouse's, civil partner's or cohabitant's social welfare payment, and also qualifies for CA, the allowance is paid at up to half the normal rate.

I can advise the Deputy that as of 31st May 2020 there were 87,270 customers in receipt of

Carer's Allowance. Of these -

- 47,882 customers were in receipt of the full rate Carer's Allowance.
- 39,388 customers were in receipt of the half rate Carer's Allowance.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance**

865. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will make a substantial reward payment to those in receipt of the carer's allowance in view of the contribution they are making in the Covid-19 crisis while those in their care were unable to attend day care centres and so on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13646/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government acknowledges the crucial role that family carers play and is fully committed to supporting carers in that role. This commitment is recognised in both the Programme for Government and the National Carers' Strategy.

The main income supports to carers provided by my Department are Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit and the Carer's Support Grant. The projected expenditure on Carer's Allowance in 2020 is approximately €919 million. Combined spending on the above payments to carers in 2020 is expected to exceed €1.3 billion.

In responding to the current COVID-19 crisis, the Department has made urgent special provisions for those, including carers, who may be most vulnerable and negatively affected at this time, that is, those who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, have been medically certified to self-isolate and those who have lost their jobs and whose incomes have reduced as a result of the pandemic.

To ensure that the most vulnerable groups are provided for, my Department introduced the following short-term emergency payments - the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment and COVID-19 Enhanced Illness Benefit. Both of these temporary measures allow payments to be made with certain other social welfare payments including Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit. In effect, a carer whose work ceases as a result of COVID-19 and whose situation qualifies them for one of these payments will get them along with their current carer income support whether Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit.

Despite the substantial extra financial demands due to the COVID-19 crisis, I announced that the Carer's Support Grant would continue to be paid to carers this year at an estimated cost of over €237 million. The annual grant of €1,700 is available to all carers providing full-time care to an older person or a person with a disability, regardless of their means or social insurance contributions. This award can be used for any purpose at the discretion of the carer and it is not taxed. Other people who are not in receipt of a social welfare payment but who are providing full time care and attention to someone who requires that level of care are also eligible and can apply for a grant.

On Thursday 4 June, 125,000 grants were paid automatically to 114,000 people receiving Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit and Domiciliary Care Allowance. Some 11,000 carers who are providing care for two or more people received a grant in respect of each person they are caring for. The grant is paid in respect of each person being cared for to take account of the ad-

ditional cost of providing care and to recognise the particular challenges faced by these carers.

The Deputy will be aware that payments made by my Department are set out in legislation or administrative guidelines. There is no provision to make the type of payment outlined by the Deputy.

Finally, I have no plans to introduce additional income supports for carers at this time. However, I can assure the Deputy that I am very aware of the key role carers play in society and the particular challenges they face in light of Covid-19 and I will continue to keep the range of supports available to carers under review. Any improvements or additions to these supports can only be considered in a budgetary context and in the light of available financial resources.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Bereavement Care**

866. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an augmentation of the bereavement grant will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13705/20]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** A claim for assistance with funeral expenses under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) Scheme is treated as a claim for an Exceptional Needs Payment (ENP). An ENP is made at the discretion of the designated officer on the basis of the circumstances of each case and in line with governing guidelines.

According to the records of my Department, the person concerned submitted an application for assistance with funeral expenses and was awarded an ENP of €3,000 on 29/11/19 on the basis of the circumstances of her case.

To date the person concerned has not submitted any further applications for financial assistance with funeral expenses. An application form has been posted to the person concerned. It should be completed and returned to Newbridge Intreo Centre, Community Welfare Services, Moorefield Road, Newbridge, Co Kildare. This service can also be contacted by phone at 045 491500 (option 5). The application will be processed and on completion of an assessment, a decision will issue to the person concerned.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

*Question No. 867 answered with Question No. 837.*

### **Property Registration Authority**

868. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which the services offered by the Property Registration Authority has been impacted by the Covid-19 crisis; when the services offered by the authority are expected to return to full capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12790/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I understand that, as part of an escalated recovery plan, the Property Registration Authority (PRA) is now providing a full range of registration services. However, the PRA is currently experiencing an increased backlog due to the impact of the Covid-19 crisis, but as the number

of applications being lodged is decreasing, response times will improve over time.

The PRA's information unit responsible for handling telephone enquiries is resuming next week and arrangements are being put in place to re-open the PRA public counter. Customers can continue to send their enquiries to *info@prai.ie*.

The provision of PRA services will continue to be reviewed and implemented in line with recovery planning, the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business and all public health guidance.

### **Water Safety**

869. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a commitment will be given to improve the methods of informing persons of do not swim notices along Dublin Bay following wastewater leaks; if the use of local media will be arranged to provide information of such a health warning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12906/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The means for communicating bathing water information to the public are well established and include beach signage, print media and social media. In relation to the Dublin Bay Area, my Department is working with Dublin City Council, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, Environmental Protection Agency and the Health Service Executive to improve co-ordination of all matters related to bathing waters in Dublin Bay. This includes improving communications between these organisations and the speed at which bathing water information is made available to the public.

An additional task force comprising of my Department, Dublin City Council, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and Irish Water is also looking at particular issues related to bathing water quality at Sandymount and Merrion Strand, including developing improved communication tools. This work will ensure that information on bathing water quality will be disseminated to the public as soon as possible and will assist the local authorities in undertaking one of their key functions under the Bathing Water Regulations.

Under the recently adopted Programme for Government, the Government has also committed to continuing the 8.5 billion euro funding package agreed in Project Ireland 2040, which will provide investment in both drinking and wastewater infrastructure by Irish Water.

### **Telecommunications Infrastructure**

870. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the necessity for the proposed erection of a 22 m high telecommunications mast at Ballymoreen, Littleton, County Tipperary will be examined (details supplied); if the local community will be engaged with regarding the concerns they have in relation to the proposed mast; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13005/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act), all development, unless specifically exempted under the Act or associated Regulations, requires planning permission.

In this regard, Class 31 of Schedule 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, provides that certain classes of development carried out by a statutory undertaker

authorised to provide a telecommunications service are, subject to specified conditions, exempted development from the requirement to obtain planning permission. Where the conditions and size thresholds specified in the exemption class are not complied with or are exceeded, planning permission is required.

These arrangements are considered appropriate for the purpose of supporting the roll-out of a high quality communications service while also taking account of the ongoing technological advances in this area. The legislative provisions are supplemented by planning guidelines entitled the Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structure Guidelines, which originally issued to planning authorities in 1996. In 2012, my Department issued Circular Letter PL07/12 to planning authorities, updating certain sections of these Guidelines. The Guidelines provide advice on appropriate location and siting considerations for telecommunication installations and masts to be considered in the development planning and development management process. The Guidelines, and subsequent Circular Letter, are available on my Department's website at the following links:

*<https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Planning/FileDownload%2C1630%2Cen.doc>*

and

*[https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/pl\\_07.12\\_-\\_telecommunications\\_antennae\\_and\\_support\\_structures\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/pl_07.12_-_telecommunications_antennae_and_support_structures_guidelines.pdf)*

In making decisions on a planning application, a planning authority, or the Board as appropriate, must consider the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, having regard to the provisions of the development plan, any submissions or observations received from the public and the statutory consultees, and any relevant Ministerial or Government policies, including any guidelines issued by the Department. Public participation is a crucial element of all substantive decision-making processes under the Act, and is also a requirement under the UN Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation on Decision Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention) and the European Union Environmental Impact Assessment Directive 2011/92/EU, as amended, in relation to specific types of developments.

The right to appeal is a fundamental aspect of the planning system. An applicant, or anyone who has made a submission or observation in relation to a planning application, may apply to An Bord Pleanála to appeal a decision made by a planning authority in respect of an application for permission. In making decisions in respect of a planning appeal, the Board is required to consider the same matters as the local planning authority did in its consideration of the original planning application and will then reach its own conclusions in relation to the application.

Under section 30 of the Act, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned, except in specific circumstances which do not apply in this case.

### **Departmental Reports**

871. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the cost of the Moorhead Report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13287/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** In June 2018 Ms Sara Moorhead SC was invited to carry out a review of the role and remuneration

of local authority elected members. Her final report was recently published on my Department's website:

*[https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/independent\\_review\\_of\\_role\\_and\\_remuneration\\_of\\_local\\_authority\\_elected\\_members.pdf](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/independent_review_of_role_and_remuneration_of_local_authority_elected_members.pdf)*

Ms Moorhead did not receive a fee for her substantial work in carrying out this review. Administrative support, including work involving the surveying of elected members and gathering of financial data from local authorities, was provided to Ms Moorhead by officials in my Department. As a result, there were no direct costs incurred in the preparation of the report.

### **Health and Safety Regulations**

872. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the window restrictors on sale here are safe; if they comply with national and EU regulations; the person or body responsible for checking such products; when the regulations and the enforcement of these regulations were last reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13399/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The design and construction of buildings is regulated under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014. The Act provides for the making of Building Regulations and Building Control Regulations.

The Building Regulations set out the legal requirements in Ireland for the construction of new buildings (including houses), extensions to existing buildings as well as for material alterations and certain material changes of use to existing buildings. The related Technical Guidance Documents (Parts A - M) provide technical guidance on practical compliance with the regulations.

Technical Guidance Documents are free to view/download on my Department's website at the following link:

*<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/building-standards/tgd-part-d-materials-and-workmanship/Technical-guidance-documents>*.

The Building Regulations (Part K Amendment) 2014, came into effect on 1 January 2015 and was accompanied by Technical Guidance Document K (2014). Section 2.7 of Technical Guidance Document K provides that in dwellings where a window has an opening section through which a person may fall, (having particular regard to children under five years of age), and is more than 1400 mm above external ground level, suitable safety restrictors should be provided. The Building Regulations, including Part K requirements, are subject to ongoing review.

Safety restrictors should restrain the window sufficiently to prevent such falls. Restrictors can be either an integral part of the window operating gear or separate items of hardware which can be fitted to a window at the time of manufacture or at installation. Restrictors should operate so that they limit the initial movement of an opening section to not more than 100 mm.

In relation to products, Part D of the Building Regulations sets out the legal requirements for materials and workmanship. It requires that all works must be carried out using "proper materials" which are fit for the use for which they are intended and for the conditions in which they are to be used" and in a workmanlike manner to ensure compliance with the Building Regulations.

Under the Construction Products Regulation (Regulation (EU) No. 305/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down harmonised conditions for the marketing of construction products and repealing Council Directive 89/106/EEC) (CPR), manufacturers are required, when placing a construction product (which is covered by harmonised European standards or European Technical Assessments) on the EU market, to make a Declaration of Performance and affix the CE mark.

In broad terms, this means that manufacturers are required to provide robust and reliable information in a consistent way for construction products. For many construction products, the application of the CE mark will require the involvement of a third party (known as a ‘notified body’) to undertake certain tasks as specified in the harmonised European standard. These tasks can include initial type-testing of products, inspection of factory production control and surveillance of factory production control.

Windows in which restrictors are an integral part of the window operating gear are covered by harmonised European standards and therefore must comply with the CPR.

Window restrictors which are on sale as separate items of hardware which can be fitted to a window after manufacture are not covered by harmonised European standards and therefore do not fall under the CPR. Such products (which do not require a CE mark) must however comply with General Product Safety Regulations to ensure that they are safe. This is the responsibility of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the General Product Safety Regulations come under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

It is important, to note that in the first instance, it is a matter for owners, designers and builders, with responsibility for compliance with the Building Regulation, to specify the particular project specific performance requirements of products in the context of the conditions in which they are to be used.

In addition, during construction such steps as are necessary should be taken to ensure that the products provided meet these specifications and are suitable for the purpose for which they are intended. Guidance is provided in relation to this in the Code of Practice for Inspecting and Certifying Buildings and Works, which is available at the following link:

*[https://www.localgov.ie/sites/default/files/2016-10-21\\_code\\_of\\_practice\\_for\\_inspecting\\_and\\_certifying\\_buildings\\_and\\_works\\_final\\_version-2016.pdf](https://www.localgov.ie/sites/default/files/2016-10-21_code_of_practice_for_inspecting_and_certifying_buildings_and_works_final_version-2016.pdf)*

Enforcement of the Building Regulations is a matter for each of the 31 local building control authorities that are independent in the performance of their statutory duties. Building control authorities are also designated as the principal market surveillance authorities for construction products that fall within the scope of the CPR. In both cases authorities have a range of enforcement powers.

In terms of rental housing properties, all landlords have a legal duty to ensure that their rented properties comply with certain minimum physical standards. These minimum standards are set out in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2019, which provide that suitable safety restrictors must be fitted to windows through which a person could fall.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

**873. Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the additional resources which will be provided to Westmeath County Council to reim-

burse it for the direct and extraordinary costs incurred relating to Covid-19 emergency measures such as purchasing of information and communications technology equipment to facilitate staff working from home, costs associated with testing centres, loss of rates income, loss of paid parking revenue and loss of working hours due to staff now undertaking risk assessment work. [13586/20]

874. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the additional resources which will be provided to Longford County Council to reimburse it for the direct and extraordinary costs incurred relating to Covid-19 emergency measures such as purchasing of information and communications technology equipment to facilitate staff working from home, costs associated with testing centres, loss of rates income, loss of paid parking revenue and loss of working hours due to staff now undertaking risk assessment work. [13587/20]

889. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department will make up the shortfall in funding to local authorities from commercial rates lost due to Covid-19. [13334/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 873, 874 and 889 together.

I intend to continue supporting measures taken by the Department to assist local authorities with the financial difficulties they are experiencing since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is recognised that some additional costs are being incurred by local authorities in relation to Covid-19. Local authorities have been advised to capture all related costs in their financial systems to aid future financial analysis of the impact of Covid-19 on the Sector.

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, €136m was made 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. Further to these measures, my Department recently arranged for the early payment of 50% of each local authority's individual Payroll and PSPR allocation, amounting to €54.8m. This interim payment would ordinarily be paid later in July.

On 2 May 2020, a waiver of commercial rates was announced 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 to be met by the Exchequer. The approved Programme for Government – Our Shared Future, commits to setting out how commercial rates will be treated for the remainder of 2020, as a priority action for the new Government.

In order to support the local government sector generally, I will ensure that 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.

### **Departmental Communications**

875. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a copy of the instruction or guidelines issued by his Department to local authorities will

be provided with respect to section 10 funding in which it states the services that will be funded and not funded. [12770/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988 sets out the purposes for which cost may be incurred by housing authorities in respect of the provision of homeless accommodation and related services.

While responsibility for the provision of accommodation for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities, the administration of homeless services is organised on a regional basis, with nine administrative regions in place. A homelessness consultative forum has been established in each region and it is a matter for the management group of the consultative forum, in the first instance, to determine the services and the funding required to address homelessness in each region. Each region submits an annual expenditure programme to my Department and my Department approves a funding allocation. The management of the funding allocation is delegated to the lead authority in each region and is governed by a protocol between my Department and the lead authority. This protocol contains reporting requirements in relation to performance and expenditure. The protocols can be provided to the Deputy if requested. My Department is not aware of any other guidelines or instructions which the Deputy may be referring to.

### **Heritage Sites**

876. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the purchase of a location (details supplied) in conjunction with Dublin City Council or an AHB for housing use and to secure the property ownership in view of its historical significance to the State. [12776/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** 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 Dublin City 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. 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 Dublin City Council in relation to this property.

### **Legislative Measures**

877. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there is a more accurate description of the reserved function referenced in section 109 of the Housing Act 1966 listed in a more recent Act; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [12830/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):**  
Section 109 of the Housing Act 1966 provides that:

(1) A housing authority may perform any of their functions under this Act outside of their functional area.

(2) Where a housing authority intends to perform a function in the functional area of another housing authority, the authority by whom the function is intended to be performed and the other authority may make and carry out an agreement in relation to the function, and where an agreement is made under this section the parties to the agreement may terminate it at any time if they so agree.

(3) The making of an agreement under this section shall be a reserved function.

A description of section 109 of the Housing Act 1966 is included in the list of Reserved Functions to be Performed by the Local Authority in Part 3 of Schedule 3 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, which states:-

‘The making of an agreement between authorities to enable a housing authority to perform any of its housing functions outside its functional area.’

I am not aware of any other statutory description of the section 109 provision.

### **Social and Affordable Housing**

878. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the sites in north-western areas of Dublin that have availed of the serviced sites fund. [12856/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):**  
The statutory basis for the delivery of affordable housing for purchase in the State is Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009 which were commenced in June 2018. Regulations in respect of the making of a Scheme of Priority were signed in March 2019, and were subsequently issued to local authorities. The Scheme of Priority sets out the affordable purchase arrangements at local authority level, including the methodology to be applied by local authorities to determine the order of priority to be accorded to eligible households where demand exceeds supply. Further regulations are currently being drafted regarding eligibility and other matters.

To support the delivery of the homes that will be made available by local authorities for purchase under the scheme, €310 million was made available under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF). This fund sub-vents the cost of facilitating infrastructure and a maximum SSF funding amount of €50,000 is available per affordable home. On this basis, at least 6,200 more affordable homes, to buy or rent, can be facilitated by this measure alone. This funding is being made available in areas where local authorities have demonstrated a requirement for more affordable housing and the viability to deliver such housing from their sites. To date, funding of €127 million has been approved in principle to provide infrastructural work that will support 35 projects in 14 local authorities, delivering 3,200 homes.

Details of all SSF projects that have received approval in principle under both SSF calls, including those in Dublin North, and the number of more affordable homes whose delivery will

be supported by SSF funding are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following links:

Call 1: <https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-gives-the-go-ahead-for-ten-local-authority-sites-for-affordable-housing-under-the-serviced-sites-fund/>

Call 2: <https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-approves-funding-of-e84m-to-support-delivery-of-1770-affordable-homes-under-the-ssf/>

It is intended to issue a third call for proposals under the SSF to local authorities later this year.

## Urban Renewal Schemes

879. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the solutions being considered to address the large amount of urban decay in towns and villages nationwide, in particular old and dilapidated business premises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12924/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** A number of actions have been taken in recent years, to address vacancy and dereliction in part of our towns and city. A core principle of the Project Ireland 2040 and the National Planning Framework (NPF) published in 2018, is the promotion of compact urban growth and the re-use of brownfield sites. This builds on the particular actions set out in Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, published in 2016 in relation to the use of our existing housing stock.

The NPF includes specific objectives to regenerate cities, towns and villages of all types and scale, and in particular to reverse the stagnation or decline of many smaller urban centres, including measure to reduce vacancy, re-use existing buildings and promote infill and area or site-based regeneration.

The important roles of our towns and villages, is reflected in the Programme for Government with the proposed development of a “Town Centre First” policy. Similarly, the Programme for Government commits to the development of the cities of Cork, Waterford, Limerick and Galway as viable alternatives to Dublin using Project Ireland 2040, to help regional towns prosper. The Programme for Government notes the importance of balanced regional development in reducing environmental pressures and keeping our smaller urban centres vibrant.

Local authorities have already been provided with a number of powers and measures to deal with the issue of vacancy and dereliction of in our urban centres. There also exists a framework of overarching policy and capital funding which provides support to development, including urban regeneration.

From a legislative perspective, this includes for example,

- the Derelict Sites Act 1990, which imposes a general duty on every owner and occupier of land to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the land does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site. The Act also imposes a duty on local authorities to take all reasonable steps, including the exercise of appropriate statutory powers, to ensure that any land within their functional area does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site;

- the Planning and Development (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2018, which came into

operation on 8 February 2018, and provides for an exemption from the requirement to obtain planning permission in respect of the change of use of certain vacant commercial premises, including vacant areas above ground floor premises, to residential use. This measure is aimed at facilitating the productive re-use of qualifying vacant commercial buildings as homes, while also facilitating urban renewal and the bringing on stream of increased housing supply;

- the vacant site levy provisions in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, under which planning authorities were empowered to apply a vacant site levy of 3% of the market valuation of relevant properties which were listed on local authority vacant site registers in 2018, which relevant owners were liable to pay in January 2019. The rate of the levy increased to 7% for sites listed on local authority vacant sites register from 2019 onwards which site owners became liable to pay in January 2020; and

- local authorities also have compulsory purchase order powers which can be used in certain circumstances to address these issues.

From a funding perspective, significant resourcing is being provided to enhance the urban environment of our cities, towns and villages through the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund established under Project Ireland 2040: The National Development Plan. The URDF, which is the fund operated by my Department, was launched in 2018 and has an overall provision of €2 billion to 2027. The URDF was established to support applicant-led projects that will contribute to regeneration and rejuvenation of Ireland's five cities and other large towns, in line with the objectives of the NPF and the NDP. The aim is to achieve more compact, sustainable and mixed use development, with a view to ensuring that more parts of our urban areas can become attractive and vibrant places in which people choose to live and work, as well as to invest and to visit. This will be done by supporting proposals that contribute to the re-development of key brownfield areas, including areas containing derelict sites and buildings, both by enabling infrastructure and new master-planned development proposals. 88 projects across the breadth of the country have been approved for URDF support thus far. A second call for proposals was launched in January of this year. The closing date for applications was 29 May 2020 and these applications are now being assessed.

Under the National Vacant Home Reuse Strategy 2018-21, the Vacant Homes Unit in my Department has, since 2018, provided annual funding of €50,000 to each local authority to support the work of a Vacant Homes Office. Each such office is tasked to support, implement and further develop, update, monitor and review the progress of local authorities' Vacant Homes Action Plans and actions to address vacant private housing; in addition to other core functions to identify and bring back vacant homes into use. In addition, under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, two schemes were introduced to assist in bringing vacant stock back into use.

- the Repair and Leasing Scheme introduced to assist property owners in bringing vacant properties back into use for social housing purposes. The scheme is particularly targeted at owners of vacant properties who cannot afford or access the funding needed to bring their properties up to the required standard for rental properties.

- the Buy and Renew Scheme introduced to support local authorities in purchasing and renewing housing units in need of repair which can then be made available for social housing use. The Buy and Renew Scheme particularly focuses on older vacant homes to help tackle the problem of dereliction and improve the appearance of the community. As a complementary initiative to the Repair and Leasing Scheme, it provides the option for suitable properties to be purchased rather than leased, if that is the preference of the owners of vacant properties.

The regeneration of our towns and villages will remain an important component of urban policy and the Programme for Government in committing to the continuation of the URDF and RRDF, also proposes the bringing forward of an expanded town and village renewal scheme to bring vacant and derelict building back into use and promote residential occupancy.

### **Wastewater Treatment**

880. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a house must be in a catchment area identified as a prioritised area for action in accordance with the River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021 in order to qualify for the new domestic wastewater treatment grants as recently announced; if a house with a treatment system that needs an urgent upgrade can apply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13037/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Under the Water Services Acts 2007 and 2012 (Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems) Regulations 2012, the owner of a domestic waste water treatment system is responsible for its maintenance and renewal and shall ensure that its parts and components are fit for purpose, operational where appropriate and kept in good order and repair so as to prevent a risk to human health or environment.

The Housing (Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems Financial Assistance) Regulations (S.I. 184 of 2020), revises the grant scheme to support the remediation, repair or upgrading works to, or the replacement of a domestic waste water treatment system under the National Inspection Plan.

Following an examination of the previous arrangements, consultation with stakeholders including local authorities, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Health Service Executive, and consideration of the matter by the Rural Water Working Group, the revised scheme brings into effect the following changes:

- The means test that previously applied to this grant scheme has been removed.

- The level of grant support has been increased to 85% of the eligible costs of approved works subject to a maximum grant of €5,000. The maximum grant available previously was €2,500 or €4,000 depending on the financial means of the applicant. This represents an increase of 100% and 25%, respectively, relative to the previous maximum grant levels.

Financial assistance has been expanded further with the introduction of two new grant schemes to support the attainment of water quality objectives in what are called 'prioritised areas for action' and 'high status objective catchment areas', as outlined in the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021. In both of these schemes, the level of grant support is 85% of the eligible costs of approved works subject to a maximum grant of €5,000. The relevant Regulations are:

- Housing (Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems Financial Assistance for Prioritised Areas for Action) Regulations 2020 (S.I. No. 185 of 2020).

- Housing (Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems Financial Assistance for High Status Objective Catchment Areas) Regulations 2020 (S.I. No. 186 of 2020).

These schemes form part of the larger investment already being made through the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021 to support the communities and local economies of Ireland, and are being administered by local authorities on behalf of the Department. Details of

the Terms and Conditions for each scheme be found on the Department's website here.

### **Urban Regeneration and Development Fund**

881. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he expects to announce the successful URDF projects for 2020; if the support of this Deputy will be noted for the port access northern cross route for Drogheda, County Louth (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13045/20]

882. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he expects to announce the successful URDF projects for 2020; if the support of this Deputy for a project will be noted (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13046/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 881 and 882 together.

The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) is providing funding assistance for applicant-led proposals that will contribute to the regeneration and rejuvenation of Ireland's five cities and other large towns, in line with the objectives of the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan. Projects that are supported will enable a greater proportion of residential and mixed-use development to be delivered within the existing built-up footprints of our cities and large towns, while also ensuring that more parts of our urban areas can become attractive and vibrant places in which people choose to live and work, as well as to invest and to visit.

Applications for funding support in respect of the two projects in question were recently received from Louth County Council under Call 2 of the Fund. The closing date for applications under Call 2 was 29 May. A large number of proposals were received, with every local authority submitting at least one application for URDF support.

Because of the nature of the URDF programme the proposals are very complex, and each will require detailed assessment. The assessment process will take place over the coming months with the intention that a new tranche of approved proposals, which will augment the existing pipeline of projects from Call 1 and contribute to the achievement of NPF objectives, will be announced later in the year.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

883. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an extension to the three-month moratorium on evictions due to expire on 30 June 2020 has been considered particularly for persons with an underlying health condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13075/20]

884. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the ban on evictions and rent increases will be extended to at least the end of 2020 in order to protect persons from homelessness and give local government the space to cope with an overburdened housing crisis with diminished funds due to Covid-19. [13230/20]

896. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is considering extending the ban of housing evictions due to Covid-19; if tenants engaging in antisocial behaviour will be excluded from such a ban; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [13416/20]

904. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the rent freeze and ban on evictions beyond July 2020 will be extended until the end of January 2021 to provide stability and security for renters that will be disproportionately affected by Covid-19 and the financial aftermath of same. [13625/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 883, 884, 896 and 904 together.

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. These emergency laws initially applied for a period of 3 months from the enactment of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 but, on the request of the former Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, the former Government, by Order, extended their application until 20 July 2020.

Under the legislation, the process for any extension of the COVID-19 emergency period involves the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government requesting the Government to make an Order, having consulted with the Minister for Health and with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The Government must consider it appropriate and be satisfied that it is in the public interest to extend the emergency period having regard to the following:

- the threat to public health;
- the highly contagious nature of COVID-19; and
- the need to restrict the movement of persons to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Any future request to Government to make an Order to extend the emergency period will be made at the appropriate time and in accordance with the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020.

Where a tenant is engaging in anti-social behaviour, a notice of termination cannot be served during the emergency period; however, tenants must continue to pay rent and observe the other normal terms and conditions of their lease. An Garda Síochána should be contacted, if necessary, to safeguard the local community and property.

The RTB would encourage landlords and tenants to communicate with each other during the emergency period to see if a resolution to any disputes can be found. The RTB is also encouraging all customers who may require assistance or advice 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**

885. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a debt resolution mechanism will be established to protect tenants that have lost their employment due to Covid-19. [13231/20]

888. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment the measures he plans to put in place to control the excess rent requirement in view of increased rents, leading to increasingly unaffordable excess rent payable by renters within the HAP system. [13330/20]

906. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if rent arrears accrued by tenants during the lockdown period of Covid-19 will be cancelled. [13658/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 885, 888 and 906 together.

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/departments/departments-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. My Department is conducting 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)*

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/>* .

Under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, a tenant sources their own accommodation in the private rented market. The tenancy agreement is between the tenant and the landlord and is governed by the Residential Tenancies Act 2004, as amended. HAP supported tenancies are afforded the same protections as all private rented tenancies. The accommodation sourced by tenants should be within the prescribed maximum HAP rent limits, which are based on household size and the rental market within the area concerned. Each local authority

has statutory discretion to agree to a HAP payment up to 20% above the prescribed maximum rent limit in circumstances where it is necessary, because of local rental market conditions, to secure appropriate accommodation for a household that requires it. It is a matter for the local authority to determine if the application of the flexibility is warranted on a case-by-case basis.

My Department is aware that some HAP recipients are making payments directly to their landlords, beyond the amount of HAP being paid on their behalf. There is no legislative provision precluding HAP supported households contributing towards the monthly rent to their landlord beyond that of their HAP payment. However, decisions in relation to HAP, including the suitability of HAP accommodation, is solely a matter for the local authority concerned and local authorities have a responsibility to ensure that tenancies are sustainable and are advised not to provide HAP support to tenancies where the household would not be in a position to meet the rental costs being sought.

Where HAP tenants are not financially impacted by the COVID-19 measures, they are expected to continue to pay their HAP differential rent. However, if tenants' circumstances change, the local authority should reassess those tenants and adjust their differential rent accordingly. Local authorities have been requested to ensure that HAP tenants newly in receipt of Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) supports be facilitated in remaining in their HAP tenancies. If amendments cannot be made immediately to a tenant's differential rent amount, any arrears accumulating from the date of approval of the new DEASP support should be rectified at a later date. This will not affect the HAP payment to the landlord.

The DEASP Rent Supplement scheme continues to play a key role in supporting families and individuals in private rented accommodation, with the scheme currently supporting approximately 21,200 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 renters experiencing a temporary loss of employment during the COVID-19 emergency can continue to meet their rental commitments.

Since the introduction of the former Government's COVID-19 emergency response approximately, 6,700 customers have been provided Rent Supplement support; in addition, there are currently, approximately, 1,100 pending applications awaiting a decision or in the process of providing the necessary documentation to the officer dealing with their claim. The DEASP response to the COVID-19 emergency has ensured the flexibility of the Rent Supplement scheme via specific measures to prevent undue delays in processing applications despite the large number of new cases received over a relatively short timeframe. The 2/3 day turnaround of applications ensures that customers do not build up rent arrears and officers attempt to ensure that a person's rental obligations are met in full.

The DEASP Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) scheme offers a safety net within the overall social welfare system by providing assistance to those whose means are insufficient to meet their own needs and those of their dependents. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide immediate and flexible assistance to those in need who do not qualify for payment under other State schemes. There are several payments within the scheme including once-off exceptional needs payments (ENPs) which can cover rent arrears.

Where a person has a change of circumstances, such as a loss of income, they should notify the relevant local authority in the case of a HAP claim, or the DEASP for Rent Supplement to assess the level of any payment that can be made.

## Planning Appeals

886. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of decisions of An Bord Pleanála that have been the subject of judicial review proceedings in the past ten years; the number of decisions of An Bord Pleanála quashed by the courts; the number of High Court cases appealed to a higher court; the success rate on appeal for An Bord Pleanála; the number of times An Bord Pleanála conceded to the plaintiff in a judicial review case; the number of times legislation has been amended as a result of decisions of the courts; the legal firm and barristers that represented An Bord Pleanála in each case; the legal costs for each member of the legal team by case in the past ten years; the legal costs of the plaintiffs in circumstances in which An Bord Pleanála lost or did not concede by case; and the details of legal costs including persons paid and payments to the legal team of the plaintiff in cases in which An Bord Pleanála conceded without trial. [13261/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The recording of court cases is one in which I have no statutory function and is a matter for the Courts Service which is statutorily independent. Judicial Reviews against the State, which my Department may be included as a party, are co-ordinated by the Chief State Solicitors Office under the guidance of the Attorney General's Office.

Under section 30 of the Act, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned.

An Bord Pleanála can be challenged by Judicial Review on a range of its functions and they publish an update on legal cases in their Annual Report. Local authorities may also be subject to Judicial Review on a range of their functions and therefore it is a matter for each local authority and their respective legal teams to record.

In accordance with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Circular 25/2016 entitled "Protocol for the Provision of Information to Members of the Oireachtas by State Bodies", the Board has the necessary arrangements in place to deal directly with enquiries from Oireachtas members, including a dedicated email address ([oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie](mailto:oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie)) and webpage: <http://www.pleanala.ie/about/oireachtasqueries.htm>.

## Social and Affordable Housing

887. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a list of new build social houses will be published for each of the years 2016 to 2019, by local authority; and the target for each year in tabular form. [13296/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** My Department publishes comprehensive statistics on a quarterly basis on all social housing delivery activity under Rebuilding Ireland. This is published on the statistics page of my Department's website, at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision>

This data provides a breakdown of social housing delivery across a range of mechanisms.

In addition to the statistical overview of activity in each local authority, a detailed Social Housing Construction Status Report is published each quarter which provides scheme level

detail on new build activity under Rebuilding Ireland. The most recent publication covers the period up to the end of Q4 2019 and is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

<https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-for-q4-2019-2/>

This is sorted by local authority, and gives a list of the individual projects that make up the new Build programme for that local authority (excluding Part V delivery).

A version of this file can be downloaded at the following link and used for various analysis in terms of stage of activity, location, quarter of completion, number of homes etc.

<https://data.gov.ie/dataset/social-housing-construction-status-report-q4-2019>

In terms of targets, all local authorities were issued with targets in April 2015 that covered the period out to 2017 under the Social Housing Strategy. This released €1.5 billion for nearly 23,000 new social housing units to be delivered via a combination of building, buying and leasing schemes. It did not further disaggregate targets into Build in isolation.

Following the publication of Rebuilding Ireland, there were increased national targets for social housing delivery, and a more nuanced focus on specific delivery categories. From 2018, local authorities were given 4 year overall social housing delivery targets, followed by annual targets, and they are working towards these targets to end 2021. In order to drive transparency and accountability at local level these targets were published on the Rebuilding Ireland (<https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>) and delivery against target is tracked on a quarterly basis.

Overall targets for each year under Rebuilding Ireland, and delivery against these targets is available at this link:

[https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/table\\_rebuilding\\_ireland\\_targets\\_and\\_progress\\_updated\\_for\\_2019\\_delivery.xlsx](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/table_rebuilding_ireland_targets_and_progress_updated_for_2019_delivery.xlsx)

*Question No. 888 answered with Question No. 885.*

*Question No. 889 answered with Question No. 873.*

### **Building Regulations**

**890. Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the percentage of overall new builds in 2019 and 2020 that have a heat pump; if he has considered updating the building regulations to make fossil fuel free energy systems a requirement for each new building to avoid future retrofit costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13391/20]

**891. Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the percentage of social housing unit builds in 2019 and 2020 that have a heat pump; if he has considered updating the building regulations for social housing units to make fossil fuel free energy systems a requirement for new social housing units to avoid future retrofit costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13392/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O’Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 890 and 891 together.

The Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB) requirement applies to all new dwellings – including social housing - which commenced construction from November 2019 subject to transition arrangements.

An NZEB dwelling is one that has a very high energy performance, as determined in accordance with Annex I of the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive Recast (EPBD Recast) 2010/31/EU of 19th May 2010. The nearly zero or very low amount of energy required should be covered to a very significant extent by energy from renewable sources, including energy from renewable sources produced on-site or nearby.

My Department has progressively updated Part L of the Building Regulations, relating to the Conservation of Fuel and Energy in Dwellings, over the last decade in order to improve the energy and carbon dioxide emissions performance of all new dwellings to achieve these “NZEB” performance levels – which are equivalent to an A2 Building Energy Rating (BER) for a typical dwelling.

The performance requirements in building regulations are set at the cost optimal level which ensure that the best energy performance is obtained for the lowest lifecycle cost taking account of capital cost and operating costs. The cost optimal calculations are reviewed every 5 years.

A range of solutions can be used to achieve these performance requirements. The advanced performance requirements in the current regulations combined with a mandatory renewables requirement, is creating a rapid transition to low carbon heating systems in all new dwellings. New social housing is subject to these same requirements.

Builders and homeowners have a choice in deciding which energy system best suits their needs. The regulations encourage the use of renewable technologies and the move away from traditional fossil fuels. This strategy is working based on CSO statistics– the installation of oil boilers has dropped from 36% to 4% in new dwellings. Electrical heating systems which are primarily heat pumps has increased to 44% in new dwellings in recent years and continue to increase their market share every quarter. There are no statistics available on the percentage of new social housing specifically that have a heat pump however it is expected that it would follow the national trend for all new dwellings.

It is estimated that the cumulative improvements to regulations mean that a dwelling built to the 2011 Part L regulations requires 90% less energy than the equivalent dwelling built in 1978 to deliver the same standards of heat, hot water and light. This shows the very significant progress that has already been made in the standards for new buildings.

### **Homeless Persons Data**

892. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons sleeping rough in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13394/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O’Brien):** My Department’s role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and associated services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities and the Dublin Region Homeless Executive in Dublin.

In the Dublin region, an official rough sleeper count is conducted twice yearly, in April and

November, by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE). The latest official Dublin Region rough sleeper count took place on the night of 26 November 2019. A total of 90 individuals were identified sleeping rough. This was the lowest figure for a winter rough sleeper count since 2015. The count scheduled for April 2020 was deferred due to Covid-19.

The DRHE has put in place an assertive outreach service to engage with individuals who are rough sleeping, to encourage them to avail of accommodation and related supports. This work is continuing as normal during the COVID-19 response in accordance with public health guidelines. The DRHE has reported to my Department that a considerable number of individuals have availed of accommodation and supports in recent months.

### **Social and Affordable Housing**

893. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the numerical definition of an affordable house used by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13395/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O’Brien):** I assume the Deputy is referring to the income levels that would define eligibility in the case of affordable dwelling purchase arrangements under Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009.

The main eligibility criteria for an Affordable Dwelling Purchase Arrangement under Part 5 is that the net income of the applicant household be such that the repayments on a (90%) mortgage for the purchase of a suitable home at market value would exceed 35% of that net income. As such, and in the case of dwellings that any housing authority is advertising for sale under the affordable purchase scheme, it will be possible for the authority to express eligibility as a simple income limit in each case.

If the household’s repayment on a mortgage for a suitable dwelling would not exceed 35% of net household income, then that household would not be deemed eligible to apply for an affordable home under the scheme.

Further Regulations are currently being drafted under Part 5 to prescribe a definition of income and the interest rate and mortgage duration to be used in making the above calculation. When the operational procedures for the scheme are finalised, and before dwellings are made available for purchase under the scheme, a programme of communication will be undertaken by my Department and local authorities.

### **Social and Affordable Housing**

894. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of 733 Part V units delivered under the social housing current expenditure programme for 2019 that were lease to buy units in which the title transfers at the end of the lease period; the number that were straight leases in which the title remains with the developer and landlord at the end of the lease period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13400/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O’Brien):** 733 Part V dwellings delivered in 2019 were supported under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP). 719 of these dwellings were Part V’s delivered under the

Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) 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.

**Table: SHCEP Part V Delivery 2019 – Ownership**

Source	No. of Dwellings
CALF Part V (AHB Ownership)	719
Part V Lease (Private Ownership)	14
Total	733

### Social and Affordable Housing

895. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of the 589 local authority Part V units in 2019 that were provided on and off-site, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13401/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O’Brien):** Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, requires that every planning permission to which the Part applies contains a condition that a Part V agreement be entered into between the developer and the planning authority for the transfer of land or units to the planning authority for the provision of social and affordable housing. When submitting a planning application, developers must specify how they intend to comply with these obligations.

My Department publishes statistical data in relation to Part V output on the Department web site. The latest data is accurate to end 2019 can be found at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/affordable-housing/affordable-housing-and-part-v-statistics>

Additional Part V data relating to delivery to end Q4 2019 is available at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>

A breakdown of Local Authority Part V units delivered in 2019, broken down by on-site and off-site delivery can be found in the table below.

#### Part V Social Housing acquired by local authority - Onsite and Offsite Units

Local Authorities	Onsite Units	Offsite Units
Carlow County Council	5	0
Cavan County Council	0	0
Clare County Council	0	0
Cork City Council	78	4
Cork County Council	49	3
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	9	4
Donegal County Council	0	0
Dublin City Council	16	15
Fingal County Council	36	6
Galway City Council	4	2
Galway County Council	26	1
Kerry County Council	1	3

Local Authorities	Onsite Units	Offsite Units
Kildare County Council	59	9
Kilkenny County Council	0	0
Laois County Council	6	0
Leitrim County Council	0	0
Limerick City and County Co	24	0
Longford County Council	0	0
Louth County Council	0	0
Mayo County Council	6	2
Meath County Council	88	0
Monaghan County Council	10	0
Offaly County Council	0	0
Roscommon County Council	0	0
Sligo County Council	6	1
Sth Dublin County Council	47	2
Tipperary County Council	3	1
Waterford City and County Council	16	0
Westmeath County Council	2	3
Wexford County Council	25	0
Wicklow County Council	17	0
Total	533	56

In addition to the 589 Part V homes listed, 14 homes were secured by Local Authorities under Part V leases in 2019.

*Question No. 896 answered with Question No. 883.*

### Local Authority Rates

897. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason local authorities have sent rates demands for the full annual rates bill; the reason the rates waiver has not been applied; if details have been finalised with the local authorities in relation to the rates waiver and the way in which it is to be implemented; when the details will be finalised; the reason for the delay in finalising this matter; if he will consider extending the moratorium for a further period to support businesses that have lost out on business for over three months to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13428/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The levying and collection of rates are legally matters for each individual local authority. Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes.

In order to support the local government sector, my Department is continuing to keep local authority income, expenditure and cash flow generally under review and will work with all local authorities on both collective and individual issues arising. In addition, my Department has previously engaged with the Departments of the Taoiseach, Public Expenditure and Reform, and the former Departments of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and Transport, Tourism and Sport in relation to commercial rates and local

authority funding issues, as well as the role that local authorities may be in a position to play in supporting economic recovery.

To that end, on 2 May 2020, the then Government announced that a waiver of commercial rates would apply to all businesses that have been forced to close due to public health requirements, from 27 March 2020, for a three-month period. These costs will be met by the Exchequer. The administration by local authorities of this measure will be by way of a credit in lieu of commercial rates. My Department is currently preparing further guidance on the scope and application of the waiver for local authorities. Until such time as such guidance is finalised, local authorities continue to levy rates demands as normal.

The approved Programme for Government - Our Shared Future, commits to setting out how commercial rates will be treated for the remainder of 2020, as a priority action for the new Government.

In order to support the local government sector generally, I will ensure that 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.

### Commercial Rates

898. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the length of time it takes to process an appeal with the Valuation Tribunal; the reason for such a delay in which a higher rates demand is under appeal; if the business has to pay the previous rates amount or the new amount under appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13429/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Valuation Tribunal is an independent appeal body established and operating under the Valuation Acts of 1988 and 2001. It deals with appeals against decisions of the Commissioner of Valuation on the valuation of commercial properties for rating purposes and appeals against determinations of market value on derelict sites or vacant sites made by local authorities under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 and the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015.

The Tribunal has experienced unprecedented levels of appeals in recent years in the context of the National Revaluation Programme being carried out by the independent Commissioner of Valuation. At the beginning of 2020 some 2,600 appeals were on hand with the average length of time to determine an appeal at approximately 18 months.

A number of measures have been put in place in order to support the expedited processing of appeals. One of the new provisions introduced under the Valuation (Amendment) Act, 2015 provides for appeals to be determined by a single member of the Tribunal based on written documentation obviating the need to holding a hearing. Other developments include the introduction of a call-over system allowing an opportunity for parties to review their options and a recent revision of the Tribunal rules. My Department is working with the Valuation Tribunal on further measures to help deal with cases on hands and those anticipated in the future as quickly as possible.

Under the legislation, notwithstanding any appeal or notice of appeal, the current rate is levied and payable as if no appeal had been made, until the appeal is decided.

## **Brexit Issues**

899. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if UK citizens resident here will continue to be allowed to vote in European elections when the UK exits the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13529/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Under Part II of the Electoral Act 1992, a person is entitled to be entered on the register of electors if that person:

- has reached the age of 18 years, and
- is ordinarily resident in a constituency in the State.

Subject to the age and residency requirements, a registered elector's citizenship then determines the polls at which he or she is entitled to vote. Irish citizens alone are entitled to vote at all elections (i.e. local, European, Dáil, and presidential) and at referendums. Citizens of Member States of the European Union may vote at European Parliament and local elections. Non-EU citizens may vote at local elections only.

In addition, under the Common Travel Area agreement, reciprocal arrangements are in place with regard to voting rights between Irish citizens resident in the United Kingdom and British citizens resident in Ireland. In this regard, British citizens resident in Ireland are also eligible to vote at elections to Dáil Éireann as well as at local elections.

Under European Union law, only citizens of the European Union have the right to vote (and stand for election) in European Parliament elections. As the United Kingdom legally departed the European Union when the Withdrawal Agreement entered into force on 1 February 2020, British citizens residing in Ireland no longer have a right to vote at, or stand as candidates in, future elections to the European Parliament held in Ireland.

## **Postal Voting**

900. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to simplify the process to apply for a postal vote to include persons with a letter from their employer asking that they be accommodated with a postal vote; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13530/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Postal voting is provided for in electoral law in respect of a number of categories of electors - whole-time members of the Defence Forces, members of An Garda Síochána, Irish diplomats serving abroad and their spouses/civil partners, electors living at home who are unable to vote because of a physical illness or a physical disability, electors whose occupation, service or employment makes it likely that they will be unable to vote in person at their local polling station on polling day, full-time students registered at their home who are living elsewhere while attending an educational institution in the State, prisoners and certain election staff employed at the poll outside the constituency where they reside.

An application for a postal vote for electors who are unable to vote at their polling station due to circumstances of occupation, service or employment must be certified by an employer, or in the case of a self-employed person, a statutory declaration, indicating that due to circumstances of their employment they are likely to be unable to go in person on polling day to vote at a polling station. The application form (PV2) is available from local authorities and on [www](http://www).

*checktheregister.ie*

Work is currently ongoing in my Department to modernise the electoral registration process. The Programme for Government - Our Shared Future contains a commitment to complete the modernisation process for voter registration, including through the simplification of forms and the registration process and the development of an online registration option. It also commits to the establishment of an Electoral Commission which will examine the use of postal voting with a view to expanding its provision.

### **Departmental Staff**

901. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13550/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The majority of staff in my Department have been facilitated to work remotely in accordance with Government policy and HSE advice during the COVID 19 pandemic. Guidance has been provided to staff to support them in this changed working environment and online training has also been made available. A remote working policy for my Department is currently being drafted for the post-pandemic period. My Department will continue to liaise with their colleagues in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in this regard.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

902. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to change co-living regulations to limit the potential to spread viruses such as Covid-19. [13576/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The new Programme for Government, identifies the need to avoid over-concentration of particular housing types in areas, by requiring local authorities to complete housing need and demand assessments to inform delivery of an appropriate mix of housing typologies to cater for the needs of disparate household types and sizes.

Further to this, my Department will continue to monitor the operation of the Sustainable Urban Housing Guidance with regard to co-living, which will also be informed by the work of a Commission on Housing that will be established under the Programme for Government, to examine issues that will include tenure, standards, sustainability and quality of life in the provision of housing.

### **Foreshore Licences**

903. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the of processing the foreshore licence application by Galway City Council in order that it can commence critical coastal protection works from Sáilín to Silverstrand; when the application was received; when a decision will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13602/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):**

My Department received an application from Galway City Council in 2014 to develop coastal protection works in an area that is within a designated Special Area of Conservation. There has been correspondence between my Department and the City Council including a request to submit a Natura Impact Statement to allow for Appropriate Assessment of the application and further correspondence raised questions about material alterations and deviations from the planning consent granted by An Bord Pleanála. The Council, in their most recent correspondence detailed the deviations, among other clarifications, but did not comment on validity of the planning consent in these circumstances.

A lot of time has elapsed since this application was originally submitted and there are still complex environmental and planning issues involved. To progress matters the Council should engage with the Marine Planning, Policy and Development Unit of my Department and jointly work towards having the application determined.

*Question No. 904 answered with Question No. 883.*

### **Property Registration Authority**

905. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will enquire with the Land Registry Office regarding the way in which a situation (details supplied) could occur; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13626/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** In relation to any specific cases with the Property Registration Authority (PRA), 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).

*Question No. 906 answered with Question No. 885.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

907. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if arrangements will be made to automatically transfer persons in receipt of the rent supplement payment onto the housing assistance payment in view of the impact of Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13683/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a form of social housing support for people who have a long-term housing need. In order for a household to qualify for HAP, they must first be assessed as eligible for social housing support by their local authority. Any household assessed as eligible for social housing is immediately eligible for HAP.

If a household has been deemed eligible for social housing support, it is a matter for the local authority to examine the suite of social housing supports available, including the HAP scheme, to determine the most appropriate form of social housing support for that household in the administrative area of that local authority. Accordingly, the determination of entitlement to HAP, including the assessment of an applicant's means, is governed by the same arrangements as for other social housing supports.

HAP is replacing Rent Supplement for those with a long-term housing need who qualify for social housing support. However, Rent Supplement will remain available through the De-

partment of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) to households as a short-term income support.

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. These emergency laws initially applied for a period of 3 months from the enactment of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020, however, this period has now extended until 20 July 2020.

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)*

### **Homeless Accommodation**

908. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied with the running and performance of private homeless hostels in view of evidence to show that some private homeless hostels do not Garda vet some staff, in view of the fact that legislation stipulates that persons working with children or vulnerable adults must be Garda vetted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13695/20]

909. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the hiring of staff for privately run homeless hostels without Garda vetting is an issue to which his attention has been drawn; the measures he plans to put in place that will prohibit such practices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13697/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 908 and 909 together.

Supporting individuals and families experiencing homelessness is a priority for this Government. My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities.

A National Quality Standards Framework has been developed to ensure a consistent approach in how local authorities and service providers respond to the needs of those experiencing homelessness and to improve the quality of services provided to individuals, families and their children who are accessing emergency accommodation.

The Framework includes the provision that service providers must ensure that staff recruitment and selection procedures comply with statutory vetting requirements. The Framework has

been fully operational across the Dublin region since February 2019. All local authorities were requested to fully implement the Framework over a 12-month period, commencing from 1 July 2019.

Arising out of a commitment made in Rebuilding Ireland, a specific course on child protection was developed in partnership between the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) and Tusla. The DRHE has been providing child protection training to Private Emergency Accommodation staff, which covers their legal responsibilities under child protection legislation. Child protection booklets have been distributed to operators of private emergency accommodation.

### **Local Authority Functions**

910. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his officials have considered a notice of motion passed by the Shannon Municipal District of Clare County Council in March 2019 subsequently referred to his Department, calling for town status to be granted to the densely populated cluster of Westbury, Shannon Banks and Carraid Midhe in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13698/20]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Local Government Reform Act 2014 established municipal districts as the fundamental sub-county level of governance and democratic representation in the State. Separate town councils are not provided for under the Act. Municipal districts are a key decision-making component, with specified reserved powers, of plenary councils and each municipal district can include several towns and their hinterlands.

The new Programme for Government specifically commits to ensuring a strong voice for towns at the heart of local authority decision making. It also commits to considering the review by the Institute of Public Administration regarding the role and operation of municipal districts with a view to strengthening local democracy and to identifying local needs and initiatives needed to strengthen and grow our communities, villages and towns in a sustainable manner. This review, which was published on 25 June 2020, is available on the Institute's website at [https://www.ipa.ie/\\_fileUpload/Documents/MunicipalReport\\_June2020.pdf](https://www.ipa.ie/_fileUpload/Documents/MunicipalReport_June2020.pdf).

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

911. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when it is planned to permit general travel to the offshore islands in view of the fact that phase 5 of the opening of the country has been brought forward to phase four of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business; the reason for the delay in making an announcement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12703/20]

912. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when persons will be allowed to travel on and off the islands; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12936/20]

922. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when persons that own homes on offshore islands but do not reside there can travel to the islands.

[13511/20]

927. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gael-

tacht if the islands will not reopen for tourism before the end of July 2020, in view of the concerns of islanders; the protocols and directions that will be in place for the opening of the islands; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13605/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 911, 912, 922 and 927 together.

My Department has had extensive consultation and engagement with island community and business representatives throughout the COVID-19 crisis, in order to understand the challenges facing island communities and help inform Government policy in managing the crisis.

The Government has been guided by advice from health professionals when considering the acceleration of the original Roadmap. Acting on this advice, the Government has been in a position to ease restrictions earlier than originally anticipated, with all travel restrictions within the country being removed as and from 29 June.

The Department has advised all ferry operators to regularly review the HSE website to ensure they are implementing the requisite guidelines. The HSE has also developed a set of guidelines specifically for ferries operating to the offshore islands:

*[https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/porth-ealthguidance/COVID-19\\_Guidance%20for%20ferries%20to%20offshore%20islands\\_v1\\_20.03.2020.pdf](https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/porth-ealthguidance/COVID-19_Guidance%20for%20ferries%20to%20offshore%20islands_v1_20.03.2020.pdf)*

These guidelines set out the steps that should be taken by the ferry operators, from use of graphics and notices, to hygiene practices, and how to deal with any passengers that may have COVID 19.

The Department understands that work is underway to ensure the proper signage and protocols are in place on the piers, reminding those using the piers to adhere to guidelines in terms of social distancing etc.

The reduction in the spread of the virus has been such that, in keeping with health advice, Government is confident that the restrictions on travel to the islands may now be lifted, with travel to the islands now being permitted as and from 29 June. The protocols and guidelines in relation to social distancing, use of masks and general hygiene advice all remain in place on the ferries as on other forms of public transport. In addition, the Department is in contact with all of the relevant local authorities and Departments responsible for the upkeep of the piers in order to confirm that they have taken steps to ensure the safety of ferry passengers.

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

913. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if musical societies such as those within a centre (details supplied) are eligible to apply for funding support under the Covid-19 related schemes from her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12726/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** The Government has introduced a range of measures aimed at supporting organisations during the coronavirus crisis. Organisation such as that referred to by the Deputy, can avail of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) operated by the Revenue Commissioners to allow it to retain its employees for the duration of the crisis. The Government has extended the scheme until 31 August. If the organisation is unable to retain some or all employees, they can avail of

the Pandemic Unemployment Payment which is operated by the Department of Social Protection and Rural Development and the Islands.

Earlier this month in light of the challenges faced by the arts and culture sector, Government allocated an additional €20 million to the Arts Council bringing its 2020 allocation to a total of €100 million. Under the Arts Act 2003, the Arts Council is independent in its decisions on funding and I as Minister cannot intervene. The Council has indicated that it will provide funding to include bursaries and commissions to artists and arts organisations. It has also said that it will take a national and local approach to the survival of strategic arts organisations, particularly arts centres and other buildings-based organisations to meet financial commitments for 2020.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

914. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the date her Department has identified as the reopening date for cinemas; the restrictions which will be in place in respect of the operation of cinemas in terms of social distancing and so on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12735/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** The third phase of lifting the public health restrictions put in place to prevent the spread of the coronavirus took effect from 29 June 2020. Cinemas are included in the list of cultural venues that may open from that date. Reopening is subject to the Phase 3 and Phase 4 restrictions on numbers for indoor public gatherings as well as other important public health advice including in relation to social distancing. As the country continues to reopen, every step will be guided by scientific evidence and public health advice, including in relation to any restrictions in place.

### **Departmental Funding**

915. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding provided by her Department to a museum (details supplied) over the past 20 years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12959/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** Following a review of Departmental records dating back to its establishment in 2011, I am not aware of any application for funding submitted by the museum referred to and, accordingly, no funding has been provided.

### **Maoiniú d'Eagrais Ghaeilge**

916. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cén plean atá ag an Rialtas chun a chinntiú nach ndéanfar slad éagothrom arís ar Údarás na Gaeltachta i gcomparáid leis an nGníomhaireacht Forbartha Tionscail agus le Fiontraíocht Éireann agus chun a chinntiú go ndéanfar infheistiú suntasach d'fhonn cothromú a dhéanamh ar an slad ó 2018 chun go gcuirfear ar chumas an Údaráis fostaíocht a chruthú agus teacht i dtír ar éigeandáil Covid-19; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [13069/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** I dtús báire, is mian liom a chur in iúl do Teachta go bhfuil soláthar iomlán de €23.652m curtha ar fáil ag mo Roinn d'Údarás na Gaeltachta in 2020. Baineann €10m den soláthar seo le buiséad caipitil na heagraíochta chun fostaíocht a chruthú.

Sa bhreis air sin, tá ciste suas le €10.484m san iomlán curtha ar fáil don Údarás faoin gCiste um Athghiniúint agus Forbairt Tuaithe, chomh maith leis an gCiste um Forbairt Fiontraíochta Réigiúnaí le dhá bhliain anuas.

Is mian liom an Teach a chur ar an eolas go raibh an leibhéal is mó fostaíochta le 11 bliain i gcliantchomhlachtaí Údarás na Gaeltachta sa bhliain 2019. Cruthaíodh 593 post nua lánaimseartha - rud a chiallaigh glanmhéadú de 219 post lánaimseartha. D'fhág sé seo go raibh 7,844 post lánaimseartha i gcliantchomhlachtaí an Údaráis ag deireadh na bliana 2019.

Ó tharla géarchéim COVID-19, bíonn teagmháil leanúnach ag oifigigh mo Roinne le hoifigigh Údarás na Gaeltachta faoin tionchar a d'fhéadfadh an ghéarchéim a imirt ar chliantchomhlachtaí na heagraíochta.

An tseachtain seo caite, d'fhógair mo Roinn go mbeadh rochtain ag cliantchomhlachtaí Údarás na Gaeltachta ar réimse iomlán tacaíochtaí faoin gCiste Cothaithe Fiontair agus €5 milliún breise ar fáil i mbliana mar thús don eagraíocht, le hathbhreithniú le bheith déanta ar a cuid riachtanas roimh dheireadh na bliana. Cinntíonn sé seo go mbeidh rochtain ag fiontair Ghaeltachta ar an gCiste €180m Cothaithe Fiontair, atá á riar ag na háisíneachtaí Stáit le cúramaí fiontraíochta, faoi mar a aontaíodh ag an Roinn Fiontair, Gnó agus Nuálaíochta leis an Coimisiún Eorpacha faoin gcreat sealadach cúnaimh Stáit.

Tagann sé seo sna sála ar mhaoiniú breise de €0.6m a fógraíodh d'Údarás na Gaeltachta cúpla seachtain ó shin chun an Scéime Trádála Ar Líne a fheidhmiú sa Ghaeltacht. Is mar thoradh ar an gcomhoibriú leanúnach idir mo Roinn agus Údarás na Gaeltachta agus na ranna agus áisíneachtaí ábhartha eile Stáit atá na tacaíochtaí praiticiúla seo curtha ar fáil do ghnólachtaí atá buailte de bharr Covid-19.

### **Buiséad Fhoras na Gaeilge**

917. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad iad na bearta a dhéanfaidh an Rialtas chun buiséad líne Fhoras na Gaeilge a ardú, ar a laghad go dtí an leibhéal ar a raibh sé in 2007, chun a chumasú don Fhoras tacaíocht a thabhairt don teanga i rith éigeandáil Covid-19 agus dá héis; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [13071/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** Is í an Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh Theas (CATT) a cheadaíonn na buiséid do na Forais Trasteorann uile, An Foras Teanga san áireamh. Mar gheall ar chúinsí polaitiúla i dTuaisceart Éireann, áfach, níorbh fhéidir cruinnithe CATT a eagrú ó lár 2016 i leith agus, dá bhrí sin, níl na buiséid i leith 2017 go 2020 ceadaithe go hoifigiúil go fóill. Idir an dá linn, ó 2017, tá sé aontaithe ag na Ranna Airgeadais sa dá dhlíse go bhfeidhmeodh na Forais Trasteorann uile de réir na buiséid a cheadaigh an CATT ina leith don bhliain 2016.

I mbliana, íocfaidh mo Roinn €11,087,183 (75% den ollbhuiséad CATT) d'Fhoras na Gaeilge. Anuas air sin, cuirfidh mo Roinn maoiniú breise ar fáil d'Fhoras na Gaeilge i ndáil le nithe imfhálaithe mar a bhaineann le Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge (€1,061,165) agus Colmille (€118,519). Is fiú a nótaíl freisin go ligtear d'Fhoras na Gaeilge an t-ioncam breise a ghintear ó dhíol leabhar agus eile a choinneáil le caitheamh ar a chuid gníomhaíochtaí.

Ba mhaith liom a threisiú go bhfuil an Rialtas ag tacú i gcónaí le clár oibre Fhoras na Gaeilge chun an teanga a chur chun cinn ar bhonn uile-oileáin. Táim sásta go bhfuil na hallúntais atá curtha ar fáil dom le cúpla bliain anuas le caitheamh ar chláir Ghaeilge agus Ghaeltachta mo Roinne agus na n-eagras atá faoina cúram á chaitheamh go stuama ar mhaithe leis an Ghaeilge

agus an Gaeltacht a chur chun cinn agus a fhorbairt.

Is mian liom a dheimhniú go mbíonn oifigigh mo Roinne i dteagmháil ar bhonn rialta le Foras na Gaeilge ar mhaithe le riachtannais na heagraíochta, riachtannais de bharr na paidéime COVID-19 san áireamh, a phlé.

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

918. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of a compensation package for summer schools (details supplied); if the funding is new funding; if not, if it is directed from existing schemes; if directed from existing schemes, the scheme and the budget allocation for the scheme for 2020; the reason accommodation providers applying for same are required to commit to providing accommodation in 2021 as part of the 2020 compensation scheme in view of the fact they have not been provided guidelines or information on potential social distancing requirements for 2021 which they may not be able to meet; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13205/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** As the Deputy is aware, my predecessor announced the establishment of an emergency fund worth €4.7m in order to stabilise the Irish summer colleges sector. Funding for this stabilisation measure is being provided from existing resources provided this year for Scéim na bhFoghlaimoírí Gaeilge within my Departments Vote, which became available for re-allocation following the decision, on 20th April 2020, to suspend the scheme for 2020 due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the primary objectives of this once-off funding is to ensure the long-term viability of the sector going forward into 2021 and beyond, for the benefit of both the Irish language and the Gaeltacht.

Arrangements are currently in hand to disburse the fund to qualifying householders and college authorities.

In light of the importance to the sector of ensuring the ongoing availability of suitably qualified households to provide student accommodation into the future and, notwithstanding the uncertainty around how matters will unfold in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, applicants under the stabilisation measure are being asked to confirm inter alia, that they intend to participate in the scheme next year.

Needless to say, my Department will continue to monitor the situation regarding the impact of COVID-19 on an ongoing basis in the context of the Irish summer colleges sector and ensure that public safety remains as a priority.

### **Gaeltacht Policy**

919. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the measures she plans to put in place to protect the language and culture of Gaeltacht areas in view of decisions by An Bord Pleanála to allow planning permission for relatively large-scale housing developments in Gaeltacht areas without a requirement for occupants to speak the language or embrace the local culture; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13332/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** The Planning and Development Regulations 2001 contain a number of provisions aimed at protect-

ing the language and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht including promoting the Irish language as a community language.

Under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 a Planning Authority must contact both my Department and Údarás na Gaeltachta for their views in relation to planning applications for developments which, in the opinion of the authority might materially affect the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht, including the promotion of Irish as the community language.

While my Department recognises that compliance with these regulations is a matter for the relevant local authorities, the Department, in the context of its remit in relation to Gaeltacht regions and the Irish language, undertook to formally write on a number of occasions - most recently in 2018 - to the seven local authorities whose jurisdictional area include Gaeltacht regions in order to remind them of their responsibilities in this regard, particularly in the context of the ongoing implementation of the language planning process which has a statutory footing under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012.

While my Department will continue, when requested to do so, provide observations to planning authorities in relation to such planning applications which fall within the ambit of the aforementioned regulations, the Department also recognises that the decision to grant or refuse permission in such cases - and indeed to assign conditions in the case of such planning applications where permission is granted - is ultimately a matter for the relevant planning authorities.

### **Wildlife Control**

920. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will bring forward policy measures to discourage persons from feeding seagulls in parks and public open spaces generally in view of the nuisance this creates; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13409/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** My Department's responsibilities include the protection and conservation of bird species including seagulls under national and EU legislation. I do not have the powers to control the feeding of bird species by members of the public in public open spaces which are matters for consideration by individual local authorities.

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

921. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if concerns (details supplied) raised in relation to the events industry will be addressed; if further supports will be made available for freelance and self-employed workers in the sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13424/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** The Government has introduced a wide range of measures aimed at supporting business during the COVID-19 crisis. Among these the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment operates a number of support packages available for all businesses including the sectors referred to by the Deputy. Measures have been developed to meet the varying needs of Irish enterprise and they are very specifically targeted by size, sector and need, and at vulnerable but viable companies. In parallel, the Revenue Commissioners operate the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme which has been extended to 31 August, while the Department of Social Protection, Community

and Rural Development and the Islands operates the Pandemic Unemployment Payment extended until 10 August. These supports are available to businesses and workers in the events industry and in the school transport system. Full details on these COVID-19 supports are available at the following links

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/63d47e-government-supports-for-covid-19-impacted-businesses/>

<https://dbej.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

My Department has responsibility for initiatives specific to the tourism sector and events and festivals. To this end, a Tourism Recovery Taskforce was set up 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. Full details including updates may be accessed at this link <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8f914-tourism-recovery-taskforce-news-and-updates/>

There are also two jobseekers benefit schemes 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. Further detail of these schemes can be accessed at the following link <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/4cf0e2-covid-19-coronavirus-information-for-employers-and-employees-test/?referrer=http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0b6a34-advice-for-employers-and-employees/>

On 16 June a significant investment of €25 million in Arts and Culture in 2020 was announced by Government to help the Arts and Culture sector recover from the Covid19 Emergency in 2020. The funding will include bursaries and commissions to artists and arts organisations, and resources for museums and culture workers as they prepare for the re-opening of society. This is additional to funding previously allocated to the sector.

A total of €20 million will be allocated to the Arts Council bringing its allocation this year to €100 million. A further €5 million will be available for other measures, including securing the future of key cultural and museum spaces and facilities throughout Ireland, and the production of high-quality digital art and on-line performances.

Also on 16 June, it was announced that the Department of an Taoiseach and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht would convene a meeting of relevant representatives from the public and private sector to discuss how to protect and sustain the arts and culture sector through the Covid19 recovery and beyond, recognising that the issues faced by venues as well as artists in an era where mass gatherings are restricted, are unique and will be problematic for quite some time. That process of engagement is now underway.

*Question No. 922 answered with Question No. 911.*

## **Island Communities**

923. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the estimated date for the publication of the islands action plan. [13512/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Government established an Interdepartmental Committee for Island

Development in July last year and, following meetings of this committee, a work plan was agreed for the preparation of an islands policy and subsequent action plan.

As part of this process, a consultation paper, with input from relevant Government Departments was prepared and published. This consultation paper set out information on services that are currently being provided to the islands which would form the basis for the consultation process.

Since January this year, officials of my Department arranged a series of consultation meetings to provide island communities the opportunity to offer their views and opinions on a future islands policy and to discuss island necessities.

To date, meetings have taken place on eleven islands as follows:

Islands	Date
Sherkin	9 January 2020
Whiddy	10 January 2020
Dursey	10 January 2020
Bere Island	17 January 2020
Inis Oírr	22 January 2020
Inis Mór	29 January 2020
Inis Meáin	30 January 2020
Heir	7 February 2020
Long	7 February 2020
Cléire	7 February 2020
Árainn Mhór	13 February 2020

The public consultation element of the process has had to be temporarily postponed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The next step in the process will be to arrange meetings on the remaining islands and with relevant stakeholders, including state bodies who provide services to the islands. Once this aspect of the work has been completed, it is intended that the new Islands Policy will be agreed by Government and published, following on from which an action plan based on the policy will be developed.

The Deputy will be pleased to learn that this work has been identified as a priority in the recently agreed Programme for Government.

### Island Communities

924. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on putting in place funding to provide public toilet facilities on each offshore island. [13513/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** The provision of public toilets on the islands is, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant Local Authority.

However, my Department's funds a small works programme for the islands whereby an allocation is set aside annually to fund small infrastructure projects on the inhabited offshore islands. This is done in conjunction with the relevant Local Authorities who submit a list of the proposed works to the Department.

In order to maximise effectiveness of the funding available, my Department provides 75% of the total capital cost with the remainder paid by the relevant Local Authority.

If an application were to be received from a local authority for the provision of public toilets on an island, it could be evaluated in the context of the demands on the aforementioned scheme and the financial allocation available under same.

### **Gaelcholáistí Issues**

925. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will establish an enhanced grant scheme to support schoolchildren in attending Gaeltacht courses in 2021 in view of the cancellation of same for summer 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13537/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** 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 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 the stabilisation package which has been approved, up to €3.1m will be directed at supporting the college authorities to refund fees/deposits to parents in full while a further €1.6m is being allocated towards supporting the c. 700 certified Gaeltacht householders who normally keep students attending one of the recognised 42 colleges during the summer months.

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).

I am confident that the success of this scheme will ensure that there will be no need for extra financial supports for the Irish summer colleges sector in 2021, above and beyond those normally provided to households providing student accommodation under my Department's Scéim na bhFoghlaimoirí Gaeilge.

In the broader context, the Deputy may be aware that the Department, via Scéim na bhFoghlaimoirí Gaeilge, subvents the cost of attending summer college in Gaeltacht regions. Under the terms of the scheme, the Department provides a subsidy worth €10 per day (equivalent to € 220 per student for a three week course) which benefits over 26,000 students a year while staying in any of the c.700 households throughout the Gaeltacht which are recognised under the scheme. This represents a State investment of over €4m annually in the Irish summer colleges sector, which forms a critical part of the Gaeltacht economy and is estimated to be worth €50m annually.

In addition to providing and administering this practical assistance, the Department also administers three separate funds under the scheme, for the benefit of the Irish language and the Gaeltacht, namely:

- DEIS Gaeltachta – Under this measure which commenced in 2019, 50 scholarships are offered annually worth c. €850 each to provide the opportunity for attendees of DEIS post-prima-

ry schools throughout the country to attend recognised summer colleges in Gaeltacht regions.

- ERASMUS Gaeltachta – Under this initiative which commenced in 2019 an annual fund worth €250,000 has been created to give up to 175 third-level students the opportunity to spend a semester residing with accredited Gaeltacht households.

- Árainn Gaeltachta – This initiative provides funding of up to €150,000 over a 3-year period so that up to 30 post-primary students per year can spend a full year attending any one of the three post-primary schools on the Aran islands.

Needless to say, my Department continues to keep under constant review how best to further support and develop the sector within available resources and in a way which best supports the overall objectives of the overarching 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 and in turn, the Irish language and Gaeltacht regions.

### **Departmental Staff**

926. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department has established a working from home policy for its employees; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13544/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** My Department has not established a formal working from home policy for employees as a working from home policy is being developed centrally by Civil Service HR in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

With the exception of those whose attendance at the workplace is essential, employees in my Department are currently working from home on an emergency basis in line with public health guidance. My Department is communicating regularly with staff to ensure ongoing engagement and well-being.

*Question No. 927 answered with Question No. 911.*

### **Arts Funding**

928. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to correspondence addressed to An Taoiseach regarding arts and culture funding from a fund (details supplied); if the issues and concerns addressed in same will receive a response; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13623/20]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** I can confirm that I received a copy of the correspondence addressed to the Taoiseach to which the Deputy refers. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the Expert Advisory Group appointed by the Arts Council has now completed its Report which has been sent to my Department. The Arts Council has published the Report and it is available at this link-

*[http://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/Survive%20Adapt%20Renew\\_A%20response%20to%20the%20Covid-19%20crisis%20for%20the%20Arts%20in%20Ireland.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/Survive%20Adapt%20Renew_A%20response%20to%20the%20Covid-19%20crisis%20for%20the%20Arts%20in%20Ireland.pdf)*

As the correspondence notes, a significant additional allocation of €20 million for the Arts Council was announced by Government, bringing the Council's allocation this year to €100 million. The additional funding will address immediate priorities to assist with unique chal-

lenges faced by the arts, as our society and economy reopens. Artists and arts organisations will be supported to continue to create art and innovate. In the Report entitled *Survive, Adapt, Renew*, the Arts Council gives details on how it will allocate the new funding, including new bursaries and commissions to support freelance artists and those looking to develop projects on a collaborative basis.

My Department will continue to engage with the Arts Council on the recommendations set out in the Report of the Expert Advisory Group.

[[https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2020-06-30\\_pq928-30-06-20\\_en.jpg](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2020-06-30_pq928-30-06-20_en.jpg)] Letter to an Taoiseach