

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].

Covid-19 Pandemic

1. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Taoiseach the number of deaths for March, April and May 2020 compared to the same three months over the past five years; and if there is national collection or classification of data of patients dying with Covid-19 versus of Covid-19 in the same months. [14508/20]

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 May 2020 may not be registered until the end of August 2020. Therefore, the information requested is not yet available for comparison purposes to the same periods in the last five years. Furthermore, all deaths involving COVID-19 are reportable to the Coroner's office and are registered on receipt of the Coroner's certificate.

Mortality data is encrypted and received electronically on a weekly basis from the General Registration Office (GRO). Mortality coders in the Central Statistics Office (CSO) then assign an Underlying Cause Of Death (UCOD) code to each mortality record. The UCOD is based on the medical condition(s)/disease(s) reported on the death certificate and this is coded to the WHO International Classification of Diseases, ICD-10. In the case of an unnatural death, the UCOD is based on the verdict of the Coroner and, in some instances, the information returned to the CSO on a Form 104 (i.e. a form completed by a member of An Garda Síochána that attended the death scene). There is, therefore, a time lag between the receipt of the raw data from the GRO and completion of all coding by the CSO and as a result, the publication of quarterly data based on the date of registration of a death is generally 5 months after the end of a given reference period.

The 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/>

Consultancy Contracts

2. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Taoiseach the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within his Department from 2018 to date;

and the costs associated with such services. [14062/20]

The Taoiseach: My Department, in line with the rest of the Civil Service, actively supports diversity and inclusion in the workplace. In addition to arranging to training on diversity and inclusion related topics, my Department also supports staff attendance at relevant conferences and staff participation in mentoring programmes that promote diversity and inclusion. Diversity and inclusion considerations are also incorporated into other training and development opportunities available to staff including the Department's Leadership Development Programme for Senior Management, and the suite of training courses available to all staff through OneLearning.

Details of the training courses, conferences and programmes on diversity and inclusion related topics are detailed in the following tables.

2018

| Training | Provider | Cost |
|--|--|---------|
| Unconscious Bias Training for Departmental Staff | CMC Business Psychology Ltd | £973.35 |
| Interview Board Training (including unconscious bias training) - HEO | Carr Communications | €650 |
| Interview Board Training (including unconscious bias training) - EO | Carr Communications | €650 |
| Harmony at Work (Lunch and Learn Session) | Civil Service Employee Assistance Service | 0 |
| IMI/30% Cross-Company Mentoring Programme | Irish Management Institute | €2,500 |
| WAM Pre-Placement Training | Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) | 0 |

2019

| Training | Provider | Cost |
|--|----------------------------|--------|
| Interview Board Training (including unconscious bias training) - PO | Carr Communications | €650 |
| Interview Board Training (including unconscious bias training) - AP | Carr Communications | €650 |
| Interview Board Training (including unconscious bias training) - Service Officer | Carr Communications | €650 |
| Interview Board Training (including unconscious bias training) - Press Officer | Carr Communications | €650 |
| IMI/30% Cross-Company Mentoring Programme | Irish Management Institute | €2,000 |

| Training | Provider | Cost |
|---|--|------|
| Conference: Achieving Equality at Work: Reasonable Accommodation in Practice | Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission | 0 |
| Conference: Building inclusive healthy workplace cultures – the power of well-being and diversity | Public Affairs Ireland | €325 |

2020

| Training | Provider | Cost |
|----------------------------|--|------|
| WAM Pre-Placement Training | Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) | 0 |

Departmental Legal Costs

3. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Taoiseach the expenditure his Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form. [14079/20]

The Taoiseach: My Department incurred no expenditure in respect of external legal fees in the years 2016 to date in 2020

The Moriarty Tribunal of Inquiry and the Commissions of Investigation, which are independent of my Department, have sanction to engage legal counsel, as required, to assist them in their work. All legal services fees are paid at rates approved by the Government.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

4. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Taoiseach the details of his most recent discussions and engagement with the UK Prime Minister. [14436/20]

The Taoiseach: I spoke with Prime Minister Boris Johnson by phone on Tuesday, 30 June. The Prime Minister congratulated me on my appointment and we both looked forward to working together.

We had a constructive discussion that covered the current Covid-19 situation and our respective plans to deal with its impact on the economy, employment and society. We also discussed Brexit, and the negotiations currently taking place between the UK and the EU. We agreed to work closely on Northern Ireland, and on strengthening bilateral relations, especially in the post Brexit era.

We looked forward to meeting in the near future.

Departmental Programmes

5. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach when a unit within his Department will be established to work towards a consensus on a shared island; and the overall remit of the unit. [14497/20]

The Taoiseach: As set out in the Programme for Government, a new Shared Island Unit will be established within the Department of the Taoiseach which will use the potential of the Good Friday Agreement to deliver sustained progress for all communities.

This unit will work towards a consensus on a shared island and will examine the political, social, economic and cultural considerations underpinning a future in which all traditions are mutually respected.

Work on its structure, staffing and work programme is underway and I hope that the unit will start its work by the end of the month.

Ministerial Responsibilities

6. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Taoiseach if he will publish the Departmental briefing paper on his roles, remits and powers afforded to him upon his appointment. [14532/20]

The Taoiseach: As the role of the Taoiseach is set out in the Constitution, the Ministers and Secretaries Acts and other statutes, no specific briefing paper was prepared on my appointment.

Business Regulation

7. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the potential supports available for a person (details supplied); his views on whether the EU definition of undertaking in difficulty is prohibitive for many businesses such as this one; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13724/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The challenges that many businesses face in accessing State supports due to the EU definition of ‘Undertakings in Difficulty’ is a matter the Department is very much aware. Over the last 2 months, the Department has made a number of formal written submissions to the Commission in relation to the difficulties that arise for enterprises, particularly those high growth/high performance start-ups which technically, under the EU definition, could have been deemed undertakings in difficulty under state aid rules, but are in fact viable going concerns. The State Aid Unit of my Department has raised this issue directly with the EU Commission during recent conference calls and my predecessor, Minister Humphreys, raised it with Commissioner Hogan during a recent conversation.

I therefore very much welcome the announcement by the Commission on 29th June 2020 of its adoption of the 3rd amendment to the Temporary Framework. This amendment allows for support to be granted under the Temporary Framework to micro and small enterprises (up to 50 employees with less than EUR 10M annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet), even if they fall under the category of an undertaking in difficulty on 31 December 2019 provided that they are not subject to collective insolvency procedure under national law and have not received rescue or restructuring aid which has not yet been repaid). Such aid is also intended to increase support possibilities to innovative start-ups in the high growth phase which are micro or small in size.

This amendment will apply retrospectively to schemes already developed under the Temporary Framework, including the EI Sustaining Enterprise Fund.

Employment Rights

8. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the action he plans to take in view of the High Court ruling on sectoral employment orders, SEOs, recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13727/20]

9. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if he will introduce emergency legislation to ameliorate the impact from the recent High Court ruling on the SEO regarding electrician workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13728/20]

10. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the action he plans to take in view of the High Court ruling on SEOs recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13729/20]

11. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if he will introduce emergency legislation to ameliorate the impact from the recent High Court ruling on the SEO regarding electrician workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13730/20]

20. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation his plans to appeal the High Court decision on the electrical contractor's sectoral employment order; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13910/20]

29. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation his plans to respond to the High Court judicial review ruling on the electrical contractors' SEO and Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2015; if a stay on the order will be sought; if an appeal will be sought; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14126/20]

30. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation his plans to amend the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2015 in view of the recent High Court judicial review to rectify the deficiencies in the Act as identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14127/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 8 to 11, inclusive, 20, 29 and 30 together.

The High Court has ruled that the Sectoral Employment Order (electrical contracting sector) Order (SI 251 of 2019), providing minimum rates of remuneration and other matters for workers in the electrical contracting sector was made ultra vires, that is, outside the powers of the parent legislation. Accordingly, the judge is proposing to set aside the impugned order.

Furthermore, the judge is proposing to make a Declaration that Chapter 3 of Part 2 of the Industrial Relations Act 2015 is unconstitutional with regards Article 15.2.1. The High Court found that the construction of the Chapter is too vague to provide appropriate guidance for the circumstances required before the Labour Court can lawfully reach a decision to make a recommendation and its subsequent approval by the Minister and the Houses of Oireachtas. This means that the High Court is of the view that the Chapter in the 2015 Act, which governs the making of a SEO, unlawfully delegates law making powers to authorities outside the Oireachtas.

It is important to note that the ruling does not have legal effect until an Order giving it effect has been made. The parties have 21 days, that is, up to 14 July, to make their replies to the Court. My officials, in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, are giving the rul-

ing careful consideration and what the appropriate next steps are.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

12. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if he will address a matter raised in correspondence from a person (details supplied) on guidelines for reopening business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13758/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): On June 19th 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, all indoor and outdoor amenities for children can now reopen, subject to the limits on the number of attendees at indoor and outdoor gatherings. Full details are available at www.gov.ie

It is recommended that those organising children's parties of the type referred to carry out a risk assessment before reopening to manage the public health risk for their customers, attendees, participants and staff. The HPSC Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for these sectors can assist with this.

The National Return to Work Safely Protocol is the primary guide for businesses in 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, an agency of my Department, is the lead agency in overseeing compliance with the National Return to Work Safely Protocol in the workplace. If further guidance is needed on the Protocol, the HSA Helpline can be contacted at 1890 289 389 or wcu@hsa.ie.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

13. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the restart grant will be extended to sole traders and other businesses that do not pay commercial rates (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13792/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Restart Grant support is just one part of the wider €12bn package of supports for commercial firms of all sizes, which includes grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities, all of which will help those businesses to continue trading and to maintain employment.

This package is a significant step-up in the supports available for all businesses in all sectors at this very difficult time and the measures have been developed to meet the varying needs of Irish enterprise. 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 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. 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.

All Covid 19 business supports and Schemes are under constant review in terms of the evolving situation and will be adapted as circumstances dictate, including adaptations to the phased opening of our economy. In that regard, I can assure the Deputy that I will continue to work with my colleagues across Government and all stakeholders to examine further appropriate supports to assist businesses impacted by Covid-19. Government will continue to explore funding potential for all enterprises as they work through the challenges facing them, including through any mechanisms allowable under the EU's state aid framework and this analysis will be a key input to our consideration of additional measures that may be warranted as part of the Government's July Recovery Plan.

Full details on all COVID19 supports for business are available at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

14. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the supports available to sole traders affected by Covid-19, in particular those that do not pay rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13800/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Restart Grant support is just one part of the wider €12bn package of supports for commercial firms of all sizes, which includes grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial rates and deferred tax liabilities, all of which will help those businesses to continue trading and to maintain employment.

This package is a significant step-up in the supports available for all businesses in all sectors at this very difficult time and the measures have been developed to meet the varying needs of Irish enterprise. They are very specifically targeted by size, sector and need and are targeted at vulnerable but viable companies.

On 25 June it was announced that the Department of Social Protection'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. 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.

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 Trad-

er, 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.

All Covid 19 business supports and Schemes are under constant review in terms of the evolving situation and will be adapted as circumstances dictate, including adaptations to the phased opening of our economy. The Government is examining further appropriate supports to assist businesses impacted by Covid-19 as we prepare the forthcoming Recovery Plan and any suggestions the Deputy has in this regard would be most welcome.

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/>

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

15. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the specific supports, including financial supports and guidelines or advice provided to those working as taxi drivers or chauffeurs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13801/20]

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.

There are a number of loan schemes which have been put in place to assist businesses. 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.

The Covid-19 Working Capital Scheme is open to eligible SMEs and small mid-caps (businesses of up to 499 employees) and 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.

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.

On June 25th it was announced that the Department of Social Protection'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 National Transport Authority, as taxi industry regulator, has updates on the latest industry news and advice

<https://www.nationaltransport.ie/taxi/publications-and-regulations/latest-news-and-industry-updates/>.

The Government is examining all appropriate business supports to assist enterprises, including self-employed service providers, impacted by Covid-19, as we prepare the forthcoming Recovery Plan.

My colleague, Minister Eamon Ryan T.D., Minister for Transport may be able to provide more specific guidance on supports for the transport sector, and in particular taxi and private chauffeur providers.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

16. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the precise amount distributed to each local authority for the restart grant by local authority in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13828/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government has allocated €250m for the Restart Grant Scheme.

A funding tranche of €200m was made immediately to the 31 local authorities, collectively, to meet the initial applications from qualifying businesses associated with Phases 1 and 2 of the

Government's Roadmap for the re-opening of the business sector .

The Scheme is subject to ongoing review and oversight by my Department in the context of potential further grant aid and the liquidity challenges faced by microenterprises and SMEs.

I have set out in the following table the amounts advanced to each Local Authority:

| | Breakdown of €200m advance on Restart Grant by Local Authority |
|------------------------|--|
| LOCAL AUTHORITY | ALLOCATION |
| Carlow | €2,669,080 |
| Cavan | €3,251,425 |
| Clare | €5,638,513 |
| Cork City | €12,014,139 |
| Cork County | €15,885,944 |
| Donegal | €7,402,598 |
| Dublin City | €26,681,619 |
| Dun Laoghaire Rathdown | €7,679,343 |
| Fingal | €8,043,964 |
| Galway City | €4,984,031 |
| Galway County | €6,559,248 |
| Kerry | €7,483,917 |
| Kildare | €6,678,602 |
| Kilkenny | €3,757,697 |
| Laois | €2,510,378 |
| Leitrim | €1,429,630 |
| Limerick | €8,756,156 |
| Longford | €1,884,751 |
| Louth | €5,902,142 |
| Mayo | €5,601,789 |
| Meath | €6,201,184 |
| Monaghan | €3,251,425 |
| Offaly | €3,357,663 |
| Roscommon | €2,759,580 |
| Sligo | €3,007,469 |
| South Dublin | €9,095,857 |
| Tipperary | €7,114,049 |
| Waterford | €5,314,551 |
| Westmeath | €4,135,434 |
| Wexford | €5,974,280 |
| Wicklow | €4,973,539 |
| Total | €200,000,000 |

Work Permits

17. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if consideration will be given to an application for a work permit in the case of

a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13844/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Employment Permits Section of my Department informs me that there is no current application for an employment permit for the named person (details supplied) or that person's spouse.

In order to apply for an employment permit a non-EEA national must have secured a job offer for an eligible occupation from an Irish registered employer. An application for an employment permit by the named person (or spouse) will be considered should such an application be made, subject to the application fulfilling all relevant criteria.

Details on how to apply for an employment permit are available on my Department's website at the following link - <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/>

In order to assist with the application process, my Department has produced a suite of information including various checklist documents, a 'User Guide' to our online application system and a comprehensive FAQ Document which answers the most common queries received regarding employment permits. All this information can be found in the Employment Permit section of my Department's website at www.dbei.gov.ie.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

18. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the business supports available that are specific to the taxi and small private bus hire sector in the context of Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13849/20]

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://dbei.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.

There are a number of loan schemes which have been put in place to assist businesses. 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.

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 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.

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.

On June 25th it was announced that the Department of Social Protection'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 Government is examining all such appropriate business supports to assist enterprises, including self-employed service providers, impacted by Covid-19, as we develop the forthcoming Recovery Plan.

My colleague, Minister Eamon Ryan T.D., Minister for Transport may be able to provide more specific guidance on supports for the transport sector, and in particular taxi and private bus operators.

Employment Rights

19. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the removal of a sectoral employment order setting out pay rates, pension and sick pay entitlements in the electrical industry will have consequences for the rest of the construction sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13864/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The High Court has ruled that the Sectoral Employment Order (electrical contracting sector) Order (SI 251 of 2019), providing minimum rates of remuneration and other matters for workers in the electrical contracting sector was made ultra vires, that is, outside the powers of the parent legislation. Accordingly, the judge is proposing to set aside the impugned order.

Furthermore, the judge is proposing to make a Declaration that Chapter 3 of Part 2 of the Industrial Relations Act 2015 is unconstitutional with regards Article 15.2.1. The High Court found that the construction of the Chapter is too vague to provide appropriate guidance for the circumstances required before the Labour Court can lawfully reach a decision to make a Recommendation and its subsequent approval by the Minister and the Houses of Oireachtas. This means that the High Court is of the view that the Chapter in the 2015 Act, which governs the making of a SEO, unlawfully delegates law making powers to authorities outside the Oireachtas.

It should be noted however, that the operation of other employment rights frameworks pro-

tect existing wages and other terms and conditions of existing workers.

It is also important to note that the ruling does not have legal effect until an Order giving it effect has been made. The parties have 21 days, that is, up to 14 July, to make their replies to the Court. My officials, in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, are giving the ruling careful consideration and the appropriate next steps.

Question No. 20 answered with Question No. 8.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

21. **Deputy James O'Connor** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if he will address the issue of the allocation of restart grants by local authorities due to insufficient funding which prevents them from allocating funding to companies outside of phases 1 and 2 under the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business even if the application has been successfully processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13982/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Eligible businesses which had stayed open throughout the crisis, as well as those which were reopening under Phase 1 (from 18th May) and Phase 2 (8th June) of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business are encouraged to apply for the Restart Grant.

As the Deputy will be aware, the acceleration of the Roadmap lead to a further number of businesses allowed to reopen in advance of what was initially anticipated and there is no longer a need for prioritisation of applications in line with reopening dates. Accordingly, all eligible businesses are invited to apply for the grant.

Regarding the funding of the scheme, I am satisfied, based on original estimates provided through the Local Authorities, that the Scheme is sufficiently funded.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

22. **Deputy James O'Connor** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if support will be provided to the publican sector with regard to the issue of loss of stock due to its perishable nature as a result of Covid-19 pandemic restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13983/20]

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://dbei.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.

On the June 25th it was announced that the Department of Employment Affairs and Social

Protection's Enterprise Support Grant would 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.

As an immediate step I would encourage all pub owners to apply for the Government's Restart Grant, which 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.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

23. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 422 of 16 June 2020, if his attention has been drawn to the fact that not all tradespersons continued to operate as a result of Covid-19; if such persons can apply for the restart grant in view of the fact they are returning to their work the same as the self-employed and businesses that pay rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13986/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Restart Grant support is just one part of the wider €12bn package of supports for commercial firms of all sizes, which includes grants, low-cost loans, write-off of commercial

rates and deferred tax liabilities, all of which will help those businesses to continue trading and to maintain employment.

This package is a significant step-up in the supports available for all businesses in all sectors at this very difficult time and the measures have been developed to meet the varying needs of Irish enterprise. They are very specifically targeted by size, sector and need and are targeted at vulnerable but viable companies.

Specifically with regard to tradespersons who do not operate from rateable premises and are thus ineligible for the Restart Grant, I wish to advise the deputy on June 25th it was announced that the Department of Social Protection'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. 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.

All Covid 19 business supports and Schemes are under constant review in terms of the evolving situation and will be adapted as circumstances dictate, including adaptations to the phased opening of our economy. In that regard, I can assure the Deputy that I will continue to work with my colleagues across Government and all stakeholders to examine further appropriate supports to assist businesses impacted by Covid-19. Government will continue to explore funding potential for all enterprises as they work through the challenges facing them, including through any mechanisms allowable under the EU's state aid framework. Any suggestions the Deputy has in this regard would be welcomed.

Full details on all COVID19 supports for business are available at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

24. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if he will consider a proposal by a person (details supplied) on businesses which are ineligible for grants but may play a key role in the restart of local SMEs going forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14014/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Restart Grant is just one part of a wider assistance package for business and 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. Within the funding available, the priority has been to assist those who have suffered most, including closure of the business, but whom will still have incurred ongoing costs.

As the publisher referred to seems to be a sole trader, then perhaps the Government's Enterprise Support Grant announced on 25th June may be more suitable to help reinvigorate this business. The 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. 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 COVID19 Business Restart Grant or other similar

business reopening grants. Many businesses are reluctant to take on debt at this uncertain time, but 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 no repayments. Thereafter a reduced interest rate of 4.5% APR applies to loans applied for through the Local Enterprise Office and this may provide them with the necessary capital injection to help them recover, while the surrounding businesses that provide the bulk of their revenue continue to find their feet. All Covid19 business Schemes are under constant review in terms of the evolving situation and will be adapted as circumstances dictate, including adaptations to the phased opening of our economy. Government will continue to explore funding potential for all enterprises as they work through the challenges facing them, including through any mechanisms allowable under the EU's state aid framework.

Any SME should speak to representatives from their Local Enterprise Office to discuss what assistance and guidance they can offer, noting that the Local Enterprise Offices do not provide direct grant-aid to areas such as retail, personal services, local professional services, construction/local building services, as it may give rise to the displacement of existing businesses.

Full details on all COVID19 measures for business are available at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

Programme for Government

25. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if he will provide documents on those costings. [14023/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department has not carried out any costings on the Programme for Government.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

26. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the provisions in place for those that are not commercial rates payers but wish to avail of the restart scheme or similar in order to reinvent their businesses, for example, bed and breakfast owners that want to convert to self-catering accommodation. [14039/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Restart Grant is just one part of a wider assistance package for business and 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. Within the funding available, the priority has been to assist those who have suffered most, including closure of the business, but whom will still have incurred ongoing costs.

On the June 25, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection 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. The grant will be payable to self-employed micro enterprises which employ fewer than 10 people, have an annual turnover of less than €1 mil-

lion and are not eligible for support from the COVID19 Business Restart Grant or other similar business reopening grants.

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.

Regarding any further targeted measures specifically aimed at the tourism sector, in March 2020 a dedicated Tourism Recovery Taskforce was established made up of leaders from various sectors of the industry, who will work together to deal with the many challenges ahead. It has been specifically tasked with identifying measures required to enable Irish tourism to recover from the devastating effects of COVID19.

All Covid 19 business Schemes are under constant review in terms of the evolving situation and will be adapted as circumstances dictate, including adaptations to the phased opening of our economy. Government will continue to explore funding potential for all enterprises as they work through the challenges facing them, including through any mechanisms allowable under the EU's state aid framework.

Full details on all COVID19 measures for business are available at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

Consultancy Contracts

27. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within his Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14048/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department has not engaged an external consultancy organisation or provider to deliver diversity and inclusion training since 2018.

Departmental Legal Costs

28. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the expenditure his Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14065/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The following link contains information concerning the amount of external legal fees, inclusive of VAT, incurred by my Department and Offices for the period from January 2016 to June 2020.

The table contained in the link does not include expenditure on external legal fees incurred by the Department's Agencies.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumenta-

tion/2020-07-07_pq28-7-7-2020_en.xlsx">Summary of Legal Fees]

Questions Nos. 29 and 30 answered with Question No. 8.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

31. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applications made to the Covid-19 restart grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14138/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Restart Grant scheme is just one part of the wider €12bn suite of measures 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. This package is a significant step-up in assistance 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 of 6 July 2020, the Restart Grant scheme has received a total of 37,525 applications across 31 local authorities nationwide.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

32. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the supports or grants available to a sector (details supplied) in the context of Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14147/20]

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.

On June 25th it was announced that the Department of Social Protection'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.

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 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 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 Government is examining what additional measures may be warranted as part of the forthcoming Recovery Plan.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service

33. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if his attention has been drawn to situations in which business owners that do not hold EEA citizen status that had their visas automatically renewed by the INIS due to Covid-19 restrictions, are being told by the Companies Registration Office that they are unable to register their business name until they can prove that they are allowed trade in Ireland, in view of the fact this is impossible at this time due to the closure and significant backlog in the INIS offices. [14165/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Registration of Business Names Act, 1963, an application for registration must be submitted to the CRO within one month of the date of adoption of the business name. The CRO requires that applicants who are not EEA or Swiss nationals must provide a copy of their current Irish Residency Permit.

In light of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the immigration service of the Department of Justice and Equality announced that all Irish Residency Permits due to expire between 20/03/2020 and 20/05/2020 were automatically renewed for a period of two months. This arrangement was extended for permits due to expire between 20/05/2020 and 20/07/2020.

I understand that the Registrar of Companies has reviewed the current administrative arrangements in place when dealing with applicants who are not EEA / Swiss nationals and will now accept expired Irish Residency Permits which fall into the automatic renewal criteria announced by the immigration service. Any applicants who have been unsuccessful on the basis of a residency permit that has expired since 20/03/2020 can now resubmit their applications to the CRO and they will be processed in accordance with the Registrar's decision.

EU Directives

34. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the timeline for transposition of the representative action directive; the body to be named as qualified entity for the purposes of launching actions for injunction and redress under the directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14208/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The European Commission published a proposal in 2018 for a Directive on representative actions for the protection of the collective interests of consumers and for the repeal of the Injunctions Directive 2009/22/EC. The purpose of the Directive is to contribute to the proper functioning of the internal market by achieving a high level of consumer protection through the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of Member States concerning representative actions. To this end, the Directive aims to improve consumers access to justice. The EU co-legislators reached a political agreement on the draft Directive on 22 June 2020, however it will still have to be formally approved by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament before it becomes EU law.

When the draft Directive becomes EU law, Member States will have 24 months within which to transpose it into their domestic legislative framework. The issue of how a qualified entity will be enabled to seek injunction and redress measures in the course of a representative action will be addressed by my Department during the transposition period.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

35. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of SME restart grants granted to businesses for each county to date; the amount awarded to businesses in total to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14463/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have set out in the following table the total number of applications received and which have been paid and the value of same per Local Authority under the Restart Grant scheme as of 6 July 2020. A further €17,844,688 of grant funding has been approved as of this date and will be paid shortly.

| Local Authority | NUMBER APPLICATIONS PAID | VALUE APPLICATIONS PAID € |
|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Carlow | 227 | €889,198 |
| Cavan | 256 | €865,639 |
| Clare | 702 | €2,598,527 |
| Cork City | 531 | €2,539,245 |

| Local Authority | NUMBER APPLICA- TIONS PAID | VALUE APPLICATIONS PAID € |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Cork County | 957 | €3,433,004 |
| Donegal | 439 | €1,703,121 |
| Dublin City | 388 | €1,844,390 |
| Dun Laoghaire Rathdown | 285 | €1,542,676 |
| Fingal | 795 | €4,076,918 |
| Galway City | 800 | €4,139,541 |
| Galway County | 824 | €2,800,975 |
| Kerry | 753 | €3,202,217 |
| Kildare | 649 | €2,829,902 |
| Kilkenny | 421 | €1,611,166 |
| Laois | 249 | €795,589 |
| Leitrim | 203 | €565,315 |
| Limerick | 1032 | €4,458,328 |
| Longford | 111 | €375,837 |
| Louth | 476 | €2,171,433 |
| Mayo | 1018 | €3,605,748 |
| Meath | 964 | €3,804,199 |
| Monaghan | 598 | €2,013,226 |
| Offaly | 287 | €955,327 |
| Roscommon | 325 | €1,104,296 |
| Sligo | 481 | €1,721,574 |
| South Dublin | 230 | €1,355,320 |
| Tipperary | 913 | €3,064,381 |
| Waterford | 678 | €2,853,008 |
| Westmeath | 662 | €2,263,116 |
| Wexford | 994 | €3,904,777 |
| Wicklow | 503 | €1,931,284 |
| GRAND TOTALS | 17,751 | €71,019,277 |

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

36. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if he will review the business restart grant to remove the barrier to small business in circumstances in which the qualification is linked to rateable premises in view of the number of businesses that operate, provide services and maintain and generate employment in the smaller towns and villages. [14481/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Restart Grant is just one part of a wider assistance package for business and 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. Within the funding available, the priority has been to assist those who have suffered most, including closure of the business, but whom will still have incurred ongoing costs. I can assure the Deputy that I am keeping our range supports under continuous review and we will be considering all options in developing

the forthcoming Recovery Plan.

On the 25 June, the then Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection 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. 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 COVID19 Business Restart Grant or other similar business reopening grants.

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.

All Covid 19 business Schemes are under constant review in terms of the evolving situation and will be adapted as circumstances dictate, including adaptations to the phased opening of our economy. Government will continue to explore funding potential for all enterprises as they work through the challenges facing them, including through any mechanisms allowable under the EU's state aid framework.

Full details on all COVID19 measures for business are available at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

Ministerial Responsibilities

37. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if he will publish the Departmental briefing paper on his role, remits and powers afforded to him upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14518/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Yes. These briefing papers will be published on the Department's website in coming weeks.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

38. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount in grants disbursed to businesses under the restart grant since its inception; and the number of grants disbursed to businesses under the restart grant since its inception disaggregated by the value of grants in intervals of €1,000, from €2,000 to €10,000. [14546/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As of 6 July 2020, a total sum of €71,019,277 in grants has been disbursed to businesses under the Restart Grant scheme since its inception in May 2020. A further sum of €17,844,688 is due to be paid in respect of applications which have recently been approved.

The additional information which the Deputy is seeking in terms of the amounts per thousand disbursed to businesses since the inception of the Restart Grant is still in the process of being collected from the local authorities and will be made available at a later date.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

39. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if taxi drivers will be allowed access to the various support schemes for SMEs from which they are currently excluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14566/20]

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://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

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.

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.

Government will continue to explore funding potential for all enterprises as they work through the challenges facing them. I will keep the supports provided under review and continue to support businesses as they work through the challenges facing them.

My colleague, Minister Eamon Ryan T.D., Minister for Transport may be able to provide more specific guidelines or supports designed to suit your particular business.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

40. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if specific supports have been provided to the commercial launderette and dry-cleaning sectors; his plans to provide bespoke assistance to these businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14569/20]

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 temporary 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://dbei.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.

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 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.

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the ‘first-stop-shop’ for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports to those wishing to start or grow their own business, in the first instance they act as a ‘signposting’ service for all government supports available to the SME sector. Supports offered through the Local Enterprise Offices include mentoring and training. The Mentor Programme 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 mentor contributes independent, informed observation and advice to aid decision making. Furthermore, the LEOs have moved training programmes, workshops and networking meet-ups online. The LEOs provide a wide range of high-quality training supports which are tailored to meet specific business requirements. In addition to this, the LEOs launched the LEO Client Training Initiative which is a new ‘Lunch & Learn’ live training webinar series. This is open and accessible to all LEO client companies and prospective clients across the country, with no registration or sign-up required.

In addition to the above, the LEOs act as a signposting service for businesses to other business supports, the full extent of which can be viewed on my Department’s website at: *<https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/>*

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection’s Enterprise Support Grant has been 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.

Government is considering what further initiatives are needed as part of the forthcoming Recovery Plan. Any suggestions the Deputy has in this regard would be welcome.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

41. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number and value of loans approved and issued to applicants through the Covid-19 credit guarantee scheme since 23 March 2020. [14635/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The new €2 billion COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme which was announced on 2 May 2020, forms a major component of the Government's strategy to aid SMEs in these difficult times by providing critical support to ensure businesses are facilitated in having access to credit facilities to assist a return to a more regular trading environment.

It will provide an 80% guarantee on lending to SMEs until the end of this year, for terms between 3 months and 6 years. The guarantee can be used for a wide range of lending products between €10,000 and €1 million that have a maximum term of 6 years or less. The new Scheme is expected to include overdrafts and short-term re-financing facilities, the terms of which are currently under discussion with the financial providers.

The implementation of this Scheme requires primary legislation, the drafting of which has been approved by Government and work on drafting is ongoing.

My officials are also currently engaged with the European Commission in seeking approval for the Covid-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme and ensuring the Scheme's adherence to the rules set out in their Temporary Framework.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

42. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number and value of loans approved and issued to applicants through the credit guarantee scheme since 23 March 2020. [14636/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Credit Guarantee Scheme was implemented under the Credit Guarantee Act 2012, which came into effect on 30th August 2012, with secondary legislation setting out the operational detail of the Scheme. The Credit Guarantee Scheme is available to Covid-19 impacted businesses, it supports loans up to €1 million for periods of up to 7 years. The Scheme offers a partial Government guarantee of 80% to banks against losses on qualifying loans to eligible SMEs. The scheme is designed to support a range of debt products appropriate to the borrowing needs of SMEs. Term loans and other products such as stocking facilities, performance bonds are covered by the Scheme.

An application to access the Credit Guarantee Scheme can be made through one of the participating finance providers which are currently Allied Irish Banks, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank Ireland. The Scheme is operated by SBCI. The Department plays no role in the application or decision-making process, which, is fully delegated to the participating lenders. The current Credit Guarantee Scheme facilitates guarantees up to a maximum of €150 million

in any one year.

Since the 23 March 2020 there have been 5 loan applications approved and drawn down, with a combined value of €1,606,000.00

Information on the uptake of Covid-19 schemes is available from the Take-up of Covid-19 Supports page of my Department's website.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

43. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number and value of loans approved and issued to applicants through the Covid-19 working capital loan scheme since 23 March 2020. [14637/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Covid-19 Working Capital Scheme is offered in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and is supported by the InnovFin SME Guarantee facility. The scheme is operated by the SBCI through participating finance providers.

It currently makes available a fund of up to €200 million to eligible businesses that have been negatively affected by impacts arising from the outbreak of Covid-19 to enable those businesses to innovate, change or adapt in response to the current business environment. Work is under way on a significant expansion to the scheme which will be brought to the market in the coming weeks.

The scheme is open to eligible SMEs and small mid-caps (businesses of up to 499 employees) negatively impacted by Covid-19. Loans under the scheme range from €25,000 to €1.5m and are for periods of up to three years. The maximum interest rate under the scheme is 4% and loans of up to €500,000 are available unsecured.

Since the 23 March 2020 and as of 6 July 2020 there have been 632 loans sanctioned under the Covid-19 Working Capital Scheme to a total value of €76.56m.

Information on the uptake of Covid-19 schemes is available from the Take-up of Covid-19 Supports page of my Department's website, which is updated weekly.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

44. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number and value of loans approved and issued to applicants through the Covid-19 business loan scheme operated through Microfinance Ireland since 23 March 2020. [14638/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Covid-19 Loan, available from Microfinance Ireland (MFI), was introduced as a support to microenterprises to help them access funding arising from the Covid-19 crisis.

These loans are available for eligible microenterprises responding to Covid-19-related difficulties, the negative impact of which must be a minimum of 15% of actual or projected income or profit. Loans up to €50,000 are available with terms that include a six months interest free and repayment free moratorium, with the loan to then be repaid over the remaining 30 months of the 36-month loan period.

MFI provides vital support to microenterprises by filling the lending gap in the market by lending to business that cannot obtain loans from other commercial lenders. It lends to business that do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by commercial lenders and applies interest rate charges for its lending which are not reflective of its credit risk.

Standard loans from Microfinance Ireland have interest rates of between 6.8% and 7.8%. Given the cost burden to businesses even with these subsidised rates of interest a substantial reduction was applied on the interest rate to 4.5% on the Covid-19 loans provided by MFI. This reduced rate is available to all micro-enterprises where the application is made through the Local Enterprise Network or referred by a bank or Local Development Committees. The new rate for direct applications to MFI is reduced to 5.5%.

As these loans are available interest free for the first six months, the net effect is to further reduce the net interest rate payable over the period of the loan.

The types of businesses normally supported, if they could obtain unsecured bank funding, would normally attract a significantly higher rate of interest due to the unsecured nature of this lending and the inherent risk. Microfinance Ireland is a not-for-profit lender and is loss making due to the nature of the risk it is mandated to take.

As of the 3 July 2020, out of 989 applications under the Covid-19 loan, 581 applications had been approved to the value of €15.65m. €12.38m of this has been drawn down as of the same date by micro businesses.

To note, a full list of supports that are available to assist businesses address the challenges posed by the COVID -19 crisis, together with details of uptake of such supports, is available on

<https://dbej.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

This list is updated every week in consultation with Business Units with the updated table published on the Department's website by lunchtime on Mondays.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

45. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applications for loans under the Covid-19 credit guarantee scheme that have been rejected by lenders since 23 March 2020. [14639/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The new €2 billion COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme forms a major component of the Government's strategy to aid SMEs in these difficult times by providing critical support to ensure businesses are facilitated in having access to credit facilities to assist a return to a more regular trading environment.

It will provide an 80% guarantee on lending to SMEs until the end of this year, for terms between 3 months and 6 years. The guarantee can be used for a wide range of lending products between €10,000 and €1 million that have a maximum term of 6 years or less. The new Scheme is expected to include overdrafts and short-term re-financing facilities, the terms of which are currently under discussion with the financial providers.

The implementation of this Scheme requires primary legislation, the drafting of which has been approved by Government and work on drafting is ongoing.

My officials are also currently engaged with the European Commission in seeking approval

for the Covid-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme and ensuring the Scheme's adherence to the rules set out in their Temporary Framework.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

46. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applications for loans under the credit guarantee scheme that have been rejected by lenders since 23 March 2020. [14640/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Credit Guarantee Scheme was implemented under the Credit Guarantee Act 2012, which came into effect on 30th August 2012, with secondary legislation setting out the operational detail of the Scheme. The Credit Guarantee Scheme is available to Covid-19 impacted businesses. It supports loans up to €1 million for periods of up to 7 years. The Scheme offers a partial Government guarantee of 80% to banks against losses on qualifying loans to eligible SMEs. The scheme is designed to support a range of debt products appropriate to the borrowing needs of SMEs. Term loans and other products such as stocking facilities, performance bonds are covered by the Scheme.

An application to access the Credit Guarantee Scheme can be made through one of the participating finance providers which are currently Allied Irish Banks, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank Ireland. The Scheme is operated by SBCI. The Department plays no role in the application or decision-making process, which, is fully delegated to the participating finance providers. As such the refusal of applications is a confidential matter between the customer and the finance provider.

Information on the uptake of Covid-19 schemes is available from the Take-up of Covid-19 Supports page of my Department's website.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

47. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applications for loans under the Covid-19 working capital loan scheme that have been rejected by lenders since 23 March 2020. [14641/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Covid-19 Working Capital Scheme makes available a fund of up to €200 million to eligible businesses that have been negatively affected by impacts arising from the outbreak of Covid-19 to enable those businesses to innovate, change or adapt in response to the current business environment. Work is under way on a significant expansion to the scheme and this will be brought to the market in the coming weeks.

This Covid-19 Working Capital Scheme is operated by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through participating finance providers. It features a two-stage application process, whereby businesses must first apply for eligibility confirmation with the SBCI. Successful applicants are issued an eligibility reference number which they can use to apply with participating finance providers. This code remains valid for six months, and businesses may apply to secure eligibility for an application at a later date.

The scheme is open to eligible SMEs and small mid-caps (businesses of up to 499 employees) negatively impacted by Covid-19. As of the most recent report (3 July), there had been

3,288 applications for eligibility under the scheme made to the SBCI. Of those, only 15 applicants (less than 0.5%) have so far been determined to be ineligible.

Loans under the scheme are subject to the participating banks' own credit policies and procedures. Information on the decline rate of loan applications under the scheme remains with the banks and is not reported on in relation to individual schemes.

If an applicant feels that their loan application has been declined unreasonably, they can appeal this decision through the Credit Review Office. Applicants may also use the same eligibility reference number to apply with another participating bank.

SME credit decline rates are collated through the Department of Finance Credit Demand Survey and the Central Bank of Ireland SME Market Report. For its Credit Demand Survey, the Department of Finance conducts a biannual survey of 1,500 SMEs in relation to the demand for bank credit and related issues. The results from the most recent survey in respect of the period April 2019 to September 2019, shows that excluding pending applications, the overall decline rate stands at 14% (the same level compared to September 2018). According to the Central Bank of Ireland's most recent SME Market Report (2019), "rejection rates on loan/overdraft applications in Ireland have declined and converged to euro area averages."

The decline rates for SME loans will continued to be monitored through these surveys and comparison will be made to SME loan decline rates in the euro area. The data from these surveys is a significant source of information on which insights can be drawn in relation to access to finance for SMEs in Ireland.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

48. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applications for loans under the Covid-19 business loan scheme operated by Microfinance Ireland that have been rejected by lenders since 23 March 2020. [14642/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Covid-19 Loan, available from Microfinance Ireland (MFI), was introduced as a support to microenterprises to help them access funding arising from the Covid-19 crisis.

These loans are available for eligible microenterprises responding to Covid-19-related difficulties, the negative impact of which must be a minimum of 15% of actual or projected income or profit. Loans up to €50,000 are available with terms that include a six months interest free and repayment free moratorium, with the loan to then be repaid over the remaining 30 months of the 36-month loan period.

MFI provides vital support to microenterprises by filling the lending gap in the market by lending to business that cannot obtain loans from other commercial lenders. It lends to business that do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by commercial lenders and applies interest rate charges for its lending which are not reflective of its credit risk.

Standard loans from Microfinance Ireland have interest rates of between 6.8% and 7.8%. Given the cost burden to businesses even with these subsidised rates of interest a substantial reduction has been made in the interest rate to 4.5% on the Covid-19 loans provided by MFI. This reduced rate is available to all micro-enterprises where the application is made through the Local Enterprise Network or referred by a bank or Local Development Committees. The new rate for direct applications to MFI is reduced to 5.5%.

As these loans are available interest free for the first six months, the net effect is to further reduce the net interest rate payable over the period of the loan.

The types of businesses normally supported, if they could obtain unsecured bank funding, would normally attract a significantly higher rate of interest due to the unsecured nature of this lending and the inherent risk. Microfinance Ireland is a not-for-profit lender and is loss making due to the nature of the risk it is mandated to take.

As of the 30th June 2020, out of 963 applications under the Covid-19 loan, 72 were ineligible/withdrawn and 147 applications have been declined. 581 applications had been approved and 163 were in progress.

Broadcasting Sector

49. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will consider the long-standing request of musicians and artists for broadcasters to be required to play a minimum of 40% of domestically produced music, drama and artistic output; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14567/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to answer this question, pending the formal transfer of Broadcasting functions from my Department to the Department of Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht. There are a number of factors which must be taken into account when considering the feasibility of introducing broadcasting content quotas. The potential benefit to the Irish artistic industry must be balanced with the rights of broadcasters, subject to their contractual or regulatory obligations, to determine the type of content they wish to broadcast and to maximise their commercial revenue particularly in the context of the current media climate. Importantly, the introduction of broadcasting quotas would need to be consistent with EU law.

An EU based example of broadcasting quotas is that of airplay quotas in France. In 1994, France introduced a mandatory quota for 40% airplay of French language music on French radio stations; this quota was reduced to 35% in 2016. Any quota for airplay would be considered to restrict free movement of services by placing music meeting certain criteria in a more advantaged position. However, a quota for airplay of music in a particular language, as is the case in France, can be justified under EU case law, as the preservation and promotion of an official language of a Member State constitutes a general interest objective. Unlike music in a particular language, a quota system for music, drama or other artistic content produced in a particular place, as suggested in this question, does not appear to have grounds for exemption from the general requirements of EU law. Therefore, a quota for broadcasting content produced in a particular Member State would be considered to restrict free movement of services by placing content produced in other Member States at a disadvantage.

However, it should be noted that traditional and contemporary Arts are among the categories set out the Broadcasting Act, 2009 as being eligible for funding under the Sound and Vision Scheme which is supported by 7% of TV licence fee receipts.

National Broadband Plan

50. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** 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. [13743/20]

51. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** 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. [13744/20]

62. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to a number of households just outside the reach of national broadband coverage (details supplied); the steps being taken to expedite broadband connection; and if those households within 500 metres of the existing roll out will be treated as priorities in cases in which a clear need for connection exists. [14109/20]

70. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the provision of fibre broadband supply on a road (details supplied). [14348/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 50, 51, 62 and 70 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. 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 people's frustration 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. 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 deployment under the National Broadband Plan (NBP). 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.

The BCP delivery project is well underway and connectivity is being provided to each of the sites by National Broadband Ireland (NBI). Subsequent to this, the sites, other than schools, are being Wi-Fi enabled by Vodafone under a contract with the Department of Rural and Community Development. This work also involves the local authorities and site owners determining the services that will be provided for end-users at each site. For the 75 schools that are also part of this project, enabling these schools with Wi-Fi is being led by the Department of Education subsequent to NBI providing the connectivity to the schools.

Bringing connectivity to remote rural locations is central to promoting regional development and BCPs represent an important delivery in the early stages of the National Broadband Plan.

Pension Provisions

52. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a matter will be addressed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13750/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department has made enquiries with the NSSO who have confirmed that responsibility for the matter raised in the question rests with the company concerned. My Department will liaise with the Deputy to provide further assistance and facilitate obtaining up to date information from the relevant bodies.

Alternative Energy Projects

53. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the financial supports in place for a person to set up a solar energy farm; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13955/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) has been established to support delivery of Ireland's 70% renewable electricity target by 2030. The RESS is a competitive, auction-based scheme which invites renewable electricity generation projects, including solar farms, to bid for capacity and receive a guaranteed price for the electricity they generate for up to 16.5 years. The RESS also includes broader policy objectives such as technology diversification and support for community ownership and participation. The first RESS auction is currently underway and includes a specific category for solar energy projects and community owned projects.

Other financial supports are available for solar energy micro-generation projects. These include tax based incentives for the development of renewable technologies such as the Accelerated Capital Allowances Scheme and the Employment and Investment Incentive as well as improvements for farm enterprises supported by the Department for Agriculture, Food and Marine, under the Pig and Poultry Investment Scheme as part of the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS).

As part of delivering the RESS project, and in consultation with SEAI, my officials are exploring a variety of options, including soft loans and grants for community led projects including solar projects.

Trading Online Voucher Scheme

54. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of applications for the online trading voucher received and processed from January 2020 to date by the LEO Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13957/20]

55. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of applications received and processed for the online trading voucher from January to December 2019 by the LEO Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13958/20]

56. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if attendance at a seminar is a mandatory requirement as part of the criteria for businesses applying for the online trading voucher; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13959/20]

57. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when funding will be made available to the LEO Wicklow to allow it to process the high volume of applications received recently from businesses for the online trading voucher; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13960/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 54 to 57, inclusive, together.

The Trading Online Voucher Scheme is managed by my Department and delivered nationwide in partnership with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Department of Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht, Enterprise Ireland, the 31 Local Enterprise Offices and Údarás na Gaeltachta. The Scheme offers skills training, mentoring and a grant of up to €2,500 to help small and micro-businesses to develop their ecommerce capability.

It is a requirement of the Scheme that prospective applicants participate in an information session, which is currently delivered by way of webinar. The content of the information session includes:

- What the Trading Online Voucher can be used for, and how the Scheme Works;
- The opportunities of ecommerce;
- Tools for helping a business participate in ecommerce; and
- The do's and do nots of an online ecommerce presence.

The information session also provides prospective applicants with an opportunity to network and learn from the experience of their peers.

In response to Covid-19, funding for the Scheme in 2020 was increased from €2.3m to €19.8m, and new flexibilities were introduced including reducing the requirement for co-funding from 50% to 10% and allowing businesses to apply for a second voucher of up to €2,500 where they have successfully utilised their first one.

During 2019 the Wicklow LEO processed and approved 39 applications for vouchers to a value of €83,523.

In the period 1 January to 1 July 2020 the Wicklow LEO processed and approved 133 applications for vouchers to a value of €310,658.

On 1 July 2020 my Department increased the voucher allocation to the Wicklow LEO from 170 to 262 vouchers or in value terms from €408,000 to €628,800 (based on an average voucher value of €2,400).

Inland Fisheries

58. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the arrangements in place to monitor commercial fishing activity on rivers to ensure that regulations are complied with; the number of officials working on these rivers; the rate of non-compliance being reported; the protections in place to safeguard salmon stock in rivers in which stocking levels are under threat; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13994/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) is responsible for oversight of commercial salmon fishing in our 140 salmon rivers. The harvest of salmon, by commercial or recreational means, is only permitted on those river stocks that are meeting their conservation limit - the minimum number of adult fish required to maintain a healthy and sustainable population in the individual river. A suite of secondary legislation is set out annually to establish the status of the salmon stocks in each river and the available surplus on each river that is open for harvest. A further specific suite of secondary legislation is also made each year to set out the various opening and closing dates, specify where commercial fisheries are permitted, and licensing requirements, enabling the management of any quota made available to licensed commercial fishermen from the available surplus. If no surplus is available no commercial quota is established. Protection under the legislation in this area also extends to sea trout over 40cms in length.

IFI deploys 166 officers on a range of duties such as conservation, protection and enforcement of fisheries legislation. These activities are carried out via vehicle, vessel, kayak, personal watercraft, bicycle and foot patrols and using a range of state-of-the-art equipment. IFI also carries out covert surveillance at poaching “hot-spots” and deploys a specialist dog unit trained in the detection of concealed nets and other apparatus.

In 2019, IFI invested almost 150,000 person hours in protecting the fish resources of the State and in the process seized almost 200 nets, totalling some 10kms in length. IFI Officers also undertook 881 inspections of licensed commercial fishing activities during the year and initiated or completed 121 prosecutions for fisheries offences.

Programme for Government

59. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if he will provide documents on those costings. [14025/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I understand that the Department of the Taoiseach has published the briefing material provided by Government Departments in accordance with agreed procedures, via the Department of the Taoiseach, as part of Government formation negotiations. The material is available at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7b927-programme-for-government-documents/>

Consultancy Contracts

60. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within his Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14050/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment rolled out a Diversity and Inclusion eLearning module to all staff in February 2020. The provider was Legal Island and the cost was €4,500. In addition to that two employees attended the National Diversity and Inclusion Conference facilitated by the Irish Centre for Diversity and Inclusion in 2019 at a cost of €1,168.

Departmental Legal Costs

61. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the expenditure his Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14067/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department administers a very diverse and complex brief. Its remit includes oversight of very complex policy areas and direct procurement of major services where protection of the State's interest must be paramount. This situation necessarily requires my Department to procure specialist external professional advice in legal areas to enable it to discharge its responsibility to deliver quality services and protect the interests of the State and the taxpayer. In procuring specialised legal services, my Department always seeks to ensure value for money and the keeping of expenditure to the minimum necessary.

The information requested is outlined in the following table.

| Year | Cost |
|--------------|------------|
| 2016 | €686,449 |
| 2017 | €3,161,039 |
| 2018 | €1,820,473 |
| 2019 | €1,674,460 |
| To date 2020 | €2,348,841 |

Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 50.

Trading Online Voucher Scheme

63. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a proposal raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) regarding the streamlining of trading online vouchers will be given consideration. [14185/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Trading Online Voucher Scheme is managed by my Department and delivered nationwide in partnership with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht, Enterprise Ireland, the

31 Local Enterprise Offices and Údarás na Gaeltachta. The Scheme offers skills training, mentoring and a grant of up to €2,500 to help small and micro-businesses to develop their e-commerce capability. In response to Covid-19, funding for the Scheme in 2020 was increased from €2.3m to €19.8m, and new flexibilities were introduced including reducing the requirement for co-funding from 50% to 10% and allowing businesses to apply for a second voucher of up to €2,500 where they have successfully utilised their first one. In addition, the restaurant and accommodation sectors have been included as eligible sectors under the Scheme.

It is a requirement of the Scheme that prospective applicants participate in an information session. The content of the information session includes:

- What the Trading Online Voucher can be used for, and how the Scheme Works;
- The opportunities associated with ecommerce;
- Tools for helping a business participate in ecommerce; and
- The do's and don'ts of an online ecommerce presence.

The information session also provides prospective applicants with an opportunity to network and learn from the experience of others. Given these benefits it is not proposed to remove this requirement.

My Department has a long-standing policy of technology and product neutrality, and as such does not endorse or pre-approve any particular technology or product.

Each business is best placed to decide whether a particular ecommerce solution will meet its current and future needs. Businesses are permitted to use the voucher for subscriptions to low cost online retail platforms, however they are encouraged to use the majority of their voucher to develop their own website that can handle transactions so they are not tied indefinitely to ongoing management or transaction fees.

Local Authority Staff

64. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the level of funding allocated to local county councils to enforce air enforcement priorities of local authorities (details supplied); the number of staff employed by each local county council to enforce same in each of the past five years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14212/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department does not compile data regarding the resources and staffing allocated to, and by, individual Local Authorities to undertake specific functions, such as air quality monitoring or enforcement. It is at the discretion of each Local Authority to decide its own priorities and to allocate staff and resources accordingly. Funding of such services would generally be met from the exchequer and local authority own resources.

Bituminous Fuel Ban

65. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of prosecutions for breaching the smoky coal ban in each of the past five years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14213/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Enforcement of the Air Pollution Act (Marketing, Sale, Distribution and Burning of Specified Fuels) Regulations, commonly known as the “Smoky Coal Ban” Regulations, is principally a matter for Local Authorities. Local Authorities report information to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) each year regarding inspection and enforcement activities under environmental legislation. The following table, provided by the EPA, outlines the level of enforcement notices and prosecutions as reported to the Agency by Local Authorities for the years 2015 to 2018 under the “Smoky Coal Ban” Regulations.

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|--|---------------|------|------|------|
| Enforcement actions under Solid Fuel regulations (S.I. 326 of 2012) | 78 | 50 | 97 | 7 |
| Fixed Payment Notices (FPNs) under Solid Fuel regulations (S.I. 326 of 2012) | 0 | 11 | 5 | 8 |
| Prosecutions initiated under the Solid Fuel regulations (S.I. 326 of 2012) | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Prosecutions initiated for failure to pay FPNs. | Not available | 0 | 3 | 6 |

I am advised by the Agency that corresponding data for 2019 is still being collated and checked.

Internet Safety

66. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the online safety and media regulation Bill which includes the establishment of an online safety commissioner; if he will address the issue of websites that are developed for the express purpose of anonymity for trolling persons online; the accountability which will be in place to stop this behaviour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14282/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The proposed Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill will establish a multi-person Media Commission, including an Online Safety Commissioner, dissolve the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, establish a regulatory framework for online safety and the regulation of audiovisual media services, and transpose the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive.

The regulatory framework for online safety will be overseen by the Online Safety Commissioner. The Commissioner will have the power to designate online services for regulation and to create and enforce binding online safety codes. These will seek to minimise the availability of harmful online content, including serious cyberbullying material, through oversight of the systems that online services use to deliver and moderate content. The regulator will have the

power to sanction non-compliant online services.

The General Scheme of the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill was approved by Government on 9 January 2020 and subsequently published on 10 January 2020. At that time the Government also approved the detailed drafting of the proposed Bill by the Office of the Attorney General and forwarded the General Scheme to the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Communications, Climate Action and Environment for pre-legislative scrutiny. Due to the dissolution of the Dáil and Committees in January, pre-legislative scrutiny has not yet commenced. Engagement with the AGO is continuing on the detailed drafting of the Bill.

The finalised General Scheme will also be notified to the European Commission for a technical conformity assessment with relevant EU law regarding regulations on online services.

Responsibility for media and broadcasting is being assigned to the Minister for Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht.

Waste Management

67. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the role of the price monitoring group in respect of residential waste collection charges; the role of the price monitoring group in the future; his plans to regulate waste management companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14322/20]

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. 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 at that time 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. The PMG will continue to play an important role in collecting and analysing market data to inform policy makers.

I will soon be bringing forward an ambitious new waste policy which will include a range of measures to reform and strengthen waste collection, while enhancing the position of the consumer. The new waste policy will take account of the public consultation process and the discussions of the Advisory Group established to support development of the policy. The policy will also reflect the level of ambition in the waste and climate areas at EU level, including the range of actions proposed in the European Green Deal, which was published in December 2019. It will set out a range of objectives and targets for the State and the measures by which to achieve them.

Just Transition Fund

68. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of funding provided for the just transition fund; the amount spent to date; the progress to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14328/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Just Transition Fund is a key pillar of the Government's just transition plan for the midlands. Up to €11 million will be available in 2020 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. This is financed through an Exchequer allocation of €6m from carbon tax revenues and an additional €5 million committed by ESB. I am informed by the secretariat to the Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) that over 150 projects were received via Stage 1 - the MRTT - START engagement process. This stage closed on Friday, 12 June. Projects that have registered at the first stage may now proceed to submit an application for funding to my Department, subject to meeting eligibility requirements and terms and conditions for funding published by my Department on Friday, 19 June. Projects have until Friday, 17 July to submit proposals for funding. Evaluation of submitted proposals will commence shortly afterwards and initial disbursement of funding to successful projects will take place following the conclusion of this process.

Just Transition Fund

69. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of funding provided for the peatlands rehabilitation scheme; the amount spent to date; if his Department has created the targeted number of 70 jobs in year one; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14329/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Bord na Móna announced, on 16 June, their 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. My Department and Bord na Móna are progressing the necessary measures to facilitate the advanced rehabilitation of 33,000 hectares of Bord na Móna bog previously harvested for peat used in electricity generation, commencing this year.

Question No. 70 answered with Question No. 50.

Just Transition Fund

71. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if it is his policy to completely phase out the extraction of peat over the coming years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14438/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The section in the Programme for Government titled 'The Exit from Peat in the Midlands' commits to ensuring that the transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy is fair. The transition out of peat in the Midlands is the first test of the just transition. The Government will ensure that the Just Transition in the Midlands works inclusively and that it is an example of how large communities can introduce major changes in their daily lives and workplaces and still prosper. As part of this work, my Department will support the Just Transition Commissioner in designing a comprehensive and inclusive response, publish and implement a detailed all-of-government implementation plan consistent with the recommendations of the first report of the Just Transition Commissioner and conduct a

feasibility study into the establishment of a Green Energy/Renewable Energy Hub in the Midlands, using the existing infrastructure in this region.

In conjunction with this, Government will undertake a national land use review, including farmland, forests, and peatlands, so that optimal land use options inform all relevant government decisions. The review will balance environmental, social, and economic considerations and involve a process of evaluation of the ecological characteristics of the land. It will include consideration of emissions to air and water, carbon sequestration, and climate adaptation challenges. Policy co-benefits, such as rewetting or forest regrowth to mitigate flooding risks in river catchments, will be considered. All stakeholders will be consulted.

National Broadband Plan

72. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the centres of cultural significance in counties Longford and Westmeath that have low-level internet access, thereby affecting their ability to create an online footprint to advertise events and attract tourists. [14478/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie, shows the areas in County Longford and County Westmeath 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 Longford and Westmeath, 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 |
|-----------|---|---|--|
| Longford | 38% (8,602) | 61% (13,645) | 1% (121) |
| Westmeath | 26% (11,631) | 74% (32,758) | <1% (167) |

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 deployment under the National Broadband Plan (NBP). 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.

The BCP delivery project is well underway and connectivity is being provided to each of the sites by National Broadband Ireland (NBI). Subsequent to this, the sites, other than schools, are being Wi-Fi enabled by Vodafone under a contract with the Department of Rural and Community Development. This work also involves the local authorities and site owners to determine the services that will be provided for end-users at each site. For the 75 schools that are also part of this project, enabling these schools with Wi-Fi is being led by the Department of Education subsequent to NBI providing the connectivity to the schools.

Bringing connectivity to remote rural locations is central to promoting regional development and BCPs represent an important delivery in the early stages of the National Broadband Plan.

North-South Interconnector

73. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if local communities along the route of the proposed north-south interconnector which are of the view that the project should be undergrounded will be supported; if the project will be reviewed in view of the delays that have ensued to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14498/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The North South Interconnector is critical to improving the efficient operation of the Single Electricity Market and increasing security of electricity supply across the island of Ireland. It will also help us to move towards 70% renewable electricity. A resilient and well connected energy infrastructure is vital for Ireland's economic well-being and the ability to respond to the future needs of energy consumers. My Department published an independent study in October 2018 on undergrounding the interconnector. The study found that an overhead line remained the most appropriate option for the proposed interconnector. The study report is available on the Department's website at

<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/energy/publications/Documents/20/IEC%20Final%20Report%20North%20South%20Interconnector.pdf>.

This study was the latest in a series of studies that reached the same conclusion and whilst there have been delays in securing planning consent in both jurisdictions I do not intend to order a further review of the project.

Ministerial Responsibilities

74. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will publish the Departmental briefing paper on his role, remits and powers afforded to him upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14520/20]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department provided a comprehensive briefing document to me on my appointment as Minister. It is my intention to publish the document as soon as possible.

Heritage Sites

75. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the engagement between his Department and groups (details supplied) on the closure of heritage sites in the mid-west. [14083/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The operation of the heritage sites referred to by the Deputy, is an operational matter for Shannon Heritage and its parent company Shannon Group plc. I have therefore forwarded your question to Shannon Group plc. for direct reply.

If the Deputy does not receive a reply from the Company within ten working days, please advise my Private Office.

Heritage Sites

76. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has received representations from a group (details supplied) in relation to seeking a PSO to allow heritage sites to remain open after 31 August 2020. [14084/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As the Deputy is aware, Shannon Heritage is part of Shannon Group which operates in both the aviation and tourism sectors and in addition to the dramatic fall off in passengers at the airport, the closure and restricted re-opening of some Shannon Heritage sites means the impacts on the Group have been particularly severe. I would like to advise the Deputy that while I have not received specific representations from Shannon Heritage in relation to a PSO to allow heritage sites to remain open after 31 August 2020, my Department has received a request from Shannon Group for a range of government support measures to assist and enable Shannon Group, including Shannon Heritage, to help mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. My Department is considering these requests as part of a wider examination of the future viability and sustainability of the Group and will bring recommendations to government in this regard in due course. As the Deputy may be aware the operation of the Shannon heritage sites, including opening arrangements, is an operational matter for Shannon Heritage and its parent company Shannon Group plc.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

77. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider providing a local authority fund to assist small, non-profit sports clubs when they struggle to meet their running costs during difficult times such as the lockdown (details supplied). [14152/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): 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.

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 are to be met by the Exchequer and the administration by local authorities of this measure will be by way of a credit in lieu of rates. My Department is currently preparing further guidance on the scope and application of the waiver for local authorities.

Land that is developed for sport, such as playing pitches, is exempt from rates under the Valuation Act 2001. There is also provision for the exemption of community halls which are not licensed to sell alcohol and where the facilities are not used for profit. However, the Act provides that where an organisation or club is registered under the Registration of Clubs (Ireland) Act 1904, and is licensed to sell alcohol, all the club buildings, wherever located, are rateable in their entirety. Such premises closed and ceased trading in line with the health restrictions set out in the Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (Covid-19) Regulations 2020 (S.I. No. 121 of 2020).

The 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.

Road Projects

78. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration will be given to providing additional funding to local authorities as part of the July stimulus initiative to complete outstanding 30 km/h road projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14396/20]

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 Exchequer road grants, where applicable. In the case of the four Dublin Councils, since the revision of the arrangements for the retention of Local Property Tax in 2015 these Councils are required to largely self-fund their road programmes.

As regards the 'Guidelines for Setting & Managing Speed Limits in Ireland' published in March 2015, under the relevant road traffic legislation, it is Council elected members that take decisions on the application of special speed limits in accordance with the Guidelines. Following the publication of the 2015 Guidelines, my Department did introduce grant support for the provision of speed limit and warning signs related to the reduction of speed limits in housing areas. The Department has continued to provide grant support to eligible local authorities since then and this programme is now nearing conclusion. The Department has also funded a number of pilot traffic calming schemes with a view to assessing the effectiveness of different measures.

Eligible local authorities have been advised that where a Council considers that additional traffic calming measures are required in addition to appropriate signage in housing areas, such proposals can be included in its annual Safety Improvement Works programme application.

In relation to the consideration of measures for inclusion in the July stimulus programme, the primary focus of proposals will be on measures that can be implemented quickly with a

focus on employment generation.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

79. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason seasonal restaurants are only opening during the summer season in view of the fact those not open when the lockdown was announced do not have access to Covid-19 business supports; if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties seasonal operations have in addressing the costs of Covid-19 for reopening and other costs associated with the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14464/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Government is acutely aware that tourism and hospitality is one of the most directly affected sectors in the current crisis. The impact of COVID-19 on tourism globally has been overwhelming and immediate with unprecedented consequences for Ireland's tourism and hospitality sector.

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 Deputy will be one of the many factors that will be taken into account as part of that exercise.

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. The Taskforce has submitted an initial report to Ministers.

Parking Provision

80. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the parents of a child with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and severe intellectual disability are entitled to a disabled parking permit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14496/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Disabled Parking Permit (also known as the European Parking Card or Disabled Parking Badge) is available to people living in Ireland whose mobility is severely restricted, whether they are drivers or passengers, and also to those who are registered blind. In 2010 the Department conducted a review of the Disabled Parking Scheme, in consultation with various stakeholders, and one of the issues examined was eligibility for the scheme. As a result of the review the scheme was revised so that permits are now given on the basis of mobility impairment rather than the diagnosis of a particular condition or illness. This is in line with the original intention of the scheme.

The possibility of extending the eligibility criteria for the scheme to include people with certain intellectual, developmental and other invisible disabilities has been raised on a number of occasions and the Department has consulted extensively with the joint issuing authorities of the scheme, the Disabled Drivers Association of Ireland (DDAI) and the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWC), who also represent the people with disabilities for whose needs the scheme is intended. In light of these consultations there are currently no plans to change the criteria.

I would particularly emphasise to the Deputy that issuing a large number of extra permits by extending the eligibility criteria would put the existing scheme under significant additional pressure and compromise the availability of disabled parking spaces in general, thus disadvan-

tagging those with restricted mobility who are currently eligible.

Aviation Industry

81. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps being taken to liaise with the airline industry to ensure that consumers who have been unable to make scheduled flights due to the current travel restrictions are being prioritised and dealt with in a fair and just manner via airlines internal complaints and refund application facilities in view of the fact many have incurred significant personal losses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13725/20]

91. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the financial protections in place for those who have flights booked for outgoing flights to Spain while the current guidance is that no non-essential travel is to be undertaken; if persons can claim a refund under EU directives; if the travel provider has a duty to refund or voucher the cost of flights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13863/20]

97. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the result of requests made to request airlines to refund families that cannot travel even though flights may be operating. [13953/20]

121. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason airlines, such as an airline (details supplied), are permitted to continue to sell airline tickets and run flights without refunding passengers when non-essential travel is advised against; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14281/20]

141. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that airline companies are refusing to refund fares to persons who cancel their holidays abroad in line with the advice of the Government not to travel unnecessarily abroad in 2020; the action he will take to ensure persons are not at the loss of the airline fares paid in good faith, either by direct refund by the Government or by way of discussions with the airlines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14586/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 81, 91, 97, 121 and 141 together.

As the Deputy is aware, current Government advice to people is to avoid all non-essential travel overseas, based on the advices of our public health experts. However, there are no flight restrictions in place in Ireland, and there have not been any at any stage since the Government first responded to the threat from Covid-19. This means that the operation of flights remains a commercial decision for airlines. People can still travel if they consider that it is essential to do so and so long as they comply with self-isolation requirements on their return.

As things stand in law, air passenger rights are protected by Regulation (EC) No. 261/2004, which covers the rights of passenger in instances of cancellations. 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. That said, I understand that the main Irish airlines are currently allowing customers who are booked to travel over the summer months to move their flights with zero change fee. Where flights are cancelled by the airlines, people are entitled to a full cash refund.

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 im-

mense 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 be raising with the industry at the first available opportunity. Clearly, if the industry is seeking to secure State financial support to help it through the current period - and I believe that is a likely recommendation from the Aviation Taskforce - then a commitment to fairness and clarity on consumer rights will have to be offered in return, at the very least.

Driver Test

82. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons waiting for driver tests for classes (details supplied) respectively; the number of tests conducted in each of the past four weeks in each class in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13735/20]

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

83. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if driver testers are eligible to and hired to administer driver tests in each vehicle class, for example, car, bus and truck; and if some or all driver testers are only eligible to provide tests in respect of specific vehicle classes. [13740/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority to answer. I have forwarded the Deputy's query to them to respond directly. If a response has not been received within 10 working days, the Deputy should contact my office directly.

Driver Test

84. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeline for the resumption of driver tests in respect of each vehicle class. [13741/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Following the publication, by Government, of a revised Phase 3 road map for reopening Ireland, it is now possible to restart the testing of car drivers earlier than anticipated.

From Monday 29 June driving tests have resumed on a phased basis for trucks, buses and motorcycles (except for trucks in C1 and buses in D1 categories). Fourteen driving test centres have reopened, but as the number of tests and categories of vehicles being tested increases in the coming weeks, the remaining test centres will reopen. The RSA will update its website, *rsa.ie*, to advise on each centre as it re-opens.

While a specific date has not yet been finalised for the restart of car tests, this is a high priority for my Department and the RSA, who have assured me that they are working towards getting car tests up and running, as soon as possible in Phase 3.

Driver Test

85. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if demand for driver tests in private vehicles, that is, cars, exceeds that of other vehicle classes; and if driver testers can be reassigned to provide private vehicle driver tests. [13742/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority to answer, and I have forwarded the Deputy's query to them for direct reply. If the Deputy has not received a response within 10 working days he should contact my office directly.

National Lottery Funding

86. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount made available to organisations through national lottery funding in 2000 and 2010; the amount that will be made available to organisations through national lottery funding in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13777/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Details of how the funding generated by the National Lottery is used to fund different categories of worthy projects is available at www.lottery.ie/news/good-causes.

In relation to sport projects, two Departmental sub-heads are part funded from the proceeds of the National Lottery. These are the Sports Capital Programme (SCP) and Sport Ireland. The total amount allocated under the SCP in 2000 was just over €45m. In 2010, while there was no general round of the Programme, allocations of €13m were made to the National Governing Bodies of Sport and local authorities. The total funding available for the SCP in 2020 is €40 million. Details of allocations made under the Programme are published at the following website address:- www.gov.ie/en/service/d13385-sports-capital-programme .

Funding allocated by my Department to Sport Ireland is also part-funded by the proceeds of the National Lottery. Sport Ireland is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport, increasing participation at all levels and raising standards, including the allocation of funding across its various programmes. Current funding is provided to Sport Ireland to fund a wide range of programmes aimed at increasing participation and raising standards in Irish sport and to allocate funding to National Governing Bodies of Sport to enable them to develop their sport in a strategic manner. Capital funding is allocated to Sport Ireland for the development of the Sport Ireland National Sports Campus at Blanchardstown.

The total Exchequer allocation for Sport Ireland in 2020 is €68.5m (€65.6m current and €2.9m capital funding). Prior to Sport Ireland being established in 2015, the Irish Sports Council was part-funded by the proceeds of the National Lottery. The total Exchequer allocation for the Irish Sports Council in 2000 was €13.2m (current funding) and in 2010 was €49.5m (current funding).

Covid-19 Pandemic

87. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Jujutsu classes can return on 29 June 2020 in view of the level of close contact involved and the potential for the spread of Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13798/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The return to sport permitted in Phase 3 of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business applies to all sports from Monday, June 29th. This includes both contact sports and fitness classes. It must be emphasised however that this resumption is subject to the Phases 3 and 4 restrictions on numbers for public gatherings and other important public health advice on social distancing, hygiene and respiratory etiquette and appropriate mechanisms to assist with contact tracing.

The Expert Group on Return to Sport, which was established by my predecessor, has accordingly encouraged a gradual and inclusive approach to the resumption of all sporting and fitness activities. General guidance has been published by Sport Ireland on behalf of the Return to Sport Expert Group, which is available on its website.

I would also like to indicate to the Deputy that many National Governing Bodies of Sport, including the Irish Martial Arts Commission, have prepared and published detailed operational protocols for the safe return of these sports. These protocols will also be of assistance to organisers of classes in ensuring compliance with the prevailing public health advice.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

88. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the specific supports, including financial supports and guidelines or advice provided to those working as taxi drivers or chauffeurs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13802/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I recognise that since the onset of the present COVID-19 pandemic 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 has fallen considerably and many operators stopped working temporarily.

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, the waiver of late licence renewal fees, and, in conjunction with the motor insurance industry, the suspension of SPSV insurance for those operators who decided to temporarily stop working and suspend their licences. The NTA has also published information on its website for the SPSV industry which includes guidance on the installation of screens and guidelines on how to keep vehicles clean to reduce the spread of COVID-19. 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.

The focus now is on assisting those who have stopped working to get back to work as the economy reopens and passenger demand for SPSVs returns. My Department is in regular contact with the NTA to monitor the impact that 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.

Driver Test

89. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when driver instructors can return to work in line with public health guidance in view of the fact they are self-employed and do not come under the remit of the RSA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13815/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), a team of national experts, advised Government when it decided to include driving schools on the list of businesses cleared to reopen on 29 June.

In anticipation of the resumption of driver testing on that same date, the Road Safety Authority (RSA) wrote to each Approved Driving Instructor on 22 June, advising them of the planned phased return 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 RSA cannot, however, dictate to driving schools how they should run their business and nor cannot it issue medical advice. It is up to each driving instructor or driving school to protect themselves, their families and communities by adhering to the official Government guidelines on hygiene and social distancing.

I understand that any business which reopens is subject to inspection by Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and may face serious sanctions, including closure, if found to be not in compliance with Covid-19 requirements.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

90. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding available for sports and snooker clubs to help them get up and running again after Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13825/20]

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.

This funding will be invested through new grant schemes which will be administered by Sport Ireland.

The grant schemes are currently being developed and it is expected that the precise terms of each of the new grant schemes will be announced by Sport Ireland later this month.

Sport Ireland will announce an open invitation to applications from funded bodies for assistance under the grant schemes in due course.

Question No. 91 answered with Question No. 81.

Driver Test

92. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if driver instructors and schools for each class of vehicle may return to work on 29 June 2020 in line with the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business (details supplied). [13926/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I would firstly like to point out that the National Public Health Emergency Team, a team of national experts, advised Government in its decision to revise the Roadmap for Reopening Ireland, including which businesses could resume trading in each Phase of the gradual reopening of our economy, and they included driving schools on the list of businesses cleared to reopen on or after 29 June.

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.

However, the RSA cannot dictate to driving schools on how they should run their business, or issue medical advice. It is up to each driving instructor or driving school to protect themselves, their families and communities by adhering to the official Government guidelines on hygiene and social distancing.

While the RSA is responsible for driver testing and took the original decision to close the driver testing service during the pandemic, the RSA has no authority to order a suspension or resumption of driving instruction. This is decision for driving instructors and schools in keeping with national policy.

The RSA resumed driving tests for motorcycles, buses and trucks from 29 June, with resumption of tests for the car, van and minibus categories due to be introduced later in phase 3 of the reopening Roadmap. However the continued provision of driver tuition can only be taken by the individual driving instructor taking into account their own personal circumstances.

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.

With regard to insurance, insurance companies are regulated by the Central Bank, which comes within the remit of my colleague the Minister for Finance. I have no role or powers in relation to the terms applied by insurance companies.

Aviation Industry

93. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the provision of section 18(A)(4) of the Package Holidays and Travel Trade Act 1995 applies to persons who booked a holiday earlier in 2020 to Spain for a family wedding through an online UK based travel company which subsequently had to be cancelled due to the pandemic (details supplied); if not, the options open to them to recoup their money; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13930/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The EU Package Travel Directive (EU Directive 2015/2302), as implemented nationally in the Package Holidays and Travel Trade Act 1995, is the relevant law in respect of package holidays sold in EU countries, whether the travel organiser is based in an EU country or directs such business to EU member states from a third country. Among the consumer protections in the Directive are those relating to the right to cancel package travel contracts and receive refunds. While the company in question is a UK company, under the terms of the EU/UK Brexit “Withdrawal Agreement” EU law applies in its entirety to the UK until 31 December 2020.

In all instances the consumer should check the terms and conditions of the booking in respect to refunds and reference this against the EU Directive. The matter should be pursued with the holiday company directly, who must comply with the law. In instances where difficulties persist with EU-based travel agents operating outside of Ireland, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission advises that such cases should be brought to the European Consumer Centre (ECC) Ireland, which assists consumers on matters relating to products or services sold in other EU Member States.

Sports Funding

94. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the direction organisations (details supplied) received with regard to the spending of their 2020 budget; if this direction has been made from his Department or Sports Ireland; the details of the distribution of high performance funding between Paralympic sport and Olympic sports; if his attention has been drawn to the fact the organisation will have no chef de mission for the remainder of 2020; and if his attention has been further drawn to the fact there is no plan for a chef de mission in the future. [13932/20]

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 allocation of funding to the sporting bodies.

As the distribution and conditionality attaching to such funding, including for high performance, is a matter for Sport Ireland, I have referred the Deputy’s question to Sport Ireland for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Covid-19 Pandemic

95. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if guidance will be provided on regulations (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13934/20]

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. In this context, the NTA is engaging directly with both PSO and commercial transport operators.

With the commencement of Phase 3 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business on 29 June 2020, changes to the existing public transport social distancing restrictions were

agreed, allowing a move from 2 metres social distancing to utilising 50% of the passenger-carrying capacity of fleet. I understand that moving to 50% capacity utilisation means that 52/53 seater coaches can now carry approximately 24 passengers, up from 12 passengers which could be carried with 2 metre social distancing. This will help to underpin public transport services during these unprecedented times, with a view to safeguarding public transport capacity in Phases 3 and 4 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business . Alongside this change, the wearing of a face covering when using public transport is now being made mandatory, with the exception of those who cannot do so for health reasons or due to young age. The legal framework to back up the mandatory use of face coverings on public transport is currently being prepared and we expect to have new Health Regulations in the coming days.

Covid-19 Pandemic

96. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if taxi and hackney drivers and their passengers will be required to wear masks as part as the latest plan to make masks compulsory on public transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13951/20]

103. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if it is mandatory to wear a face covering in a taxi; the requirements and supports in place for drivers and passengers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14043/20]

112. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if guidelines will be provided for taxi operators regarding which they are to adhere to in view of the fact they have not received any; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14186/20]

124. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if face masks and face coverings will be mandatory in taxis and private operator vehicles such as limousines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14312/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 96, 103, 112 and 124 together.

Following the commencement of Phase 3 of the Government's *Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business* on 29 June 2020, the public health advice recommends that individuals to wear a face covering in retail settings, on public transport, and in situations where it is not possible to achieve the recommended social distancing of 2 metres. Deputies will be familiar with the extensive public information campaign currently underway to advise the public about the use of face coverings for the benefit of themselves and those around them.

Given the size of most taxis and other small public service vehicles (SPSVs), public health advice indicates that people travelling in such vehicles should wear face coverings. Guidance on the safe use of face coverings is available on the gov.ie website. Under existing regulatory provisions for the SPSV sector, drivers already have the right to refuse carriage to a passenger who does not comply with a "reasonable request" which, in the present circumstances, would include a request to wear a face covering.

Deputies will be aware that it has recently been decided to make the wearing of face coverings on public transport a legal requirement. Work on this is very advanced and we expect to have new Health Regulations in the coming days to cover mass transit situations. My Department is also working with the National Transport Authority (NTA) in relation to an appropriate approach for the SPSV sector.

In the meantime, compliance by passengers with the public health advice in relation to face coverings is being carefully monitored and, given the current situation and the public health advice, I would strongly encourage all drivers and passengers to wear a face covering while in an SPSV.

In addition to face covering, vehicle cleaning is also important, and guidance on this has been available to the SPSV industry and on the NTA website for the last number of months.

Question No. 97 answered with Question No. 81.

Driver Test

98. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his officials have consulted driver instructors with regard to their appropriate reopening date in the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business; if his Department will work with the Health Protection Surveillance Centre to issue specific health guidance for driving instructors in view of their unique circumstances and very close proximity to pupils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13985/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I would firstly like to point out that the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), together with a team of national experts, advised Government in deciding which businesses could resume trading in each Phase of the gradual reopening of our economy. NPHE included driving schools on the list of businesses cleared to reopen on 29 June.

It is not the role of the Health Protection Surveillance Centre to provide guidance in relation to specific sectors, as a rule, nor to provide guidance in relation to working conditions. Its role is surveillance.

A National Return to Work Safely Protocol has been produced under the aegis of the Labour Employer Economic Forum and is the result of a collaborative effort by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), the Health Services Executive (HSE) and the Department of Health and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. The HSA has in turn produced COVID-19 checklists and templates, based on the Protocol, to help employers, business owners and managers to get their business up and running again and to inform workers about what they need to do to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

The RSA is developing protocols, as any employer must, to apply the overall protocols to its particular needs, including in relation to driver testing. In doing so, it was assisted by the overall national protocol and also by the additional templates and checklists from the HSA. I understand that the National Office of Traffic Medicine was also available to the RSA to assist in its tasks.

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.

However, neither my Department nor the RSA cannot dictate to driving schools on how they should run their business, or issue medical advice, or indeed interfere in the statutory role of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). It is up to each driving instructor or driving school

to protect themselves, their families and communities by adhering to the official Government guidelines on hygiene and social distancing.

While the RSA is responsible for driver testing and took the original decision to close the driver testing service during the pandemic, the RSA has no authority to order a suspension or resumption of driving instruction. This has to be decided by driving instructors and schools, in keeping with national policy.

While the RSA has taken the decision to suspend driving tests (although testing on motor-cycles, trucks and buses resumed on 29 June) and, it is anticipated that car driving tests will be phased in shortly, the continued provision of driver tuition can only be taken by the individual driving instructor taking into account their own personal circumstances.

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.

Departmental Budgets

99. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost in 2021 if the budget for green schools travel within his Department increased by 20%. [14003/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I can inform the Deputy that my Department has a current expenditure allocation in 2020 of €1.65 million for the An Taisce Green-Schools Travel Programme and that funding is provided through the National Transport Authority (NTA). Based on the 2020 figure, a 20% increase in 2021 would cost €330,000.

The Deputy is aware that the Programme for Government commits toward a fundamental change in the nature of transport in Ireland, with a particular emphasis on sustainable mobility, including walking and cycling. I look forward to working with all stakeholders, including the NTA and An Taisce in relation to the Green Schools Programme, as we look to transform how we travel in Ireland.

Driver Test

100. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the advice his Department is giving to driver schools in order to facilitate them reopening in a safe manner as part of the easing of lockdown restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14020/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The NPHE, together with a team of national experts, decided which businesses could resume trading in each Phase of the gradual reopening of our economy, and they included driving schools on the list of businesses cleared to reopen on 29 June.

In anticipation of the resumption of driver testing on 29 June, the RSA wrote to each Approved Driving Instructor on 22 June, advising them of the planned phased return 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.

However, the RSA cannot dictate to driving schools on how they should run their business, or issue medical advice. It is up to each driving instructor or driving school to protect themselves, their families and communities by adhering to the official Government guidelines on hygiene and social distancing.

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.

Programme for Government

101. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if he will provide documents on those costings. [14038/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): During the course of Government formation talks, my Department provided briefing material and costings related to various policy proposals. These were published on 3 July 2020 by the Department of the Taoiseach and can be found at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7b927-programme-for-government-documents/>.

Costings for the specific Programme for Government commitments related to this Department will be analysed over the coming months in the context of budgetary discussions.

Covid-19 Pandemic

102. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce measures on public transport to ensure healthcare workers can get to work with capacity likely to become an issue as the country reopens; his further plans for healthcare workers to receive priority boarding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14042/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): There is a need for a fundamental change in the nature of transport in Ireland and the Programme for Government commits to making active travel and public transport better and more accessible. Among the measure we will prioritise is a Sustainable Rural Mobility Plan to ensure settlements over a certain size can connect to the national public transport system, expanding the Local Link rural transport service and prioritising public transport projects that enhances regional and rural connectivity.

Continued operation of the public transport sector is important, and it has been designated among the essential services that have carried on during the Covid crisis. 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.

With the commencement of Phase 3 of the *Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business* on 29 June 2020, changes to the existing public transport social distancing restrictions were agreed, allowing a move from 2 metres social distancing to utilising 50% of the passenger-carrying capacity of fleet. This will help to underpin public transport services during these unprecedented times, with a view to safeguarding public transport capacity in Phases 3 and 4 of the *Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business*. Alongside this change, the wearing of a face covering when using public transport is now being made mandatory, with the exception of those who cannot do so for health reasons or due to young age. The legal framework to back up the mandatory use of face coverings on public transport is currently being prepared and we expect to have new Health Regulations in the coming days.

Further, there is continued strong messaging that public transport capacity remains restricted and therefore should only be used for essential travel, with only those who absolutely have to travel at peak times doing so and encouraging staggered retail and office opening hours. People are being encouraged to walk or cycle where practical, and organisations are encouraged to continue to facilitate working from home.

Temporary funding supports, in accordance with EU and national legislation, have also been approved 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 is aimed at ensuring the continued operation of essential licensed bus services for a period of up to six months. The support 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 the revenues generated on the services. The National Transport Authority (NTA), as the public transport licensing agency, will administer the support through the establishment of contracts between the NTA and the relevant operators.

Question No. 103 answered with Question No. 96.

Covid-19 Pandemic

104. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the Bus Éireann fleet of public buses will be fitted with protective screens for drivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14044/20]

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. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

The issue raised is an operational matter for Bus Éireann, in conjunction with the National Transport Authority, 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.

Consultancy Contracts

105. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within

his Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14063/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being collated by my officials and will be forwarded to the Deputy within 10 working days.

Departmental Legal Costs

106. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expenditure his Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14080/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Details of the expenditure incurred by my Department in respect of external legal fees for the years 2016 to 2018 is available at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/30ae9c-expenditure-on-external-services/>

Details of the expenditure incurred in the years 2019 and to date in 2020 is being collated by my officials and will be forwarded within 10 working days.

Football Association of Ireland

107. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to meet an association (details supplied) in respect of ongoing governance issues and the referral of a report to An Garda Síochána and the ODCE. [14099/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The report mentioned by the Deputy was commissioned by the organisation itself and I understand that the organisation has referred the report to An Garda Síochána and the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement. I did not receive a copy of the report from the organisation and I have no plans to meet the organisation to discuss the report.

With regard to ongoing governance issues, Sport Ireland remains in communication with the organisation 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.

Covid-19 Pandemic

108. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for the tourism and hospitality sector in the context of Covid-19 [14100/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): On 20 May 2020,

a Tourism Recovery Taskforce was established 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 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.

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 on 25 June which is aimed at helping tourism to survive in the initial reopening period as Ireland emerges from the COVID-19 lockdown period. The on-going work of the taskforce will inform Government policy in supporting the sector to recover from this crisis.

Covid-19 Pandemic

109. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the arrangements in place to ensure workers in rural areas can access public transport to travel to and from work in view of the small number allowed on buses and trains and in circumstances in which services have been curtailed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14105/20]

128. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which he plans to increase capacity for commuters who cannot access public or private transport due to Covid-19 related capacity restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14437/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 109 and 128 together.

There is a need for a fundamental change in the nature of transport in Ireland and the Programme for Government commits to making active travel and public transport better and more accessible. Among the measure we will prioritise is a Sustainable Rural Mobility Plan to ensure settlements over a certain size can connect to the national public transport system, expanding the Local Link rural transport service and prioritising public transport projects that enhances regional and rural connectivity.

Continued operation of the public transport sector is important, and it has been designated among the essential services that have carried on during the Covid crisis. 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.

With the commencement of Phase 3 of the *Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business*

on 29 June 2020, changes to the existing public transport social distancing restrictions were agreed, allowing a move from 2 metres social distancing to utilising 50% of the passenger-carrying capacity of fleet. This will help to underpin public transport services during these unprecedented times, with a view to safeguarding public transport capacity in Phases 3 and 4 of the *Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business*. Alongside this change, the wearing of a face covering when using public transport is now being made mandatory, with the exception of those who cannot do so for health reasons or due to young age. The legal framework to back up the mandatory use of face coverings on public transport is currently being prepared and we expect to have new Health Regulations in the coming days.

Further, there is continued strong messaging that public transport capacity remains restricted and therefore should only be used for essential travel, with only those who absolutely have to travel at peak times doing so and encouraging staggered retail and office opening hours. People are being encouraged to walk or cycle where practical, and organisations are encouraged to continue to facilitate working from home.

Temporary funding supports, in accordance with EU and national legislation, have also been approved 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 is aimed at ensuring the continued operation of essential licensed bus services for a period of up to six months. The support 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 the revenues generated on the services. The National Transport Authority (NTA), as the public transport licensing agency, will administer the support through the establishment of contracts between the NTA and the relevant operators.

Trans European Transport Network Programme

110. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the review of the Ten-T maps for Ireland with a view to including more regional development; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14133/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): In April 2019, the European Commission commenced the review of TEN-T with an evaluation of the existing TEN-T Regulation together with an open public consultation. This consultation took place between April and July 2019 and generated responses from more than 600 citizens and organisations, including 33 from Ireland.

In August 2019 my predecessor Minister Ross made a submission to former EU Transport Commissioner, Violeta Bulc, on the matter of reviewing the TEN-T network. The submission focussed on highlighting national policy developments since the TEN-T Regulation came into force in 2013, particularly Ireland's National Planning Framework and National Development Plan and the implications of Brexit. The Minister requested that the Commission consider the existing methodology of the TEN-T core network with a view to including the Atlantic seaboard region of Ireland. In her response, Commissioner Bulc gave assurances that the specificities of Ireland's situation within the EU would be taken into account during the TEN-T review process.

The Commission then launched a targeted stakeholder consultation in January 2020 which largely consisted of a range of specific surveys that address the broad range of directly concerned stakeholders.

Since the review process began, my Department has been engaging with relevant stakehold-

ers on the review. As part of the overall evaluation, on 7 July 2020 my Department is meeting with the TEN-T consultants engaged by the European Commission.

The Commissioner has advised that once the analysis of the evaluation is complete, the Commission will publish a Commission Staff Working Document expected in November 2020. In parallel, it will launch the Impact Assessment this summer, including a consultation on the policy options.

Taxi Licences

111. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of taxi licences issued since 2015 to date specifically those covering the greater Dublin area, respectively; the number of applications awaiting processing for granting of a taxi licence and for the greater Dublin area, respectively; the number of taxis licensed to operate in the greater Dublin area; his plans for taxi numbers in view of the collapse of economic activity in the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14137/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including SPSV licensing, 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.

Question No. 112 answered with Question No. 96.

Shannon Airport Facilities

113. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 648 of 23 June 2020, the number of occasions on which each operator undertook the activity specified; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14207/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for Shannon Airport Authority and for this reason the Deputy's previous question was forwarded to the Airport for direct reply. I understand that Shannon Airport Authority has responded to the Deputy and accordingly, any clarification of the material provided by the Company, should be raised directly with the Company.

To assist the Deputy, I have forwarded this question to Shannon Airport Authority for direct reply. If the Deputy does not receive a reply from the Company within ten working days, please advise my Private Office.

Aviation Industry

114. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that customers are being charged €50 per person for cancelling their tickets further to the announcement that customers who have booked travel tickets through an agency should be refunded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14222/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Under EU Directive 2015/2302, the Package Travel Directive, consumers have a right to a refund of all payments where a package holiday is cancelled either by the consumer or by the organiser due to unavoidable and extraordinary circumstances. In instances where unavoidable and extraordinary circumstances pertain - such as Government advice not to travel - then no termination fee should be applied to a cancellation. In all other instances the travel agent or tour operator may apply a fee, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the booking.

Consumer information on this issue is available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/40f0d7-guidance-on-the-right-of-travellers-to-terminate-package-travel-cont/>.

Road Projects

115. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress on traffic management works required on the link road from the roundabout at the junction of the M9 and Danesfort through Foulkstown to Kilkenny city which his predecessor inspected with local representatives; if he has engaged with Kilkenny County Council to devise a plan and identify funding for a traffic management scheme; his views on the dangers shown and the high number of poorly marked and designed junctions on the road; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14235/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As Minister for Climate Energy and Communications and Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme.

Once funding arrangements have been put in place with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the upgrading and improvement (including the distribution and management of funding) for individual national roads is a matter for TII, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects

116. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected date of completion of the northern ring road in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14262/20]

117. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected commencement date of the northern ring road in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14263/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 116 and 117 together.

As Minister for Climate Energy and Communications and Transport Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects

118. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration has been given to fund additional road safety measures in County Cork in view of the large number per population of road fatalities in the county in 2019 and notwithstanding funding already allocated to Cork city and county councils. [14264/20]

119. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the percentage of overall national spending on road infrastructure spent in County Cork in each of the years 2010 to 2019, notwithstanding city and county council operations and projects. [14265/20]

120. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated percentage of overall national spending on road infrastructure spent in County Cork to date in 2020, notwithstanding city and county council operations and projects. [14266/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 118 to 120, inclusive, together.

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from Councils' own resources supplemented by Exchequer road grants, where applicable. In the case of the four Dublin Councils, since the revision of the arrangements for the retention of Local Property Tax in 2015 these Councils are required to largely self-fund their road programmes.

As regards grant funding provided to Cork City and County since 2010 relative to overall grant funding, each year my Department prepares regional and local road allocation and payment booklets. These booklets, which are available in the Oireachtas library, include details of grant allocations and payments to each local authority under the grant programmes operated by my Department. In relation to grant payments to date in 2020, the position is that €1.5 million approx. has been paid to Cork City and €10.7 million approx. to Cork County. The overall grant amount drawn down to date is €78.5 million. Drawdown to date in 2020 by the two Cork Councils is therefore 15.5% of the total.

For the Deputy's information, the main grant programmes currently in operation are:

Restoration Maintenance (RM): The purpose of the RM grant is to protect the structural integrity of the road by way of surface dressing through the sealing of the road surface. The purpose of restoration maintenance is to maintain the asset before it requires improvement.

Restoration Improvement Grant (RI): The RI grant programme is the main road strengthening programme and caters for surface restoration, pavement overlay works, complete road rehabilitation works and for drainage works where required.

Discretionary Grant (DG): Councils have discretion in spending these grants for improvement and maintenance works subject to selecting from a list of eligible works.

Bridge Rehabilitation (BR): This programme allows local authorities to apply for monies to undertake bridge rehabilitation works.

Safety Improvement Works (BS) : This programme allows local authorities to apply for

monies to undertake safety improvement works.

Community Involvement Scheme (CIS): The programme facilitates community involvement in repair and improvement of roads.

Drainage Programme: The purpose of this grant is to promote network resilience.

A pilot scheme has been implemented to provide assistance to local authorities specifically for the maintenance of Former National (FN) roads.

Specific Grant and Strategic Grants: The Department no longer seeks annual applications from local authorities in respect of the Specific (road improvement schemes costing up to €5m.) and Strategic (improvement schemes costing over €5m.) grant programmes. Instead it considers projects on a case by case basis taking into account the availability of funding and the outcome of project appraisals.

As regards the availability of funding for additional road safety measures in Cork, all available grant funding has been allocated for 2020. Within the budget available to the Department for regional and local road grants, allocations are made on as equitable basis as possible taking into account the length of road in each local authority area and traffic factors. It is open to local authorities to fund road safety measures from their own resources and my Department emphasises the importance of local authorities' prioritising works on roads when allocating own resources.

As Minister for Climate Action, Communications Networks and Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and securing capital funding in relation to the national roads programme. Once funding arrangements have been put in place with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, planning, design, and construction is a matter for TII in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. TII is, therefore, responsible for the distribution of funds under the Capital Programme for the implementation of the national roads programme.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII to provide you with the information requested. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Question No. 121 answered with Question No. 81.

Covid-19 Pandemic

122. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the supports in funding being made available to private bus operators during the Covid-19 pandemic that employ significant numbers of persons locally; if he will include private operators in the supports being provided to companies such as CIÉ; if his attention has been drawn to the need for supports to private operators in the interest of regional jobs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14286/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): On 25 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 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 the revenues generated on the services.

The National Transport Authority (NTA), as the public transport licensing agency, will administer the support through the establishment of contracts between the NTA and the relevant operators.

Driver Test

123. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the Road Safety Authority first announced a change for CPC course providers that all trucks must become automatic by 1 June 2020 but later pushed the date back to 1 November 2020 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14288/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The background to this issue is that almost all trucks and buses now being sold have automatic transmission systems. However, most Approved Driving Instructor (ADI) instruction vehicles have manual transmission systems. In some cases a person will take a driving test in a vehicle with an automatic transmission system; in that instance the driving licence that subsequently issues reflects this and that person cannot drive a vehicle with a manual transmission system. For the vast majority of cases this is not a problem and only arises where that person wishes to drive a vehicle with a manual transmission.

COMMISSION DIRECTIVE (EU) 2020/612 of 4 May 2020 amending Directive 2006/126/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on driving licences provides that EU Member States may allow a driver who takes a bus or truck driving test in an automatic transmission vehicle to be granted a licence to drive a vehicle with a manual transmission if they had already taken a driving test in a vehicle (usually a car) with a manual transmission.

This Directive is due to be transposed into Irish law by 1 November 2020. It was the intention to have this law in place earlier in the year, unfortunately due to emergency legislation required as a result of Covid-19 it was not possible. However, work has commenced on this piece of legislation and it is still hoped to have it in place before November.

Question No. 124 answered with Question No. 96.

Roadworthiness Testing

125. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the process for getting a self-made mechanically propelled vehicle verified for roadworthiness. [14313/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As the deputy will be aware, in order to use a vehicle on a public road in Ireland it must be registered, taxed and in a roadworthy condition at all times.

If the vehicle has yet to be registered it will likely require verification and certification that it meets the technical, safety and environmental standards required for the registration of motor vehicles in the State. The vehicle owner should contact the National Standard Authority of Ireland (NSAI) for further information on attaining Individual Vehicle Approval. The Revenue Commissioners will not be able to register the vehicle unless approval has been received.

There are different roadworthiness testing regimes in operation in the State; the National Car Test (NCT) for passenger vehicles and the Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Test (CVRT) for commercial vehicles such as vans, buses and trucks. The classification of the vehicle in question is one aspect of the Individual Vehicle Approval system and it will be possible to direct the vehicle owner to the correct roadworthiness testing service once the vehicle has been classified.

Covid-19 Pandemic

126. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures he is proposing to ensure persons using public transport wear face coverings and masks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14393/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Following the commencement of Phase 3 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business on 29 June 2020, changes to the existing public transport social distancing restrictions were agreed, allowing a move from 2 metres social distancing to utilising 50% of the passenger-carrying capacity of fleet. This will help to underpin public transport services during these unprecedented times, with a view to safeguarding public transport capacity in Phases 3 and 4 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business.

Alongside this change, it has also been decided that the wearing of a face covering when using public transport is mandatory, with the exception of those who cannot do so for health reasons or due to young age. The legal framework to back up the mandatory use of face coverings on public transport is currently being prepared and we expect to have new Health Regulations in the coming days.

Deputies will be familiar with the extensive public information campaign currently underway to advise the public about the use of face coverings for the benefit of themselves and those around them. Guidance on the safe use of face coverings is available on the gov.ie website.

Compliance by passengers with the public health advice in relation to face coverings is being carefully monitored and, given the current situation and the public health advice, I would strongly encourage all passengers to wear a face covering while on public transport.

Covid-19 Pandemic

127. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consultations are planned with the HSE, HSA or NPHE to establish industry specific guidelines for a safe return to work for driver schools and instructors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14406/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The NPHE, together with a team of national experts, decided which businesses could resume trading in each Phase of the gradual reopening of our economy, and they included driving schools on the list of businesses cleared to reopen on 29 June. It is not the role of the NPHE to provide guidance in relation to specific sectors, as a rule, nor to provide guidance in relation to working conditions. Neither has the Health Service Executive any role in relation to matters which do not involve the health service directly.

A National Return to Work Safely Protocol has been produced under the aegis of the Labour

Employer Economic Forum and is the result of a collaborative effort by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), the Health Services Executive (HSE) and the Department of Health and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. The HSA has in turn produced COVID-19 checklists and templates, based on the Protocol, to help employers, business owners and managers to get their business up and running again and to inform workers about what they need to do to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

The RSA is developing protocols, as any employer must, to apply the overall protocols to its particular needs, including in relation to driver testing. In doing so, it was assisted by the overall national protocol and also by the additional templates and checklists from the HSA. I understand that the National Office of Traffic Medicine was also available to the RSA to assist in its tasks.

In anticipation of the resumption of driver testing on 29 June, the RSA wrote to each Approved Driving Instructor on 22 June, advising them of the planned phased return 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.

However, the RSA cannot dictate to driving schools on how they should run their business, or issue medical advice. It is up to each driving instructor or driving school to protect themselves, their families and communities by adhering to the official Government guidelines on hygiene and social distancing.

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.

Question No. 128 answered with Question No. 109.

Road Projects

129. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the spend allocated and envisaged for the upgrading of the N4 from Mullingar to Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14489/20]

130. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the stage the upgrading of the N4 from Mullingar to Longford is funded to; the date it is contracted to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14490/20]

131. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there was a cost-benefit analysis undertaken on the upgrading of the N4 from Mullingar to Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14491/20]

132. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there will be no additional tolls placed along the proposed upgrade of the N4 from Mullingar to Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14492/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 129 to 132, inclusive, together.

As Minister for Climate Energy and Communications and Transport, Tourism and 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.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

133. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the support package which will be put in place for bus and coach operators in rural and regional economies. [14493/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): 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. My Department has engaged with the Coach Tourism & Transport Council of Ireland (CTTC) on a regular basis in relation to the impact of Covid-19 on licensed bus operators.

From my Department's engagement with the CTTC, and indeed from the NTA's regular engagement with them throughout the crisis, I understand the very difficult business environment that licensed bus operators are now dealing with. Indeed, across Government we are acutely aware that Covid-19 presents huge challenges for many business sectors.

That is why on 25 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 measure 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 the revenues generated on the services. The National Transport Authority (NTA), as the public transport licensing agency, will administer the support through the establishment of contracts between the NTA and the relevant operators.

The Government has also introduced a range of supports for impacted businesses generally, including new schemes of wage subsidies, rates waivers, re-start grants, lending facilities, equity injection, and business advisory supports.

Covid-19 Pandemic

134. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if immediate and clear messaging will be provided regarding the call for clarity by an organisation (details supplied) in view of the fact current guidelines have caused confusion for both travel agents and their customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14494/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Government's position is clear: there should be no overseas travel other than travel that is essential. This posi-

tion is under review, and Government is actively considering whether and when non-essential travel is allowable, but for the time being the advice is against non-essential travel, as per the guidance provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade at www.dfa.ie. Further specific information on passenger rights and entitlements for those who have booked holidays through travel agents is available on my Department's web site at www.dttas.gov.ie, under the tagline "Disruption to flights and package travel due to the Covid-19 pandemic - customer information."

Sports Capital Programme

135. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when details of the sports capital programme will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14506/20]

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.

The most recent (2018) round of the SCP attracted a record 2,337 applications. Allocations were announced in January, May and November of last year with a total of over €56 million awarded to 1,648 different projects.

All unsuccessful applicants were given the opportunity to appeal the Department's decision. In relation to the capital grants announced in November, a total of 122 appeals were submitted by the December deadline. The review of these appeals was completed in April with 6 new allocations approved.

Following the finalisation of the appeals process, a full Review of the 2018 round of the SCP was undertaken. This Review is currently under consideration and includes recommendations for some changes to the terms and conditions of the next round of the SCP. I understand that a final decision is expected shortly and a decision on the timing of a new round of the SCP will be taken after that.

Ministerial Responsibilities

136. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will publish the Departmental briefing paper on his role, remits and powers afforded to him upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14533/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My officials provided a comprehensive briefing document to me on my appointment as Minister. It is my intention to publish the document (redacted where necessary) shortly.

Covid-19 Pandemic

137. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if specific programmes of support will be put in place as a matter of urgency to assist the tourism and hospitality sector through present challenges in view of the severe impact of Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14541/20]

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 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.

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. The Taskforce has submitted an initial report.

The Programme for Government contains a commitment that a July Jobs Initiative will be brought forward which will, among other things, take further sector specific measures where required. In this context the Government will consider additional measures that may be needed to support the tourism and hospitality sector.

Fáilte Ireland has also put in place a number of supports for the tourism and hospitality sector. I have asked Fáilte Ireland to provide the Deputy with further details in this regard. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Taxi Regulations

138. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the request of taxi drivers to give a two-year extension on the ten year rule for public service vehicles that are currently licensed in view of the financial impact on their industry as a result of Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14563/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including age limits for SPSVs and 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.

Taxi Regulations

139. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the request of taxi representative groups for an immediate review of the sustainability of the industry, taxi numbers and the likely supply and demand issues over the coming period in view of the Covid-19 crisis; if he will consider a moratorium on the issuing of further PSV licences until the review is completed and the industry has recovered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14565/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I recognise that since the onset of the present COVID-19 pandemic 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 have fallen considerably and many operators stopped working temporarily.

Over the past few months, the National Transport Authority (NTA), which is the body under the aegis of my Department with responsibility for regulating the SPSV sector, has undertaken a number of measures to assist operators in the industry including waivers, facilitating temporary licence suspensions, interaction with the Insurance industry, and providing guidance to operators on cleaning and other ways to reduce the risk of spreading Covid-19.

The focus now is on assisting those who have stopped working to get back to work as the economy reopens and passenger demand for SPSVs returns. My Department is in regular contact with the NTA to monitor the progress of the Government's Roadmap to Reopening Society and Business and the impact this is having on demand for SPSV services with a view to ensuring that those SPSV operators who temporarily stopped working are well placed to return to work.

I understand that the Advisory Committee on SPSVs (commonly known as the Taxi Advisory Committee) is looking at the sector's situation as it faces into the coming months, and I expect to receive their report when this has been completed.

Given that the process of reopening the economy is ongoing and the present pandemic is continuing, I believe it would be premature to undertake a longer term review of the industry at the present time. However, I agree that there will be a need to undertake a review of the industry in the near future, noting among other things any lasting impact arising from COVID-19.

On the specific question of a moratorium on the issuance of SPSV licences, it is not intended to introduce such a measure.

Environmental Protection Enforcement

140. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of the training, capacity building and investment necessary to support the national maritime oil and HNS spill contingency plan; and the timeline for the roll out of same. [14582/20]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): In 2020, my department was provided with a current allocation of €370,000 and capital allocation of €50,000 in respect of pollution response and ship casualty tasks undertaken by the Irish Coast Guard (IRCG).

It is a requirement for Ports and Local Authorities to have trained personnel available to respond to a pollution incident. Specific training is designed for such staff and offered each year by the IRCG covering Tier 1 and Tier 2 Pollution Response. The courses are certificated and are based on the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) model courses on marine pollution preparedness and response. Once the certificates have been valid for three years, individuals are then offered Refresher training.

The IRCG has engaged consultants to develop a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the activation and operation of the Incident Command System (ICS) within the IRCG. The new procedure will feature the standard and internationally recognised framework of the ICS. The establishment and implementation of this formal and structured process for the management of incidents, including oil spill and Hazardous Noxious Substance (HNS), will provide the ability to scale response management in a coordinated, phased and tiered manner in single and multi-agency environments.

New pollution response equipment was purchased in 2018 and 2019 amounting to €750,000. It is anticipated that it will be commissioned in late 2020 or early 2021 and added to the National Pollution Stockpile. It is intended that equipment in the National Pollution Response

Equipment Stockpile that reaches its expiry will be replenished as required over the next three years. A new unique identification system will be developed and introduced for the National Pollution Response Equipment Stockpile over the next four years.

Question No. 141 answered with Question No. 81.

Tax Reliefs

142. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter regarding consanguinity relief (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14254/20]

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

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

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

Help-To-Buy Scheme

143. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will revisit the help-to-buy scheme in terms of its loan-to-value ratio borrowing requirement being 70% when such threshold precludes significant numbers from accessing the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14510/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Programme for Government ‘Our Shared Future’ includes a commitment to “retain and expand the Help to Buy scheme for new properties and self-build properties”. The intention is to deliver on this and other commitments in the programme within the duration of the life of the Government.

In relation to the 70% loan to value floor in the scheme, I should also point out that one of the central policy aims of the Help to Buy scheme is to help make mortgages more accessible to first-time buyers, many of whom have difficulty securing the required deposit under the Central Bank macro-prudential rules. Individuals who are in the fortunate position of being able to avail of a mortgage at a lower loan-to-value ratio than 70% are considered to have sufficient resources to more than meet the deposit requirements of the macro-prudential rules and thus may be less in need of assistance from the Exchequer.

Mortgage Lending

144. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the reported refusal by a bank (details supplied) to allow a first-time buyer to draw down a mortgage in August 2020 should the person who has been professional disaffected by the pandemic continue to be in receipt of the pandemic unemployment payment, when the house is built and ready for occupancy; his views on whether this reported anomaly could potentially pose a widespread problem for first-time buyers in their dealings with banks and lending institutions going forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13721/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In the context of mortgage lending, the European Union (Consumer Mortgage Credit Agreements) Regulations 2016 (CMCAR) provides 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 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. The assessment of creditworthiness must be carried out on the basis of information on the consumer's income and expenses and other financial and economic circumstances which is necessary, sufficient and proportionate. In addition, the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code 2012 imposes 'Knowing the Consumer and Suitability' requirements on lenders. Under these requirements, lenders are required to assess affordability of credit and the suitability of a product or service based on the individual circumstances of each borrower.

Within the parameters of this regulatory framework, the decision to grant or refuse an individual application for mortgage credit is a commercial decision to be made by the regulated entity and it is not appropriate or possible for me to instruct lenders in that regard. Nevertheless, lenders continue to process mortgage applications and have supports in place to assist customers impacted by COVID-19. The Banking & Payments Federation Ireland (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. The FAQ indicates that lenders may extend the period of a mortgage Approval in Principle where an individual's circumstances have not materially changed as a result of COVID-19. The BPF state that this will likely be for 3-6 months, but it may vary depending on the lender's assessment of an individual's circumstances. However, if a borrower's circumstances have materially changed as a result of Covid-19, the BPF advises that lenders may keep the application open on its system for a period of time; but this again may vary depending on the lender's assessment of an individual's circumstances. After this period of time, the BPF states that the lender will undertake a review of the application which will likely include a request for the individual to provide an update on their employment and income situation.

More generally 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.

Mortgage Lending

145. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the action he will take regarding the fact that many banks are refusing to allow persons in receipt of the temporary

wage subsidy scheme who have been approved for mortgages to draw down those mortgages while in receipt of the subsidy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13731/20]

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 (BPFI) as the lending industry works to address the difficulties the COVID-19 situation is causing for both borrowers and lenders.

In that context, lenders continue to process mortgage applications and have supports in place to assist customers impacted by COVID-19. The BPFI has published a Covid-19 Support FAQ which customers can consult, or customers can contact their lender directly, if they have any queries or concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on their mortgage application.

However, 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 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.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

146. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the processing of the revised claim for fuel grant for members of the drivers and passengers with disabilities scheme; if the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13756/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have asked my officials to investigate the status of this claim and if all is in order to ensure payment is made without further delay. I understand that the initial delay was due to an error in the online claim. I have further asked my officials to revert directly to the Deputy on the matter in the coming days.

Tax Reliefs

147. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if relief is available on donations to reconstruct a building (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13759/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy's question relates to tax relief under section 847A Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA) for donations to certain sports bodies for the funding of capital projects.

I am advised by Revenue that the sports body in question has been granted exemption under section 235 TCA, which means that donations to the sports body for the purpose of the capital project would be eligible for tax relief under section 847A TCA, provided the other conditions of the relief are met. In particular, the capital project in question must be approved by the Minister for Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sports and the Gaeltacht. The sports body must also possess valid tax clearance.

The other conditions in section 847A TCA that must be met for the donation to qualify for the relief are that:

- the donation is made to the approved sports body for the sole purposes of funding an approved project;
- the donation is or will be applied by that body for that purpose;
- the donation is not otherwise deductible in computing the profits or gains of a trade or profession or deductible as an expense of management in computing the profits of a company;
- the donation is not a relevant donation relievable under section 848A TCA (which deals with relief for donations to approved charities);
- the donation is not liable to be repaid;
- neither the donor nor any person connected with the donor receives a benefit, whether directly or indirectly, as a result of making the donation;
- the donation is not conditional on or related to the acquisition of property by the approved sports body (otherwise than by way of gift) from the donor or any person connected with the donor; and,
- in the case of a donation made by an individual, the individual is resident in the State for the year of assessment in which the donation is made, and in the case of a taxpayer who is not within the self-assessment system, the individual has given an appropriate certificate to the approved sports body in relation to the donation and has paid the tax referred to in such certificate and is not entitled to a repayment of that tax or any part of that tax.

A list of all sporting bodies granted exemption under section 235 TCA is available on the Revenue website at: www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/registrations/sports-bodies-numeric.pdf.

Value Added Tax

148. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance when a decision will be made regarding the VAT rate for the hospitality and tourism sector in view of the current crisis the sector faces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13772/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): 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.

This Government is currently preparing a the July stimulus package which will set out supportive measures for a wide range of sectors including the hospitality and tourism sectors to ensure that the economy is in a position to recover rapidly while maintaining a stable tax base. Details of the July stimulus package will be announced by Government shortly.

Revenue Commissioners

149. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance when the office of the Revenue Commissioners in Cork will reopen to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13783/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it closed its public offices, including the Cork office, in accordance with the Government measures announced on 27 March 2020 to suppress the transmission of COVID-19. Revenue has also confirmed that it is adhering to the public health advice that people work from home to the greatest extent possible. To facilitate such ‘remote working’ Revenue has provided the required IT and telephony support to staff so that service to customers is maintained.

I am aware that Revenue has continued to provide a full online service to its customers since the restrictions began and is for the most part delivering a next day response to queries received through the MyEnquiries channel. A similar level of service is being provided in respect of queries received through the postal service. Revenue has also maintained the National Employers Helpline and ROS Helpdesk throughout the pandemic to ensure claimants of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) have a comprehensive support if required to assist them receive their entitlements.

Revenue is fully aware that not all customers can access its online services for a variety of reasons such as poor broadband connectivity or lack of IT skills and is prioritising reopening services as quickly as possible, while continuing to have regard to public health advice. For example, the National PAYE Helpline (01-738 3636) and the Local Property Tax Helpline (01-738 3626) have reopened in recent days on a 9.30am to 1.30pm basis (Monday to Friday) and it is intended that the other Helplines will follow as quickly as possible.

I am advised by Revenue that the position of public offices, including the Cork office, is under review and decisions will be made in accordance with public health advice and will focus on customer and staff safety as its highest priority. As was the case for most of its public offices before the pandemic, Revenue will re-open on an appointment only basis for customers and that all such appointments will fully observe the necessary social distancing protocols.

Finally, if the Deputy is aware of a specific customer that requires assistance from Revenue, he can provide the details through the Oireachtas Helpline at telephone number 01-8589999.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

150. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider implementing a number of measures (details supplied) in view of the economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. [13808/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The flexible approach taken by Revenue to debt collection, accrual of interest and enforcement activity to date has provided vital

liquidity support to businesses during the COVID-19 crisis.

In this context, Revenue has emphasised the importance of businesses continuing to file tax returns promptly, even in circumstances where they cannot pay the associated liabilities. Revenue has also acknowledged that some businesses may have difficulty in completing accurate returns due to the pandemic and in such circumstances advises that they submit a best estimate, which can be amended at a later date if necessary. This is important to enable both Revenue and my Department to have a clear picture of the portfolio of emerging tax debt, particularly debt that may be included in the proposed tax ‘debt warehousing’ arrangements that will be provided for in future legislation. In relation to ‘debt warehousing’, it will be a condition of that scheme that tax returns are up to date.

It is too early to make decisions regarding tax filing deadlines that fall due later in the year, for example the self-assessment ‘pay & file’ date of 31 October 2020 (12 November if filing and paying via ROS), as it is not possible to fully predict the progress of public health measures and their impact on the ability of businesses to meet tax filing and payment obligations. However, I have every confidence that Revenue will make appropriate decisions regarding these matters in due course and will continue to support businesses affected by the pandemic to the greatest extent possible, as has been the case to date.

Wage Subsidy Scheme

151. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which the temporary wage subsidy scheme evaluates average pay for furlough if unpaid sick leave was taken in December 2019 and January 2020 which has subsequently impacted negatively on an employee’s average furlough pay. [13812/20]

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 Deputy will be aware that 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 rapidly, having regard to the Government objective of providing financial assistance to employers and employees, where businesses have been seriously affected by the pandemic and the necessary restrictions that were introduced as a result.

In the context of the 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 before 1 April 2020.

For the purposes of the operation of the TWSS, the Average Revenue Net Weekly Pay is the employee’s average net weekly pay for January and February 2020 based on the payroll submissions made by the employer concerned to Revenue.

I have been advised by Revenue that if no payroll is on record for an employee in January due to unpaid sick leave, then Revenue will use the February payroll submissions for the cal-

ulation of the Average Revenue Net Weekly Pay and divide that by the number of insurable weeks reported in that period. Thus, an employee would not be negatively impacted if he or she only had payroll submissions covering four weeks during the January and February period as the calculation is proportionate to the number of insurable weeks reported.

Wage Subsidy Scheme

152. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Finance if the criteria for the temporary wage subsidy scheme will be redefined to ensure that seasonal workers and businesses are not being left to struggle alone with no supports as they reopen in line with advice [13814/20]

153. **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. [13817/20]

160. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will extend the temporary wage subsidy scheme to a business (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13913/20]

166. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Finance the supports available for tourism businesses which are seasonal and would normally be operating at full capacity (details supplied); his views on whether a seasonal average would be fairer for tourism businesses; and if plans are in place to make allowances for the seasonality of businesses in the tourism sector. [14108/20]

183. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Finance if the temporary wage subsidy scheme will be extended to seasonal workers; and if not, if a specific measure will be put in place to support such workers to allow them have an income stream and to ensure hotels and restaurants have a full complement of staff for the reduced tourist season. [14421/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 152, 153, 160, 166 and 183 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:

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

Wage Subsidy Scheme

154. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated number of taxpayers in receipt of the temporary wage subsidy scheme who will have an additional tax, USC and or PRSA liability as a result of the tax at the end of 2020; the average amount liable; the number of taxpayers on the pandemic unemployment payment who are projected to have an additional tax, USC and or PRSA liability at the end of 2020 as a result of receiving same; the average amount liable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13820/20]

190. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the planned tax treatment for Covid-19 pandemic unemployment payments, particularly in which the tax liability for those payments exceeds unused personal and PAYE tax credits for 2020; the planned tax treatment for payments made through the temporary wage subsidy scheme particularly in which the tax liability for those payments exceeds unused personal and PAYE tax credits for 2020; and the considerations provided by his Department to introduce legislation that would prohibit interest accrual for mortgage holders availing of a moratorium or payment break in the context of Covid-19 as was implemented in other EU jurisdictions. [14568/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 154 and 190 together.

Section 28 of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 provides for the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS). The scheme is designed to maintain the key relationship between employers and employees and minimise the impact on the economy to the greatest extent possible during the public health restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the most recent statistics, for the week to 2 July 2020, 410,000 employees are currently being supported by the scheme and almost 568,000 employees have received a subsidy

since commencement. In addition, the Department of Social Protection and Rural Affairs has indicated that since the start of the pandemic over 730,000 people have applied for the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP).

Payments made under both the TWSS and PUP are income supports and share the characteristics of income and are subject to tax. The TWSS is also subject to USC while the PUP follows the general taxation rule for social welfare payments and is exempt from that charge. Both schemes are exempt from PRSI charges. However, neither scheme is being taxed in real-time through the PAYE system, but recipients may become liable for tax and USC (for TWSS) at the end of the year, which will be calculated by Revenue through the employee End of Year Review process.

The level of tax and USC due by any person at year end in respect of TWSS and PUP payments may be reduced or eliminated by the amount of unused tax credits available. 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 either the TWSS or the PUP on the 'week 1 basis' of taxation for the remainder of 2020 to 'preserve' unused tax credits that can then be used to offset any tax or USC liabilities that arise.

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

I am advised by Revenue that the final calculation of the end of year liability for each person is dependent on a range of factors, including a person's civil status, the available tax credits, the actual amounts received during the year under the TWSS and PUP schemes, any top-up payments made by the employer, as well as other entitlements and credits, such as health expenses. As there are considerable differences in each person's tax circumstances, it is not yet possible to provide details of the estimated undercharges (if any) arising from the taxation of TWSS and PUP payments. It is also not yet possible to estimate the numbers of taxpayers who may have such undercharges as these details will not be available with any degree of accuracy until after the year end.

In relation to Deputy Doherty's point regarding payment breaks for mortgage holders, I welcomed the announcement by the Banking and Payments Federation of Ireland (BPF) of the introduction of the payment breaks for those affected by Covid-19 in March for 3 months and the subsequent announcement on 30 May of the extension to the payment breaks for a possible further 3 months, on a non-legislative basis. Figures released by the BPF on 28 May stated that over 78,000 payment breaks were in place for mortgages and work is ongoing in relation to those seeking to avail of the 2nd payment break. These payment breaks have provided welcome breathing space and support for those affected by Covid-19.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Central Bank expects lenders to clearly explain to their customers the implications of a payment break; for the term, payment schedule, and costs of the loan. The Central Bank has communicated its expectations to financial institutions that at the end of the agreed payment break, borrowers should be given the option to either (i) repay the loan within the remaining term or (ii) extend the term of the loan. This choice should apply for all loans, including mortgages, and the impact of both options on the overall cost of credit and monthly repayments should be fully explained to the customer, noting that borrower circumstances and the appropriateness of each option will differ. As part of their supervisory work, they will be monitoring compliance with this expectation and take action, where their expectations are not met.

Questions - Written Answers
Home Repossessions Rate

155. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of repossessions of family homes carried out by each of the main banks in each of the past five years to date; the number of multiple residence developments affected in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13847/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been advised by the Central Bank of Ireland that within the remit of their responsibilities for safeguarding stability and protecting consumers, its approach to mortgage arrears resolution is focused on ensuring the fair treatment of borrowers through a strong consumer protection framework and ensuring that lenders have appropriate arrears resolution strategies and operations in place.

The Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) forms part of the Central Bank’s Consumer Protection Framework. It is a statutory Code first introduced by the Central Bank in February 2009, with the current CCMA becoming effective from 1 July 2013. The CCMA provides a strong consumer protection framework, aimed specifically at the process to be followed by relevant firms, to ensure borrowers in arrears or pre-arrears in respect of a mortgage loan secured on a primary residence are treated in a timely, transparent and fair manner.

Under the CCMA, a regulated entity may only commence legal proceedings for repossession where it has made every reasonable effort to agree an alternative repayment arrangement (ARA) with the borrowers and other clear requirements are met or the borrower has been classified as not co-operating.

This framework requires lenders to exhaust the options available from the suite of ARAs offered before taking action which may result in the borrower losing his/her home (whether by voluntary sale or repossession). During the legal process, borrowers have opportunities to re-engage with lenders to find a solution. In some circumstances, however, loss of ownership may be unavoidable.

The Residential Mortgage Arrears, Restructures and Repossessions Statistics published every quarter provides detail in relation to the number of home mortgage repossessions. The data is published on the central bank website

<https://centralbank.ie/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/mortgage-arrears>.

The following tables provide a summary of owner occupier (Principal Dwelling house (PDH)) repossessions over the previous five years. The available data is broken out into Banks and Non-bank lenders, not by individual banks. Furthermore, no separate breakout of the data is currently available in relation to number of multiple residence developments.

PDH properties TOTAL (bank & non-bank)

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 (Q1) |
|--|-------|-------|-------|------|------|-----------|
| Total Residential properties repossessed in the period | 1,535 | 1,693 | 1,417 | 878 | 535 | 64 |

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 (Q1) |
|---|------|-------|------|------|------|-----------|
| - Properties repossessed on foot of an order | 726 | 492 | 526 | 250 | 144 | 25 |
| - Properties voluntarily surrendered/ abandoned | 809 | 1,201 | 891 | 628 | 391 | 39 |

PDH - Banks

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 (Q1) |
|--|-------|-------|-------|------|------|-----------|
| Total Residential properties repossessed in the period | 1,299 | 1,452 | 1,269 | 779 | 417 | 39 |
| - Properties repossessed on foot of an order | 603 | 417 | 455 | 203 | 74 | 14 |
| - Properties voluntarily surrendered/ abandoned | 696 | 1,035 | 814 | 576 | 343 | 25 |

PDH - Non-Banks

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 (Q1) |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|-----------|
| Total Residential properties repossessed in the period | 236 | 241 | 148 | 99 | 118 | 25 |
| - Properties repossessed on foot of an order | 123 | 75 | 71 | 47 | 70 | 11 |
| - Properties voluntarily surrendered/ abandoned | 113 | 166 | 77 | 52 | 48 | 14 |

Questions - Written Answers
Vehicle Registration Tax

156. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to amend the rate of VRT due on vehicles that are being purchased for use as a taxi and or private limousine service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13848/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There are currently five VRT categories which determine the basis of the applicable VRT charge. I have no plans to make changes to the type of vehicles that are in these categories.

Tax Credits

157. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance if a response to correspondence regarding single person child carer credit, SPCCC, will issue (details supplied). [13858/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue raised by the Deputy relates to the eligibility criteria for the Single Person Child Carer Credit (SPCCC).

The SPCCC is a tax credit that is available to a single person who has a “qualifying child” resident with him/her for the whole or greater part of the tax year and who satisfies the other conditions of the relief. The value of the credit is €1,650 for each tax year. In addition to the credit, a claimant is entitled to an additional €4,000 on the standard rate income tax band (i.e. the amount on which tax is paid at the lower rate of tax, which is currently 20%). An individual can only receive one SPCCC irrespective of the number of qualifying children residing with him/her.

To qualify as a single person for the purposes of the SPCCC, the individual must not be jointly assessed for income tax as a married person or civil partner, living with his/her spouse or civil partner, or cohabiting with a partner.

A qualifying child includes a child born in the tax year, a child who was under the age of 18 at the start of the tax year or a child who was over the age of 18 at the start of the tax year if he/she is either in full-time education or is permanently incapacitated by reason of mental or physical infirmity from maintaining himself/herself. A qualifying child also includes a permanently incapacitated individual who is over the age of 21, if he/she became permanently incapacitated before reaching the age of 21 or while in full-time education.

The credit is ordinarily given to the primary claimant. The primary claimant is the individual who proves that a qualifying child resides with him/her for the whole or the greater part of the tax year (i.e. a period greater than six months) and that the child is either his/her own child or a child who has been placed in his/her custody.

A primary claimant can relinquish his/her entitlement to the SPCCC to a secondary claimant. The secondary claimant can then claim the credit if he/she qualifies as a single person and the qualifying child resides with him/her for at least 100 days throughout the tax year.

Detailed information on the Single Person Child Carer Credit can be found on Revenue's website at the following link:

www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tm/income-tax-capital-gains-tax-corporation-tax/part-15/15-01-41.pdf

Primary Medical Certificates

158. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the resumption of oral hearings for the appeal of the primary medical certificate that needed to be cancelled in April 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13865/20]

187. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to improve the criteria for the primary medical certificate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14535/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 and 187 together.

I have been advised that hearings of the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal have been postponed due to Covid-19 restrictions, where the fact that many appellants would likely be in the vulnerable or high-risk Covid-19 category is a relevant consideration.

I have also been advised that a Supreme Court decision of 18 June found in favour of two appellants against the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal's refusal to grant the individuals Primary Medical Certificates (PMC). My officials are currently examining the judgement, in conjunction with the Attorney General's Office, and will bring forward any policy and/or legislative proposals, as necessary, for my consideration in due course.

Insurance Coverage

159. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the practice that is carried out by insurance companies to impose a limit on the number of years a person cannot have insurance before they lose access to a no claims bonus (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13901/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset you should note 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 as to how they price their policies or the terms and conditions they apply in those policies.

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 motor insurance, factors may include those such as the age of the driver and the relevant driving experience, as well as the age and type of vehicle, how the vehicle is used, the claims record, the number of drivers, and the location of storage. 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.

In respect of motorists, such as those noted in the details supplied, who lose access to a "no claims bonus" because they have not been insured for a number of years, I understand that in general, this is because insurance companies set a date by which a no-claims bonus will expire, where the driver has held no insurance in their own name for two or more years. This applies whether the person continues to reside in Ireland, or they decide to move abroad and it is primarily a commercial matter for insurance companies. I understand from Insurance Ireland that this is because the possession of continuous insurance without making a claim is taken as posi-

tive evidence of the unlikelihood of a future claim being made – thus resulting in a discount on their premium known as a no claims bonus. They also note that different insurers will price the increased likelihood of a claim being made in the absence of such continuous insurance in different ways and that most will refuse to apply a no claims bonus in situations where there has been no driving experience for a set number of years. As previously mentioned, such decisions are commercial and based on their application of the rating factors noted above and also on the fact that the risk profile of such a person has changed.

The Deputy should note that during the Cost of Insurance Working Group's work in relation to motor insurance, this issue was raised mainly in the context of returning emigrants, who may have found it difficult to secure insurance, despite having driving experience while abroad. In this respect, a protocol was agreed between Insurance Ireland and the Department of Finance, under which insurance companies committed to accepting the driving experience of such drivers gained while abroad, when the driver has had previous driving experience in Ireland. The details of it is available on Insurance Ireland's website and the websites of its member companies. The guiding principle of the protocol is to ensure that a returning emigrant is not treated differently to any other driver, subject to verification of their continued driving experience and the normal acceptance criteria of the company. Thus, a returning emigrant will not be disadvantaged from spending that time abroad. Furthermore, under the protocol, insurance companies will not distinguish between countries on the basis of which side of the road driving takes place therein.

It is important to note that the protocol also states that if more than two years have passed since the Irish motor insurance policy was cancelled/lapsed, the Irish No Claims Discount is no longer valid. Notwithstanding this, if the person has been abroad for longer than two years, Insurance Ireland members have agreed through the protocol that if the person has claims-free driving experience in a different country in their own name, they will take this experience into consideration if that person seeks a quotation from an insurer, on their return to Ireland, subject to the appropriate verifiable documentation being provided.

Finally, any motorist having difficulty in relation to this issue can contact Insurance Ireland, who operate a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance at feedback@insuranceireland.eu.

Question No. 160 answered with Question No. 152.

Value Added Tax

161. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Finance if yoga studios currently in the VAT rate group of 13.5% can be moved into the second reduced rate of 9% in conjunction with other sporting activities and physical education activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13927/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The VAT rating of goods and services is subject to the requirements of the EU VAT Directive, 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. The "use of sporting facilities" is specifically listed in Annex III which therefore allows Ireland to apply the second reduced rate, currently 9%.

Services consisting of the care of the human body supplied in the course of a health studio business or similar business, such as a yoga studio, are not listed in Annex III and therefore

would in general be subject to the standard rate. However, the Directive allows for historic VAT treatment to be maintained under certain conditions and Ireland has retained the application of the reduced rate of VAT, currently 13.5%, to the services of yoga studios. This is known as a ‘parked rate’ and the continuation of this reduced rate application is conditional on the rate being no less than 12%. Therefore, there is no discretion under the Directive to apply the 9% rate to these services.

Value Added Tax

162. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Finance if he is considering the introduction of a VAT claim back on the purchase of materials related to crèches reopening post Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14013/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the VAT rating of goods and services is subject to EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply. In accordance with the VAT Directive, crèche services are exempt from VAT. As is the case with all VAT exempt businesses, crèches are not entitled to reclaim VAT on the purchase of materials used for their VAT exempt supplies, nor are they required to charge VAT on their fees.

Programme for Government

163. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if he will provide documents on those costings. [14030/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of the Taoiseach has published material provided by Government Departments in accordance with agreed procedures, via the Department of the Taoiseach, to Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party, as part of Government formation negotiations; this information is available at the following link: www.gov.ie/en/publication/7b927-programme-for-government-documents/.

Additionally, the costings provided by my Department to political parties as part of the Programme for Government discussions will be published together with the costings provided in advance of Budget 2020 and in preparation for Election 2020. It is intended that these costings will be published on my Department’s website on 15 July 2020. As such, the costings will be made available but my Department will not be providing them on an individual basis.

Consultancy Contracts

164. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within his Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14055/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that the organisation that provided the unconscious bias programme to 53 staff of the Department during 2018 was CMC Business Psychology Ltd. and the cost was €5,610.26.

Departmental Legal Costs

165. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance the expenditure his Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14072/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The amount my Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each year since 2016 are in the following table.

| Year | External Legal Fees Amount |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| 2020 (to date) | €226,193.93 |
| 2019 | €471,546.46 |
| 2018 | €948,806.92 |
| 2017 | €2,463,556.26 |
| 2016 | €734,859.80 |

Note 1: Over the course of this period, additional amounts of €526,106.84 in 2017 and €249,382.50 in 2018 were paid in respect of the costs of other parties.

Note 2: there are timing differences between when costs are incurred by the Department and when they are recouped which can lead to recoupments being received in the subsequent financial year.

*Recoupments:

2016: €269,419.15

2017: €856,138.60

2018: €214,400.72

2019: €38,507.63

2020 unavailable at this time.

Question No. 166 answered with Question No. 152.

Universal Social Charge

167. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Finance the annual cost of the removal of the 3% USC surcharge on incomes over €100,000 for the self-employed. [14114/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the estimated first and full year costs of abolishing the 3% Universal Social Charge (USC) surcharge on incomes over €100,000 for the self-employed are €53m and €98m, respectively. These estimated figures are based on projected 2020 incomes, calculated on the basis of actual data for 2017, which is the latest year for which income tax returns data are currently available. I am further advised by Revenue that income data for 2018 should be available in the coming weeks and may give rise to a revision of these estimates.

Wage Subsidy Scheme

168. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance if matters raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) on the calculation of ANRWP, average revenue net weekly pay, for the temporary wage subsidy scheme will receive a response; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [14131/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As previously advised to the Deputy in my reply to his Parliamentary Question on 30 June 2020, the amount of Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) 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.

In the example referenced by the Deputy, Revenue advise me that there is no underpayment of subsidy. The individual in question was paid for two full months in January and February 2020, which includes nine insurable weeks and the ARNWP is correctly calculated by dividing the total net pay figure for the two-month period by nine. Revenue has informed me that it has reviewed the relevant payroll submissions in respect of the individual and is satisfied that the calculations are operating correctly and in accordance with the rules of the scheme.

Regarding the taxation status of payments made under the TWSS, these amounts are income supports and share the characteristics of income. Therefore, payments made under the scheme are subject to income tax and Universal Social Charge (USC), but not employee PRSI. The TWSS payments are not being taxed in real-time through the PAYE system but a recipient will become liable for tax and USC at the end of the year, which will be calculated by Revenue through the ‘End of Year Review’ process.

The tax and USC deductions of the individual in question are currently being calculated on the ‘week 1’ basis of calculation rather than the ‘cumulative’ basis of calculation. This means that any unused tax credits will be ‘preserved’ until year end and can be offset against any tax or USC liabilities that arise. As previously advised, any additional tax credits such as health expenses may also be used to further reduce or eliminate tax liabilities arising from the payment of the TWSS. Revenue has also assured me that if any tax and USC liabilities still arise following the allocation of unused credits, it will work with persons impacted to collect the outstanding liabilities over an extended period. This will be achieved by reducing their tax credits for future years, thereby minimising any financial hardship to the greatest extent possible.

Finally, Revenue has advised me that it will make direct contact with the person to clarify any queries she may still have regarding how the TWSS entitlements are calculated.

EU Budget Contribution

169. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the concern expressed in a 2018 report from the Oireachtas Standing Committee of Public Accounts that established macroeconomic indicators have become unreliable in the Irish context and that the distorted picture they provide overstates debt sustainability and is costing the State hundreds of millions of euro each year in EU budget contributions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14142/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Irish macroeconomic statistics have been heavily affected by globalisation and the activities of multinationals in recent years. I have outlined on a number of occasions the difficulties in particular with using GDP given the small and very open nature of the economy. This was most evident with the national accounts figures for 2015 (published in 2016). For these reasons, alternative measures of output produced by the CSO, such as modified Gross National Income (‘GNI*’), offer a more appropriate benchmark

for economic activity.

For example, my Department uses a range of metrics to assess debt sustainability rather than solely relying on debt to GDP figures. This includes the debt to GNI* ratio. Last year, this ratio was 99 per cent whereas the GDP equivalent was substantially lower at 59 per cent. Furthermore, my Department produces an annual report on public debt which discusses these types of issues in depth. This year's report is currently being finalised and will be published later in the year.

In relation to EU budget contributions, these are calculated by the EU Commission in line with the provisions outlined in Own Resource Decision (ORD) Regulation (2014/335) which was ratified by all Member States. There are three main sources of revenue, namely customs duties, VAT and GNI based contributions. The latter is the largest source of income for the EU and Ireland is obliged to make payments based on our share of EU GNI. This ensures that EU revenues match expenditure.

In recent years, Ireland has become a net contributor to the EU budget reflecting the growth in the economy, the overall size of the budget as well a range of other factors. This period has also been marked by a large increase in Ireland's GNI based contribution in part due to the effects of globalisation. My Department will release a new report on our financial transactions with the EU later in the year.

Tax Collection

170. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners have agreed the amounts of refunds due to a person (details supplied); if refunds are due, when payments will be made; and if a tax clearance certificate has been issued. [14153/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that the refund claims in question have been examined by Revenue, following which three are approved as correctly due, four require further clarifications from the taxpayer or tax agent and three are not properly due. The issues requiring further clarification have been provided to the tax agent to which responses have not yet been received.

The refunds that were approved will be offset against the significant tax liabilities owed by the person in question. A tax clearance certificate cannot issue to the person until arrangements are agreed regarding the full tax liabilities owed.

Revenue Commissioners

171. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Finance the position for businesses that have received letters from the Revenue Commissioners regarding an inspection of their compliance regarding the temporary wage subsidy scheme; and the ramifications for businesses that are ultimately in compliance but due to staffing shortages or working from home arrangements are unable to meet the five day deadline for the compliance check as set out by the Revenue Commissioners. [14162/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) is a support to maintaining employment during the public health restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, the scheme has provided support to almost 59,000 employers in respect 568,000 employees totalling €1.9 billion. Approximately 410,000 em-

ployees are currently in receipt of the subsidy.

The Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (COVID-19) Act 2020 places the administration of the TWSS under the care and management of Revenue, which includes ensuring that this very significant investment of public funds is properly allocated to eligible employers and employees. In the exercise of this important role, Revenue is conducting a programme of compliance checks on all employers availing of the scheme to confirm that they meet the eligibility criteria and crucially that employees are receiving the correct amount of subsidy due to them.

In order to verify eligibility, Revenue is asking employers to summarise the impact of the COVID-19 restrictions on their business, the basis on which they reasonably anticipated a reduction of 25% or more in their turnover in Quarter two of this year, and whether the expected level of reduction actually occurred. In order to ensure that employees are being fairly treated and TWSS funds are being paid out as intended, Revenue is also seeking a sample of payslips from each employer. It is important to note that employers are obliged to include the amount of subsidy paid on each employee's payslip.

Regarding the Deputy's specific concerns, Revenue has assured me that it is fully aware of the difficulties that many businesses are currently experiencing due to the pandemic and will minimise any administrative burden arising from the compliance checks to the greatest extent possible, including issuing the compliance notifications on a staggered basis over the next few months. For many employers, a simple statement that due to the nature of their business, they were required to cease trading for a significant part of Quarter two is sufficient to confirm eligibility. Where any employer genuinely cannot provide the required documentation or payslip copies within the five days due to staffing shortages, working from home arrangements or any other difficulty, Revenue will provide the additional time needed if the business makes contact and advises of when the documentation will be provided.

Revenue has advised me that where a business had a reasonable basis for projecting a minimum 25% decrease in turnover, but ultimately suffered a lesser reduction in trade, it will require that employer to exit the scheme on a prospective basis rather than suffer any retrospective impact. However, where a business was clearly not eligible for the scheme or failed to pay the correct level of subsidy to its employees, or abused the scheme in any other way, there will be a requirement to repay the funds received. Any identified abuse of the TWSS will also lead to a more in-depth examination of the employer's overall tax position.

Finally, Revenue has advised me that it has issued just over 4,000 compliance notifications to-date and many of these employers have already provided prompt and satisfactory responses. Some of the employers have provided commendations in relation to the speed of development of the TWSS and in respect of Revenue's role in ensuring such a vital liquidity support is being properly applied.

Tax Reliefs

172. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Finance if 2020 renovation expenditure on a bed and breakfast can be claimed as tax relief in 2021 (details supplied) in view of the fact there will be no income in 2020 due to the Covid-19 crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14179/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that renovation expenditure on a bed and breakfast (B&B) could, depending on the type of expenditure involved, either be regarded as capital or revenue in nature.

Where accommodation is provided as part of the carrying on of a B&B trade, in computing the profits chargeable to tax, a deduction will be available for expenditure that is revenue in nature and which is expended wholly and exclusively for the purposes of the B&B trade. For example, this might include the cost of repainting a bedroom or purchasing bed linen.

If the expenditure is capital in nature and qualifies for wear and tear (capital) allowances, the amount of taxable profits of the B&B trade may be reduced by the amount of the wear and tear allowances. Capital expenditure incurred on plant and machinery (fixtures and fittings) in use for the purposes of a B&B trade can be offset against trading profits at a rate of 12.5% per annum over 8 years. Renovation work to a building which is used for the purposes of carrying on a B&B trade will generally not qualify for capital allowances. However, if any expenditure is in respect of the refurbishment of a Guest House which is registered with Fáilte Ireland, it may qualify for wear and tear allowances of 4% per annum over 25 years. Renovation expenditure on a B&B located in a Special Regeneration Area under the Living City Initiative may qualify for a wear and tear allowance of 15% per annum over 7 years.

If the B&B trade is carried on by an individual (sole trader), any expenses of a revenue nature will be taken into account in computing the amount of any trading profit or loss arising in 2020. In addition, the individual can use any available wear and tear allowances relating to capital expenditure to create or augment a trading loss that can be set against other taxable income in 2020. Any remaining trading loss or excess capital allowances can be carried forward for offset against profits of the B&B trade in 2021 and future years.

If the B&B trade is carried on through a company, available wear and tear allowances are taken into account in computing the amount of any trading profit or loss for the accounting period. If the company has a trading loss in 2020, it can offset that loss against taxable profits in the current and preceding accounting periods and carry forward any balance remaining for offset against trading profits in its 2021 and future accounting periods.

Public Liability Insurance

173. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if insurance providers will refund the 2020 public liability insurance premiums for seasonal bed and breakfasts which have not opened (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14180/20]

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, including B&Bs and guesthouses. The Deputy should note that neither I, nor the Central Bank, have any influence over the pricing of insurance products, nor can we compel any insurer operating in the Irish market to provide refunds to their customers, as this is a commercial matter for insurers. This position is reinforced by the EU Single Market framework for insurance (the Solvency II Directive) which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules, which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products.

Notwithstanding the above, I and my officials have had extensive engagement with the insurance industry over insurance cover and reliefs for businesses during the COVID-19 emergency. The outcome of this engagement is an agreement that I announced on 10 April whereby most of the key insurers in the Irish market - namely Allianz, AIG, AXA, FBD, Liberty Insurance, RSA, Travelers Insurance and Zurich - will ensure that a number of common forbearance measures are available to their business customers. It should be noted that this is a voluntary agreement, but my views are that the other major insurers in the Irish market should also sign

up to this commitment.

The common measures included in the agreement are outlined below:

Forbearance

Insurers will reduce premiums for business customers to reflect reduced level of exposure as a result of COVID-19 restrictions for Employer Liability/ Public Liability and Commercial Motor.

Insurers will allow up to 28 days after renewal for payment.

Business Premises

Insurers will maintain cover for unoccupied commercial buildings/ premises not in use due to COVID-19 restriction (for a maximum of 90 days). Appropriate supervision and security of the premises is required.

Insurers will support requests for a change of property use during the crisis.

While I believe that the above agreement should assist many businesses in relation to their insurance, this will only happen if insurers deliver upon their commitments. Therefore, 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. I 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, and I am awaiting that currently.

The Deputy should also be aware that the Central Bank has written to insurance firms setting out their expectations that insurance firms should take account of the difficult and challenging situation in which many customers find themselves. The Bank has also stated that, as a matter of urgency, firms should develop consumer-centric solutions to the handling of insurance payment breaks and policy rebates in light of the COVID-19 emergency.

I have said on more than one occasion that insurers should treat their customers honestly, fairly and professionally and in line with the Central Bank’s Consumer Protection Code. However, neither the Central Bank nor I have any role in adjudicating on matters such as insurance refunds or rebates. I encourage consumers to engage directly with their broker or insurer regarding forbearance measures and other reliefs. 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. through use of a firm’s internal complaint process or recourse to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman or litigation.

Finally, I would like to assure the Deputy that my Department will continue to be as proactive as it can be on these issues and will continue to liaise with the Central Bank and Insurance Ireland on an ongoing basis. In that regard, my officials will be meeting with Insurance Ireland today on a number of issues as part of their ongoing engagement with them. It should also be noted that I met with the Alliance for Insurance Reform recently and my Department will continue to seek their members’ experience on these matters.

Wage Subsidy Scheme

174. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if a decision on a wage subsidy application by a club (details supplied) in County Cork will be re-examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14181/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I previously responded to the Deputy on this matter on 27 May 2020 in reply to a Parliamentary Question that he addressed to me. The position has not changed since then.

The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) is available for any employee, whether full-time or part-time, who was on the payroll of the employer at 29 February 2020. This requirement is set down in Section 28 of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (COVID-19) Act 2020.

I have been advised by Revenue that the individual in question did not begin his current employment until 9 March 2020, which is outside of the specified dates provided in the legislation. For this reason, it is not possible for Revenue to provide his employer with access to the TWSS on his behalf.

Banking Sector Staff

175. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance the number of agency staff employed by a bank (details supplied) in which the State is a majority shareholder;; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14204/20]

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

Notwithstanding this, the information sought by the Deputy in respect of the number of agency staff employed by AIB is not held in the Department.

Officials in my department forwarded your query to AIB and received the following response:

“AIB does not employ any agency staff, however, it does engage a number of third parties to provide resources, the level of which fluctuates based on ongoing business requirements. For commercial reasons AIB does not disclose the details of those arrangements.”

Mortgage Lending

176. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if he will meet with banks on behalf of mortgage holders whose mortgage contracts are being delayed due to the fact that they are in receipt of the temporary wage subsidy scheme; the steps he is taking to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14221/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I fully appreciate the concerns many people are experiencing about mortgage applications and drawdowns at this difficult time, and

my Department is maintaining close contact with the Central Bank and Banking and Payments Federation Ireland (BPF) as the lending industry works to address the difficulties the Covid-19 situation is causing for both borrowers and lenders. In this context, the Central Bank has advised that it expects all regulated firms to take a consumer-focused approach and to act in their customer's best interests at all times, including during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the context of mortgage applications, lenders continue to process 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. However, 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 and contractual decision to be made by the regulated entity and 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.

Commencement of Legislation

177. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance when he will enact the Consumer Insurance Contracts Act 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14335/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In line with the commitment that I had previously given that the commencement of the Consumer Insurance Contracts Act would be determined by the Minister for Finance of the new Government, I can confirm that the matter is under active consideration. I envisage that the bulk of the provisions of the Consumer Insurance Contracts Act will be commenced shortly.

I am also keen to determine an appropriate commencement date for section 8 'Pre-contractual duties of consumer and insurer' and Section 12 'Renewal of contract of insurance', and the interlinked Sections 9 'Proportionate remedies for misrepresentation' and Section 14(1)-(5) 'Duties of consumer and insurer at renewal' as soon as possible. On the basis of my previous discussions with the insurance industry, I believe a certain amount of time is required for them to put in place new systems and processes to enable them implement these provisions effectively. I expect that my officials will provide me with their assessment as to the appropriate lead in time shortly, once they have concluded their current discussions with Insurance Ireland. I then expect to be able to signal my decision on this matter in the next number of weeks.

178. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the number of requests for information and any other interactions the Central Bank has had with the investigation into the insolvency of a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14356/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the Central Bank that it cannot comment on its engagement with individual firms.

Two companies of the group in question have notified the Central Bank of their intention to passport services into Ireland under authorisations obtained in the UK and Germany.

The group does not hold an authorisation from the Central Bank of Ireland.

Value Added Tax

179. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration will be given to reducing the VAT rate on personal protective equipment to 0%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14391/20]

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 (including personal protective equipment) 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. 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. An extension of 3 months is currently being considered.

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 certain goods as necessary to combat COVID-19 (including personal protective equipment) 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 personal protection equipment would require a change in legislation at EU level; the VAT Directive would not permit a legislative measure for the application of the zero rate of VAT to such supplies and there are no grounds in the Commission Decision that would support the adoption of such a measure, even on a temporary basis.

The Deputy will be aware that businesses 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.

Value Added Tax

180. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Finance if a reduced VAT rate will be implemented for the tourism sector similar to the steps taken during the last recession to help businesses survive as they reopen post Covid-19. [14398/20]

193. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for a lower VAT rate for the tourism sector; his views on the findings from the 2018 OECD economic survey of Ireland report which recommended that preferential VAT rates be eliminated and lower rates for discretionary categories of expenditure, for example, hotel and restaurants are regressive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14589/20]

194. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for a lower VAT rate for the tourism sector in view of the July 2018 report of his Department stating the regressive nature of the reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14590/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 180, 193 and 194 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.

Tax Code

181. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Finance the capital gains and other tax liabilities if a person surrenders their property to the financial institution that owns the mortgage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14407/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that, in general, where a person surrenders their property to a financial institution and where a person such as a receiver appointed by a financial institution disposes of a property on behalf of that financial institution, the debtor i.e. the property owner, is the person disposing of the property but the person acting on behalf of the financial institution is accountable for any CGT that may be due. That tax must be paid by such accountable person out of the proceeds of the disposal in priority to any debt such as a mortgage secured on the property.

The amount of CGT chargeable is determined by reference to the circumstances of the debtor. Accordingly, if the property disposed of was occupied by the debtor as that debtor's principal private residence for all or part of the debtor's period of ownership, full or partial relief from CGT may apply to the extent that any CGT liability arises. The last 12 months of ownership of the property by the debtor is treated as a period of occupation for this purpose.

With respect to local property tax (LPT), under the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended), the person who is the liable person on the liability date for a particular year is the person who is responsible for the payment of LPT for that year. Thus, for example, the person who is the liable person on 1 November 2019 is responsible for the payment of LPT for the year 2020.

In general, the owner of a residential property is the liable person. However, where a financial institution enforces its security over a property by taking possession of the property, the financial institution, as a 'mortgagee in possession', displaces the owner of the property as the liable person. If the financial institution does not actually become a 'mortgagee in possession', the owner of the property continues to be the liable person. However, depending on the particular circumstances, it may happen that a financial institution that does not become a 'mortgagee in possession' agrees to pay the LPT.

Mortgage Lending

182. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if the relationships framework which prevents the State from intervening in the way in which banks manage their day-to-day business, in the case of banks in which the State has a shareholding will be reviewed by the Government and the European Commission in view of the actions of some banks to greatly restrict mortgage lending in the midst of a housing crisis and unilaterally deny mortgage approval to applicants that are in receipt of a State wage subsidy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14412/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme is one of the main tools with which we are protecting the income of employees who otherwise would not be working. However, whilst I 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 Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme are treated in lending sustainability evaluations by regulators and lenders.

As you have mentioned, the Relationship Framework applies in cases like this. It means that 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.

However just as relevant are the European Union (Consumer Mortgage Credit Agreements) Regulations 2016 (CMCAR). These mandate that before concluding a mortgage credit agreement, a lender must make a thorough assessment of the consumer's creditworthiness. That 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 also 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.

This overall regulatory framework means a decision to grant or refuse an individual application for mortgage credit is a commercial decision to be made by the regulated entity. Where a

formal loan offer is made by a lender, the loan offer may contain a condition that may allow the lender to withdraw or vary the offer if in the lender's opinion there is any material change in circumstances prior to drawdown. In such cases, the decision to withdraw or vary the loan offer is also a commercial decision for the lender.

These overlapping and complimentary regulations are designed to protect consumers, prevent risky unsustainable lending, protect the integrity of the financial system and preserve competition in the market.

Question No. 183 answered with Question No. 152.

Wage Subsidy Scheme

184. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons in receipt of the temporary wage subsidy scheme by county and age cohort in ten-year intervals in tabular form. [14429/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I would like to advise the Deputy that Revenue publish comprehensive statistics on the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) at the following link:

www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/number-of-taxpayers-and-returns/covid-19-wage-subsidy-scheme-statistics.aspx

I would draw the Deputy's attention to Table 11 of the 25 June report which breaks down the employees and employers availing of the TWSS by county.

Separately, the Central Statistics Office publishes detailed data on recipients of the COVID-19 income supports, comprising the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and TWSS, alongside data on the Live Register at the following link:

www.cso.ie/en/statistics/labourmarket/liveregister/detailedcovid-19incomesupportandliveregistertables/

I would draw the Deputy's attention to Table 1 of the TWSS table which includes a breakdown of the employees supported by the scheme by age, and Table 2 which has a breakdown of both age and county.

Both these data sources are updated regularly to reflect the most up-to-date data available.

Brexit Issues

185. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which the financial and economic commitments provided for in the programme for Government will be affected in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14435/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A failure to achieve a trade agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union at the end of this year could have severe implications for the economy and the public finances, particularly when combined with the shock of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Deputy will recall that Budget 2020 was framed on the prudent assumption of a disorderly Brexit in January 2020. While the economic scenario has changed dramatically since last

October, the scale of the ‘swing’ in the fiscal position will provide some broad indication of the potential impact of the current transition period concluding without an agreement.

Budget 2020 projected a general government deficit in the order of €2.0 billion. This represented a negative swing of some €3.2 billion from the previous forecasts, driven, primarily, by the impact of a disorderly Brexit assumption.

These projections were a point in time forecast, and circumstances have, of course, now changed. The fiscal impact at this juncture may differ significantly from these historic figures. During the process of framing Budget 2021, my Department will take into consideration the impact of a range of potential risks to the economy, including that of a failure to agree a trade deal.

This work forms part of the whole-of-Government preparations for the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020, which is being taken forward on the basis of two scenarios: a limited Free Trade Agreement in goods (and an accompanying fisheries agreement) or a disorderly Brexit (i.e. without an EU-UK trade agreement).

Ministerial Responsibilities

186. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance if he will publish the departmental briefing paper on his role, remits and powers afforded to him upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14525/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that a briefing document prepared by the Department of Finance was provided to me on my appointment as Minister for Finance. Arrangements are in train for publication of this document having regard to the relevant provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

Question No. 187 answered with Question No. 158.

Property Tax

188. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will request the Revenue Commissioners to extend the 2020 local property tax collection date from 21 July to 18 August 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14540/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am aware that Revenue has already deferred collection of 2020 Local Property Tax (LPT) liabilities that were scheduled for payment on 21 March 2020 via the electronic *Annual Debit Instruction (ADI)* option on two occasions. The initial revised date for collection was 21 May 2020 which Revenue subsequently further extended to 21 July 2020 in response to the unfolding COVID-19 crisis.

Revenue has advised me that arrangements are now in place for these payments to be deducted from nominated bank accounts on 21 July and that no further extensions are possible. Revenue has already written to the relevant property owners advising them that the deductions will be activated on 21 July. It is important to note that property owners availing of the ADI option are a subset of the overall LPT case-base, the vast majority of which has already paid the 2020 liabilities or are paying them on a phased basis over the course of the year.

Revenue has also confirmed that any residential property owners that opted for the ADI option, but are now experiencing changed financial circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic, can still amend their payment arrangement to a more suitable method by logging on to

their online LPT account at link:

<https://lpt.revenue.ie/lpt-web/views/login.html?execution=e1s1>

To access the system, property owners require their unique Property ID and PIN numbers.

Finally, I am advised that the LPT Helpline (01-7383626) is now operating from 9.30am to 1.30pm, Monday to Friday, to assist with any queries or amendments that customers may have.

Wage Subsidy Scheme

189. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a tailored wage subsidy scheme for taxi drivers whose industry is facing long-term reductions in incomes as a result of Covid-19 until the sector fully recovers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14564/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Covid 19 Public Health emergency, the Government developed a suite of measures designed to support households and businesses that have been negatively impacted by the pandemic and the restrictions that were put in place as a result. These measures include temporary income support for individuals by way of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) and the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS). The TWSS is available in respect of employees and the PUP is available to others who have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic or self-employed persons who cannot maintain their businesses.

I have direct policy responsibility for the TWSS; the PUP is a matter for the Minister for Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands.

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 taxi sector 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. I expect that decisions will be taken at an appropriate time on next steps for the TWSS beyond end-August. In this regard, the Deputy may also wish to note that the Programme for Government contains a commitment that the July Jobs initiative will set out a pathway for the future implementation of the Temporary Wage Subsidy. 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 decisions.

Question No. 190 answered with Question No. 154.

Fiscal Policy

191. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to increase general spending as a percentage of GDP in view of the low rate here when compared to the European Union 27; if general spending will be increased and sustained in line with the eurozone average during

the lifetime of the Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14587/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As is widely recognised, GDP figures for Ireland can be misleading due to statistical distortions and are therefore of limited use for comparative purposes. Instead, modified Gross National Income, or ‘GNI*’, an alternative metric published by the CSO, provides a more suitable measure of the underlying size of the Irish economy and as a result is a more appropriate indicator for international comparison.

General government expenditure in EU Member States in 2019, was estimated to be 46.7 per cent of GDP. The equivalent Irish figure was 41.9 per cent of GNI*.

These figures proceed the unprecedented global crisis that we are currently living through. The Covid-19 pandemic is the most significant shock to the world economy since the global financial crisis and, indeed, the impact is likely to be more severe. The response to the pandemic has resulted in a ramping-up of government expenditure this year.

The Stability Programme Update, published by my Department in April, projects general government expenditure of €95.7 billion this year, the equivalent of 55.1 per cent of GNI*. As the economy begins to reopen, general government expenditure looks set to fall next year as temporary policy supports are unwound. As such, general government expenditure is projected at €93.3 billion (49.0 per cent of GNI*) next year.

The level of uncertainty regarding the short- and medium-term path for the economy is unprecedented. It is as yet unclear how different the new equilibrium will be from the old, both in Ireland and for other euro area and EU Member States. Apart from the uncertainty regarding expenditure paths in the short-term, the longer-term effects of the pandemic will need to be considered carefully, especially for the Irish economy with its deep integration into the wider global economy.

That being the case, aiming to increase general government expenditure to equate with overall EU rates would not be appropriate. Government fiscal policy is guided by what is right for the economy at a particular point in the cycle, not by external benchmarks based on the overall budgetary patterns of 27 economies with disparate fiscal and economic situations. The Covid-19 crisis has only reaffirmed this.

Fiscal Policy

192. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance the status of his plans to manage the public finances to ensure necessary investment in infrastructure and skills required to enhance competitiveness as outlined in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14588/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Stability Programme Update, published in April, estimated a general government deficit of €23 - €30 billion in 2020. As I have said previously, it is entirely appropriate that Government runs a deficit and increases borrowing to support the economy in these unprecedented circumstances. However, borrowing at this scale cannot go on indefinitely and once circumstances allow, we must return the public finances to a sustainable path.

Looking ahead, fiscal policy is likely to continue to follow a three phased response as follows:

During phase one, the Government has taken swift action to introduce emergency measures

aimed at protecting individuals and businesses during the initial period of uncertainty. Cumulative support provided by Government, so far, amounts to some €15.5 billion, or the equivalent nearly 8 per cent of GNI*. The level of support is exceptional and will be unwound as we continue to reopen our economy.

The main concern in phase two, the ‘recovery phase’, will be to get as many people back to work as quickly as possible. As set out in the Programme for Government, a number of initiatives will be set out to get business back on their feet, bring back confidence to consumers and kick start the economy. This will be done through a targeted, time-limited stimulus, with the primary focus on boosting employment. The Programme for Government also sets out the proposed Recovery Fund, a key pillar of which will be reskilling and retraining for those who have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic and are unable to return to their previous employment.

Once the economy has recovered, fiscal policy will be required to pursue a credible path towards sustainability. Over the long-term, investment in infrastructure and skills depends on having the public finances on a solid footing.

Questions Nos. 193 and 194 answered with Question No. 180.

Wage Subsidy Scheme

195. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to extend the temporary wage subsidy scheme beyond the scheduled deadline; if he plans a comprehensive audit of companies receiving the scheme to ensure they have met the stated criteria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14591/20]

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. 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 rapidly, having regard to the Government objective of providing financial assistance to employers and employees, where businesses have been seriously affected by the pandemic and the necessary restrictions introduced as a result.

The Government decided on 5 June 2020 to extend the TWSS until the end of August. The intention is to continue to monitor the scheme closely. I expect that decisions will be taken at an appropriate time on next steps for the TWSS beyond end-August. In this regard, the Deputy may also wish to note that the Programme for Government contains a commitment that the July Jobs initiative will set out a pathway for the future implementation of the Temporary Wage Subsidy.

I have been advised by Revenue that an employer compliance programme to ensure correct operation of the TWSS was announced on 23 June last and is now underway. Over 58,600 employers have already received subsidy payments under the TWSS. Revenue has commenced contacting these employers to confirm that the scheme is operating correctly and is seeking certain documentary evidence to establish that:

- employers participating in the scheme meet the eligibility criteria,
- employees are receiving the correct amount of subsidy, and
- the subsidy amount is being correctly identified in employee payslips.

In order to verify eligibility for the TWSS, Revenue is asking employers to summarise the impact of the Covid-19 restrictions on their business, the basis on which they reasonably anticipated a reduction of 25% or more in their turnover in Quarter 2 of this year and whether that reduction has occurred. In order to ensure that employees are being fairly treated and TWSS funds are being paid out as intended, Revenue is also seeking a sample of payslips in each case. Based on analysis of the material provided, Revenue may request more detailed information from some employers.

I understand, from Revenue, that providing this basic information should not impose a significant overhead and indeed that many employers have already provided an immediate and satisfactory response to the compliance checks. For many employers, a simple statement that, due to the nature of their business, they were required to close their premises and cease to trade for a significant part of Quarter 2 is sufficient to establish eligibility.

Nonetheless, Revenue has made it clear that it recognises the challenges faced by businesses at the present time and will provide additional time to any employers who are experiencing genuine difficulty in meeting the deadline for provision of the requested documentation. The compliance programme now underway is expected to last for several months and Revenue expects that it will confirm that the vast majority of employers are fully compliant in their operation of the TWSS.

Programme for Government

196. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to move to a more sustainable tax environment as stated in the programme for Government in view of potential international corporation and digital tax changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14592/20]

213. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to implement the Roadmap on Corporation Tax Reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14609/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 196 and 213 together.

In September 2018 my Department published Ireland's Corporation Tax Roadmap. This Roadmap set out the progress made at that time, and the direction in which we would go, towards ensuring that Ireland's corporation tax regime remained appropriate in order to support economic growth and prosperity.

Significant actions have been taken on foot on the Roadmap including the introduction of Controlled Foreign Company rules, amendments to Ireland's exit tax rules, the quick ratification of the BEPS Multilateral Instrument. Most recently, Finance Act 2019 introduced new anti-hybrid mismatch rules in line with our commitments under the Anti-Tax Avoidance Directive, and reformed our transfer pricing provisions ensuring they comply with OECD standards.

The Programme for Government reaffirms our commitment to the 12.5% corporation tax rate. It also confirms that this Government will continue both to implement the Corporation Tax Roadmap and to engage constructively on international tax reform through the OECD process.

As set out in the Programme for Government, this Government recognises that taxation policy needs to reflect a changing digital economy. This work is best done through the OECD, as opposed to unilateral measures that could undermine trade. Ireland remains actively involved in that important work at the OECD on addressing the tax challenges arising from the

digitalisation of the economy.

I intend, later this year, to publish an update on Ireland's Corporation Tax Roadmap. This update will reflect on the significant progress we have made and consider what future actions may be needed to ensure Ireland's tax system meets international standards. It will also provide an opportunity to reflect on the evolving international tax environment and the important work that continues at the OECD.

Programme for Government

197. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to increase purely domestic activity as indicated by GNI as part of a more sustainable tax environment outlined in the programme for Government in view of identified external market risks such as Brexit and increased trade tensions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14593/20]

202. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which he plans to utilise taxation measures to close the deficit as outlined in the programme for Government; if he plans to predominantly use progressive or regressive taxation measures to achieve same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14598/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 197 and 202 together.

The Programme for Government "Our Shared Future" contains a number of commitments in the area of budgetary policy and taxation including a commitment to use both taxation measures, as well as expenditure measures, to close the deficit and fund public services if required. In doing so, the Government will seek to focus any tax rises on tax behaviours with negative externalities such as carbon tax, sugar tax, plastics. A key focus of the Programme for Government is to get people back to work as quickly as possible, in order to restore the public finances and enable the provision of better and more accessible public services on a sustainable and long-term basis. A stable and sustainable regulatory and tax environment and sound management of the public finances will allow investment in the infrastructure and skills required to enhance competitiveness.

Looking ahead, fiscal policy is based on a three phased response:

- During the initial phase, phase one, swift action was taken to introduce emergency measures aimed at protecting individuals and businesses during the initial period of uncertainty.
- The focus of the next phase of the response, is on ensuring that the economy returns to growth. The main concern in this recovery phase will be to get as many people back to work as quickly as possible and the State will have a role to play in that regard.
- Over the longer time, fiscal policy will be required to pursue a credible path towards budgetary sustainability; to provide confidence to businesses, the public and to demonstrate that Ireland is back on the right path again.

It is important to note that Ireland has one of the most progressive income tax systems in the developed world – the most progressive within the EU members of the OECD. A progressive income tax system means that those on higher incomes pay proportionately higher rates of tax than those on lower incomes. It is a broad-based income tax system, where the majority of income earners make some contribution but according to their means. As a matter of policy, taxation measures are reviewed on a regular basis as part of the annual Budget and Finance Bill

process.

The Programme for Government sets out the commitments for the 5-year term of the Government which has just been formed. The immediate focus of Government is on a fiscal stimulus plan to introduce a package of measures that will build on existing measures in order to help kick-start the economy, safeguard jobs and protect people's livelihoods. Therefore, as I have previously stated, the short-term focus is on supporting households and firms, to limit the medium term impacts on the economy and to lay the ground for recovery. In October, the Government will set out the medium term budgetary strategy to restore fiscal balance.

Programme for Government

198. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance the timeline for the establishment of a commission on welfare and taxation as outlined in the Programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14594/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Programme for Government "Our Shared Future" contains a number of commitments in the area of budgetary policy and taxation including a commitment to the establishment of a Commission on Welfare and Taxation. The stated purpose of the Commission will be to consider how best the tax system can support economic activity and promote increased employment and prosperity while ensuring that there are sufficient resources available to meet the costs of the public services and supports in the medium and longer term.

The Programme for Government sets out the commitments for the 5-year term of the Government which has just been formed. The work of the Commission should help to set the framework within which tax policy will be determined for the next decade and I believe that it is important that the Commission take a strategic, considered and balanced perspective that recognises the emerging and significant challenges in our economy and society.

The immediate focus of Government is on a fiscal stimulus plan to introduce a package of measures that will build on existing measures in order to help kick-start the economy, safeguard jobs and protect people's livelihoods. In due course, the details of the proposed Commission on Welfare and Taxation, including the membership, the terms of reference and the reporting date can be considered and agreed.

Property Tax

199. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance when he plans to bring forward legislation for the local property tax on the basis of fairness as outlined in the programme for Government; his plans to increase the local property tax yield on the basis of fairness in view of the comparative low local property tax yield as cited in the 2019 report (details supplied) by his Department; if he plans to bring the yield of the tax in line with the EU average; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14595/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Programme for Government "Our Shared Future" adopted by the Government on 27 June 2020 includes a commitment to bring forward legislation in relation to the Local Property Tax (LPT) on the basis of fairness and that most homeowners will face no increase in their LPT liability. In addition there is a commitment to bring new homes, which are currently exempt from the LPT, into the taxation system. Further, all LPT funds collected locally will be retained within the local authority concerned. This

is to be done on the basis that those counties with a lower LPT base are adjusted via an annual national equalisation fund paid from the Exchequer.

My Department is examining options for the implementation of these commitments in conjunction with the Revenue Commissioners and relevant Departments. Matters such as the overall LPT yield naturally fall to be considered in that context. I hope to be able to bring proposals to Government soon.

Credit Unions

200. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to enable and support the credit union movement to grow as outlined in the programme for Government; the way in which he plans to help credit unions deliver an expanded range of community banking services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14596/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government welcomes the important work credit unions are doing to support communities throughout Ireland at this difficult time and recognises the key role that credit unions play in the delivery of financial services in local communities across Ireland, the need for which is heightened at this time. Credit unions account for approximately one third of the consumer credit market and are well positioned to provide access to credit to support the recovery from the current crisis.

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

There are several commitments in Programme for Government which relate to credit unions, which will be expanded upon in the coming weeks and months as the new Government beds down, taking into account work already completed such as the CUAC report noted above and a separate CUAC report on directors finalised in February 2020.

But credit unions do already have the ability to deliver an expanded range of community banking services. Credit unions could further grow their consumer lending, mortgage and SME lending, expand the range of products and services they provide their members and further embed digitisation, either individually or through collaborative efforts.

Following recent revisions to Central Bank lending regulations the sector currently has capacity to lend an additional €1.1 billion for mortgage and SME lending collectively, with additional lending capacity available to credit unions which can comply with certain conditions or on approval by the Central Bank. As at end 2019 credit unions had a mortgage and SME loan book of approximately €300 million.

There are also positive examples of credit unions providing new services. To date, 53 credit unions have been approved by the Central Bank to provide current accounts with debit cards, overdrafts and a range of payment services to their members. This has been rolled out in approximately 35 credit unions so far.

I and my officials will continue to engage constructively to assist credit unions in delivering new services to their members.

Programme for Government

201. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for a national recovery fund; if he plans to use windfall gains as identified in the programme for Government to reduce borrowing requirements; his views on whether such windfall gains would be more appropriately utilised as part of a national recovery fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14597/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is intended that, beginning in 2020, the Recovery Fund will be available for three years and will consist of three primary elements:

- Infrastructure development - focussing on areas such as housing, retrofitting and transport to maintain employment and lay the foundation for future employment.

- Reskilling and retraining - for those who have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic and are unable to return to their previous employment, so that they can receive the skills they need to attain new opportunities.

- Support investment - measures to help Irish companies access credit and capital to support the retention and creation of jobs.

Measures such as these will have a significant fiscal cost and will be additional to the cost of the wide range of measures introduced to-date. As a consequence of this support, as well as the fall-off in taxation receipts, the general government deficit is expected to be in the region of €23-€30 billion this year. As I have said previously, it is entirely appropriate that Government runs a deficit and increases borrowing to support the economy in these unprecedented circumstances. However, borrowing at this scale cannot go on indefinitely and once circumstances allow, we must return the public finances to a sustainable path.

a As the Programme for Government sets out, windfall gains - such as they may arise - will be used to reduce the overall level of borrowing. For example, the first tranche of the NAMA surplus, some €2 billion, was returned to the Exchequer last month. The NAMA transfer means that we will borrow €2 billion less this year than would otherwise be the case. Similar transfers, such as the proceeds from the liquidation of the Irish Banking Resolution Corporation or the sale of the state shareholdings in the banks, will also be used to reduce our borrowing requirements. Given the likelihood of continued fiscal deficits over the medium-term, and the level of our existing stock of debt, such an approach is the most effective strategy for use of such receipts.

Question No. 202 answered with Question No. 197.

Programme for Government

203. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to focus tax rises on behavioural taxes with negative externalities such as carbon tax, sugar tax and plastics as outlined in the programme for Government; his views on whether the cited behavioural taxes are not a sustainable source of revenue in view of the fact the stated objective of the tax is to reduce consumption of the good producing the negative externality; his further views on whether these taxation measures match the broader aim to achieve a sustainable tax environment as outlined in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14599/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Programme for Government sets out the Government's intention to utilise taxation measures, as well as expenditure measures, to

close the deficit and fund public services, if required. It is further stated in the Programme that governmental policy will aim to focus any tax rises on those taxes which tax behaviours with negative externalities, such as carbon tax, sugar tax, and plastics.

Excise taxes seek to reflect the negative externalities caused by the consumption of an excisable commodity. These externalities are the costs to society that without the tax would not otherwise be reflected in the price of the excisable commodity and for which the consumer would not otherwise have to pay. The carbon tax and sugar tax are reviewed on an ongoing basis throughout the year and analysis of yields and trends forms part of the examination of budgetary options.

The impact of COVID-19 domestically and internationally will have a bearing on any budgetary policy decision and we will have greater clarity on this prior to Budget 2021 when, as outlined in the Programme for Government, we will set out a medium-term roadmap detailing how Ireland will reduce the deficit and return to a broadly balanced budget.

Tax Code

204. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to review capital gains tax in each budget over the next five years; his views on the matter (details supplied) by the tax strategy group 2020 relating to the tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14600/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Programme for Government states that there will be a review Capital Gains Tax (CGT) in each Budget over the next five-years, in particular with the objective of supporting innovation driven enterprises that will help transition to a low carbon economy.

CGT is subject to ongoing review, which involves the consideration and assessment of the rate of CGT and the reliefs and exemptions from the tax. CGT policy and legislation is subject to consideration in the Taxation Strategy Group, as part of the annual Budget and Finance Bill process, is considered as part of a wider set of policy analyses (e.g. examination of revised CGT Entrepreneurs Relief as part of the 2020 Budget process) and in tax expenditure evaluation work. The requirements of the Programme for Government will become part of this ongoing work.

Ireland taxes wealth in a variety of ways, such as CGT and Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT). These are levied on an individual or company on the disposal of an asset in the case of CGT, or the acquisition of an asset through gift or inheritance, in the case of CAT. Deposit Interest Retention Tax (DIRT) is charged at 33%, with limited exemptions, on interest earned on deposit accounts; and the Local Property Tax (LPT), which was introduced in 2013, is a tax based on the market value of residential properties. Capital taxes can help improve equity and tax fairness in the overall taxation system. However, the CGT yield in Ireland, while significant, is small relative to the other tax heads. Changes to CGT are likely to have a reduced overall impact on income and wealth inequality.

Against any revenue raising and equality arguments must be balanced the need to have a CGT system which supports economic activity and employment creation. Considerations such as the rate of CGT, relative international tax competitiveness and indeed the potential impact on investment activity is essential for a full view of the operation of the CGT system.

The Deputy may be interested to know that the most recent OECD Economic Survey of Ireland, published earlier this year, stated that the highly redistributive tax and transfer system has contained income inequality in Ireland.

Programme for Government

205. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to increase the self-employed earned income tax credit with the employee tax credit as outlined in the Programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14601/20]

207. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to ameliorate the USC surcharge applied to self-employed income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14603/20]

208. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for income tax credits and bands to be indexed linked to earnings as outlined in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14604/20]

209. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the programme for Government plan for no income tax or USC rates over the lifetime of the Government; if he is committed to no increase in income tax or USC rates for the top 5% of earners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14605/20]

211. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to increase the home carer tax credit as outlined in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14607/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 205, 207 to 209, inclusive, and 211 together.

The Programme for Government '*Our Shared Future*' contains a number of commitments relating to taxation, including in relation to the tax credit referred to by the Deputy.

The intention is to deliver these commitments within the duration of the life of the Government, noting the need to provide a stable and sustainable enterprise environment alongside sound management of the public finances.

Decisions on how these commitments are met, including the timing, will be made in due course.

Tax Code

206. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to review the rate and threshold of capital acquisition taxation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14602/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, consideration of possible changes to CAT rates and thresholds generally takes place as part of the annual Tax Strategy Group, Budget and Finance Bill process. Together, these processes consider options for changes across the wider tax system. As is normal, the Deputy will appreciate that I cannot comment on any possible changes in advance of the 2021 Budget.

Questions Nos. 207 to 209, inclusive, answered with Question No. 205.

Programme for Government

210. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a recent European

Commission report (details supplied); his views on whether the programme for Government reflects the recommendation of the European Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14606/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, I am supportive and have repeatedly spoken on the need to broaden the tax base. A number of measures have been taken in this regard in recent years and include the introduction of the Universal Social Charge, the Local Property Tax and the Sugar Sweetened Drinks Tax. More recently changes to the VAT rate and carbon tax changes were introduced to broaden the tax base and to counteract the effect of negative externalities. In addition, I have also taken steps to broaden and enhance the stability of our corporation tax base, including through the introduction of the 80 per cent cap on capital allowances for intangible assets in Budget 2018 and the introduction of a broader Exit Tax regime in Budget 2019.

The Programme for Government recognises that we need to remain cognisant of avoiding the mistakes of the past and being overly reliant on a narrow set of taxes. The carbon tax is set to increase throughout the lifetime of this government with an annual increase of €7.50 per annum to 2029 and €6.50 in 2030. To the extent that taxation measures are required to close the deficit in the medium term, the Programme for Government notes that we will focus any tax measures on behaviour with negative externalities such as carbon tax, sugar tax and plastics. This can be seen as a further step in broadening the tax base.

More generally in relation to the automatic stabilisers, as the Deputy is aware, these refer to the counter-cyclical support that the public finances automatically provide to the economy through spending and taxation channels - for example through higher social protection payments, and on the revenue side, lower tax collections in economic downturns. These stabilisers help to smooth the economic cycle. It is imperative that we allow these mechanisms to work and this will be facilitated by measures to broaden the tax base such as those outlined. This will make our economy more resilient to cyclical fluctuations and shocks.

Question No. 211 answered with Question No. 205.

Statutory Instruments

212. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the national register of beneficial owners; his views on the European Commission recommendation in a recent report (details supplied); the way in which he plans to monitor the quality of the information provided and the effectiveness of the register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14608/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Statutory Instrument 110 of 2019, the European Union (Anti-Money Laundering: Beneficial Ownership of Corporate Entities) Regulations 2019, was signed into law on 22 March 2019. These Regulations transpose Article 30 of the Fourth Anti-Money Laundering Directive (as amended by the Fifth Anti-Money Laundering Directive) and maintain the obligation, first established in 2016, for corporate entities to obtain and hold information on their beneficial ownership.

The Regulations also provide for the establishment of a Central Register of Beneficial Ownership of Companies and Industrial and Provident Societies (RBO), an office of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. This central register began accepting filings in July 2019. While the relevant legislation was signed by myself as Minister for Finance, the register is maintained by a “Registrar of Beneficial Ownership of Companies and Industrial and Provident Societies”, as provided under Regulation 18 of SI 110/2019, who was appointed by the

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

To date, 81% of companies and 63% of societies have registered their beneficial ownership details with the RBO. I understand that the Registrar plans to issue further reminders to those companies and societies who have not yet filed with the RBO in the coming months.

Regarding the quality of the information and the effectiveness of the Register, the very purpose of the Register is to maintain an accurate record of beneficial ownership for all relevant entities and this is facilitated by the use of Personal Public Service Numbers (PPSNs) to validate and verify a beneficial owner's identity. There is a legal obligation to provide accurate information to the register and to update this when changes occur.

The Regulations also require that if a designated person forms the opinion that there is a discrepancy between the information in the central register (RBO) and the information the entity is required to hold in its internal register of beneficial ownership, he/she/it must inform the Registrar of that opinion, specifying the particulars about which the discrepancy exists. Designated persons are persons who carry out customer due diligence on an entity, or otherwise, under the Regulations and include credit institutions, financial institutions, auditors, external accountants, tax advisors and property service providers among others. A designated person who fails to comply with the requirement to report a discrepancy commits an offence and shall be liable on summary conviction to a Class A fine.

The Regulations also state that where a relevant person, namely a competent authority, the Garda Síochána, the Revenue Commissioners or the Criminal Assets Bureau, forms the opinion that there is a discrepancy between the information relating to a relevant entity in RBO and the beneficial ownership information available to the relevant person, relating to the same entity (to the extent that it does not interfere unnecessarily with the performance of its functions), the relevant person shall deliver, in a timely manner, to the Registrar, notice of that opinion specifying the particulars of the discrepancy.

Under the Regulations, a relevant entity that fails to comply with a notice served by the Registrar in relation to a discrepancy, shall be liable (a) on summary conviction, to a Class A fine; or (b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine not exceeding €500,000.

The Regulations further state that a body corporate, or natural person, who knowingly files false information with the RBO commits an offence and shall be liable (a) on summary conviction, to a Class A fine, or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or both; or (b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine not exceeding €500,000, or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, or both.

I also understand that the RBO maintains statistics on compliance levels, website usage and requests for beneficial ownership information.

The combination of these provisions will help ensure that the information held in the Register of beneficial ownership is accurate and will enhance its overall effectiveness.

Question No. 213 answered with Question No. 196.

Tax Credits

214. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to increase the take-up of the research and development tax credit by small domestic companies; the take-up rate for micro, small, medium and large companies, respectively in tabular form; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [14610/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Research and Development (R&D) tax credit allows companies to claim a 25% tax credit in respect of expenditure incurred on qualifying R&D activities. In making a claim for the R&D tax credit, companies must satisfy two tests: the activity must be a qualifying activity (a science test); and the amount of the claim must be based on R&D expenditure incurred (an accounting test). A claim for the R&D tax credit is made on a self-assessment basis.

Revenue have taken a number of steps in recent years to assist companies with making claims for the R&D tax credit, particularly small and micro companies. In February 2017 Revenue issued guidance aimed at reducing the administrative burden for small and micro companies in relation to claiming the R&D tax credit. The aim of this guidance is to give smaller companies greater clarity on how they can demonstrate to Revenue that their R&D tax credit claim satisfies the science test. Where a company spends up to €200,000 on activities which Enterprise Ireland or other such bodies have reviewed and confirmed as R&D, then in most cases Revenue will accept that those activities pass the science test. Revenue may still review the claim to ensure that the accounting test has been satisfied.

To further assist companies in making R&D credit claims, in 2019, Revenue published updated guidance on the operation of the R&D tax credit and the expected level of records to support a research and development tax credit claim. Revenue has also presented at conferences around the country, which are attended by companies, advisors and educators, to build awareness of the R&D tax credit.

I am advised by Revenue that statistical information on the research and development credit is published at: www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/r-and-d-tax-credits.aspx.

This includes a breakdown by size of the claimant company on pages 7 and 8.

The Government is conscious of the importance of SMEs to the economy, and also recognises the unprecedented impact that the Covid-19 pandemic is having, placing strain in particular on small and micro businesses. The Government has put in place a suite of measures to assist SMEs during these difficult times, including a major expansion of supports in liquidity measures to help viable businesses affected by Covid-19 pandemic.

The Government has further committed to a series of immediate actions to support the economy to return to capacity – the ‘July Stimulus’. The main tool for this will be the Recovery Fund and further details will be announced in the coming weeks.

Programme for Government

215. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to assess the code of conduct on mortgage arrears, including the available suite of alternative repayment arrangements and ensure that it has full legal effect as outlined in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14612/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been advised by the Central Bank of Ireland (the Central Bank) that it is committed to regularly reviewing its statutory Codes and ensuring they remain effective.

The Central Bank first introduced the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) in

2009 in the midst of an economic and employment crisis to provide statutory safeguards for vulnerable, financially-distressed borrowers in arrears or at risk of falling into arrears. Further strengthened in subsequent years, the CCMA, and within it, the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP), is just one part of the national policy framework of supports and protections to assist people with mortgage arrears difficulties.

The CCMA is a statutory code issued under Section 117 of the Central Bank Act 1989, which gives the Central Bank the power to draw up, amend or revoke codes of practice and such codes must be complied with by regulated entities. The provisions of the CCMA are legally binding on regulated entities, and the Central Bank has the power to administer sanctions on regulated entities for a contravention of the CCMA under Part IIIC of the Central Bank Act 1942.

The objective of this statutory Code is to ensure that regulated entities have fair and transparent processes in place for dealing with borrowers in or facing mortgage arrears. Due regard must be given to the fact that each case is unique and needs to be considered on its own merits. All cases must be handled sympathetically and positively by the regulated entity, with the objective at all times of assisting the borrower to meet his or her mortgage obligations.

An alternative repayment arrangement (ARA) is a contract that is entered into between the regulated entity and the borrower, and the process for arriving at the ARA is stipulated in the CCMA. Provision 39 of the CCMA requires that in order to determine which options for ARAs are viable for each particular case, a regulated entity must explore all of the options for ARAs offered by that regulated entity. A non-exhaustive list of ARA options which may be included in a regulated entity's suite is set out within this provision. It is a commercial decision for each regulated entity to determine the suite of ARAs it considers putting in place for borrowers. Any ARA offered to a borrower must be appropriate and sustainable for his/her individual circumstances. The Central Bank cannot interfere in the contractual rights between regulated entities and borrowers such that it could require a regulated entity to consider or put in place specific ARAs for borrowers.

Rather, in regulating conduct of business, the Central Bank seeks to ensure that regulated entities comply with relevant conduct of business rules, including providing consumers with all relevant information, putting in place a process for the management of customers' financial difficulties and not exerting undue pressure or influences on customers.

The CCMA also requires regulated entities to have an appeals process in place to enable a borrower appeal a decision by a regulated entity, including where the borrower is not willing to enter into an ARA or where the regulated entity declines to offer an ARA. The appeals procedure must inform the borrower of his/her right to refer the matter to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman.

The protection of borrowers in mortgage arrears continues to be a key priority for the Government and the Central Bank. The consumer protection framework provides a significant number of protections and supports for borrowers in or facing mortgage arrears, in recognition of the distress and, in the case of mortgages secured on a borrower's primary residence, the vulnerability of borrowers at risk of losing their home.

As outlined in the Programme for Government, my Department is committed to assessing the CCMA, including the available suite of alternative repayment arrangements, and ensuring that it has full legal effect.

216. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance the timeline for the introduction of the senior executive accountability regime to deliver heightened accountability with the banking system as outlined in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14613/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Programme for Government has committed to introduce a Senior Executive Accountability Regime (SEAR). SEAR will drive positive changes in terms of culture, greater delegation of responsibilities, and enhanced accountability while simplifying the taking of sanctions against individuals who fail in their financial sector roles.

Officials in my Department are engaging with the Attorney General's Office in advance of submitting draft heads of Bill to Government so as to ensure that the correct balance between additional powers for the Central Bank and the protection of individuals' constitutional rights is struck and that the provisions of the Bill are constitutionally sound in the event of legal challenge.

Subject to potential delays related to Brexit and COVID-19, it is intended that draft heads of Bill will be presented to Government for approval in the coming months.

Covid-19 Pandemic

217. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to work with the banking industry and non-bank lenders to support customers during and after the Covid-19 crisis as outlined in the programme for Government; his plans to support customers by working with banks to reduce the high rates of interest compared to the eurozone average for personal and commercial loans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14614/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government is very much aware of the economic difficulties and challenges the Covid-19 pandemic is causing for very many people and businesses. Therefore, in the Programme for Government - Our Shared Future - this new Government commits itself to make every effort to get people back to work, to re-open businesses while developing the strategies and the policies to drive this forward. The first major step in this will be the development of an economic and jobs initiative to be published this month.

However, the Programme for Government also contains a further range of measures which are designed to renew economic activity, including measures which will encourage and support the provision of credit to businesses and households. To that end, my Department will continue to maintain close contact with the Central Bank and the banking industry, through the Banking and Payments Federation Ireland (BPF) as the industry's representative body, as the lending industry works to address the difficulties the Covid-19 situation is causing for both borrowers and lenders and as it seeks to support the regeneration of the economy. Measures which will support new lending to businesses, such as the proposed new Credit Guarantee Scheme, will be very important in that regard.

It will also be important, consistent with the need to protect financial stability and to ensure that banks lend on a prudent and sustainable basis, to try ensure that the level of interest charged on loans will be competitive and economic for both borrowers and lenders. However, it will be important to recognise that there are many factors which influence and determine the level of interest charged on mortgages, business and other loans. These include the fact that the pricing of loans needs to reflect credit risks, funding costs, capital requirements (which in

Ireland are elevated due to historical loss experience) and operating costs. Structural factors also play a role, including the duration of fixation of interest rates, the offering of cashback and other incentives in the Irish market, and the mix of deposit and non-deposit funding, which can bring interest rate risk when lending over long durations. In this regard, it should be borne in mind that the under-pricing of credit risks by Irish banks would itself bring financial stability concerns in the event of widespread default events following an economic shock, suggesting that calls for further interest rate reductions for borrowers must be carefully weighed up against such systemic risk concerns.

While interest rates in Ireland remain higher than in many other European countries, it should nevertheless also be noted that there has been significant reduction in interest rates on new mortgage lending over the last few years. For example, the new business interest rate, excluding negotiations, on mortgage loans with fixations over one year, was 4.02% at Jan 2015 and is now 2.70%. These are significant reductions that benefit borrowers greatly over loan lifetimes. Many borrowers currently paying more on their mortgages could benefit from switching onto these lower new business rates.

It is nevertheless the case that the interest rates charged by lenders for their mortgage, business and other loans (and indeed also the decisions they make on the interest they pay for their deposits and other funds) are ultimately commercial matters for individual lenders having regard to cost and competitive considerations, and neither the Central Bank of Ireland, nor I as Minister for Finance, has the power to prescribe the lending interest rates charged banks or other commercial lenders; and neither is it appropriate that I should have such a power. However, I will continue to work with the Central Bank as regulator, and with the banking industry to see if any there are further regulatory or other appropriate measures can be deployed to, in a sustainable way, further support the credit environment for business and personal borrowers.

Motor Tax

218. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to review the motor taxation regime to ensure that it adequately captures the harm caused by nitrogen oxide and sulphur oxide emissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14615/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Programme for Government measures such as this are being considered by my officials in the context of the upcoming Budget and future Budgets.

Programme for Government

219. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to increase and hypothecate all additional carbon tax revenue as outlined in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14616/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As stated in the Programme for Government, it is the Government's intention to increase the carbon tax to 100 euro per tonne by 2030. This increase is to be achieved by an annual increase of €7.50 per annum to 2029 and €6.50 in 2030.

The Programme for Government also plans to legislate for the hypothecation of all additional carbon tax revenue into a Climate Action Fund, raising an estimated €9.5 billion over the next ten years. This Fund will be utilised over that period to:

1. Ensure that the increases in the carbon tax are progressive by spending €3 billion on targeted social welfare and other initiatives to prevent fuel poverty and ensure a just transition
2. Provide €5 billion to part fund a socially progressive national retrofitting programme targeting all homes but with a particular emphasis on the Midlands region and on social and low-income tenancies.
3. Allocate €1.5 billion to a REPS-2 (Rural Environment Protection Scheme) programme to encourage and incentivise farmers to farm in a greener and more sustainable way. This funding will be additional to funding from the Common Agriculture Policy. It will include incentives to plant native forestry and to enhance and support biodiversity.

Programme for Government

220. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce a set of well-being indices to create a well-rounded holistic view of the way in which society here is faring as outlined in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14617/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Well-being is a multidimensional concept which spans economic, social, health, and environmental concerns, amongst others. One of the responsibilities of Government entails monitoring and improving the living standards, or well-being, of the Irish people through a variety of channels.

The limitations of standard economic statistics such as GDP in reflecting the welfare of citizens have been recognised. Indeed in Ireland alternative economic statistics more reflective of the domestic economic situation and how it affects the income of residents have been developed and are published regularly by the CSO. These statistics, such as Modified Gross National Income (GNI*), are forefront in the macroeconomic analysis performed by my Department, and the set of indicators we monitor has been continually expanding.

In addition, policies are currently evaluated in terms of their impacts on the environment, on distributional outcomes, and on gender inequality. Similar factors compose a significant fraction of the well-being metrics of other countries. Through initiatives such as Equality Budgeting and Green Budgeting, the government is working towards making the well-being analysis involved in policy-making more explicit and transparent.

The Programme for Government commits to the development of a cohesive and comprehensive set of well-being measures, and my Department will provide input and support to this process.

As the development of new and better measurements of Irish living standards goes forward, we will continue to monitor and analyse those factors relevant for the well-being of the Irish people and to account for those factors in our decision-making.

Budget Process

221. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to develop and incorporate measures relating to the distribution of wealth into the budgetary process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14619/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that the main channel through which resource redistribution is incorporated within the budgetary process is by means of our highly progressive income tax system. In its study published in January of this year, the ESRI found that Ireland's tax system does the most in Europe to reduce household income inequality. It found that in 2017, the tax system lowered Ireland's Gini coefficient for income inequality by one fifth, almost twice the average impact delivered by tax systems across the EU generally.

In addition, compared to the OECD average, Ireland's tax wedge (a measure of tax on labour income) is lower than 23 of the 36 OECD countries considered as part of the OECD's *Taxing Wages 2020*.

Indeed, both income inequality and wealth inequality have reduced significantly in recent years in Ireland, owing to the redistributive nature of our tax and welfare system. Data from the *Household Finance and Consumption Survey*, conducted by the CSO, indicates that the Gini coefficient for net wealth inequality reduced from 0.75 to 0.67 between 2013 and 2018, signalling a reduction in wealth inequality.

As far as my Department's work in this area is concerned, officials actively conduct budgetary impact analysis from an equality perspective on an ongoing basis as part of the budgetary process. As part of the Budget documentation, my Department published a *Distributional analysis of Budget 2020 tax and welfare measures* using the ESRI's microsimulation model, SWITCH. This analysis outlined the progressive nature of the Budget's welfare and tax measures, showing that poorer households benefitted to a proportionately higher degree. My Department also conducts analysis of the distributive impacts of various tax proposals considered by the Tax Strategy Group each year. This ensures that the distributive impacts of tax policy considerations are highlighted as an input to the budgetary process ahead of Budget day each year.

Budget Process

222. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to incorporate national satellite accounts into the budgetary process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14621/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In answer to this PQ, please refer to the reply provided by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to Parliamentary Question No. 239 of today. PQ Ref:14626/20.

Flood Relief Schemes

223. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the dates he received flood defence applications for the Glashaboy and Bride rivers in County Cork regarding the application confirmation process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13753/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): The Blackpool and Glashaboy Flood Relief Schemes are currently undergoing assessment as part of the Confirmation process by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. This process was instigated in late 2018 but was delayed by the transposition into Irish law of EU EIA Directive 2014/52/EU insofar as the provisions of the Arterial Drainage Acts are concerned. The Regula-

tions were completed and published in late 2019.

Further information has now been requested by the Minister as part of the environmental impact assessment which he is required by the new Regulations to carry out on both proposed Schemes. This information is currently being prepared and will be provided to the Minister as soon as possible. The Confirmation process will be concluded by the Minister thereafter in the quickest possible time frame.

Office of Public Works

224. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works will remove dangerous trees in a residential area on lands (details supplied) which are falling and are extremely dangerous; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13839/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): Under the provisions of Section 28 of the State Property Act 1954, property held by dissolved companies at the time of dissolution can vest in the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. There are often complex title and other legal issues associated with such properties, particularly given that the interest acquired by the Minister is described as a defeasible interest as it may be defeated by restoration of the company within a period of time.

In this particular case, the Office of Public Works and the Chief State Solicitor's Office have been working through a number of complicating legal issues which are dependant on responses from third parties in order to reach a firm conclusion. Efforts are continuing and some progress is being made.

Notwithstanding this, I understand from my officials that the OPW has, over the last few years, made a number of interventions, including works to reduce risk to persons living in the area. With regard to the trees in the small forested section to the rear of this estate, the OPW has recently undertaken an initial assessment of this area.

The OPW will continue to work through the legal issues referred to above, in consultation with the CSSO.

Flood Relief Schemes

225. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the flood relief works will be completed on the Templemore to Borrisoleigh road, County Tipperary, (details supplied). [13954/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): A decision will be made shortly in relation to the application for flood relief works on the Templemore to Borrisoleigh Road submitted by Tipperary County Council under the Remedial Works element of the Voluntary Homeowners Relocation Scheme.

Garda Stations

226. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the Garda stations within the Meath division that are being refurbished by the OPW; the Garda sta-

tions within the division that are due to be refurbished by the OPW over the next 12 months; the status of each project; and when each refurbishment project is due to be completed. [14001/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I can confirm that the Office of Public Works (OPW) is currently carrying out cell refurbishment works at Kells Garda Station. These works are due for completion in September 2020.

A new two story extension to include 4 new cells, prisoner processing facilities with ancillary rooms and new office accommodation is planned for Navan Garda Station. Tender documents will be issued shortly and works are expected to commence in late 2020 and completed in 2021.

In addition to these projects the OPW continues to provide ongoing maintenance to all the Garda stations in the Meath Division as required.

Flood Relief Schemes

227. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide all documents relating to engagement with landowners at a site (details supplied). [14008/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I am happy to respond to the Deputy in relation to this matter. I am advised however, that it will take a little time to review and assess any files and documentation relevant to the question and that my Office will respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Programme for Government

228. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if he will provide documents on those costings. [14035/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I wish to advise the Deputy that the Department of the Taoiseach has arranged for the publication of material provided by Government Departments in accordance with agreed procedures, via the Department of the Taoiseach, to Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party, as part of Government formation negotiations. This material is available on the *gov.ie* website at the following link

www.gov.ie/en/publication/7b927-programme-for-government-documents/.

Consultancy Contracts

229. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within his Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14060/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): The details of the diversity and inclusion training delivered in my Department from 2018 to date is set out in the following tables.

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

| Year | Training provider / Consultants name | Cost |
|------|--------------------------------------|----------|
| 2019 | Ernst & Young | € 30,750 |

Office of Government Procurement

| Year | Training provider/Consultants name | Cost |
|------|--|---------|
| 2018 | Garda Inspector delivered a talk on his experience on the development of an LGBT employee network to provide support for LGBT colleagues within the force. | Nil |
| 2019 | A keynote speaker from Specialisterne, an organisation set up to support people on the autism spectrum to gain and maintain employment, spoke at the OGP Staff Conference on integrating people with autism into the workplace. As part of the PRIDE 2019 series of events, a colleague from the Property Registration of Ireland delivered a talk on how to create and foster a safe and supportive working environment for LGBT employees. | Nil Nil |

| Year | Training provider/Consultants name | Cost |
|------|--|------|
| 2018 | Garda Inspector delivered a talk on his experience on the development of an LGBT employee network to provide support for LGBT colleagues within the force. | Nil |

| Year | Training provider/Consultants name | Cost |
|------|--|--------|
| 2019 | A keynote speaker from Specialisterne, an organisation set up to support people on the autism spectrum to gain and maintain employment, spoke at the OGP Staff Conference on integrating people with autism into the workplace. As part of the PRIDE 2019 series of events, a colleague from the Property Registration of Ireland delivered a talk on how to create and foster a safe and supportive working environment for LGBT employees. | NilNil |

Departmental Legal Costs

230. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the expenditure his Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14077/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I wish to advise the Deputy that all details of my Department's consultancy spend is regularly updated and published on *gov.ie*. In this context, details of external legal fees since the Department's establishment in 2011 up to the end of April 2020 can be found at the following link: www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/8b97d6-consultancy-costs/.

Flood Relief Schemes

231. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when construction will commence on the Glanmire flood relief scheme. [14117/20]

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 project meetings with Cork City Council to ensure a contractor is engaged, and the works commence, as soon as possible.

Prison Service Staff

232. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if concerns have been expressed to her Department regarding the operation of the post-1995 pension scheme for prison officers which precludes them from working up to 20 hours per week after they retire unlike those that retired pre-1995 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14141/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): The post-1995 occupational pension scheme for prison officers, as with the pre-1995 pension scheme, does not preclude prison officers from taking up further employment post-retirement. There are two issues which can affect the pension of a public servant where the individual chooses to take up employment subsequent to retirement - pension abatement and supplementary pension rules.

1. Abatement Where a Public Servant (including Prison Officers) returns to work within the Public Service their public service pension will be abated in accordance with Section 52 of the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012 (the Act) where no more of the pension, when combined with the remuneration in the new public service position, shall exceed the pensionable remuneration at retirement as uprated to present day values.

Abatement policy remains a key component of the Act and addresses valid concerns about simultaneous payment of both pension and salary in the public service. Abatement applies to all public servants regardless of whether they have been appointed pre or post 1995. Where a public servant in receipt of a public service pension takes up private sector employment there is no impact, in respect of abatement, on the public service pension.

2. Occupational Supplementary Pension.

Following a Government decision in April 1995, civil servants, including prison officers, who pay Class A PRSI during their employment in the public service have their public service occupational pension integrated with the Social Welfare system. This means that account is taken of any social welfare pension payable to the individual in calculating the occupational pension payable to that individual.

Where an individual does not qualify for a social welfare pension or qualifies at less than the maximum rate of Contributory State Pension they may be entitled to the payment of a

supplementary pension subject to meeting certain conditions. These conditions are laid down in Circular 6/1995 – Revised Social Insurance Status and Conditions of Service of Certain Civil Servants. The conditions for payment of the Supplementary Pension include:

1. the individual must not be engaged in paid employment;
2. he or she does not qualify for social insurance benefit or fail to qualify for such benefit at the maximum rate; and
3. his or her failure to qualify must be due to causes outside his or her control

However, there is no overall rule placing a “20 hour” employment restriction on a retired public service pensioner as suggested by the Deputy. Ultimately, the decision regarding working post retirement is an individual choice for a retired public servant.

Public Procurement Contracts

233. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if community-led companies for construction and maintenance contracts and so on can be included in social contracts as part of the selection of contractors for the delivery of social projects. [14182/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): Under normal conditions of competition, ‘sheltered workshops’ or social enterprises whose main aim is to integrate disadvantaged people in the workplace might not be able to obtain contracts. Under the EU Procurement Directives, contracting authorities are able to restrict some tendering procedures to ‘sheltered workshops’ and social enterprises. To participate in reserved procurement procedures, 30% of the company’s employees must be disadvantaged. Contracting authorities may also reserve certain contracts for health, social and cultural services to organisations such as not-for-profit organisations which meet certain conditions, namely the pursuit of a public service mission linked to the delivery of the relevant services and reinvestment of profits in the organisation.

The appropriateness of including social considerations needs to be examined on a contract-by-contract basis and there needs to be sufficient flexibility to allow each individual contracting authority to decide what, how, and when social considerations can be used. It is a matter for individual contracting authorities to ensure that their public procurement activities are discharged in line with procurement rules and procedures. The Office of Government Procurement (“OGP”) supports contracting authorities in this regard by making them aware of their legal and policy obligations in respect to public procurement.

The OGP promotes the inclusion of social considerations, including reserved contracts and sheltered workshops. To further support the incorporation of social considerations into public procurement, in October 2019 the OGP published Circular 20/2019: Promoting the use of Environmental and Social Considerations in Public Procurement. The Circular highlights the possibilities for Departments to deliver wider social and environmental aims through public procurement including in relation to employment and training opportunities for disadvantaged groups, disability access, promoting social inclusion and social enterprises.

To help policy makers and practitioners understand how procurement can be used to facilitate the advancement of existing social policy objectives as well as the wider context and implications of including them in particular procurement projects, the OGP published an Information Note on incorporating social considerations into public procurement in December 2018 which

is available on *ogp.gov.ie*. A cross Departmental Social Considerations Advisory Group was also established in March 2019.

These developments promote and facilitate the inclusion of social considerations in a structured manner and are aimed at helping policy makers and procurement practitioners understand how procurement can be used to support advancement of existing social policy objectives, the wider context and the implications of including them in procurement projects.

Ministerial Responsibilities

234. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will publish the Departmental briefing paper on his role, remits and powers afforded to him upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14530/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I wish to advise the Deputy that the briefing document provided to me by my Department following my appointment will be published in the coming weeks. The published version will have regard to the relevant provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

Programme for Government

235. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to introduce a set of well-being indices to create a well-rounded holistic view of the way in which society here is faring as outlined in the Programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14622/20]

236. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to develop a balanced scorecard for each area of public policy focused on outcomes as outlined in the Programme for Government; his discussions with the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Minister for Health and Minister for Education and Skills on his plans for a balanced scorecard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14623/20]

237. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to develop and incorporate measures relating to the distribution of wealth into the budgetary process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14624/20]

238. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans for new measures to account for the value of public expenditure based on outcomes achieved; the status of his discussion with the Department of the Taoiseach to convene a group of experts to guide this work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14625/20]

244. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of his discussions with the Minister for Health and the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, respectively regarding their respective plans to improve budgeting for demographic related costs and produce service improvement and reform plans in conjunction his Department as outlined in the Programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14631/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 235, 236, 237, 238 and 244 together.

As outlined in the ‘Programme for Government - Our Shared Future’, the government has

committed to developing a set of wellbeing indicators to give a more well-rounded, holistic view of how our society is faring. Initially focusing on housing, education and health, a set of indicators will be developed to create a broader context for policy-making, to include a balanced scorecard for each area of public policy, focused on outcomes and the impact that those policies have on individuals and communities. The overriding focus is to improve the wellbeing of the Irish people and society.

The development of this work will be informed by the experience of other jurisdictions which have developed similar measures in recent years. Through the Department of the Taoiseach, a group of experts will be convened from the public service, academia, NGOs, and the private sector to guide this work.

Once developed, Government will ensure that it is utilised in a systematic way across government policy-making at local and national levels, in setting budgetary priorities, evaluating programmes and reporting progress. This will be an important complement to existing economic measurement tools that are in place to support well-being and outcomes-based approaches to policy making.

This includes the ESRI's SWITCH Model which will continue to be utilised to help Government understand the impact of proposed reforms on households. Moreover, initiatives such as the Spending Review process, which is a key platform for evidence informed policy making across the Civil Service, will continue to produce evidence relevant to the wellbeing and outcomes of people, households, businesses and sectors of the economy.

Through my Department's responsibility for Performance and Equality budgeting, work is already underway in examining developments in this area, particularly regarding international best practice. Leveraging the experience in identifying metrics which maximise transparency and accountability, and utilising the guidance we provide to line departments in identifying the most appropriate measures to scrutinise public expenditure, I envisage that my Department will play a key role in working with the Department of the Taoiseach in delivering this work.

In terms of budgeting for demographic related costs, this is an issue that is under constant review in my Department. An updated version of the paper 'Budgetary Impacts of Changing Demographics 2020 - 2030' was published by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service alongside Budget 2020. A number of policy areas of particular relevance to demographics are covered in this paper, including pensions, child benefit, education provision and health schemes such as the Nursing Home Support Scheme.

This most recent version of the paper suggests demographic pressures of approximately €0.5 billion annually across Health, Social Protection and Education over most of the period to 2030. The analysis in this paper is based on an examination of sectoral expenditure data and CSO population estimates for the period, using the M2F2 projection scenario. These estimates form a central part of Estimates discussions with the relevant Ministers and Departments and are subject to ongoing evaluation.

Budget Process

239. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to incorporate national satellite accounts into the budgetary process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14626/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): By national satellite accounts I understand the Deputy to mean statistics that cover activities linked to the

domestic economy but not part of the core national accounts. These include the modified measures of output and augmented sectoral accounts as produced by the Central Statistics Office.

Such metrics are already used in a key area of the Budgetary process, namely in the Department of Finance's macro-economic forecasts. The biannual forecasts, endorsed by the Fiscal Council, involve assessing the CSO's satellite accounts' data to obtain a more accurate picture of real activity in the domestic economy.

Data in such areas has improved enormously over recent years and provides a useful supplementary set of indicators to the standard set of financial and economic tools available. In recognition of this the Programme for Government commits to supplementing existing economic measures with a new set of indicators, to include a set of wellbeing indices and a balanced scorecard for each area of public policy, and with clear linkages to budgetary policy.

Public Procurement Contracts

240. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to instruct the Office of Government Procurement to update all procurement frameworks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14627/20]

241. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to evaluate and manage the environmental, economic and social impacts of procurement strategies as outlined in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14628/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 240 and 241 together.

The Government has set out a number of commitments in the Programme for Government in relation to public procurement including evaluating and managing the environmental, economic and social impacts of procurement strategies within the state and tasking the Office of Government Procurement ("OGP") to update all procurement frameworks in line with green procurement practice over the next three years.

This is in line with work already underway by the OGP to promote wider policy considerations including environmental and social in public procurement. Strategic spending can play a key role in responding to societal, environmental and economic challenges. The range of policies is broad and can include disability access, training for young or disadvantaged people, SME access as well as green public procurement and environmental sustainability.

The OGP has been actively engaged and proactive on this issue. The OGP published Circular 20/2019: Promoting the use of Environmental and Social Considerations in Public Procurement in October 2019. The circular highlights the potential for Departments to deliver wider social and environmental aims through public procurement including in relation to employment and training opportunities for disadvantaged groups, disability access, promoting social inclusion and social enterprises. The circular, a commitment under the Climate Action Plan, provided a clear signal of the direction of travel. Green public procurement (GPP) is about leveraging the State's purchasing power to choose more environmentally friendly goods, services and works and help contribute to more sustainable consumption and production.

The Circular was the latest in a series of measures following publication of the Information Note on Incorporating Social Considerations into Public Procurement in December 2018. The Information Note assists policy makers and practitioners in understanding how public procure-

ment can be used to facilitate the advancement of existing social policy objectives as well as the wider context and implications of including them in particular public procurement projects.

The OGP also established the cross Departmental Social Considerations Advisory Group in March 2019, bringing together officials from policy Departments with procurement practitioners to share best practice and to facilitate the process of incorporating social and environmental considerations into public procurement. In addition to the work of the Social Considerations Advisory Group, the OGP has also engaged in bilateral meetings with Government Departments and promotes strategic procurement at procurement related events aimed at public sector bodies as well as for suppliers and social enterprises across the country. The OGP works with Government Departments when it is putting new central arrangements in place to ensure that appropriate regard is taken for sustainability criteria.

These developments promote and facilitate the inclusion of social considerations in a structured manner and are aimed at helping policy makers and procurement practitioners understand how procurement can be used to support advancement of existing social policy objectives, the wider context and the implications of including them in procurement projects.

I, along with my colleagues in Government, will be considering how best to implement the commitments in the Programme for Government. Minister of State Smyth and I have met with the Chief Procurement Officer and will be having further discussions with the OGP in this regard, building on the progress to date.

Question Heading for question(s) 242

242. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to introduce a bargaining clause in the new agreement to make progress on sectoral issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14629/20]

243. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to negotiate a new public pay deal with the public service unions; his further plans to ensure that there is an emphasis on embedding positive work practice changes that have emerged from the Covid-19 emergency and general productivity gains and effectiveness based on measurable outcomes; if he plans to ensure public servants are adequately compensated for the outcomes of these measurable productivity gains; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14630/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 242 and 243 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the current public service pay agreement - the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 - runs to the end of the year.

Within the Programme for Government there is a commitment to seek to negotiate a new agreement with the public service unions which would take account of, inter alia, the State's financial position and outlook and that could include a mechanism to make progress on sectoral issues.

I will give full consideration to all of these issues over the coming weeks and arrangements will be made for discussions with relevant staff interests at the appropriate time.

Question No. 244 answered with Question No. 235.

Wildlife Control

245. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the impact of urban seagull colonies on communities will be reviewed; if so, if recommendations will be made; if the details including notes of the briefing to her predecessor in respect of reports (details supplied) by community representatives will be provided with regard to the consultative committee established. [14316/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): My Department is aware of the impact of gull species especially in coastal urban areas.

The State Wide Declaration for the period up to 30 April 2021 allows the killing and capturing of certain wild bird species where they are causing damage to crops, livestock and fauna or represent a threat to public health or safety. The Declaration is published on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department at www.npws.ie/legislation/irish-law/eu-birds-directive-derogations. The Declaration includes methods to control seagull species in a specific area in North Dublin for public safety reasons. The control method involves the removal of eggs and nests only and the culling of seagulls is not permitted.

ANIAR Ecology were appointed by my Department to undertake a comprehensive review of the derogation process under Article 9 of the EU Birds Directive and published their report in October 2018. In line with the recommendations in the consultant's report a Consultative Committee was established to undertake a review of the issues surrounding the impact of gulls in urban areas, with an independent chair, whose membership includes representatives of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department, Fingal County Council, a local Community Committee and BirdWatch Ireland.

The remit of the Consultative Committee was not confined to one particular urban area given the widespread range of seagulls. The Committee was formed in June 2019 and has published its first interim report.

I will make arrangements to have the documentation referred to in the question provided to the Minister of State.

Invasive Species Policy

246. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if there are proposals in place to reduce the prevalence of the invasive grey squirrel; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14475/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is responsible for the implementation of the Wildlife Acts and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477/2011), both of which prohibit activities to introduce or spread invasive species. In addition to national legislation, the EU IAS Regulation (1143/2014) also provides for a range of concerted EU wide measures to be taken with respect to listed species of Union concern (the 'Union list'). The grey squirrel, introduced to Ireland just over 100 years ago, is listed as an invasive alien species of national concern on the Third Schedule of the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations and is also included on the Union list.

NPWS is working in conjunction with a range of agencies, including local authorities as well as with colleagues in the EU, and the UK, to manage the risks associated with Inva-

sive Alien Species. New legislation around invasive alien species, including provisions to fully implement aspects of the EU IAS Regulation, has been drafted by the NPWS and is currently being finalised by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. This legislation will update and strengthen existing legislation and provide appropriate powers to deal effectively with invasive alien species in the State.

The most effective control of the grey squirrel appears to have occurred through the spread of pine martens in recent years. The Grey Squirrel had become numerous in most of the eastern half of the island of Ireland. It competes with the Red Squirrel for resources, and carries a disease that is fatal to the native Red. The spread of Grey Squirrel was mirrored by a retraction in Red Squirrel range and a reduction in numbers.

In recent surveys of the two squirrel species it became apparent that the Grey Squirrel had disappeared from parts of the midlands. This disappearance was linked to the re-emergence of the Pine Marten, a native carnivore. It had previously almost disappeared but has made a considerable recovery after it was protected under Irish law. High densities of Pine Marten were found in the midlands of Ireland, in the areas where Grey Squirrel had disappeared. Meanwhile, Red Squirrel has made a recovery in some of these areas and seems capable of co-habiting woodlands with the Pine Marten. Similar findings have since been made in Scotland.

A full report on a recent survey of the three species was published by the NPWS as Irish Wildlife Manual no. 121 and can be found at www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/IWM121.pdf.

I am advised that the policy of the Department of Agriculture and the Marine is that pest and mammal control is a matter for landowners. Grey squirrels are not a protected species under the Wildlife Acts and are considered a pest species as they cause serious damage to broadleaf trees. Teagasc outline a number of management options to reduce a woodland's susceptibility to such damage in its Farm Forestry series of Information leaflets.

Departmental Staff

247. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of conservation rangers and wildlife inspectors recruited by her Department in 2018, 2019 and to date in 2020, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14539/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): The following table outlines the number of conservation rangers and wildlife inspectors appointed in my Department in 2018, 2019 and to date in 2020.

| Grade | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | Total |
|----------------------------|------|------|------|-------|
| CON-SERVATION RANGER | | 16 | 2 | 18 |
| WILDLIFE INSPECTOR GRADE 1 | 1 | 1 | | 2 |
| WILDLIFE INSPECTOR GRADE 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |

| Grade | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | Total |
|----------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|
| WILDLIFE INSPECTOR GRADE 3 | 6 | 8 | 1 | 15 |
| Total | 8 | 26 | 4 | 38 |

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

248. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will agree to the requests of agencies (details supplied) to protect all local authority arts and entertainment arts related funding streams and budget for next year and not allow the impact of Covid-19 on this year's spending to reduce next year's budgets; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14562/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): While the core funding of local authorities is a matter for my Cabinet colleague the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the principal mechanism through which my Department directly supports arts and culture at local authority level is the Creative Ireland Programme. Creative Ireland is a culture-based programme led by my Department and designed to promote individual, community and national wellbeing. Its core proposition is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal wellbeing and achievement.

Under Pillar 2 of the Programme – ‘Enabling Creativity in Every Community’ – each local authority has published a 5-year Culture and Creativity Strategy, as well as establishing a Culture Team led by a Creative Ireland Coordinator to oversee its implementation. My Department, together with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government have, over the course of 2018 and 2019, allocated total funding of €6.549 million to all 31 local authorities to enable them to implement their individual strategies through extensive programmes of activities, events and initiatives. The same level of core funding which was provided last year (€3 million) is also being made available to local authorities in 2020 to enable them to continue the implementation of their strategies.

Furthermore, since 2018 each local authority has also been provided with additional funding by my Department to support the delivery of Cruinniú na nÓg – the national day of free creative activities for children and young people under 18 years of age. The funding provided over the course of 2018 and 2019 to support Cruinniú na nÓg activities amounted to a total of €1.406 million, while for 2020, a sum of €15,000 has been allocated to each local authority with the four Dublin local authorities awarded €75,000 each. As the Deputy will be aware, in response to the public health restrictions in place, on June 13 last Cruinniú na nÓg 2020 was delivered online, and each local authority contributed to making it a huge success.

The matter of funding measures under the Creative Ireland Programme for 2021 and 2022 will be agreed in the context of Programme priorities for those years and, as the Deputy will appreciate, are subject to annual budgetary and estimates processes. However, in the recently agreed Programme for Government – Our Shared Future – the Government parties have committed to fostering further collaboration between local authorities and local arts organisations through the Creative Communities Pillar of the Creative Ireland Programme.

In recognition of their key role in supporting and funding the arts at local level, local authorities have long been key strategic partners of the Arts Council – evidenced by the publication of “A Framework for Collaboration”, a 10-year strategy between the Arts Council and the

County and City Management Association (CCMA), which reflects on the value of the partnership to date and sets out a vision and broad goals to be progressed for the period 2016 to 2025. The Arts Council also provides funding to local authorities, supporting the programmes of Arts Offices in each local authority, as well funding a range of other initiatives, events and festivals which are carried out in partnership with local authorities and artists in every local authority area.

The question of funding provided by the Arts Council to support local authority arts programmes will be the subject of the annual budgetary process, as well as the Council's own internal procedures for the allocation of its annual budget.

Finally, recent decades have seen the development of a nationwide infrastructure of arts centres, many of which were initiated and funded by local authorities and supported through capital schemes largely operated by my Department. Support provided to these arts centres by local authorities is critical to ensuring that a stable and vibrant network can be maintained. Capital funding schemes operated by my Department continue to be focused on enhancing this existing stock of arts and culture centres throughout the country. Recent capital schemes are being informed by the strategic Review of Arts Centres and Venues commissioned by the Arts Council and CCMA, as well as the Arts Council's published Arts Centre Policy and Strategy 2019 which sets out its funding criteria for arts centres from 2020 onwards.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

249. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the obligations of the NPWS on proposed natural heritage areas. [14574/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): Section 16(1) of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 provides that where a Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht is of the opinion that a site should be designated as a natural heritage area, he or she shall publish or cause to be published a notice of his or her intention to make an order designating the site as a natural heritage area. In doing so, the Minister shall have regard to whether, on the basis of the scientific advice available to him or her at a particular time, the site is worthy of conservation by virtue of its special scientific interest for one or more species, communities, habitats, landforms or geological or geomorphological features or for its diversity of natural attributes or in light of the requirements of the EU Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive. Once a site has been proposed for designation in accordance with section 16(1) of the Act, it has legal protection under the natural heritage area provisions of that Act. These provisions are set out in Part III, Chapter II of the Act.

There are 630 proposed natural heritage areas in Ireland. Any review of some or all of these sites by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department, would be based on an analysis of the special scientific interest of each site or its diversity of natural attributes or in light of the requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives. While such a review is foreseen, the current focus of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department is on fulfilling Ireland's obligations under the Birds and Habitats Directives and the designation of Natura 2000 sites i.e. special areas of conservation and special protection areas.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

250. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to provide financial assistance to help dancing groups through the Covid-19 pandemic;

and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13736/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): The Arts Council is the main route through which the Government funds the arts and artists in Ireland. It operates under the Arts Act 2003 which includes dance as one of the arts disciplines covered by the Council. The 2020 allocation to the Council is €100 million and it includes an additional €20 million allocated last month. The Arts Council has indicated that it will allocate the additional funding to bursaries and commissions to artists and arts organisations. Further information is available at the Arts Council's website www.artscouncil.ie/funding/.

Maoiniú d'Fhoras na Gaeilge

251. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta an n-aontaíonn sí gur féidir léi buiséad Fhoras na Gaeilge a ardú den chéad uair le breis is 10 mbliana anuas, anois go bhfuil Rialtas ann ó Thuaidh arís; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [13764/20]

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. Dá bhrí sin, cé nach bhfuil na buiséid i leith 2017 go 2020 ceadaithe go hoifigiúil go fóill, ó 2017 i leith, tá aontaithe ag na Ranna Airgeadais sa dá dhlínse go bhfeidhmeodh na Forais Trasteorann uile de réir na buiséid a cheadaigh an CATT ina leith don bhliain 2016.

I mbliana, íocfaidh mo Roinn €11,087,184 (75% den ollbhuiséad ceadaithe ag 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 Colmcille (€118,519). Is fiú a nótáil 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.

Tá i gceist go dtionólfar cruinnithe CATT arís go gairid, tráth go ndéanfar na buiséad 2017 - 2020 a cheadú agus go bpléifear gach gné de chúrsaí oibre an Fhoras Teanga, buiséid san áireamh. Tréaslaím leis an obair atá déanta ag Foras na Gaeilge agus ag na ceanneagraíochtaí le blianta beaga anuas, go háirithe le linn tréimhse na géirchéime seo. Táim ag súil go mór le bheith ag obair go dlúth leis an bhForas sna blianta amach romhainn chun an teanga a chur chun cinn ar bhonn uile-oileáin.

Covid-19 Paindéim

252. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta an dóigh léi go bhfuil sé sásúil nach raibh an dara rogha ag Comharchumainn Ghaeltachta, Scoileanna Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoileanna ach faisnéis maidir leis an gcoróinvíreas a scaipeadh ar an bpobal trí Bhéarla, de bharr nár cuireadh an fhaisnéis chuí ó na húdaráis sláinte agus ón Rialtas féin ar fáil ach as Béarla dóibh; an n-aontaíonn sí go raibh sé de cheart an phoiblíocht ceannann céanna a cuireadh amach ó na húdaráis maidir le Covid-19 i mBéarla a chur amach i nGaeilge; an féidir léi a dheimhniú go gcuirfear faisnéis maidir le Covid-19 amach i nGaeilge ar gach ardán amach anseo an tráth céanna a chuirfear faisnéis amach i mBéarla; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [13765/20]

253. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gael-

tachta an n-aontaíonn sí le dearcadh Fheidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte nach raibh siad in ann íoc as fógraí maidir le héigeandáil Covid-19 ar Raidió na Gaeltachta agus nach raibh aon ní sa dlí á cheangal orthu íoc as na fógraí céanna ar na stáisiúin raidió Bhéarla agus, mar sin, nár chuir siad aon fhógra as Gaeilge ar aon stáisiún raidió i rith na héigeandála ar fad agus nár íoc siad astu; conas a bheartaíonn sí cothrom na Féinne a thabhairt do phobal na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta agus dóibh siúd sa phobal a bhfuil spéis acu sa Ghaeilge maidir le fógraíocht as Gaeilge faoin éigeandáil ar na stáisiúin raidió; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [13766/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): Tógfaidh mé Ceisteanna Uimh. 252 agus 253 le chéile

Ní mór dom a rá ar an gcéad dul síos gur ceisteanna iad seo don Aire Sláinte go príomhá.

Tá dualgais dhíreacha ar gach comhlacht poiblí faoi Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003 a chlúdaíonn eolas atá á thabhairt don phobal i gcoitinne (nó d'aicme den phobal). Is iad sin:

- **Alt 9(3) den Acht:** I gcás ina ndéanfaidh comhlacht poiblí cumarsáid i scríbhinn nó leis an bpost leictreonach leis an bpoiblí i gcoitinne nó le haicme den phobal i gcoitinne chun faisnéis a thabhairt don phobal nó don aicme, cinnteoidh an comhlacht gur i nGaeilge, nó i mBéarla agus i nGaeilge, a bheidh an chumarsáid;

- **Alt 10(a) den Acht:** Na doiciméid seo a leanas a fhoilsiú go comhuaineach i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla:

- aon doiciméad ina leagtar amach tograí beartais poiblí.

Tuigfidh an Teachta gur gnó é d'Oifig an Choimisinéara Teanga monatóireacht a dhéanamh ar fheidhmiú Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003 agus nach bhfuil aon ról agamsa ann.

É sin ráite, áfach, i gcomhthéacs cheisteanna an Teachta, tuigtear dom go bhfuil an Roinn Sláinte tiomanta do chomhairle sláinte poiblí a sholáthar i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla agus gurb iad príomhfhócas a feachtais sláinte poiblí comhairle a fhoilsiú ar shuíomh gréasáin an Rialtais agus póstaer comhairle sláinte poiblí agus leabhráin faisnéise a chur amach.

I measc na mbearta atá idir lámha ag an Roinn sin le freastal ar riachtanais eagraíochtaí ar nós na gcomharchumann Gaeltachta, scoileanna Gaeltachta agus gaelscoileanna, tá:

- Suíomh gréasáin an Rialtais (www.gov.ie) ina fhoinse faisnéise don phobal le linn na géarchéime seo agus déantar é a nuashonrú agus a aistriú go Gaeilge go rialta. Cuireadh gach preasráiteas ón bhFoireann Náisiúnta Éigeandála um Shláinte Phoiblí (FNÉSP), in éineacht lena n-aistriúcháin Ghaeilge, suas ar line;

- An Leabhrán Faisnéise Poiblí COVID-19 a foilsíodh i mBéarla agus i nGaeilge agus póstaer dátheangach maidir le 'Ní na Lámh' a rinne An Post a sheachadadh chuig gach teaghlach sa tír; agus

- Ina theannta sin, cuireadh amach gach póstaer comhairle sláinte poiblí i mBéarla agus i nGaeilge agus roinneadh iad ar fud gach Roinn Stáit agus páirtithe leasmhara eile. Tá siad ar fáil freisin le híoslódáil ó shuíomh gréasáin an Rialtais (www.gov.ie) sa dá theanga le haghaidh úsáide príobháidí agus tráchtála.

Mar fhocal scoir agus mar is eol don Teachta, rinneadh Bille na dTeangacha Oifigiúla (Leasú) a fhoilsiú i mí na Nollag anuraidh (2019) agus is é aidhm an Bhille ná Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla a láidriú. Tá i gceist agam an Bille seo a thabhairt ar ais ós comhair na dTithe

sa bhfómhar.

Inland Waterways

254. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans for increasing the level of infrastructure along the Grand Canal from Harold's Cross to Portobello to deal with the requirements of canal boats such as electricity supply to the boats and wastewater removal from the boats; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13824/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): Waterways Ireland is the cross-border navigational authority responsible for the management, maintenance, development and promotion of over 1,000 km of inland navigable waterways, principally for recreational purposes.

The body's responsibilities include the issuing of permits / mooring locations and ensuring adherence to the Canals Bye Laws by vessel owners.

Any changes to the infrastructure on the Grand Canal would require extensive consultation and engagement with all stakeholders including Dublin City Council, detailed feasibility studies, impact assessments, planning applications, and identification of suitable capital budget and associated future current budget for sustainable management of a changed infrastructure.

Waterways Ireland is presently undertaking a 10-year strategic review. As part of this exercise, it will examine all opportunities to develop, over the next 10 years, initiatives for each of its navigations. These will include areas on and along the Grand Canal consistent with its remit, funding and the importance of consultation and engagement with the many diverse groups within the catchment areas.

Waterways Ireland expects the 10-year strategic review to be available for consultation in Q4 2020.

Inland Waterways

255. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will address a matter regarding works at a location (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13871/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): This small body of fresh water at the location to which the Deputy refers periodically silts up. Approximately every seven to eight years the navigation channel needs to be dredged and deepened to original levels. This maintains access at low water levels. As with any proposed works that are within the National Park in question, they are also with a European site of nature conservation (SAC) and are subject to screening for appropriate assessment in relation to their potential impact on any of the qualifying interests of the site.

I understand that NPWS regional staff have completed the screening process as well as a tendering process to secure a suitably qualified contractor to carry out these works. They are currently considering all the requirements of the screening process prior to starting any works. A licence from the Irish Fisheries Board is also a requirement, and an application is pending.

It is likely that these works will be completed as planned in the coming weeks.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

256. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when a woodland (details supplied) will reopen; the steps the NPWS is taking in this regard; when work will commence on a new carpark and access route for the area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13971/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): Killarney National Park has remained open to the public throughout the response to Covid-19. With regard to the works referenced in details supplied, NPWS has secured €500K under the Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme in order to improve public access, including a new car park. The contract tendering process is nearing completion and it is intended to commence works in the coming weeks with a view to completion by the end of the year (weather permitting).

Programme for Government

257. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if she will provide documents on those costings. [14026/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): In accordance with the response given to the House by Minister Madigan in reply to Parliamentary Question Number 945 of 23rd June, I understand that the Department of the Taoiseach has arranged for the publication of material provided in the context of Programme for Government negotiations and that these documents can be found at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7b927-programme-for-government-documents/>.

Departmental Legal Costs

258. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the expenditure her Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14068/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): I am advised that expenditure of €2,083 was incurred on external legal fees by my Department under its Administrative Budget in the period referenced by the Deputy as set out in the following table.

| Year | Company | Amount |
|------|---------------------------|--------|
| 2019 | Byrne Wallace, Solicitors | €2,083 |

For completeness, I would bring the Deputy's attention that, from time to time, my Department makes payments to the Chief State Solicitor's Office in respect of legal services provided to my Department by that Office. Expenditure incurred by my Department in respect of legal fees and compensation is shown in the annual Appropriation Accounts published by my Department.

Hare Coursing

259. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she

is considering measures to prohibit or reduce the practice of hare coursing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14140/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): The control of live hare coursing, including the operation of individual coursing meetings and managing the use of hares for that activity, is carried out under the Greyhound Industry Act 1958, which is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. My responsibility relates to the conservation status of the hare.

While the regulation of hare coursing is not under my statutory control, licences are required by the Irish Coursing Club under the terms of the Wildlife Acts on behalf of their affiliated clubs to facilitate the netting and tagging of hares for closed park meetings. The annual licence to capture and tag hares for the 2019/2020 coursing season was issued by my Department on 9 August last year. The licences granted by my Department in such instances include a range of conditions in relation to coursing hares which are designed to provide as much protection as possible to the conservation status of the hare.

Arising from the outbreak last summer of the RHD2 virus which affects both rabbits and hares the initial licence was suspended and a revised more restrictive license was subsequently issued to the Irish Coursing Club.

My Department has received an application from the Irish Coursing Club for licences to capture and tag hares for the forthcoming 2020/21 hare coursing season and a decision will be made on the application in due course.

Covid-19 Pandemic

260. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when those engaged in the live music industry will be able to return to work. [14150/20]

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. From that date museums, galleries, theatres, concert halls and other cultural outlets were allowed to reopen. Phase 4 of Ireland's Roadmap for reopening society and business is due to commence on 20 July, subject to government approval. The main changes that are planned then are the reopening of pubs, bars, hotel bars and casinos with gatherings of up to 100 people indoors and 500 outdoors will be permissible.

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. Updates to the roadmap can be found at www.gov.ie.

Due to social distancing and public confidence issues, the reopening of live performance and entertainment venues will prove challenging. The Government operates two universal supports for all sectors including the live music industry. The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme allows employers to retain staff and it is operated by the Revenue Commissioners and it has been extended to 31 August 2020.

The Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) is available to those who are unemployed as result of the pandemic and it is operated by the Department of Social Protection and Rural Development and the Islands. The PUP has been extended to 10 August 2020.

The continuation of these income supports and other issues will be considered as part of the Government's July stimulus package to boost the economy following the crisis.

Seirbhísí Farantóireachta

261. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Thomas Pringle** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an dtabharfaidh sí uasdátú ar na pleananna chun bád farantóireachta saintógtha úr a chur ar fáil do Thoraigh i gContae Dhún na nGall agus cé na pleananna atá ann chun tonnchosc a chur ar fáil ag Cé Mhachaire Rabhartaigh i gContae Dhún na nGall (sonraí tugtha); agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [14311/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): Tá forbairt Ché Mhachaire Rabhartaigh agus soithigh saincheaptha do Thoraigh i measc na dtograí atá le forbairt mar chuid de Thionscadail Éire 2040. Anuas air sin, tá an coiste buan – Comhchoiste Rochtana Oileán Thoraí - bunaithe chun na tograí seo agus eile a bhrú chun cinn.

Maidir leis an tsoitheach úr, ach an cead cuí bheith faighte, táthar chun dul i mbun próiseas tairisceana chun comhairleoirí le saineolas san earnáil muirí a fhostú le tabhairt faoi mholtaí a ullmhú do na féidearthachtaí maidir le soitheach úr a thógáil. Agus na moltaí seo á n-ullmhú, tógfar san áireamh an t-oileán ar a mbeidh an bád nua ag freastail agus na dúshláin atá i gceist ó thaobh aimsir, foscadh, luas etc.

Maidir le forbairt Ché Mhachaire Rabhartaigh, tá Comhairle Contae Dhún na nGall tar éis próiseas tairisceana a reáchtáil d'fhonn suirbhé bataiméadrach agus geo-fisiceach a chur i gcríoch. Tabharfaidh an suirbhé léargas don Comhairle Contae ar dhoimhneacht na farraige agus ar an saghas ábhar atá ar ghrinneall na farraige in aice leis an gcé. Beidh an Comhairle Contae ábalta an tionchar a d'fhéadfadh a bheith ag na roghanna éagsúla forbartha a mheas nuair a bheidh an t-eolas seo acu. Beidh impleachtaí ag an fhorbairt ar an gcé seo, dár ndóigh, ar dhearadh aon bháid a bheidh le tógáil le freastal ar Thoraigh.

Ní mór dom a chur in iúl don Teachta go mbeidh forbairt an dá thogra seo le breithniú ag an am cuí faoi théarmaí an Chóid Chaiteachais Phoiblí, ag cur san áireamh an soláthar airgid atá ar fáil le caitheamh ar thograí oileánda agus na n-éileamh éagsúla ar an soláthar sin.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

262. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if vital services in the arts and entertainment sector, such as wedding entertainment providers and so on, will be entitled to some form of financial assistance following the loss of work from the Covid-19 pandemic; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14350/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): The Government has a number of universal supports in place to provide financial assistance for people who have lost their jobs as a result of the restrictions put in place to address the Covid-19 pandemic.

These include the Pandemic Unemployment Payment operated by the Department of Social Protection. In addition to these there are Jobseeker's Benefit and Jobseeker's Assistance schemes as well as Jobseeker's Assistance for Self-Employed Artists.

The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme is available to employers who retain their employees and this is operated by the Revenue Commissioners.

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/>

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

263. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to maintain Covid-19 payments and or wage subsidy schemes to those involved in the entertainment industry until such time that mass gatherings are permitted (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14351/20]

266. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will ask the Ministers for Social Protection, Enterprise, Trade and Employment, and Finance to respond to the request by those artists, workers and crew in the arts and live entertainment and their representative organisations to maintain the pandemic unemployment payment and the temporary wage subsidy scheme and to provide other supports and grants for those in that sector who, because of public health and social distancing requirements, have no prospect of a return to viability for the foreseeable future and to maintain those supports until full recovery in the sector is achieved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14561/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 263 and 266 together.

The Government operates two universal supports for all sectors including the entertainment industry. The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme allows employers to retain staff and it is operated by the Revenue Commissioners. I understand that over 64,400 employers are registered for the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme with the Revenue Commissioners. Those employers have around 405,000 employees being supported by the Scheme. The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme has been extended to 31 August 2020.

The Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) is available to those who become unemployed as result of the pandemic and it is operated by the Department of Social Protection and Rural Development and the Islands. I understand that as of 30 June up to 439,000 people were in receipt of Pandemic Unemployment Payment and these are now required to confirm their eligibility for the receipt of the payment. The PUP has been extended to 10 August 2020. Further details of this are available on the gov.ie website at the following link

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/6c9cf-daily-briefing-on-the-governments-response-to-covid-19-wednesday-1st-july-2020/#pup-recipients-confirmation-of-continued-eligibility>

In addition to these income supports there are jobseekers benefit and jobseekers assistance schemes as well as Jobseekers Assistance for Self-Employed Artists. Further detail of these schemes can be accessed at the following link

<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-employment-affairs-and-social-protection/>

The continuation of these income supports and other issues will be considered as part of the Government's July stimulus package to boost the economy after the coronavirus.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

264. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to support the country and Irish music industry following Covid-19; if the industry will receive sufficient national airplay from broadcasters to ensure the survival of the industry; the support package she has in place to support artists that continue to be out of work as a result of Government restrictions; her plans to support Irish artists, specifically traditional and country music artists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14399/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): The Government has a number of universal supports in place for all sectors including the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme for employers operated by the Revenue Commissioners and the Pandemic Unemployment Payment operated by the Department of Social Protection and Rural Development and the Islands. In addition to these there are jobseekers benefit and jobseekers assistance schemes as well as Jobseekers Assistance for Self-Employed Artists. 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/>

The Arts Council is the main route through which the Government funds the arts and artists in Ireland. The 2020 allocation to the Council is €100 million and it includes an additional €20 million allocated last month. The Arts Council has indicated that it will allocate the additional funding to bursaries and commissions to artists and arts organisations.

With to the question of airplay, I understand that traditional and contemporary arts are among the categories set out the Broadcasting Act, 2009 as being eligible for funding under the Sound and Vision Scheme which is supported by 7% of TV licence fee receipts.

There are a number of factors which must be taken into account when considering the feasibility of introducing broadcasting content quotas. The potential benefit to the Irish artistic industry must be balanced with the rights of broadcasters, subject to their contractual or regulatory obligations, to determine the type of content they wish to broadcast and to maximise their commercial revenue particularly in the context of the current media climate. Importantly, the introduction of broadcasting quotas would need to be consistent with EU law.

My Department has also supported a range of initiatives to bring cultural and creative content to the public during the period of restrictions. These include Culture Ireland's Ireland Performs initiative, the Courage programme in partnership with Other Voices, as well as the Hot Press Lockdown Sessions. These measures has showcased the work of artists to large national and international audiences and provided opportunities for paid work for artists and other arts workers at a time when few alternative opportunities were available.

Ministerial Responsibilities

265. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will publish the Departmental briefing paper on her role, remits and powers afforded to her upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14521/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): I can confirm that this material will be published on my Department's website over the coming weeks.

Question No. 266 answered with Question No. 263.

Just Transition Fund

267. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of funding provided for the aggregated housing upgrade scheme; the amount spent to date; the progress to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14327/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): As part of the Just Transition proposals for the midlands region, Budget 2020 made provision for €20 million to fund energy efficiency upgrades to local authority houses in the affected midland counties as a pilot programme. The programme also envisages the grouping of housing upgrades together so opportunities for retrofitting will arise for private housing with support from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI).

This programme is being developed under a Retrofit Taskforce and as well as my Department, the preparatory work also involves the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment and the SEAI. All involved are working with the relevant local authorities to identify areas of sufficient concentration of local authority housing requiring energy upgrades.

Significant preparatory work has been completed to date, including a framework for the retrofit works and the identification by the local authorities of their selected areas of housing to be retrofitted. However, the cessation of many construction-related activities due to Covid has had a significant impact on the work of the local authorities on this programme as essential preparatory work to survey local authority homes for the retrofit works was affected.

The adoption by the County and City Management Association (CCMA) of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for internal work to housing, has allowed the surveying work to proceed and as this is completed, it is expected that the retrofit works will commence on some local authority homes in August.

In light of the Covid-related delays and the fact that local authorities are currently completing the essential surveying work on their properties, there has been no funding drawn down so far by the local authorities, although I understand that costs have been incurred in the surveying work. I expect that as the surveying work is completed and the retrofitting work commences, local authorities will draw down the funding from my Department.

Local Authority Rates

268. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when it is planned to reimburse councils for the loss of rates since March 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13760/20]

269. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an adequate compensation package will be put in place for local authorities in order that they can continue the day to day running of counties (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13796/20]

272. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position on the collection of commercial rates arising from the Covid-19 lockdown; and if a rate holiday will be granted for 2020 to the end of 2021. [13853/20]

328. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will ensure any shortfall in funding experienced by local authorities due to businesses being unable to pay their rates due to Covid-19 will be filled by his Department in

order that this shortfall does not cause a reduction in local services. [14554/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 268, 269, 272 and 328 together.

I intend to continue supporting measures taken by my Department to assist local authorities with the financial difficulties they are experiencing since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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.

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.

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 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.

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.

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 local government sector. In order to support the sector generally, I will ensure my Department continues 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.

Pyrite Resolution Board

270. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the Pyrite Resolution Board will take responsibility for ongoing damage to dwellings in County Limerick, caused from the time of first notification. [13818/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides the statutory framework for the establishment of the Pyrite Resolution Board and for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme to be implemented by the Board with support from the Housing Agency.

The provisions of the Act apply only to dwellings affected by significant damage attributable to pyritic heave consequent on the presence of reactive pyrite in the subfloor hardcore material and not to damage arising in any other circumstances.

The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of “last resort” for affected homeowners who have no other practical option to obtain redress and is limited in its application and scope. The full conditions for eligibility under the scheme are available on the Board’s website at www.pyriteboard.ie.

It is a condition of eligibility under the Scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a Building Condition Assessment with a Damage Condition Rating of 2 to ensure that the resources focused on dwellings which are most severely damaged by pyritic heave. There are no proposals to amend this eligibility criterion.

I understand that the Pyrite Resolution Board has been made aware of pyrite in the hardcore in a number of dwellings in Limerick and is in the process of making a proposal to include Limerick City and County Council area in the Pyrite Remediation Scheme.

Any amendments which the Board consider are required to the Scheme will be given full consideration in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

Local Authority Funding

271. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a submission from Kilkenny County Council on its financial circumstances due to the Covid-19 crisis has been received; the range of financial supports that will be made available to the council to assist in stabilising its financial position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13851/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): I am unaware of any specific request from Kilkenny County Council to my Department in relation to its financial circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic. My Department is engaging directly with the County and City Management Agency in respect of the local government sector as a whole, on commercial rates and impacts on other income.

Regarding the range of financial supports that will be made available to the sector, 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 Covid-19.

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 this 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 under review and will continue to work with all local authorities, both collectively and individually, on issues arising.

Question No. 272 answered with Question No. 268.

Water Services

273. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the Local Government (Financial Provisions) Act 1997 outlined a central funding model for water services and removed the power of local authorities to make charges for supply of water for domestic purposes; the funding per year estimated by his Department to be made available for the provision of water services through this new funding model; the funding made available to date for the provision of water services as a direct result of the Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13854/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Local Government (Financial Provisions) Act 1997 removed the power of a local authority to make charges for domestic water services. Subsequently, the Water Services (No.2) Act 2013 provided Irish Water with the power to charge for water services. The Water Services Act 2017 discontinued charges for domestic customers of Irish Water with the exception of charges for network connections and excess use of water services.

The Local Government Act 1998 established the Local Government Fund. The Fund historically provided local authorities with finance for funding some of their day-to-day activities, including elements of water services costs, through General Purpose Grant allocations. Central Government funding was also provided for capital investment programmes, through the Water Services Investment Programme (WSIP). The total capital allocation from the WSIP over the period 2000-2013 is estimated at €5 billion or an average of over €357 million per annum.

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 allowed funding requirement for Irish Water is determined by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU), as the independent economic regulator of Irish Water. As the funding of domestic water services is disbursed through my Department's Vote, it is provided on foot of the annual estimates and budgetary processes having regard to the CRU determination.

State funding of Irish Water in respect of operating subvention, capital contributions and replacement revenue in lieu of the suspension and abolition of domestic water charges amounted to some €5.5 billion between 2014 and 2019 or an average of over €900 million per annum. The 2020 Revised Estimates provision for Irish Water is almost €1.2 billion in respect of domestic water services.

The new Programme for Government commits to fund Irish Water's capital investment plan for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure on a multi-annual basis and deliver the €8.5 billion funding package committed to in Project Ireland 2040.

Planning Issues

274. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if planning applications relating to proposed developments on State-owned land that are submitted to a local authority by State bodies, such as the National Parks and Wildlife Service under the auspices of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, are required to be published publicly in regional newspapers and viewable free of charge in public buildings such as those at local authority headquarters, county libraries and or post offices; the penalties that exist for non-compliance with such planning requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13855/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Part 4 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 specifies, in accordance with Section 33 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, the provisions with respect to applications for permission for development of land. An applicant is required to publish a notice of proposed development in an approved newspaper and erect or fix a site notice on the land or structure where the proposed development would be situated. The planning application is to be available for inspection at the offices of the planning authority and a submission or observation may be made in writing to the planning authority within a period of 5 weeks beginning on the date of receipt by the authority of the application.

In May 2020, new Planning and Development (Section 38) Regulations 2020 were signed instructing planning authorities to upload all planning application documents onto their internet websites within 5 working days of receipt, subject to exceptional circumstances. Compliance with the regulations is required to process applications. Public participation is a crucial element of all substantive decision-making processes under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, 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 in relation to specific types of developments.

Social and Affordable Housing

275. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will review the social housing policy to give tenants who suffer from a long-term illness but have personal savings the ability to purchase their home from the local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13857/20]

291. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the incremental purchase scheme; the local authorities operating the scheme; and the number and price of units delivered annually to date for each of the local authorities. [14104/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 275 and 291 together.

The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme, which came into operation on 1 January 2016, is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

The minimum reckonable income for eligibility under the scheme is determined by the relevant local authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the 2014 Act. In the determination of the minimum reckonable income, local authorities include income from a number of different sources and classes, such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, including pensions, where the social welfare payment is secondary to employment income.

In determining reckonable income, the income of all tenants of the house, including adult children that are joint tenants, is included, as is the income of the spouse, civil partner or other partner / co-habitant of a tenant who lives in the house with them, thus ensuring the appropriate level of discount is applied to the purchase price.

The minimum income criterion was introduced in order to ensure the sustainability of the scheme. Applicants must demonstrate that they have an income that is long-term and sustainable in nature. This ensures that the tenant purchasing the house is in a financial position, as the owner, to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the charged period, in compliance with the conditions of the order transferring the ownership of, and responsibility for, the house from the local authority to the tenant.

The financing of any house sold under the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme is a separate matter from the eligibility criteria for the scheme. If the tenant is deemed eligible under the scheme, he or she may fund the purchase of a house from one, or a combination, of his/her own resources or a mortgage provided by a financial institution or a local authority house purchase loan.

My Department publishes information on the sale of local authority houses each year. This can be accessed on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/social-and-affordable/other-local-authority-housing-scheme-statistics>.

In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, a review of the operation of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase (Incremental) Scheme has been recently finalised and a full report has been prepared setting out findings and recommendations.

The Programme for Government commits to maintaining the right of social housing tenants to purchase their own home with some changes to eligibility. The review and the commitments in the Programme for Government are being examined as part of the work on the broader social housing reform agenda.

Homeless Accommodation

276. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount spent on providing accommodation for homeless families and persons in hotels and bed and breakfasts in each local authority area from June 2017 up to and including June 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13878/20]

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 and support the statutory responsibility of housing authorities to provide emergency accommodation for homeless persons..

My Department does not fund any homeless service directly but provides funding to housing authorities towards the operational costs of homeless accommodation and related services under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. Under Exchequer funding arrangements, housing authorities must provide at least 10% of the cost of services from own resources. Furthermore, housing authorities may also incur additional expenditure on homeless-related services outside of the Exchequer funding arrangements provided by my Department. Therefore, the precise amounts spent by housing authorities on homeless services, as well as the types of accommodation, are a matter for individual housing authorities in consultation with the Management Group of the relevant regional joint Homelessness Consultative Forum.

Financial reports from each of the regional fora, setting out total expenditure on homeless services are published on my Department's website at the following link; <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>. Reports for 2017, 2018 and 2019 are available at this link. The reports for quarters 1 and 2 2020, will be published in due course. The table below sets out Exchequer funding provided to housing authorities for 2017 – 2019.

| Year | €m |
|------|-----|
| 2017 | 109 |
| 2018 | 139 |
| 2019 | 165 |

Planning Issues

277. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will clarify the situation regarding a housing complex (details supplied); if his Department has received an application for funding for a redevelopment of some apartments there; the status of the proposed development; and the funding stream which is available for the complex and its development. [13882/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Under my Department's Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), funding is available to Approved Housing Bodies (AHB's) towards the provision of accommodation for people with disabilities, the elderly and homeless who are social housing qualified by way of application through the local authority to my Department.

My Department also provides funding under the Capital Advance Leasing Facility scheme, again by way of application through the local authority, to assist AHB's in accessing finance through the Housing Finance Agency or elsewhere for the purchase, construction or refurbishment of units that will be made available for social housing purposes under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme.

In 2009 capital funding was provided for the provision of 41 independent living units at St. Anne's Ballinteer for elderly people under my Department's CAS. I understand that CABHRU Housing Association intends to develop the existing communal facilities into a further 6 units however, no application for funding has been made to my Department as yet. The progression of the project to funding application stage is a matter for the local authority and the AHB.

Programme for Government

278. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if he will provide docu-

ments on those costings. [14033/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):

The Programme for Government agreed in June 2020 includes a number of commitments that are relevant to my Department. My Department will be developing proposals to give effect to these commitments and such proposals will be costed in the normal manner with due regard to budgetary considerations and the annual Estimates process.

The briefing materials provided by Government Departments, including my Department, to political parties as part of Government formation discussions have been published by the Department of the Taoiseach and the documents are located at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7b927-programme-for-government-documents/>

Consultancy Contracts

279. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within his Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14058/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):

The Department's People Strategy 2018-2020 (WELL - Wellbeing, Engagement, Learning and Development and Leadership) was developed in partnership with staff and sets out the strategic priorities, objectives and actions to engage, support, develop and lead staff. The strategic goals identified under the 'WELL' Strategy reflect the evolving nature of working life in the Department and the diversity of needs, motivations and experiences that are a feature of the modern workforce.

Under the heading of Leadership, the Department committed to enhance diversity and inclusion in the workplace. In 2020, the Department ran remote Disability Awareness Training provided by Ability Focus and costing €1,107, supporting commitments under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021.

Many other measures to support diversity and inclusion have been provided through the Department's own resources since 2018, including:

- The Department has been involved in the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) programme since 2018, offering graduates with disabilities a 6 month work placement within the Department.

- In 2019, the Department established its LGBT+ staff network, which organises events and talks on a continuous basis and is chaired by an Assistant Secretary General.

- The Department supports the Job Shadow Day initiative on an annual basis, as part of the national project which brings people with disabilities and local employers together for one day. For the last number of years, we have teamed with the Walkinstown Association for People with an Intellectual Disability (WALK).

- Since 2019, the Secretary General has given his supports to the 30% Club, which promotes gender equality on boards and senior management, fostering diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

- In 2019, the Department facilitated the North East Inner City (NEIC) workplace pro-

gramme, which provides students in Dublin inner city schools with access to and insight into professions and career paths outside their existing network of contacts. We are continuing to engage with this initiative during the current Covid crisis.

- The Department is currently finalising its Universal Design and Accessibility Policy and Action Plan, which aims to demonstrate the Department's commitment to accessibility, the principles of Universal Design and reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities.

In addition, the Department has a Disability Liaison Officer who provides support to staff with disabilities on an ongoing basis, providing reasonable accommodations as appropriate. The Department complies with all central policy and guidance; in this respect, the Civil Service People Strategy 2018-2020 commits to review and revise the Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion policy, which the Department will fully support in due course.

Departmental Legal Costs

280. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the expenditure his Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14075/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): My Department seeks, where possible, to minimise legal costs and avails of the services of the Chief State Solicitor's office, the Attorney General's Office and the State Claims Agency in terms of the provision of legal advice and representation of the Department in court cases.

The following table sets out details in relation to external legal services provided directly to my Department by legal firms from 2016 to date in 2020. The table does not include costs associated with the Planning Tribunal.

| Company name | Details of legal fees / services | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 |
|--------------|---|-------|--------|---------|--------|------|
| | | € | € | € | € | € |
| A&L Goodbody | Legal advice on Water Abstraction | | 23,985 | | 23,985 | |
| A&L Goodbody | Legal advice on Water and Planning Guidance | 01 | | | | |
| Arthur Cox | Legal Advice on Foreshore Consent Issues | 4,045 | 83,623 | 113,110 | 33,070 | |

Questions - Written Answers

| Company name | Details of legal fees / services | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 |
|----------------------|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| Arthur Cox | Professional Fees in relation to Land Development Agency | | 102,716 | 171,146 | | |
| E. C. Gearty | Legal Fees incurred by Longford County Council in relation to Elfeet pig-gery | | 6,775 | | | |
| Eversheds Sutherland | Legal advice - PPP Bundles (procurement/tenders) | 157,554 | 260,529 | 48,922 | 167,200 | 22,407 |
| Geoffrey Fox | Drafting of EU (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018 | | | 43,050 | | |
| Hannah Godfrey BL | Payment of fees for legal services during 2018; Judicial Review Casey v Min Housing, Planning and Local Government | | 11,236 | | | |

| Company name | Details of legal fees / services | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 |
|---------------------|--|--------|------|--------|------|------|
| Hugh O'Neill SC | Facilitation fee for settlement of Atlantic Shellfish Case. | | | 10,250 | | |
| Paul Gilligan SC | Payment of legal fees for mediation at court case involving Sea Fibre Networks & Celtic Connect V Min for Housing, Planning & Local Govt | 12,300 | | | | |
| McCann Fitzgerald | Professional services relating to 2015 supplier dispute | | | 2,568 | | |
| McKeever Solicitors | Witnessing signature of an affidavit | | | | 10 | |
| Patrick Butler SC | Independent non-statutory review of files held by the Department | | | 8,610 | | |
| Patrick Butler SC | Preparation of report as authorised person under S. 224 of the Local Government Act 2001 | 39,475 | | | | |

| Company name | Details of legal fees / services | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|
| Philip Lee Solicitors | Legal opinion on HAP Scheme | 10,322 | | | | |
| | TOTAL | €223,696 | €488,864 | €397,656 | €224,265 | €22,407 |

1 Invoice awaited

Arts Centres

281. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of funding for the Cork event centre; and the engagement that has taken place with the local authority in the past two months in relation to the matter. [14085/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Cork Event Centre is included as a commitment under Project Ireland 2040 and it underlines the Government's objectives around urban regeneration, enhanced amenity and heritage, associated quality of life standards, balanced regional development, and the regeneration and development of Cork City Centre.

It was agreed in the context of Budget 2020 that responsibility at central Government level for making the grant aid support available for the project would transfer to my Department. In that context, funding was allocated to my Department to support the project.

Responsibility for the advancement of proposals for the development of the Cork Event Centre remains, in the first instance, a matter for Cork City Council. My Department has had no recent contact from the City Council on the matter.

Departmental Functions

282. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the functions and agencies that fall within the remit of his Department; the functions or agencies that were previously under remit of his Department that are now not within the remit of his Department; and the functions and agencies covered by the heritage remit of his Department. [14087/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The statutory transfer of functions process to give effect to the changes in respect of the heritage portfolio is underway, with the aim of completing the transfer as soon as possible, guided by the Transfer of Functions Guidelines and Best Practice Handbook. The effective date of the transfer will be determined by the Transfer of Functions Order.

Accordingly, the functions and the State bodies under the aegis of my Department remain the same for the time being. The relevant State bodies are as listed in the following table.

| |
|--|
| An Bord Pleanála |
| An Fóram Uisce (the Water Forum) |
| Docklands Oversight and Consultative Forum |

| |
|---|
| Ervia |
| Gas Networks Ireland |
| Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency (Housing Agency) |
| Housing Finance Agency |
| Irish Water |
| Land Development Agency |
| Local Government Management Agency |
| National Oversight and Audit Commission |
| National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee |
| Office of the Planning Regulator |
| Ordnance Survey Ireland |
| Property Registration Authority |
| Pyrite Resolution Board |
| Residential Tenancies Board |
| Valuation Office |
| Valuation Tribunal |
| Water Advisory Body |

Departmental Functions

283. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the planning functions of the Department for Housing, Planning and Local Government have remained within his Department. [14089/20]

305. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the National Parks and Wildlife Service is under the remit of his Department. [14363/20]

306. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the new functions, units or work areas his Department has gained; the functions, units and work areas which have been moved to other Departments; the destination for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14368/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 283, 305 and 306 together.

I can confirm that my Department is retaining all of its current functions, including its planning functions.

The Heritage functions currently under the remit of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht will be transferred to my Department. This will include the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The statutory transfer of functions process to give effect to the changes in respect of the heritage portfolio is underway, with the aim of completing the transfer as soon as possible, guided by the Transfer of Functions Guidelines and Best Practice Handbook . The effective date of the transfer will be determined by the Transfer of Functions Order.

Social and Affordable Housing

284. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average cost of Part V social housing units by local authority in 2018 and 2019, in tabular form. [14090/20]

285. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average cost of turnkey social housing units by local authority area in each of the years 2016 to 2019, in tabular form. [14091/20]

286. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average cost of Social Housing Capital Investment Programme units by local authority area in each of the years 2016 to 2019, in tabular form. [14092/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 284, 285 and 286 together.

Cost information on local authority and approved housing body direct construction and turnkeys, is collated by my Department at development level rather than at granular individual housing unit level. Disaggregating such development level information into individual unit costs, across all of the various types of units, would require significant analysis on unit characteristics such as size, type, number of bedrooms, site costs, abnormal costs, fees etc. to derive an accurate reflection of an average cost by unit.

My Department is working with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on a Spending Review of the social Housing Build programme for the period 2016-2019 which is expected to be published later this year. As part of this work, the Department's are working on extrapolating unit costs from raw data provided by local authorities.

Part V units can be delivered through a range of programmes funded by my Department, including;

- The Social Housing Capital Investment Programme (SHCIP)- LA led, 100% capital funded
- The Capital Assistance Scheme- AHB led, 100% capital funded
- The Capital Advance Leasing Facility- AHB led, range of 0% to 30% capital loan funded and ongoing lease under Payment and Availability Agreement (P&A)
- Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) Part V- generally LA- leased under current funding
- LA own funding or Cost neutral- these are Part V units delivered by LAs but not claimed from the Department.

Each programme has its own discreet data requirements and data held on file. The information requested, in the format of average unit costs by local authority, will require some time to collate, and will be made available as soon as possible.

Programme for Government

289. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the programme for Government commitment to hold a referendum on housing will be a referendum to enshrine the right to housing in the Constitution; and if so, the timeline for the publication of the legislation and the holding of the referendum. [14096/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The commitments in relation to Constitutional reform in the Programme for Government provide for the holding of a referendum on housing.

I intend to consult with my colleagues in Government as to the proposal that should be put to the electorate and the appropriate timeframes that should apply to the process.

Water Services

290. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the efforts by his Department to create a single water utility; and his plans to bring forward legislation to provide for a referendum to enshrine public ownership of the public water system in the Constitution. [14097/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Programme for Government provides that the Government will retain Irish Water in public ownership as a national, stand-alone, regulated utility.

In this context, in September 2018, the Director General of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) reported on a process of engagement, undertaken with the parties involved in the water sector transformation programme, including ICTU and relevant affiliated unions, local government management through the County and City Management Association, Ervia/Irish Water and my Department. Subsequent to this, and commencing in February 2019, there has been an ongoing series of engagements to work towards the development of a stable structural and operational framework for the future to replace the existing system of Service Level Agreements between Irish Water and each of the 31 local authorities, although progress to date has been slow.

Consistent with the Programme for Government and building on the work that has been undertaken to date through the WRC, I am planning to bring forward a clear set of policy recommendations setting out my own and the Government's expectations. To this end, I look forward to communicating directly with the parties involved.

I recognise the challenges arising, and the concerns which all parties have, notably the workers. The proposed changes also give rise to significant challenges for the local government sector in Ireland. Any process of transformation needs to be cognisant of the potential impacts on the wider local government system.

On the matter of a proposed referendum, the Programme for Government provides for the referral of the issue of the environment, including water, and its place in the Constitution, to a relevant Joint Oireachtas Committee for consideration.

Question No. 291 answered with Question No. 275.

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Issues

292. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the submission by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to the Council of Europe on the 17th National Report by Ireland on the Implementation of the European Social Charter published on 29 June 2020; and the actions he plans to take to address the housing problems raised in the submission. [14110/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Irish Government submitted updates in respect of a number of collective complaints in its “Report on the Implementation of the Revised Social Charter of the Council of Europe” on 23 December 2019. My Department fed into this report and presented an update in relation to Collective Complaints 100/2013 and 110/2014.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission submission referred to contains its comments on the Irish Government’s Report. It was forwarded to my Department on the 1 July 2020 and is being considered.

Local Authority Rates

293. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties that small, non-profit sports clubs are having in securing an exemption from local authority rates. [14152/20]

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.

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 are to be met by the Exchequer and the administration by local authorities of this measure will be by way of a credit in lieu of rates. My Department is currently preparing further guidance on the scope and application of the waiver for local authorities.

Land that is developed for sport, such as playing pitches, is exempt from rates under the Valuation Act 2001. There is also provision for the exemption of community halls which are not licensed to sell alcohol and where the facilities are not used for profit. However, the Act provides that where an organisation or club is registered under the Registration of Clubs (Ireland) Act 1904, and is licensed to sell alcohol, all the club buildings, wherever located, are rateable in their entirety. Such premises closed and ceased trading in line with the health restrictions set out in the Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (Covid-19) Regulations 2020 (S.I. No. 121 of 2020).

The 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.

Social and Affordable Housing

294. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the geographical spread for the 50,000 new social housing builds; and the yearly target per local authority area in tabular form. [14166/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Programme for Government commits to delivering 50,000 new social homes over the

coming five-year period. There will be a very strong and increasing emphasis on new build supply. Since taking up office I am working within my Department and with key stakeholders and delivery partners to fully understand the most up to date position regarding delivery across social housing programmes and in particular, the construction programme, taking the impact of Covid-19 into account and to programme future delivery taking account of policy and budgetary considerations. Once the overall annual delivery programme is agreed, it will be translated across into local delivery targets.

House Purchase Schemes

295. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the housing assistance scheme for first-time buyers applies to a once-off building of a home in the countryside; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14167/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan was introduced on 1 February 2018. The loan can be used both for new and second-hand properties, or to build your own home.

In terms of self-builds, where a loan applicant is building their own home on a pre-owned site with planning permission, the loan available under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan may not exceed 90% of the build cost. Where an applicant(s) is building their own home on a site with planning permission to be purchased, funding may not exceed 90% of the site purchase and build cost combined.

Applicant(s) are required to submit with their loan application a valuation report that details the site value, cost of works and post construction market value of the completed property. The valuation report is required to be completed by an Independent Valuer and will be considered by the local authority in assessing the associated loan application. Applicants can then drawdown their mortgage for a self-build property through stage payments if required.

The availability of the Help To Buy Scheme for first-time-buyers, which is the policy responsibility of the Minister of Finance, offers additional assistance to purchasers of newly built properties. Up to 5% of the purchase price of properties below €400,000 could be available, which represents a significant contribution towards these deposit requirements. This should alleviate some of the challenges faced by first-time buyers in accessing the 10% deposit of the market value of the property. The initiative has been designed to provide immediate and targeted support for first-time buyers in meeting their deposit requirements and encouraging the construction of new housing units.

Further information, including a Home Loan Calculator and the Application Form is available on the website www.rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie.

Departmental Schemes

296. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 876 of 23 June 2020, the nature of the rehabilitation works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14178/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Under the Housing (Private Water Supply Financial Assistance) Regulations 2020, a number of revisions have been made to the grant scheme to support improvement works to a private water

supply where, in the opinion of the housing authority, the water supply is not wholesome and clean, or the quantity of water supplied is insufficient to meet the domestic needs of the household. The Regulations outline the level of grant available, determined by the type of improvement works being undertaken, which shall not exceed the following amounts:

(a) 85% of the approved costs for well rehabilitation works, subject to a maximum grant of €3,000; or 85% of the approved costs for the provision of a new well, subject to a maximum grant of €5,000.

(b) 100% of water quality treatment costs, subject to a maximum grant of €1,000.

Responsibility for the administration of my Department's Rural Water Programme, under which funding is provided for group water schemes, has been devolved to local authorities since 1997.

Circular L4/20 on the administration of grants scheme for improvement of a private water supply to a house was issued to local authorities on 4 June 2020. Full details of the revised scheme including Terms and Conditions were issued with this Circular, and local authorities were requested to make this information publicly available on their websites.

Full details of the revised scheme including Terms and Conditions can also be found on the Department website at <https://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/private-wells>.

Heritage Sites

297. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the proposal by South Dublin County Council to spend an estimated €22 million on the development of a visitors centre and walkways at the Hellfire Club, Rathfarnham (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14226/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The elected members of local authorities are responsible for budgetary matters and the adoption of the annual budget is a reserved function. In this context, it is a matter for each local authority to determine spending priorities, having regard to available resources.

The use of funds in the manner outlined by the Deputy is, therefore, a matter for the local authority concerned.

Architects Register

298. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of a report (details supplied); his plans to act on the report and insert the grandfather clause; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14246/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Part 3 of the Building Control Act 2007 introduced a system of statutory registration for architects and restricted use of the title of "architect" to persons who are registered architects.

Section 22 of the Act makes specific provision for registration based on technical assessment of persons who had been independently performing duties commensurate with those of an architect for a period of 10 or more years in the State prior to the commencement of the Act.

This is, in effect, what is often colloquially referred to as a grandfather clause.

In 2013, in response in particular to the lower than anticipated rate of applications for registration by technical assessment, an independent review of the arrangements in place for registration was undertaken by Mr Garret Fennell, Solicitor. Mr Fennell's report on the matter is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/BuildingStandards/FileDownload%2C34097%2Cen.pdf>

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht also examined the matter and published its Report on the Title of Architect (July 2013) which is available at: *<https://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/archivedcommittees/environment-transportcultureandthegaeltacht/Report-on-the-Title-of-Architect.pdf>*

Both reports, which were welcomed by my Department, made a number of recommendations intended to improve and streamline the arrangements for registration. Implementation of these recommendations, in consultation with the Architects Alliance of Ireland and others, has seen a number of reforms being implemented, which include the administration of the technical assessment process on a cyclical basis where briefing, guidance and support for candidates can be administered in a structured manner; mentoring and supporting applicants; facilitating assessment based on recent projects; facilitating applicants with reassessment/reapplication (i.e. ensuring that the technical assessment procedure is not seen as a one chance only route to registration); and reviewing and simplifying guidance materials with direct input from practice-trained persons. My Department and the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI), as registration body, are committed to continuing to work with the Architects Alliance of Ireland and others in this manner to achieve whatever further reasonable and practical improvements of registration arrangements can be made in the context of the Fennell report or otherwise.

In addition to the transitional "grandfather" provision set out above, section 14(2)(f) of the Act provides a permanent route to registration for practically trained persons who have 7 years appropriate practical experience and who have passed the prescribed register examination. In 2016, the Architects Alliance of Ireland proposed a special entry route to incorporate the proposed development of a second prescribed register admission examination as currently provided for under this section. Assessment for registration under section 14(2)(f) comes within the responsibility of the RIAI, who are designated as the registration body for the purposes of the 2007 Act, and as the competent authority for the purposes of the Directive on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications (as amended). For this reason, the Architects Alliance of Ireland were advised by my Department to discuss their proposal, in the first instance, with the RIAI as registration body and competent authority for the architectural profession in Ireland.

My Department and the RIAI, as registration body, are committed to continuing to work with the Architects Alliance of Ireland and all other stakeholders to achieve whatever further reasonable and practical improvements in registration arrangements can be made. I would encourage all practically trained persons to pursue the routes to registration which are open to them and to continue to engage constructively with my Department and the RIAI.

Departmental Circulars

299. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a circular has been drafted by his Department and is to be issued to local authorities imposing a blanket ban on the drawdown of Rebuilding Ireland home loans in circumstances

in which the applicant with approval in principal is in receipt of the temporary wage subsidy scheme. [14260/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): All local authorities are receiving and processing Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL) applications, and are incorporating increased flexibility to accommodate applicants during the COVID 19 Pandemic. As is the case with any lender, local authorities must lend mortgages on prudent basis, taking into account the most recent income and employment data available. This is both for the protection of the lender and the borrower, in particular to seek to ensure that borrowers are not left with unsustainable debt burdens.

The Covid-19 situation has had an unprecedented economic impact and unfortunately some applicants for the RIHL have been affected. In order to address this issue, my Department has issued guidance to local authorities on the process for dealing with applicants already in the application/approval process whose economic circumstances have changed for the worse. These options could include reducing, suspending or withdrawing the amount that can be borrowed. However, there is no one size fits all approach, it depends on the individual circumstances.

On 6 July my Department issued a Circular including additional guidance on the treatment of persons whose employers avail of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. There is no blanket ban. In general, persons currently on the TWSS can continue to apply for a RIHL mortgage based on their pre-TWSS 19 Income. This will provide clarity to applicants regarding their eligibility for the loan and will enable them to commence the property search. Where such applicants are approved for a RIHL loan, draw down would not commence until the applicants' unsupported income post TWSS has returned to the level specified in the original application for a period of time, usually up to three months. Local authorities can, however, use their judgement and knowledge of local employers to advance loans to applicants in advance of this three-month period, where appropriate.

In the case of a joint application where only one party is on TWSS, the application can also proceed to drawdown if repayment capacity can be assured based on the other person's income.

For applicants whose post-TWSS income is lower (e.g. due to reduced hours) than stated on their application, their application can be re-assessed to determine the most appropriate borrowing amount for them.

This approach is in line with the need to lend on a prudent basis, as a mortgage is a long-term commitment and it would not be appropriate to lend when there is a risk that the person's income and ability to pay might not return to the level required to support the borrowing requested.

Residential Tenancies Board

300. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the Residential Tenancies Board will be allowed to recruit more adjudicators; the number of adjudicators that will be recruited in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14323/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2019 to operate a national tenancy registration system and to facilitate the resolution of disputes between landlords and tenants. The service provided by the RTB is quasi-judicial and all of their mediators, adjudicators and tribunal members have

independent decision-making powers, in the same way as judges have within the Court system. To ensure impartiality, transparency and fairness, adjudicators are independently appointed and they undertake their functions in an autonomous capacity.

Section 164 of the Residential Tenancies Acts governs the appointment or engagement of Mediators and Adjudicators. It clearly states it is for the Board and the Board alone to appoint Mediators and Adjudicators. It would be inappropriate for me, as Minister, to be involved in the process or to comment

The Clerk of the Dáil requested that arrangements be put in place to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies to members of the Oireachtas. Following the issue of Circular LG (P)05/16 on 20 September 2016 from my Department, the RTB set up a dedicated email address for this purpose. The RTB may be contacted at OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie to establish the extent to which it may hold the information sought.

Local Authority Housing

301. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will establish an independent appeals process to allow those persons on local authority housing waiting lists that were removed against their will to appeal against that decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14330/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The oversight and management of the lists of qualified households awaiting accommodation, including the allocation and transfer of tenancies, is a matter for the relevant local authority in accordance with Sections 20 and 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated Social Housing Assessment and Allocation Regulations, respectively.

Under Regulation 28 of the Assessment Regulations, a household's qualification for support may be reviewed at the discretion of a local authority and Regulation 29 provides that the household's qualification for support shall be reassessed at the point of allocation of support. If upon review, a household is found to exceed the limits on income eligibility grounds, for example, they would be removed from the list.

Furthermore, authorities are also required, when directed by the Minister, to undertake a statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA) to count the number of households on the waiting list for social housing supports whose need has not yet been met. The SSHA process requires all local authorities to review those households who are on their housing list but who are not currently in receipt of housing support. As part of this assessment, all local authorities write to relevant households informing them of the assessment process and seeking updated information where necessary. Where a number of attempts to contact a household failed to elicit a response, authorities were advised that it was not unreasonable to then close the household's application. However, local authorities were also advised that should the household subsequently respond with the information required within a reasonable time, the application could be re-activated.

I understand that many local authorities have internal complaints and appeals systems which may be used to appeal cases. This is entirely a matter for the local authority concerned.

Where a household is dissatisfied with the level of service by its local authority, it is open to that household to make a complaint under the authority's customer service complaints procedure.

Following that complaint, if a household still considers that it has been adversely affected by a local authority's action, or lack of action, which it considers unfair or unreasonable, it is open to the household to make a complaint to the Ombudsman.

Property Registration Authority

302. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the waiting time to transfer properties with the Property Registration Authority; the length of time the longest applicant is waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14332/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Property Registration Authority (PRA) are currently experiencing an increased backlog due to the impact of COVID-19. The PRA registered over 13,000 transactions for the month of June, by comparison to 16,010 transactions registered in June 2019.

The PRA's Customer Charter provides that "75% of cases, not requiring mapping, that are in order for registration, to be completed within 10 working days." The latest period for which figures are available in respect of that target is the end May 2020.

Completed in 10 days or less

| | Jan-20 | Feb-20 | Mar-20 | Apr-20 | May-20 | Cumulative 2020 |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-----------------|
| D Applications (Paper based) | 5,955 | 5,732 | 2,403 | 17 | 129 | 14,236 |
| E Applications (eRegistrations) | 4,863 | 3,533 | 2,997 | 3,070 | 2,808 | 17,271 |
| Total | 10,818 | 9,265 | 5,400 | 3,087 | 2,937 | 31,507 |
| | 87.2% | 87.2% | 54.2% | 41.7% | 34.6% | 64.5% |

As the number of applications being lodged is decreasing, response times will improve over time to re-align with the relevant Customer Charter target outlined above.

The PRA has confirmed that its records show that the longest pending application for transfer of property (not requiring mapping and not under query) was lodged on 25 February 2016.

Commercial Rates

303. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of commercial rates valuation appeals awaiting a result in each of the years 2017 to 2019; the average waiting time for such appeals; the measures he plans to put in place to alleviate the situation in view of such a high backlog; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14360/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):

The Valuation Office is currently engaged in a national programme to revalue all commercial and industrial properties in Ireland.

Prior to the commencement of the Valuation (Amendment) Act 2015, ratepayers could appeal a final valuation firstly to the Commissioner of Valuation and subsequently to the Valuation Tribunal. Since the passing of this Act, appeals are now made solely to the Valuation Tribunal. However, it is also the case that a dissatisfied ratepayer can, in the first instance, make representations to the Valuation Office within 40 days of the date of the issue of a proposed valuation certificate. If, following consideration of the representations, any ratepayer is still dissatisfied with the valuation to be placed on their property, they have a right to lodge a formal appeal with the Valuation Tribunal within 28 days of the new valuation appearing on a valuation list.

As of 1 July 2020, the Valuation Tribunal has 2,480 appeals on hand with the average length of time to determine an appeal of approximately 18 months. The number of appeals awaiting a result from each year 2017 to 2019 is as follows: 2017 (403); 2018 (162) and 2019 (1891).

A number of measures have been put in place to support the expedited processing of appeals including the introduction of a call-over system allowing an opportunity for parties to review their options and a recent revision of the Tribunal rules. 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.

Housing Policy

304. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his policy on restrictions on planning for one-off housing in rural areas and the impact it will have on rural populations and communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14362/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Under the *Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Rural Housing 2005*, planning authorities are required to frame the planning policies in their development plans in a balanced and measured way that ensures the housing needs of rural communities are met, while avoiding excessive urban-generated housing and haphazard development, particularly in those areas near cities and towns that are under pressure from urban generated development.

The Guidelines identify four rural area types in respect of which planning authorities may formulate policies for 'urban generated' and 'rural generated' rural housing. Section 3.2.3 of the Guidelines suggests that in areas "under major urban influence", planning authorities may define "rural generated" housing need for "Persons who are an intrinsic part of the rural community" and for "Persons working full-time or part-time in rural areas".

The National Planning Framework (the NPF) provides an important strategic basis for interpreting the 2005 Guidelines. National Policy Objective (NPO) 15 of the NPF fully supports the concept of the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging growth and arresting decline in areas that have experienced low population growth or decline in recent decades, while simultaneously indicating the need to manage certain areas around cities and towns that are under strong urban influence and under pressure from uncoordinated and ribbon-type development, in order to avoid over-development of those areas.

National Policy Objective 15 is supplemented by National Policy Objective 19, which aims to ensure that a policy distinction is made between areas experiencing significant overspill development pressure from urban areas, particularly within the commuter catchment of cities,

towns and centres of employment, and other remoter and weaker rural areas where population levels may be low and or declining. NPF Policy NPO19 is intended to tie in with the generally established Guidelines approach whereby considerations of social (intrinsic part of the community) or economic (persons working full or part time) need may be applied by planning authorities in rural areas under urban influence.

Furthermore, under National Policy Objective 18b of the NPF, my Department is committed to developing a programme with local authorities, public infrastructure agencies such as Irish Water and local communities for the provision of serviced sites for housing to attract people to build their own homes and live in small towns and villages.

The Programme for Government commits to support the take-up of Irish Water's Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme 2020-2024, which will provide water and wastewater growth capacity in smaller settlements, which would not otherwise be provided for in Irish Water's capital investment plan and to ensure that the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund supports the development of such projects.

Both the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and its urban counterpart (URDF) – with a total of €3 billion available between both funds to 2027 – are supporting new ideas and new initiatives to renew rural villages, as well as towns and cities. The Rural Fund provides an unprecedented opportunity to support the revitalisation of rural Ireland, to make a significant and sustainable impact on rural communities, and to address de-population in small rural towns, villages and rural areas. It will be a key instrument to support the objectives of the National Planning Framework, and in particular to achieve Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities – one of the National Strategic Outcomes of Project Ireland 2040.

The 2005 Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines are framed in the context of the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002. Given the many changes in policy and in wider society since 2002/5, the superseding of the NSS by the National Planning Framework (NPF) in 2018, together with other factors, the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines now require updating, in a broader rural development and settlement context. My Department intends to bring forward updated and comprehensive Guidelines before the end of the year, that will fully reflect NPF objectives and will bring clarity to the issue of rural housing. In the interim, the NPF objectives together with the 2005 Guidelines, enable planning authorities to continue to draft and adopt county development plan policies for one-off housing in rural areas.

Questions Nos. 305 and 306 answered with Question No. 283.

Homelessness Strategy

307. Deputy Cian O'Callaghan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the target date for ending homelessness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14371/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Helping individuals and families facing homelessness is a top priority for this Government and for myself as Minister. While there are many challenges facing people, in terms of accessing quality affordable housing, none compare to the dire situation facing people that find themselves without a home for whatever reason. For that reason, the Programme for Government "Our Shared Future" commits to reducing and preventing homelessness and provides detail on how the Government will approach this challenge.

Homelessness is complex and causal factors and family circumstances vary considerably as do the responses needed. Homelessness is also inter-related with the other areas of the housing system and indeed with broader social and healthcare policy and service delivery. Therefore, a whole of Government approach will be required in dealing with this ongoing challenge.

In terms of my own Department's areas of responsibility one of the key issues to be addressed to resolve homelessness is to increase the supply of housing, particularly for those on the lowest incomes. To this end, the Programme for Government commits to the increased supply of public, social and affordable homes. In particular, we will increase the social housing stock by more than 50,000 with an emphasis on new builds.

The Programme for Government also recognises that many households experiencing homelessness have additional support needs and includes specific measures to address these needs. These include measures to help rough sleepers into sustainable accommodation, the continued expansion of Housing First, with a focus on the construction and acquisition of one-bed homes, and, importantly, ensuring that there are dedicated funding and resources to deliver the necessary health and mental health supports required to assist homeless people with complex needs.

Fire Safety

308. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if appropriate measures are in place in publicly-owned houses, flats and apartments to prevent residential fires; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14372/20]

309. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the prevalence of combustible construction materials and non-fire retardant paint in publicly-owned houses, flats and apartments; the extent to which these materials pose a residential fire risk; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14373/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 308 and 309 together.

The provision of a fire service in its functional area is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the Fire Services Acts, 1981 and 2003. My Department supports fire authorities through setting national policy, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters, providing capital funding for priority infrastructure projects and overseeing and administering a central national training programme.

A Fire Safety Task Force was established by my Department in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy. The Report of the Task Force, published in May 2018, highlights that in most buildings and circumstances the safest approach and the default option for all occupants of the building is to evacuate in the event of fire or alarm. Individual buildings should have fire safety strategies involving the in-built passive features, active fire protection systems (such as fire detection & alarm, and emergency lighting), and a complete building management approach, including management of fire safety to prevent fires occurring in the first place and maintenance of the building and its fire protection systems. In houses, flats and apartments, residents have a large part to play in prevention of fires, in particular through care with ignition sources.

In June 2017, as part of the Fire Safety Task Force Review, local authorities were asked by my Department to assess multi-storey, multi-unit social housings' fire detection and alarm systems, emergency lighting systems and common escape routes, including corridors, stairways and emergency exits, and to ensure that such systems are in place and fully functional.

The presence of fire detection and alarm systems was confirmed in 94% of these buildings with common escape routes. The presence of emergency lighting systems in common escape routes was confirmed in 93% of buildings, while 98% of buildings had unobstructed access/egress at the time of inspection. In those cases where deficiencies were found, housing authorities were requested to carry out repairs or remedial works as soon as practicable.

The design and construction of buildings, including standards of fire safety, is regulated under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014. The Acts provide for the making of Building Regulations and Building Control Regulations. One of the primary purposes for which the Building Regulations may be made is the health, safety and welfare of persons in and around buildings.

The Second Schedule of the Building Regulations 1997- 2017, sets out the statutory minimum performance requirements for the construction of new buildings (including dwellings) and extensions to existing buildings, as well as for material alterations and certain material changes of use to existing buildings. Part B of the Second Schedule of the Building Control Regulations and Technical Guidance Document B (of 2017 for dwelling houses, and of 2006 (reprint 2020) for other buildings) deal with fire safety – including provisions in respect of materials used in building construction.

The number of fire fatalities in buildings in Ireland has shown a welcome downward trend for a number of years. Provision of a working smoke alarm is the most important step people can take, to enhance fire safety in the home. My Department continues to emphasise this in its “STOP Fire” campaign which outlines that “Together we can STOP fire: Smoke alarms – Test alarms weekly – Obvious dangers – Plan your escape.”

The focus in Building Regulations is on protection of people rather than property, although fire safety measures designed to protect life may also have the benefit of protecting property. The Schedule of Building Regulations is comprised of twelve distinct parts, classified Parts A to M, each of which sets functional requirements for buildings or works e.g. structure, fire safety, energy conservation, accessibility etc. My Department publishes Technical Guidance Documents (TGDs) in relation to each of the twelve parts. These guidance documents set out how the legal requirements can be achieved in practice.

The primary responsibility for compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations, including fire safety, rests with the designers, builders and owners of buildings. Auditing and enforcement of the provisions of the Fire Services Act and Building Regulations is a function of the 31 local authorities, who have a suite of enabling and enforcement powers under both legislative codes.

Social and Affordable Housing

310. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the price paid per Part V unit in Dublin and each other county, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14374/20]

311. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the price paid for non-Part V social housing acquisitions in Dublin and each other county, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14375/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 310 and 311 together.

Cost information on local authority and approved housing body direct construction and

turnkeys, is collated by my Department at development level rather than at granular individual housing unit level. Disaggregating such development level information into individual unit costs, across all of the various types of units, would require significant analysis on unit characteristics such as size, type, number of bedrooms, site costs, abnormal costs, fees etc. to derive an accurate reflection of an average cost by unit.

My Department is working with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on a Spending Review of the social Housing Build programme for the period 2016-2019 which is expected to be published later this year. As part of this work, the Department's are working on extrapolating unit costs from raw data provided by local authorities.

Part V units can be delivered through a range of programmes funded by my Department, including;

- The Social Housing Capital Investment Programme (SHCIP)- LA led, 100% capital funded
- The Capital Assistance Scheme- AHB led, 100% capital funded
- The Capital Advance Leasing Facility- AHB led, range of 0% to 30% capital loan funded and ongoing lease under Payment and Availability Agreement (P&A)
- Social Housing Current Expenditure programme (SHCEP) Part V- generally LA- leased under current funding
- LA own funding or Cost neutral- these are Part V units delivered by LAs but not claimed from the Department.

Each programme has its own discreet data requirements and data held on file. The information requested, in the format of average unit costs by local authority, will require some time to collate, and will be made available as soon as possible.

Planning Issues

312. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the percentage of approved planning permissions which have construction under way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14376/20]

313. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average length of time between the granting of planning permission and completion of development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14377/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 312 and 313 together.

Planning statistics are compiled by each planning authority on an annual basis for collation and publication on my Department's website, at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/statistics/planning-statistics-1>

However, the data collected relate to the total number of applications and decisions for all developments that require planning permission, broken down by year and planning authority but are not broken down by development type. The specific national information across these categories in relation to the activation of planning permission is not collated.

In addition, the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical office, compiles

and makes available detailed data on a number of housing related issues including permissions granted and completions by development type and county. Data is available at the following links on the CSO website:

<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/construction/planningpermissions/>

https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Database/eirestat/New%20Dwelling%20Completions/New%20Dwelling%20Completions_statbank.asp?SP=New

My Department publishes data on the extent of residential dwellings subject to commencement notices, including a breakdown of the number of single dwelling notices. This information is available at:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-building-and-private-rented/construction-activity-starts>

In the case of the Dublin area, the four local authorities monitor the activation of planning permissions and data is reflected in the quarterly reports of the Dublin Housing Supply Coordination Task Force.

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/construction-2020-strategy/dublin-housing-supply-task-force/housing-supply-coordination-task>

My Department separately monitors activity on permissions granted through the Strategic Housing Development (SHD) process which relates to developments of 100 housing units or more, or student accommodation or shared accommodation developments of 200 bed spaces or more. Data up to the 31 May 2020, indicates that An Bord Pleanála granted permission on 136 SHD applications in respect of a total of 37,609 homes (comprising 10,204 houses, 21,630 apartments and 5,775 Build to Rent homes), 9,498 student bed spaces and 410 shared accommodation bed spaces and it is understood that commencement notices have been lodged in respect of 42 of these projects to date. On average commencement notices have been lodged for SHD within 6 months of a grant of permission.

Social and Affordable Housing

314. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if it is policy to deliver affordable housing at prices between €160,000 and €250,000; if the equity share of the State in the properties is included in these prices; if not, if it is additional to these prices; the equity share in same; and the all in development costs that will allow his Department to deliver affordable homes at these prices. [14388/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The delivery of affordable housing is a top priority for this Government and for me, as Minister. To this end, since taking up office, I am working within my Department and with all relevant stakeholders and delivery partners to ensure that new affordable homes are delivered, particularly in Dublin and other major urban areas, where people and families are facing the greatest housing access and affordability challenge.

In terms of affordable purchase, it is my intention that the new Scheme is finalised without delay and that the programme to build new affordable homes is accelerated and expanded. It is difficult to be definitive regarding the final purchase price of affordable homes at this point but I have clearly signalled to officials working on the Scheme in my department that the new homes must be affordable for the individuals and families that badly need them.

Importantly, a significant amount of the foundations are already in place. For example, under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF), €310 million has been allocated to provide infrastructure to support the delivery of more affordable homes on local authority lands. A maximum SSF funding amount of €50,000 is available per home. This sum comprises €44,500 (or 89%) Exchequer contribution and a €5,500 (or 11%) local authority contribution. On this basis, at least 6,200 affordable homes, to buy or rent, can be facilitated. This funding is being made available in areas where local authorities have demonstrated that a requirement exists for more affordable housing and it is viable to deliver such housing from their sites.

To date, SSF funding of €127 million has been allocated in support of 35 projects in 14 local authority areas. This will provide for infrastructure works that will support the delivery of almost 3,200 affordable homes. The selling price of homes that will be made available for purchase under the affordable dwelling purchase arrangements will obviously be influenced by a number of factors which will vary significantly from development to development. This includes the overall development cost of each particular development, the housing type/tenure mix involved and the local housing market. The majority of the projects approved for funding under the SSF are at the planning and design stage. As such, the final sales prices will not be fully determined until planning permission has been obtained and after the procurement process for construction of the development in question has been completed.

The most advanced, SSF funded, affordable housing project is at Boherboy Road in Cork City. The construction has commenced on the project, which includes 116 brand new energy efficient, 2 and 3 bedroom homes. The Council has confirmed these homes are expected to be made available to first time buyers at purchase prices ranging from c.€198,000 to €223,000. Under the terms of the Scheme encompassed in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009, a charge would be placed on the property equal to the percentage discount given from the open market value at the time of sale, with the housing authority taking a repayable equity stake in the property. In case of a 2-bed unit in the Boherboy development, sold to a purchaser for €198,000, if the open market value of that home is, for example, €230,000, a local authority equity charge of 13.9% would be placed on the property.

In addition to the range of existing measures, the Programme for Government makes clear, that the target for this Government will be to bring forward a range of measures to enable home ownership for more people through increased supply and interventions that make home to make home ownership more affordable. In particular, the Programme commits to the progression of a State-backed affordable home purchase scheme, which is a priority.

Invasive Plant Species

315. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if funding will be made available to Clare County Council to eradicate an extensive spread of Japanese knotweed on public lands in Kilkee, County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14389/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Pending the formal transfer of heritage functions in accordance with the Taoiseach's announcement on the appointment of Ministers, my Department currently has no function in relation to invasive alien species.

Environmental Protection Enforcement

316. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of tree preservation orders issued by the four Dublin local authorities in each of the years 2015 to 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14395/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The specific information requested in relation to tree preservation orders is no longer collated by my Department. However, individual local authorities may compile information in this regard. Data on tree preservation orders which was collected for the years 1998 to 2012 is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/statistics/planning-statistics-1>.

Housing Estates

317. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of applications by Kildare County Council for funding to complete a housing estate (details supplied) with developer provided infrastructure; when a decision will issue on the funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14424/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): In July 2019, my Department launched the multi-annual Developer-Provided Water Services Infrastructure Resolution Programme 2019-2021. Bids were sought from local authorities for funding under the programme and nineteen local authorities with Developer-Provided Water Services Infrastructure in estates in their areas made applications for funding. Kildare County Council included the estate referred to in its application.

My Department has completed a preliminary evaluation and clarification process on the bids received from the local authorities. An Expert Panel, which includes Departmental, stakeholder and independent representation, has been appointed to examine the bids. The Panel has held a number of meetings to date.

I expect that the Expert Panel will make recommendations to me shortly on the suitability of projects for funding under the programme. This will be based on criteria set out in the Framework document issued to local authorities when requesting proposals. It is expected that an announcement on approvals and allocations will be made once that process is concluded in the coming weeks.

Local Authority Housing

318. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social homes in counties Longford and Westmeath that have had works completed under the energy efficiency and retrofitting programme; the average cost per unit for a two, three and four bed and OPD, respectively; the remaining number of homes; and the estimated costs. [14484/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): My Department has provided funding for an Energy Efficiency Retrofitting Programme for local authority homes since 2013. The Programme has two phases, phase one, which covers the bulk of the work undertaken to date, focused on delivering immediate improvements such as cavity wall and attic insulation. Phase two targets higher cost measures, such as fabric up-

grades, window and door upgrades and the installation of photovoltaic panels and heat pumps.

To date under the programme, some €151m has been spent nationally, with over 72,000 social housing homes upgraded. In Longford, 890 homes have been upgraded to end-2019, while 2,113 homes were upgraded in Westmeath, with funding support of over €5.6m from my Department, combined.

The exchequer funding available to the local authorities under the social housing retrofit programme for 2020 is set at up to a maximum of €30,100 for a mid-terrace house or apartment and €34,600 for a property that is end-terrace, detached, semi-detached or a bungalow.

The cost of carrying out an energy retrofit on a social housing home varies considerably depending on factors such as dwelling size, year of construction, dwelling condition and construction type. My Department gathers data at programme level and does not collate granular level information on the cost associated with each individual property upgraded. This information may be available from the local authorities themselves.

Housing Adaptation Grant

319. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on an amendment to the legislation that results in a child with a profound physical disability not being eligible in one parent's home for the provision of level access shower for personal hygiene and toileting needs in view of the fact it is not considered their principal private residence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14485/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Regulations S.I. 670 of 2007 and S.I. 104 of 2014 provide the statutory basis for the operation of the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability. Article 8 of the Regulations provides that the applicant must occupy the house as his or her normal place of residence on completion of the works.

The administration of the grants scheme, including the assessment, approval and prioritisation of grant applications under the various measures, is the responsibility of each local authority. Having considered all of the circumstances in any particular case, it is a matter for the local authority to determine grant eligibility.

Ministerial Responsibilities

320. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will publish the departmental briefing paper on his role, remits and powers afforded to him upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14528/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): It is my intention to publish the briefing paper presented to me by my Department, subject to any redactions made in line with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2014. The brief will be available on the Department's website shortly.

Local Authority Housing

321. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment if the funding available for local authorities for the voids programme will be increased for 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14545/20]

322. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the funding available to Cavan County Council for the Voids Programme will be increased in view of the need to bring vacant social houses back to habitable condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14547/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 321 and 322 together.

The management and maintenance of local authority housing stock, including pre-letting repairs to vacant properties, the implementation of a planned maintenance programme and carrying out of responsive repairs, are matters for each individual local authority under Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966.

Since 2014, Exchequer funding has also been provided through my Department's Voids Programme to support local authorities in preparing vacant units for re-letting. This funding was initially introduced to tackle long term vacant units and is now increasingly targeted at ensuring minimal turnaround and re-let times for local authority vacant stock. During 2019, expenditure of some €26.6 million was recouped to local authorities under the Voids Programme.

Cavan County Council has received €1.65 million in funding under the Voids Programme from 2014 to 2019, supporting 137 units being returned to use.

There is a two stage process for allocations under the Voids Programme for 2020 in light of the impact of COVID-19. Firstly, on 26 May, there was an initial call for proposals for COVID-19 Voids funding for vacant units which were required for the emergency accommodation of qualified households arising from the need to prevent, limit, minimise or slow the spread of COVID-19. The majority of works approved under this element of the programme are complete. Cavan County Council submitted 8 properties for assessment under the Covid-19 Voids Programme and have received approval for all 8 properties. A second call for proposals, under the normal voids programme, will issue shortly.

There is a commitment under Rebuilding Ireland that local authorities will introduce a preventative maintenance approach to the management of their housing stock. My Department is working with local authorities to this end.

Social and Affordable Housing

323. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for affordable housing including the cost of an affordable house; if he will provide an update on the plans for Shanganagh Castle site, including details of the cost of the affordable homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14549/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Shanganagh site in is a good example of the type of major social and affordable housing scheme that we need to see built out in Dublin. This type of mixed-tenure major housing development on public land is a major priority for this Government and for myself as Minister.

In January, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (DLRCC), in partnership with the Land Development Agency, submitted an application for approval to An Bord Pleanála for the development of circa 9.69 hectares of land zoned for residential development within the

Woodbrook–Shanganagh Local Area Plan 2017–2023. The proposed development seeks the construction of 597 new homes, crèche facility, local shop and local cafe as well as a number of resident services and amenities. The new homes will be a mix of social housing, cost rental and affordable purchase.

An application was submitted to my Department for the proposed Shanganagh development in early 2019 under the Serviced Site Fund (SSF). Recognising the potential strategic value of the project, the development was deemed a ‘Project of Interest’ at that time and a future application under the SSF is anticipated.

In relation to the future provision of homes for purchase under the Affordable Purchase Scheme, €310 million was made available under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) to support the delivery of the homes by local authorities. This fund is intended to sub-vent the cost of facilitating infrastructure and a maximum 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, 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/>

The selling price of homes that will be made available for purchase under the affordable dwelling purchase arrangements will be influenced by a number of factors which will vary significantly from individual development to development. This includes the overall development cost of each particular development the housing type/tenure mix involved and the local housing market. The majority of the projects approved for funding under the SSF are at the planning and design stage. As such, the final sales prices will not be fully determined until planning permission has been obtained and after the procurement process for construction of the development in question has been completed.

Rental Sector

324. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to roll out cost rental housing; the way in which the allocation of these homes will work; the cost of the rents for these homes in particular the cost rental plans for the Enniskerry and Shanganagh Castle sites; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14550/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): As confirmed in the Programme for Government ‘Our Shared Future’, this Government is commit-

ted to the introduction of Cost Rental housing in Ireland. This recognises that renters in Dublin and other major urban centres are facing significant housing access and affordability challenges. Cost Rental is a fundamentally different housing proposal and represents a new tenure option. It is defined as housing where the rents charged cover the cost of delivering, managing, and maintaining the homes only. Cost Rental is not intended to overlap with or replace traditional social housing for low-income households. In developing this model, we are informed by international experience of the delivery of cost rental, such as the ‘Vienna Model’. At the core of this work is the development of a new long-term and sustainable form of rental properties for tenants and a sustainable model for the financing, construction and management of homes.

Initial work on Cost Rental is underway and in 2019 an inter-departmental multi-agency Cost Rental Working Group was convened in order to assess methods for the consistent and sustainable delivery Cost Rental at scale. The Group brings together representatives of relevant government departments, State agencies, and local government. The Group is evaluating potential funding models, including the use of public land and appropriate Exchequer inputs. The Group is also considering operational matters such as tenant eligibility.

This work will be assisted by a recently initiated research consultancy sponsored by the European Investment Bank on behalf of my Department. The EIB has extensive experience in supporting the delivery of affordable housing across Europe. The final Report is scheduled for completion in December.

Rents for Cost Rental homes, depend upon the overall cost of each individual development, and will vary according to the site and design specifics. However, value engineering with long-term maintenance in mind can put downward pressure on costs and help to make Cost Rental more affordable for tenants. If construction is to be funded by borrowing, it is crucial that Cost Rental providers obtain low-cost, stable finance that is repaid over a long period of time.

The first Cost Rental pilot development at Enniskerry Road, Stepside, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, is being undertaken by the Tuath and Respond Approved Housing Bodies, with the assistance of DLR County Council. The mixed-tenure development comprises 50 Cost Rental homes alongside 105 social housing homes. The Cost Rental homes at this site are supported by zero-cost land supplied by the Housing Agency, an infrastructure grant from my Department’s Serviced Site Fund and debt financing from the Housing Finance Agency. Construction began on the site in July 2019 with delivery scheduled for Q3 2021.

The other proposed Cost Rental development referred to by the Deputy, at Shanganagh Castle, is currently in the initial planning stage with Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council working in partnership with the Land Development Agency. This is utilising Council-owned land and Shanganagh is proposed as a mixed-tenure development. It is envisaged that approximately 300 Cost Rental homes will be constructed, alongside approximately 200 social housing homes and 100 homes for sale under the Affordable Purchase scheme. A planning proposal for this site was lodged with An Bord Pleanála in January 2020. While the final cost of rents will vary according to the ultimate cost of provision of the homes they are expected to be significantly lower than open market rates for the area.

Rental Sector

325. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to provide the funds and work with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and or an approved housing body to purchase an apartment block (details supplied) in Dún Laoghaire in which ten apartments have been empty for three years and the other apart-

ments that have tenants were served with eviction notices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14551/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Delivering social housing is a major priority for this Government as evidenced by the commitments made in the Programme for Government “Our Shared Future”. My Department works closely with all Dublin local authorities to support them in this regard. To this end, funding is available to deliver additional social housing stock through a range of initiatives, including, where appropriate, the acquisition or leasing of new and previously owned houses/apartments from the private market.

As housing authorities, it is a matter for each local authority to determine, in the first instance, the suitability of any homes for acquisition or leasing, to meet local social housing needs. In this regard, local authorities consider a range of issues, including unit size, fostering sustainable communities and value for money.

As such, it is a matter for Dun-Laoghaire Rathdown County Council to determine, in the first instance the most appropriate response to the need for social housing supports in their area and to make the necessary application to my Department. No such application in relation to this development has been made thus far.

Social and Affordable Housing

326. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will discuss with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and the Department of Education and Skills, the land which could be made available to the local authority on the eastern side of the county from the Department that would be suitable for housing when the Department takes over Georges Place for the planned Dún Laoghaire Educate Together permanent school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14552/20]

327. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will ensure the ring-fencing of money for capital expenditure on housing in the event of the land at George’s Place in Dún Laoghaire being sold to the Department of Education and Skills; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14553/20]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 326 and 327 together.

The delivery of social and affordable homes in Dublin, and other major urban areas, where people face the greatest access and affordability challenge is a top priority for this government. To this end, my Department works closely with all Dublin local authorities including Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council.

As housing authorities, it is important that each local authority assesses the suitability of any lands that may be available for its housing development programme to meet local needs and seeks to progress such proposals. For my part, my Department and its Agencies will support local authorities.

Funding is available to deliver additional social and affordable housing stock from my Department through a range of initiatives. My Department will consider applications for capital expenditure funding for housing under its range of programmes.

Question No. 328 answered with Question No. 268.

Local Authority Rates

329. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will provide a rates waiver for all theatres and live entertainment venues until they can reopen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14562/20]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin): While the core funding of local authorities is a matter for my Cabinet colleague the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the principal mechanism through which my Department directly supports arts and culture at local authority level is the Creative Ireland Programme. Creative Ireland is a culture-based programme led by my Department and designed to promote individual, community and national wellbeing. Its core proposition is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal wellbeing and achievement.

Under Pillar 2 of the Programme – ‘Enabling Creativity in Every Community’ – each local authority has published a 5-year Culture and Creativity Strategy, as well as establishing a Culture Team led by a Creative Ireland Coordinator to oversee its implementation. My Department, together with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government have, over the course of 2018 and 2019, allocated total funding of €6.549 million to all 31 local authorities to enable them to implement their individual strategies through extensive programmes of activities, events and initiatives. The same level of core funding which was provided last year (€3 million) is also being made available to local authorities in 2020 to enable them to continue the implementation of their strategies.

Furthermore, since 2018 each local authority has also been provided with additional funding by my Department to support the delivery of Cruinniú na nÓg – the national day of free creative activities for children and young people under 18 years of age. The funding provided over the course of 2018 and 2019 to support Cruinniú na nÓg activities amounted to a total of €1.406 million, while for 2020, a sum of €15,000 has been allocated to each local authority with the four Dublin local authorities awarded €75,000 each. As the Deputy will be aware, in response to the public health restrictions in place, on June 13 last Cruinniú na nÓg 2020 was delivered online, and each local authority contributed to making it a huge success.

The matter of funding measures under the Creative Ireland Programme for 2021 and 2022 will be agreed in the context of Programme priorities for those years and, as the Deputy will appreciate, are subject to annual budgetary and estimates processes. However, in the recently agreed Programme for Government – Our Shared Future – the Government parties have committed to fostering further collaboration between local authorities and local arts organisations through the Creative Communities Pillar of the Creative Ireland Programme.

In recognition of their key role in supporting and funding the arts at local level, local authorities have long been key strategic partners of the Arts Council – evidenced by the publication of “A Framework for Collaboration”, a 10-year strategy between the Arts Council and the County and City Management Association (CCMA), which reflects on the value of the partnership to date and sets out a vision and broad goals to be progressed for the period 2016 to 2025. The Arts Council also provides funding to local authorities, supporting the programmes of Arts Offices in each local authority, as well funding a range of other initiatives, events and festivals which are carried out in partnership with local authorities and artists in every local authority area.

The question of funding provided by the Arts Council to support local authority arts programmes will be the subject of the annual budgetary process, as well as the Council’s own

internal procedures for the allocation of its annual budget.

Finally, recent decades have seen the development of a nationwide infrastructure of arts centres, many of which were initiated and funded by local authorities and supported through capital schemes largely operated by my Department. Support provided to these arts centres by local authorities is critical to ensuring that a stable and vibrant network can be maintained. Capital funding schemes operated by my Department continue to be focused on enhancing this existing stock of arts and culture centres throughout the country. Recent capital schemes are being informed by the strategic Review of Arts Centres and Venues commissioned by the Arts Council and CCMA, as well as the Arts Council's published Arts Centre Policy and Strategy 2019 which sets out its funding criteria for arts centres from 2020 onwards.

Programme for Government

330. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will provide detailed information on the roll out of the affordable services sites in the programme for Government. [14573/20]

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 was 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 legislative provisions regulations are currently being prepared covering eligibility and other operational 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 subvents 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 works 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 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/>

On 16th November 2019, the sod was officially turned on a housing development at Bo-

herboy in Cork City, the first such scheme to be delivered under the SSF. This project will see the development of 153 mixed tenure homes in total, of which 116 will be affordable homes. Cork City Council has advised this Department that the project will be delivered in six different phases, with the first phase to be delivered in the 1st quarter of 2021.

Under this Government's tenure the delivery of affordable homes under the SSF and through all other mechanisms will be accelerated and expanded.

The Programme for Government commits to putting affordability at the heart of the housing system and the progression of a State-backed affordable home purchase scheme to promote home ownership is a priority.

Foreign Conflicts

331. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts being made at EU and international level to address the growing humanitarian crisis in Yemen; the steps Ireland has taken in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13738/20]

335. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the actions taken by Ireland to date in the European Union and the United Nations to address the worsening humanitarian crisis in Yemen; if he has further plans to raise this issue internationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13862/20]

343. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the unfolding humanitarian disaster in Yemen; the actions he plans to take to highlight this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14290/20]

344. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the humanitarian and political situation in Yemen; if Ireland will donate humanitarian aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14309/20]

351. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the aid given to Yemen will be increased in view of the ongoing humanitarian crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14384/20]

352. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the blockade of Yemen; if he has raised the issue at international forums; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14385/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 331, 335, 343, 344, 351 and 352 together.

Yemen remains the world's worst humanitarian crisis, driven by conflict, economic collapse and the breakdown of public institutions and services. 24 million people, 80 per cent of the population, are in need of humanitarian assistance.

In both 2019 and 2020 Ireland has provided €5 million in funding to the United Nations Yemen Humanitarian Fund (YHF). This Fund mobilises and channels funding to NGOs and UN agencies which have the capacity and are best placed to deliver lifesaving assistance to the most vulnerable. In total Ireland has given over €27 million in humanitarian aid directly to Yemen since 2015.

Ireland also provides significant humanitarian funding at the global level, including to the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund. Ireland is one of the top ten contributors to the CERF

since its establishment in 2006. In 2019, the CERF provided €32 million in funding to Yemen.

As a Member State of the EU, Ireland also contributes to the EU response to the crisis in Yemen. Since the beginning of the conflict in 2015, the EU has allocated €484 million in humanitarian aid.

The roots of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen lies in conflict. Ireland and the EU fully support the efforts of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, to bring about a political resolution to the conflict. The UN Secretary General's call in March, later affirmed by the Security Council in Resolution 2532, for a global ceasefire gave a renewed impetus to this work.

I welcome efforts made towards a Joint Declaration between the Government of Yemen and the Houthis which would commit the parties to a nationwide ceasefire, bring forward a number of economic and humanitarian measures, and resume a political process. However, despite the Special Envoy's efforts over the last three months, agreement has still not been reached.

The cycle of violence continues and has even increased in some areas. I condemn the recent indiscriminate attack on Saudi cities claimed by the Houthis. I also condemn the Coalition air strikes on cities in Yemen. Ireland calls again on the parties to the conflict to comply fully with their obligations under international humanitarian law, and to continue their engagement with the Special Envoy with a view to agreeing a declaration and ceasefire that will be in the best interests of the people of Yemen.

Full, secure and unimpeded access for humanitarian and health workers and supplies to all parts of Yemen, in the spirit of Resolution 2532, would allow lifesaving assistance to reach those in greatest need.

Human Rights

332. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps taken at EU level to protect the LGBT community in Poland; if measures have been taken by the EU against Poland in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13739/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am concerned regarding developments relating to the LGBTI+ community 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.

At EU level, the European Parliament has adopted a number of Resolutions relating to LGBTI+ rights including some with specific references to Poland. This includes a Resolution adopted in December 2019 on “public discrimination and hate speech against LGBTI people, including LGBTI+ free zones”.

In February of this year, European Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli reiterated that the Commission condemns any form of violence, hatred or discrimination against LGBTI+ people, and that the Commission will not hesitate to take any necessary action within the limits conferred on it by the Treaties. More recently, the European Commission has written to the heads of regional government in a number of Polish provinces to remind them of their responsibility to comply with the principle of non-discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

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 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 is also one of a number of diplomatic representations who sign an annual letter in support of the Warsaw Equality Parade and other such parades around Poland. The letter, in addition to affirming the inherent dignity of every individual in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, also expresses support for efforts to raise public awareness of issues affecting the LGBTI+ community and other communities in Poland. The letter is presented to the Prime Minister's Chancellery. 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.

Covid-19 Pandemic

333. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if changes can be made on the requirements for a working holiday authorisation for a person (details supplied) who was unable to leave the State during the Covid-19 lockdown as required. [13745/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Working Holiday Agreement (WHA) with Canada gives young people from Ireland and Canada the opportunity to live and work in the other country. The Agreement reflects the excellent relationship we enjoy with Canada and contributes further to that relationship by fostering increased personal, cultural and professional ties between our peoples.

The individual referred to by the Deputy was issued with a Working Holiday Authorisation by our Embassy in Ottawa on 5 July 2018. In accordance with the Agreement, it is a condition that the permission shall be for a period not exceeding 24 months after the initial entry into Ireland, without the possibility of extension.

Holders of a Working Holiday Authorisation, as per the terms and conditions of their WHA, must leave the State on expiry of the WHA. They cannot apply for an employment permit whilst in the State. WHA holders may consider submitting an application for an employment permit from outside the State, upon expiration or cancellation of their WHA, and on foot of an eligible job offer. This will be considered by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment subject to the usual criteria applying under the Employment Permits Acts and Regulations.

Considerable flexibility has been shown to those holding WHA authorisations and who were unable to leave the State owing to the disruption caused by COVID-19. On 20 March, the Department of Justice's Immigration Service Delivery announced that, in light of these uncertainties, permissions to remain in Ireland that were due to expire between 20 March and 20 May would be automatically extended for two months. Subsequently on 13 May, it was announced that permissions due to expire between 20 May and 20 July would be automatically extended for an additional two months. These extensions apply to those on permissions related to the WHA. As a result, notwithstanding the uncertainty brought about by the pandemic, the terms and conditions of Working Holiday Authorisations which preclude applications for employment permits within the State continue to apply.

With direct air connectivity to Canada having resumed as of 1 July 2020, it remains practicable for Canadian citizens wishing to apply for an employment permit, following the expiration of their Working Holiday visa, to return to Canada and to apply from there.

Passport Applications

334. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of an application for Irish passports for the children of an Irish citizen (details supplied); and the way in which the person should now apply for renewal of their Irish passport which expired on 22 May 2020 in the context of their circumstances. [13836/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Officials from the Embassy of Ireland in Rome were in contact with the brother of the applicant in question in November 2019 and in January and March 2020. An official from the Embassy also spoke directly to the brother of the applicant on the phone on the 3 July 2020 to help him with any questions he had and to outline that new applications and additional supporting documentation are required from the applicant in order to process these applications.

The Embassy will arrange for the applications to be prioritised once the new applications and supporting documentation are received. The Embassy remains available to help the applicant with any further questions they have on the applications for these children.

In terms of the renewal of the applicant's own passport which expired in May 2020, this renewal can be done directly through the Passport Online service without the need to submit any documentation to the Embassy of Ireland in Rome. When the passport is produced it will be sent to the Embassy which will then liaise with the applicant on arranging for it to be sent by courier to her address in Libya.

Question No. 335 answered with Question No. 331.

Human Rights

336. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps Ireland is taking to defend the human rights of the Uighur population in China; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13867/20]

341. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to a recent report (details supplied) which concludes that the Chinese Government has been engaging in a campaign of mass female sterilisation in rural Uyghur regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14143/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 336 and 341 together.

Ireland and our EU partners remain deeply concerned about the credible reports of the treatment of ethnic Uighurs and other minorities in the Xinjiang region, including arbitrary detentions, widespread surveillance, restrictions on freedom of religious belief, and recent media reports on forced sterilisation in the region. We have raised our concerns with China in both bilateral and multilateral contexts, and, along with other EU partners, we will continue to do so.

On 30 June 2020 Ireland was one of 27 States to sign up to a Joint Statement at the UN Human Rights Council which reiterates these concerns, and highlights that they have been re-

inforced by recent additional information now in the public domain. The statement urges China to allow the High Commissioner for Human Rights meaningful access to Xinjiang at the earliest opportunity.

Ireland has previously joined a Joint Statement at the UN Third Committee in October 2019, and a Joint Letter at the UN Human Rights Council in July 2019, which outlined our concerns in the region. The Joint Statement called for the Chinese Government to urgently implement eight recommendations made by the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination related to Xinjiang, including by refraining from the arbitrary detention of Uighurs and members of other Muslim communities. The Joint Letter called on the Chinese government to uphold its international obligations, and to respect human rights in Xinjiang.

In addition to this, the matter is raised consistently at EU level, most recently at the EU-China Summit on 22 June 2020, and in an EU intervention at the current session of the Human Rights Council.

The protection and promotion of human rights is a core pillar of Ireland's foreign policy, and Ireland will continue to monitor the situation and, along with our EU partners, engage with Chinese authorities bilaterally and in multilateral fora as appropriate.

Programme for Government

337. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if he will provide documents on those costings. [14031/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department, which has responsibility for Vote 27 (International Cooperation) and Vote 28 (Foreign Affairs and Trade), is currently examining the detail of the Programme for Government. My Department will prepare a new Statement of Strategy which will encompass the Programme for Government commitments. The cost of the delivery of this Strategy will be met from the Department's Vote allocations. My Department will engage on this with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform as part of the annual Budget estimates process.

Consultancy Contracts

338. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within his Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14056/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, I am committed to progressing the values of diversity and inclusion and promoting a fair and equal workplace for our people. My Department works to ensure that our staff and workplace are representative and reflective of the people and society it serves. A number of training programmes to raise awareness and build the capacity of our staff in the areas of diversity and inclusion were carried out in recent years as detailed in the following table.

The procurement of this training was carried out in line with relevant national procurement legislation and EU Directives. The Department complies with the procedures for public procurement laid down in the Public Procurement Guidelines for Goods and Services published by

the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform in January 2019.

| Name of Organisation | Training Provided | Date | Cost |
|------------------------------------|--|------|-----------|
| Bridge Interpreting | Sign language Training | 2018 | €2,559.20 |
| O'Herlihy Access Consultancy Ltd | Disability Liaison Officer Training | 2019 | €675.00 |
| AsIAM | Autism Awareness Training (2 sessions) | 2019 | €1,000.00 |
| Gerry Sharvin Training Consultancy | Disability Awareness Training | 2019 | €1,980.00 |
| Irish Deaf Society | Sign Language Training | 2019 | €250.00 |
| Irish Deaf Society | Sign Language Training | 2020 | €1,210.00 |

Departmental Legal Costs

339. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the expenditure his Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14073/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department generally seeks advice on domestic legal matters from the Office of the Attorney General and/or the Chief State Solicitor's Office.

Depending on the subject matter, litigation is dealt with on my Department's behalf by the Attorney General's Office, the Chief State Solicitor's Office or the State Claims Agency which engage lawyers to act for the Department where necessary. The costs of any external solicitors or counsel engaged for such matters are not charged to my Department's Votes.

The expenditure incurred in respect of external legal fees in each year since January 2016 is presented in the following table:

| Year | Name | Cost |
|------|---------------|-----------|
| 2019 | Byrne Wallace | €2,339.95 |

The Department's Missions abroad engage local legal advisers from time to time to deal with a range of miscellaneous matters.

Foreign Birth Registration

340. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of processing times of foreign birth registrations; if a delay has been caused by the Covid-19 pandemic; his plans for the service in the coming period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14123/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Foreign Births Registration (FBR) team was reassigned to our consular services at the beginning of the current public health emergency to operate a COVID-19 crisis call centre, assisting our citizens abroad.

Foreign Births Registration, by its nature, can be a detailed and complex process, often involving official documentation related to three generations and issued by several jurisdictions. The Department has seen an increase in the number of applications received, from approximately 6,000 applications in 2015 to over 32,000 in 2019. Almost 10,000 applications have been submitted to date this year. There are currently 27,000 applications waiting to be processed.

Applications that have been sent to the FBR team are being held securely and will be processed when normal services resume later in the summer. The expected processing time for FBR applications is between 12 and 18 months.

Question No. 341 answered with Question No. 336.

Human Rights

342. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussion he has had with his European counterparts regarding reports of evictions and demolition of more than 900 shacks in the municipality of eThekweni, Durban during the Covid-19 emergency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14280/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The increasing spread and impact of COVID-19 in South Africa is of serious concern. The Government of South Africa adopted early and extraordinary measures in response to the pandemic and Ireland has been closely monitoring the situation, including the human rights implications of COVID-19, through our Embassy in Pretoria.

I am aware that the Government of South Africa introduced a moratorium on evictions for the duration of its national lockdown in recognition of the heightened risks of homelessness and rough sleeping during the pandemic. I am also aware of reports of evictions from informal settlements during this time, including in eThekweni, and more recently in Cape Town. Reports of the use of violence and excessive force during these evictions are of concern. South Africa has a robust civil society and strong legal system, and I understand that civil society-led actions challenging the legality of the evictions are underway. We will continue to monitor the situation, and the wider impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the response in South Africa, over the coming period.

Ireland has pledged €400,000 to support the United Nations' Flash Appeal for COVID-19 response in South Africa. Ireland's Embassy in Pretoria also works on an ongoing basis with civil society partners, supporting their efforts to promote human rights and good governance priorities, including access to justice. In 2020, this includes support for a range of COVID-response activities, such as the deployment of community human rights monitors.

The Governments of Ireland and South Africa share a commitment to democracy, human rights, good governance, tolerance and respect for the rule of law and we engage regularly with the Government of South Africa on these issues. The European Union and its Member States cooperate on a joint Human Rights Strategy in South Africa, which entails regular engagement with the Government of South Africa, including regular Human Rights Dialogues. Human rights issues will be raised on the agenda of a forthcoming EU-South Africa Ministerial Political Dialogue, as well as the EU-South Africa Summit, scheduled to take place later this year.

Covid-19 Pandemic

345. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if an official travel restriction will be considered to allow persons to avail of their travel insurance in view of the strong advice from NPHEA against non-essential foreign travel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14361/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy will be aware, the Department of Foreign Affairs publishes Travel Advice for over 200 countries. The advice provides an objective assessment of the risks individuals could face if travelling overseas, with a view to helping them to make informed decisions for themselves.

The Travel Advice is based on consultation with our Embassies and Consulates on the ground, the relevant local authorities in each country and our international partners, together with our domestic partners where appropriate. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the priority of protecting public health, we have cooperated particularly closely with the Department of Health and the HSE.

In mid-March of this year, my Department issued a general advisory for the public to avoid all non-essential travel overseas, and the security status rating for each country was amended to reflect this advice. This advice initially applied until March 29, and was subsequently extended until further notice. The Government continues to advise against all non-essential travel overseas. This advice remains under regular review.

As the Deputy will appreciate, while we are currently advising against non-essential travel overseas, we are not in a position to advise as to whether any individual citizen's trip is essential or otherwise. Any issues relating to terms and conditions of flights, holiday packages, insurance policies or refunds should be pursued directly with the airline, tour operator or insurer. These are not a matter for the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Restrictions or requirements for travel into the State are of course a matter for other Departments.

Departmental Functions

346. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the new functions, units or work areas his Department has gained; the functions, units and work areas which have been moved to other Departments; the destination for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14369/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The transfer of functions between Departments is governed by the Ministers and Secretaries Act and will be determined by a Government Decision and resulting Transfer of Functions Order under Section 6 of that Act.

Detailed provisions on managing the transfer of functions are set out in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Transfer of Functions – Guidelines and Best Practice Handbook.

In line with the document, my Department has established a group to implement the transfer

of trade-related responsibilities and is working with Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation to identify detailed arrangements for the transfer.

My Department expects that arrangements will be agreed subject to Government approval within the timelines set out.

Foreign Conflicts

347. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his assessment of recent reports of the illegal collation of secret files on civil society organisations, including human rights defenders, the press and others in Colombia; if the embassy in Colombia will monitor investigations into the alleged gathering of secret files on civil society organisations; if the creation of an international commission including the participation of the UN and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to support and oversee investigations into illegal intelligence gathering and misuse by Colombian state authorities will be supported; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14380/20]

348. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the conflict between armed groups in Rio Quito in Chocó, Colombia and the impact this is having on the local population and the environment; if he will direct the embassy to make representations to the Colombian Government on the safety and security of the affected communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14381/20]

349. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps the embassy in Colombia is taking to monitor the progress of the peace process and the disarmament of neo-paramilitary groups in the Chocó and Urabá regions in Colombia; if the embassy is giving support to the National Commission for Security Guarantees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14382/20]

350. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the embassy in Colombia is supporting the implementation of the environmental action plan for Chocó, developed in response to the landmark T-622 decision of 2016 by the Colombian Constitutional Court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14383/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 347 to 350, inclusive, together.

I am concerned at the persistent high levels of violence in some areas of Colombia, including in the Chocó and Urabá regions, and the effect that this is having on local populations and the environment. The signing of a peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP in 2016 led to a substantial reduction in conflict in Colombia but local conflicts between illegal armed groups, and between these groups and the security forces, continue. During the pandemic, the conflicts have increased in the aforementioned areas as well as in a number of other locations.

I am pleased that the international community is addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on conflict and welcome the recent United Nations Security Council Resolution on that issue. I would like to reiterate the UN Secretary General’s call for humanitarian ceasefires during the pandemic.

Ireland has supported peace-building in Colombia since discussions took place in Havana leading to the peace agreement and we will continue to do so. We have been clear, in all our discussions with the Colombian Government, that an integral implementation of the agreement

will be most effective in stabilising these post-conflict areas where violence persists. This includes the regular convening of the National Commission for Security Guarantees and a more holistic view of how to ensure the security of local communities. We have also emphasized to the Colombian Government the importance of increasing the presence of the State in these areas to ensure access to basic services and to build communities' confidence in the ability of the State to protect them.

The effects of this ongoing violence on local populations are unacceptable, with increases in displacement and the killing of leaders and human rights defenders. Our Embassy in Bogotá is continuing to work closely with other members of the international community to convey our concerns to the Colombian Government and to work with them to strengthen implementation of the peace agreement. We believe that providing services to post-conflict communities, in particular through building local economies to provide alternatives to membership of armed groups, alongside crop substitution programmes to reduce drug production, should form part of this holistic response.

The Embassy has participated in monitoring visits to areas of concern, including a visit to Chocó in 2019, and works with its partner, Peace Brigades International, to follow developments in terms of Human Rights and to offer support to Human Rights Defenders. In addition to monitoring the situation, Ireland has contributed to the implementation of the peace agreement by financing both the European Union Trust Fund and the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund, which work with Government on implementation projects. We also support civil society organisations through our grant to Christian Aid and aim to strengthen human rights in Colombia through support to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) office in the country. Ireland has contributed over €14 million in support of the Colombian peace process since 2007.

I am aware of the ruling which grants the Rio Atrato, which flows through Chocó to the gulf of Uraba, a form of legal personality in order to strengthen the environmental protection of the area. Ireland is not directly supporting the implementation of the environmental action plan for Chocó but, as a member of the European Union, contributes to a number of environmental projects. In 2019, 26 projects for over €68 million were either in implementation or about to start. A previous project on sustainable fishing in the Atrato region was successfully concluded and a new forestry project is being considered. Our Embassy will continue to work with the EU delegation in country to ensure that supports to environmental projects, including the regional action plans, are developed and implemented.

I am also aware of the reports to which the Deputy refers regarding the collection of information on civil society organisations, human rights defenders, journalists and other groups in Colombia. Our Embassy in Bogotá has been monitoring the situation since reports came to light in January. Last month, Ambassador Milton participated in an EU Heads of Mission meeting with the Minister of Defence, Carlos Holmes Trujillo, where he outlined the Government's response. President Duque has been clear that he is taking a zero tolerance response to the illegal collation of secret files. An internal investigation, started in December, is ongoing and the Ministry of Defence is sharing information with the Attorney General and Inspector General. A number of resignations from the Armed Forces, linked to the events, have taken place. The Embassy will continue to follow the situation closely, working with civil society partners, and will consider any requests for assistance including proposals for the involvement of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and OHCHR.

Questions Nos. 351 and 352 answered with Question No. 331.

Ministerial Responsibilities

353. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will publish the departmental briefing paper on his role, remits and powers afforded to him upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14526/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will be arranging for the publication of briefing material, in accordance with the usual procedures, provided to me as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, upon my appointment to the Cabinet.

Programme for Government

354. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Defence the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if he will provide documents on those costings. [14027/20]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The recently agreed Programme for Government contains a range of actions concerning the defence sector that will be implemented over the lifetime of the Programme. The potential cost implications arising from implementation of the actions will be determined in the context of the normal planning, estimates and budgetary cycles governed by any relevant separate Government decisions where these are required. It should be noted that actions outlined in the Programme may not, of themselves, have significant cost implications, or, would be provided for within the existing annual resource envelope.

Consultancy Contracts

355. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Defence the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within his Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14052/20]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department utilises a range of learning and development resources delivered by Department staff and through the Civil Service training body, One Learning. This is occasionally supplemented by external providers. In terms of external costs incurred for diversity and inclusion training, unconscious bias training was provided in 2019 by Shannon Consulting at a cost of €1,700.

Departmental Legal Costs

356. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Defence the expenditure his Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14069/20]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The expenditure incurred by my Department in respect of external legal fees in each of the years 2016 to 2019 and to date in 2020 is set out in the following table

| Year | Amount |
|------|-----------|
| 2016 | €9,213.67 |

| | |
|------|------------|
| 2017 | €40.00 |
| 2018 | €645.75 |
| 2019 | Nil |
| 2020 | €71,300.54 |

The Chief State Solicitor's Office is responsible for the costs of the State's legal teams in litigation cases that it manages on behalf of my Department. The State Claims Agency (SCA) manages and provides legal representation in relation to personal injury cases taken against the Minister for Defence. External legal costs incurred by the SCA arising from the defence of any claims managed by the Agency for my Department are refunded to the Agency by the Department.

Defence Forces Records

357. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Defence if his Department will supply historic details of the social insurance record of a person (details supplied) that requires this information in order for the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to carry out a review of the rate of payment of widower's contributory pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14160/20]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has examined the matter and I can confirm that the required information was posted to the person in question on 2 July 2020.

Naval Service

358. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Defence the number of aircraft handlers in the Naval Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14303/20]

359. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Defence the number of aircraft handler posts vacant in the Naval Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14304/20]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 358 and 359 together.

I am advised by the military authorities that there is no provision in the Naval Service establishment for aircraft handlers. The requirement for specific appointments in the Naval Service will be kept under review.

Naval Service

360. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Defence the status of the replacing of the LÉ Eithne; if a contract for the replacement of the vessel will be put out to tender in the second half of 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14305/20]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The White Paper on Defence sets out an ambitious programme of capital investment including mid-life refit and upgrade of the P50 class vessels, LÉ Róisín and LÉ Niamh, as well as, in due course, the replacement of LÉ Eithne. The P50 mid-life upgrade programme is well underway. The replacement of the flagship

LÉ Eithne with a multi role vessel (MRV) is the next scheduled component of the White Paper fleet investment programme. Projects for other vessel replacement will be considered over the life-time of the White Paper in the context of overall capability development and funding and the Equipment Development Plan (EDP) process. The EDP outlines that the MRV project is in planning ongoing stage within the indicative timeframe of 2020 to 2024.

Naturally, concurrent progression of all projects included in the White Paper is not possible within the capital funding envelope available to Defence, and as a result, some projects such as the replacement of LÉ Eithne are planned to commence later in the ten-year life-span of the White Paper. This project is being managed by a civil-military project team and work is ongoing on the pre-tender concept of operations stage and on preparing a detailed specification of capability requirements for a tender competition.

Army Equitation School

361. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Defence the full year cost of purchasing ten extra horses for the Defence Forces equitation school; his views regarding the number of Defence Forces personnel and civilian staff attached to the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14365/20]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The mission of the Army Equitation School is to promote the Irish horse through participation in international competition at the highest level. The Equitation School has discharged this task with considerable distinction down through the years and, through its participation and numerous successes in equitation events at home and abroad, it has successfully promoted the qualities of the Irish horse.

The Army Equitation School continues to source suitable Irish bred horses that meet the required standard as judged by the School's Horse Purchase Board. Horses are acquired through either purchase or lease agreement.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is difficult to predict the number of future acquisitions and the purchase price of any horse varies depending on a number of factors including age, ability, temperament etc.

With the COVID 19 Pandemic impacting on the ability of the Horse Purchase Board to convene, there have been no new horses purchased to date in 2020.

The current personnel strength of the School is 31, comprising seven Officers (including four Riding Officers), seven Non-Commissioned Officers and 17 Privates.

I am satisfied that the current arrangements allow the School to maintain its competitiveness at national and international events in fulfilment of its mission.

Ministerial Responsibilities

362. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Defence if he will publish the departmental briefing paper on his role, remits and powers afforded to him upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14522/20]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): A copy of the Ministerial Brief, provided following my appointment as Minister for Defence, will be published shortly on my Department's website. Where there are any redactions, these will be in line with the provisions of the

English Language Training Organisations

363. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to safeguard the English language teaching sector in view of the difficulties faced due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the potential decrease in revenue for the industry as a whole for 2020, reportedly in the region of 80%; her views on the continued implementation of provision of funding in line with a document (details supplied) to protect and enhance the reputation of Ireland and the English language industry from abroad; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13722/20]

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.

As part of the response to the pandemic, my Department 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 the loss of revenue experienced by their members and their proposals, such as those continued in the document in question, 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://dbe.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

Engagement with provider representatives will continue as this sector moves towards its full re-opening and continues on a path to recovery.

Special Educational Needs

364. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the guidelines for admission to the July provision scheme for children with Down's syndrome; her views on a potential shortage in tutors for the scheme due to increased numbers seeking access to same; the steps she has taken to ensure children are not excluded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13726/20]

475. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding access to the July provision scheme for preschool, primary school and post-primary school

pupils with Down's syndrome; her plans to include preschool and secondary school in the 2021 allocation of the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14584/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 364 and 475 together.

Covid-19 has presented an unprecedented global challenge for all of society, including our children. Learning has been challenging for many students since school buildings closed.

In response my Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

Summer Provision 2020 is a discrete response to Covid-19 and 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.

My Department has been flexible in its approach to the programme so as to maximise the number of children participating. In-school or home-based supports can now be delivered in July or August. Where Parents cannot secure the services of tutor they can engage an SNA to provide care support.

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:

- Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
- Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
- Any child in special school or a special class in a Primary School
- Children transitioning into a special class or special school 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

Following a decision from Cabinet this week the home based summer programme is also open to children with down syndrome who are attending post primary school.

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.

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

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>*

Full information on summer provision and its various strands, including guidance information for parents, is available at:

Gov.ie/summerprovision

Schools Building Projects

365. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of progress on a building project for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13749/20]

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

My Department is currently finalising the project brief with the aim of progressing the project into the architectural planning process shortly.

In that regard, my Department will also be in direct contact with the school authority regarding the project.

Emergency Works Scheme

366. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding is being made available for urgent repair works for a school (details supplied) to ensure the works are completed while the school is closed for the summer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13754/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I would like to inform the

Deputy that an application for funding for roof works under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme has been approved for the school in question. As this is a devolved project it is a matter for the school authority to progress the works.

Physical Education

367. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her Department has received applications and-or proposals from local schools or organisations in east County Meath for a municipal sports centre and running track; if so, the stage the application and or proposals are at; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13767/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has received the proposals to which he refers. However, I also wish to inform him that my Department does not provide funding for athletics facilities. I would advise him to refer the matter to the Minister for Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gael-tacht in that context.

Schools Building Projects

368. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason payment for works at a school (details supplied) has not been issued to the contractor that conducted the works at the school; if there is an issue with the school drawing down the funding; if it has already done so; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13768/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that funding was approved under the Additional Accommodation Scheme to enable the school in question to build a two classroom SEN base.

Following receipt of the final drawdown paperwork it was noted that the school submitted additional costings which were not approved by the Department. The Department has since liaised with the school and agreed to pay the final tranche of the approved grant aid at this time. The unforeseen costs during construction are currently under consideration and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

School Staff

369. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary schools nationwide which will lose teachers in September 2020 due to the reduction in class numbers by county; the number of teachers being lost from each school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13782/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I am very conscious of the staffing schedule and the need to prioritise teacher allocations in primary schools given their vital role in communities around the country. I am looking at how best to make further progress in reducing the primary teacher ratio in the context of the Programme for Government implementation.

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 process for primary schools is ongoing and the final allocation of teaching posts will not be known until the Autumn after confirmation of enrolments on 30th September and the conclusion of the staffing appeals process in October.

Education and Training Boards

370. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the ongoing statutory non-compliance across the ETB sector in respect of the issuing of annual pension statements to employees (details supplied); the steps that can be taken to ensure the matter is rectified; and if adequate additional resources will be provided to ETBs to remedy the situation and give comfort and assurance to ETB staff members that they will not be adversely affected by unforeseen errors which have been allowed to prevail by their employers not adhering to their statutory requirements. [13790/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and other Provisions) Act 2012 provides for the issuing of annual benefit statements to members.

My officials have been liaising with their counterparts in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to clarify various pension issues peculiar to the work patterns in the education sector which impact on the provision of annual benefit statements. This work is ongoing.

Each Education and Training Board (ETB) is a separate statutory body that is responsible for managing its own affairs, which would include meeting its statutory obligations in respect of the issuing of annual pension statements to employees. The legislative base and accountability framework for ETBs is set out in the Education and Training Boards Act 2013.

In recent years my Department has provided additional financial resources to ETBs to put in place appropriate structures to progress matters in a number of areas including pension statements. I have been advised that a number of ETBs issued Annual Benefit Statements to a number of staff members in 2019 and all ETBs are committed to issuing further Annual Benefits Statements to staff members in 2020.

Each ETB has faced challenges in developing their payroll systems to produce Annual Benefit Statements for their members. Five ETBs have migrated their payroll functions to the shared payroll services for ETBs with a further two planned to move by year end. All remaining ETBs will migrate to shared payroll in the coming years and following that transition staff will be able to generate their own online benefit statements. My officials are committing to supporting ETBs in this work.

Schools Building Projects

371. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project (details supplied); the timeframe for progression of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13795/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The major building project the school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design which includes the application for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

A revised Stage 2(b) submission has been received in the Department and is currently under review. The Stage 2(b) submission is a detailed and complex set of documents including all tender documents.

As soon as the review of the revised submission is complete the Department will be in contact with school and it's Design Team with regard to the further progression of the project.

Schools Building Projects

372. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) went to tender for full indoor refurbishment; when the work will commence; the timeline for completion of works; if the school is unable to open in August or September 2020 due to works not being completed, if pupils will still go to another school; if so, if school bus transport will be provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13803/20]

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 on the 26th of June 2020 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.

Teaching Council of Ireland

373. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the case of a person (details supplied) will be prioritised. [13804/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): Under the Teaching Council Acts the Teaching Council is the body with the statutory authority and responsibility for the regulation of the teaching profession in Ireland including the registration of teachers in the State.

I am informed the Teaching Council advise that, for teachers qualified outside of Ireland, the assessment and registration process may typically take up to 12 weeks from receipt of all required application documentation. They advise the processing time for standard Irish qualifications is 4-6 weeks assuming all required documentation is received. It is further recommended that teachers apply in advance of their planned return to or commencement of teaching in Ireland.

The application in question was received on June 18th. As the Deputy will appreciate,

the process that is applied in accordance with regulatory requirements. This includes vetting through the National Vetting Bureau and so is subject to NVB timeframes, and for applicants returning to Ireland, this includes a requirement to provide overseas police clearance.

The processing timeframes outlined above are those which apply generally and are published on the Teaching Council website, so the expectation and advice is clear in this regard.

When recruiting people to teaching positions, employers must comply with the registration requirements of the Teaching Council Act and with S.I. No. 32/2014. In particular, employers should ensure that registration with the Teaching Council is included as a requirement when advertising vacant teaching posts. Evidence of current registration should also be sought prior to that position being offered. Employers must also ensure that the requirement to maintain registration with the Teaching Council is inserted as a condition within all contracts. These requirements are outlined in the Terms and Conditions of Employment of Teachers and associated information available on the Department of Education and Skills website.

School Transport

374. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps that have been taken to ensure the school transport scheme will be able to operate at capacity when schools reopen in view of concerns raised by school bus operators and individual schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13810/20]

399. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if clarification will be provided for school bus operators regarding the measures that will be in place and the Covid-19 procedures they will need to implement and follow when they go back to providing school transport at the end of August 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13939/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 374 and 399 together.

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 2019/20 school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €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.

Schools Building Projects

375. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the reopening of a school (details supplied) in County Cork. [13811/20]

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 .

I am conscious of the tragic and extremely difficult issues referred to by the Deputy and that these have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 situation. I can assure everyone associated with the project that the school authority and its design team, actively supported by my Department’s Summer Works team, 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 recently as the tender for the works in question was advertised on the e-Tenders system.

Public Sector Pay

376. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the ending of a two-tier pay scale for teachers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13813/20]

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 sectorial 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 Foley is fully aware that the teacher unions have outstanding issues of concern fol-

lowing 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 continued engagement and collective bargaining between the Government and the public service unions and shows the benefits that such engagement can bring.

Special Educational Needs

377. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the supports available to parents of children with special needs who wish to avail of the July provision and in 2020 cannot find a teacher or special needs assistant in their area willing to participate in providing the July provision for their children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13823/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): Covid-19 has presented an unprecedented global challenge for all of society, including our children. Learning has been challenging for many students since school buildings closed.

In response my Department published details of Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education including a programme for children with complex special educational needs.

Summer Provision 2020 is a discrete response to Covid-19 and 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.

Following the decision from Cabinet this week the home based summer programme is also open to children with down syndrome who are attending post primary school.

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.

My Department has been flexible in its approach to the programme so as to maximise the number of children participating. In-school or home-based supports can now be delivered in July or August. Where Parents cannot secure the services of tutor they can engage an SNA to provide care support.

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>

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

Special Educational Needs

378. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the summer provision 2020 programme will be expanded to include children with disabilities who will be entering primary and secondary school for the first time in September 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13827/20]

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

Following the decision from Cabinet this week the home based summer programme is also open to children with down syndrome who are attending post primary school.

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>

In relation to support for preschool children the Department of Children and Youth Affairs launched a dedicated campaign and website to support 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 preschool 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>

Emergency Works Scheme

379. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application for emergency works submitted by a school (details supplied) will be granted. [13830/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the school in question has been granted Emergency Works Funding for the additional works to which he refers. These will be incorporated into its existing Additional Accommodation project.

Third Level Institutions

380. **Deputy Patrick O’Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a field hospital on the grounds of the University of Limerick will impact on the potential reopening of the university in September 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13834/20]

444. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will issue guidance to third-level institutions on when they should reopen in view of the fact many students are now in the position in which they need to be looking for accommodation but they are not sure when they will be back at college. [14285/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 380 and 444 together.

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. Questions on arrangements for a specific institution or course should be directed to the institution in question.

Schools Administration

381. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details

supplied) can repeat sixth class; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13835/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I acknowledge that this is a particularly challenging time for all students, and parents across the education system, but particularly for those students who will be transferring from primary to post-primary school.

My Department's Continuity of Schooling Group has developed guidance for schools which includes advice on how best 6th class pupils can be supported to make the transition to post-primary school, given that they will not have the opportunity to engage in all of the traditional transition activities that they would normally have engaged in.

It is important that pupils move on with their peers and continue on to the next stage of their education. In general, gaps in pupils' learning arising solely due to the emergency closure of schools should not result in a pupil repeating a year. When pupils have started back in school, the principal and teachers can assess their needs and adapt their teaching programme so that any gaps in their learning resulting from the emergency closure of schools can be addressed. For the vast majority of pupils, this will ensure progression is as seamless a manner as possible.

The guidance that issued to primary schools on Thursday 28th May includes information on managing transitions to include the move from primary to post-primary school. It sets out how existing resources can be utilised to assist with the transition.

The guidance can be accessed via the below link;

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/National-Emergencies-Public-Health-Issues/guidance-on-continuity-of-schooling-primary.pdf>

DEIS Scheme

382. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a DEIS application by a school (details supplied) will be expedited. [13840/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): My Department is in the final stages of refinement of the DEIS identification model, based on school enrolment data and the latest data available from Census 2016 under the HP Deprivation Index.

This work is at an advanced stage and the initial phase of the consultation process with education stakeholder representatives on the technical aspects of the refined DEIS ID model has commenced. It is envisaged that this model will then provide the basis for development of a DEIS resource allocation system to match resources to identified need.

I am confident that the culmination of this work will facilitate the ultimate aim of matching resources to identified need and will allow us to target extra resources at those schools most in need. Until this work is complete, it is not intended to extend the DEIS programme to any further schools.

Special Educational Needs Staff

383. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if insurance cover will be extended to cover SNAs delivering home tuition during the summer in the homes of participants. [13841/20]

7 July 2020

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

Parents/Guardians select and engage tutors/SNAs for the provision of the home based programme in a private arrangement which is then funded through the scheme.

It is the responsibility of the parent and tutor/SNA to ensure any necessary insurance arrangements are in place.

School Staff

384. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the decision to refuse the provision of extra teaching staff to a school (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13843/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I am very conscious of the staffing schedule and the need to prioritise teacher allocations in primary schools given their vital role in communities around the country. I am looking at how best to make further progress in reducing the primary teacher ratio in the context of the Programme for Government implementation.

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 referred to 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.

Public Sector Pay

385. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a teacher is paid only for their contracted teaching time or if it also includes additional tasks required of a teacher which are also open to inspection by her Department that may only be completed outside of class contact time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13859/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): My Department acts as paymaster to over 3,700 schools whose Boards of Management are their direct employers. Teachers employed in the Education and Training Board sector are paid and employed by them.

There are a number of employment types within these schools such as permanent whole-time, fixed term contracts, contracts of indefinite duration (CID) and also casual substitutes.

Teachers who have been appointed to permanent whole time, fixed term and CID positions

are paid in accordance with their point on the scale as set out in Departmental Circular 41/2019.

Teachers are required to provide certain minimum levels of tuition to pupils and preparation, correction etc are done outside of tuition time. In addition teachers may be required to undertake supervision and substitution in accordance with the relevant circulars. Also teachers may be assigned to specialist posts or appointed to leadership positions within the school which involve taking on additional roles and responsibilities.

All recognised schools are subject to inspection by my Department.

Public Sector Pay

386. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if teachers are paid by the hour for their contracted time; if they are paid a salary to remunerate them for all duties required of them by both their employer and her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13860/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): My Department acts as paymaster to over 3,700 schools whose Boards of Management are the direct employers of the teachers in those schools. Teachers in the Education and Training Board sector are employed and paid by the ETBs.

There are a number of employment types within these schools such as permanent whole-time, fixed term contracts, contracts of indefinite duration (CID) and also casual substitutes.

Teachers who have been appointed to permanent whole time, fixed term and CID positions are paid in accordance with their point on the scale as set out in Departmental Circular 41/2019.

Teachers are required to provide certain minimum levels of tuition to pupils and preparation, correction etc are done outside of tuition time. In addition teachers may be required to undertake supervision and substitution in accordance with the relevant circulars. Teachers may also be assigned to specialist posts or appointed to leadership positions within the school which involve taking on additional roles and responsibilities.

All recognised schools are subject to inspection by my Department.

Schools Building Projects

387. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the permanent building of a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13873/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I can confirm that agreement in principle has been reached with a landowner for the acquisition of a site at Donaghcumper, Celbridge. This site is presently proposed to facilitate the permanent accommodation needs of St. Patrick's National School, Celbridge Community School and St. Raphael's Special School on a campus type arrangement.

Work is progressing and is ongoing in respect of technical matters crucial to the delivery of the acquisition. We are continuing to actively engage regularly with Kildare Co. Co. and the Landowner - in relation to same. It remains a priority for the Department to make progress on this acquisition. Due to the commercially sensitive nature of site acquisitions in general, I am

unable to elaborate further but please rest assured that this project is being given our full attention.

Special Educational Needs

388. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13879/20]

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

Following a decision from Cabinet this week the home based summer programme is also open to children with down syndrome who are attending post primary school.

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>

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

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

In relation to support for preschool children the Department of Children and Youth Affairs launched a dedicated campaign and website to support 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 preschool 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>

School Transport

389. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration will be given to providing a permanent subsidised school bus from Watergrasshill village to Fermoy, County Cork, (details supplied); and she will make a statement on the matter. [13881/20]

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

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

In the 2019/20 school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €219m in 2019.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application and payment process on time will be accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation.

Children who are not eligible for school transport, but who complete the application and payment process on time, will be considered for spare seats that may exist after eligible children have been facilitated; such seats are referred to as concessionary seats.

Because of the nature of concessionary transport for non-eligible children and the priority of providing places for eligible children, there may be an excess of demand over supply for concessionary places, in these cases Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for spare seats using a random selection process.

Under the terms of the scheme, the availability of concessionary transport varies from year to year based on the capacity on the buses running on all of the various routes and the number of eligible children accommodated on each route.

A minimum number of 10 eligible children residing in a distinct locality, as determined by Bus Éireann, are required before consideration may be given to the establishment or retention

of school transport services, provided this can be done within reasonable cost limits.

All school transport services are reviewed over the summer months. Arising from this review, routes may be altered, extended or withdrawn depending on the number and location of eligible children who will be availing of school transport for the following school year.

School Transport

390. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if correspondence from a person (details supplied) regarding the impact on the loss of bus services for several Dublin schools will be addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13887/20]

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 2019/20 school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €219m in 2019.

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

Under the terms of the scheme, children are eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria (3.2km at primary and 4.8km at post-primary) and are attending their nearest school as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language. Distance eligibility is determined by Bus Éireann by measuring the shortest traversable route from the child's home to the relevant school.

All children who are eligible for school transport and who complete the application and payment process on time are accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation.

Bus Éireann has confirmed that the services referred to by the Deputy were services that were operated by Dublin Bus and that Dublin Bus has withdrawn these services. These services were operated separately by Dublin Bus and children paid fares or availed of a range of weekly tickets when travelling. These services do not fall under the remit of my Department's School Transport Scheme.

Schools Building Projects

391. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of approval for works at a school (details supplied). [13889/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I can confirm that the Stage 1/2a report has been received from the school in question.

The Department sought clarification in relation to some of the details included in the consultant's report. When this information is received it will be reviewed and officials in my Department will be in contact with the school to progress the project.

Questions - Written Answers
Schools Building Projects

392. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address a matter regarding a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13891/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The school may apply to my Department's Summer Works team to have the funds used for an alternative outdoor related project. Any application in this respect must comply with my Department's requirements for funding under the scheme, in particular our Technical Guidance Documents. Aspects of the work described by the Deputy may not do so, but a decision will be made once the application is received and considered in that context.

Schools Building Projects

393. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the stage her plans are at to provide a secondary school in Newtownmountkennedy, County Wicklow; the proposed location; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13904/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): As the Deputy may be aware, a major building project at the existing post primary school, Coláiste Chraobh Abhann, Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow is included in my Department's building programme to be delivered as part of the National Development Plan (NDP). The project is at preliminary design stage. When the project is completed, the school will have capacity to accommodate 1,000 pupils. In tandem with this, my Department is finalising the acquisition of additional site area for the development.

Newtownmountkennedy is located in the Kilcoole school planning area and it is intended that the building project at Coláiste Chraobh Abhann will meet the post primary accommodation needs in this school planning area.

Early Childhood Care and Education

394. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a Montessori preschool contracted under the early childcare and education scheme which is inspected by her Department comes under the term school under the Education Act 1998; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13918/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The relevant section of the Education Act 1998, (Section (2)) as amended, provides the following definition of a school:

“school” means an establishment which—

(a) provides primary education to its students and which may also provide early childhood education.....but does not include a school or institution established in accordance with the Children Acts, 1908 to 1989, or a school or institution established or maintained by the Health Service Executive in accordance with the Health Acts, 1947 to 1996, or the Child and Family Agency in accordance with the Child Care Act 1991.”

If an establishment comes within this statutory definition, then it is a school within the meaning of the 1998 Act.

Inspection of Early Learning and Care settings by the Inspectorate of the Department of

Education commenced in April 2016. The Inspectorate of the Department of Education was commissioned in 2015, by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (now the Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration) to develop and implement an inspection model and associated programme of inspection in Early Learning and Care settings on contract to deliver the Free Preschool in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The grant agreement for the ECCE Programme signed by preschools availing of this funding clearly sets out the terms and conditions of this funding which include cooperation with inspection by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education.

Special Educational Needs

395. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when she will issue clear guidance to schools relating to the July provision in view of the fact many schools have staff in place but appear to be refusing to do the programme due to the fact they are not prepared to put their staff and students at risk; the way in which she will ensure schools operate the programme in the context of Covid-19; the measures which will be in place in schools to ensure staff and students are safe; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13920/20]

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 237 schools have indicated they intend to provide the school based summer provision which is an increase on 2019. The estimated number of children expected to benefit is approximately 3,800.

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.

Following a decision from Cabinet this week the home based summer programme is also open to children with down syndrome who are attending post primary school.

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

Special Educational Needs

396. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a home-based July provision will be granted for a child (details supplied); if she will take into account the underlying medical conditions of the child in respect of the reason home based July provision is required; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13928/20]

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

Following a decision from Cabinet this week the home based summer programme is also open to children with down syndrome who are attending post primary school.

A child must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria.

Where exceptional circumstances, including underlying health conditions, mean that a child cannot avail of the programme in their school home-based provision will be available.

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>

State Examinations

397. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the process for out-of-school learners to engage with in order to be considered for calculated grades will be communicated to stakeholders; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13936/20]

428. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a matter (details supplied) will be examined for subjects studied outside school will be examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14173/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 397 and 428 together.

A system of Calculated Grades was put in place by my predecessor and the purpose of this process is to allow as many students as possible to progress to employment, further education and training, or higher education in a way that is fair and equitable to all Leaving Certificate students.

For the calculated grades system to be operated with integrity, an estimated percentage mark, based on credible, satisfactory evidence, can only be accepted from an appropriate source. This is necessary to ensure fairness to all students.

The Calculated Grades Executive Office (CGEO) in the Department of Education has developed a comprehensive guide to calculated grades for out of school learners – the students who are studying entirely outside of school – and has contacted each student individually on 25 June to invite them to apply for calculated grades. The closing date for applications was last Thursday (2 July 2020) and applications are now being processed.

In cases where a student is studying one or more subjects outside of school, school principals were asked to make every effort to provide an estimated mark for that subject provided there was sufficient, credible evidence available from an appropriate source. If the principal was unable to provide an estimated mark for any student they were asked to notify the Calculated Grades Executive Office of my Department.

As part of its commitment to ensure that a calculated grade is provided to as many students as possible, the CGEO are currently undertaking a review of these reports with the schools involved to ensure that the correct procedures were followed.

Despite every effort being made by schools and by the Department of Education, to provide calculated grades to as many students as possible, there will be a small number of cases where there is no credible evidence to support a calculated grade in a particular subject. To attempt to give a calculated grade in such cases would be unfair to all other candidates. Such students will have an opportunity to sit the Leaving Certificate examinations when it is safe to do so.

No decisions have been issued by the Calculated Grades Office in respect of any of these

candidates to date (6 July 2020).

My Department has continued to engage with third level stakeholders regarding the Calculated Grades process for students seeking to progress to Higher Education. This has resulted in an agreed common approach in relation to students who have studied some or all of their Leaving Certificate 2020 subjects outside school, and who have not been able to obtain calculated grades in those subjects. Students who have applied for a calculated grade, with a view to satisfying matriculation/basic minimum entry requirements and for whom the Department has been unable to award a Calculated Grade in the subject(s), will be granted an exemption in the subject(s) solely for matriculation/basic minimum entry purposes. The subject(s) for which exemption is granted will not attract points and the exemption cannot be used to satisfy additional programme requirements over and above the matriculation/basic minimum entry requirements.

These exemptions will be granted automatically by the CAO to those students who cannot be provided with a calculated grade.

Institutes of Technology

398. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration will be given to including Limerick Institute of Technology in plans for the Munster technological university in addition to Cork Institute of Technology and IT Tralee. [13937/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): Under the statutory framework provided in the Technological Universities Act 2018, two or more Institutes of Technology (IoTs) may jointly seek TU designation through a prescribed legislative process. Section 29 of the 2018 Act provides for the application jointly by two or more applicant institutes to the Minister of Education and Skills for an order seeking designation as a TU subject to their jointly meeting specified eligibility criteria. Section 38 of the 2018 Act provides that an applicant institute and an established technological university may apply to the Minister for an order.

As autonomous higher education institutions established under statute, it remains a matter for the governing body of an IoT to set the institute's particular strategic direction within the higher education landscape, including whether or not, and how, to seek TU designation through the prescribed legal processes.

In this context, Athlone Institute of Technology and Limerick Institute of Technology formed a TU development consortium last year. The consortium is understood to have a date in view of October 2020 to make an application seeking TU designation under Section 29 of the 2018 Act.

Question No. 399 answered with Question No. 374.

School Transport

400. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the decision to cancel the tender competition for school transport services that issued on 26 February 2020 will mean a new and open application process will follow; if so, when it will be advertised; if previous tender applicants and holders of contracts will be notified directly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13945/20]

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

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In the 2019/20 school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €219m in 2019.

Bus Éireann has confirmed that it currently intends that the operating boards previously included in the Tender Competition that has now been cancelled will form part of the new tender competition for school transport services.

This process will begin at the end of 2020. The tender stage of the process will take place in the first quarter of 2021 and will be open to all applicants that qualify onto the new Qualification Panel.

School Staff

401. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a decision has been made on a staffing appeal by a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13947/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I am very conscious of the staffing schedule and the need to prioritise teacher allocations in primary schools given their vital role in communities around the country. I am looking at how best to make further progress in reducing the primary teacher ratio in the context of the Programme for Government implementation.

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 referred to 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 school has been notified of this decision. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board is independent of the Department and its decision is final.

School Staff

402. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a decision has been made on a staffing appeal by a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13948/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I am very conscious of the staffing schedule and the need to prioritise teacher allocations in primary schools given their vital role in communities around the country. I am looking at how best to make further progress in reducing the primary teacher ratio in the context of the Programme for Government implementation.

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 indi-

vidual 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 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.

School Staff

403. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a decision has been made on a staffing appeal by a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13949/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I am very conscious of the staffing schedule and the need to prioritise teacher allocations in primary schools given their vital role in communities around the country. I am looking at how best to make further progress in reducing the primary teacher ratio in the context of the Programme for Government implementation.

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 referred to 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 school has been notified of this decision. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board is independent of the Department and its decision is final.

Departmental Correspondence

404. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address concerns expressed in correspondence by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13950/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I understand that the Deputy is referring to the Gaeltacht Learning Period which must be fulfilled by students who are currently in the second year of the primary Professional Master of Education and due to graduate in 2021.

Completion of the Gaeltacht placement is an important element of programmes of initial teacher education for primary teachers and therefore a requirement for registration with the Teaching Council.

As you may be aware, my Department and the Teaching Council issued a joint statement on

23 March 2020 advising that in light of the emergency measures being adopted in relation to Covid-19, students who are in the final year of their Initial Teacher Education programme will not be required to complete the usual Gaeltacht Learning Period in order to graduate in summer 2020.

In the case of student teachers in all other years of their ITE programme, the Gaeltacht requirement is being postponed, to be fulfilled at a later point in the programme. It will be a matter for each Higher Education Institution (HEI) to examine the available options in terms of rescheduling Gaeltacht placements for students. My Department will continue to liaise with the HEIs on this matter to ensure that clarity is provided for students.

School Services Staff

405. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the position with regard to school secretaries and caretakers being made direct employees of her Department; the latest engagement she has had with representative groups on this matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13956/20]

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.

In Budget 2020 the number of secretaries and caretakers in certain schools was increased, 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 the moratorium was relaxed 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.

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

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 10th 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 21st January 2020.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

406. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the situation many students face due to the lack of income and employment available to them over the summer months which might otherwise have been available; if she is considering income supports for such students; and if she has had discussions with the Minister for Employment

Affairs and Social Protection in connection with the issue. [13969/20]

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.

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. 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 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).

Further information in relation to student grant assistance is available from SUSI's website, www.susi.ie. The telephone number for SUSI's Helpdesk is 0761 087 874.

My officials have been in contact with their counterparts in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. They have advised me that full-time students who had part-time employment when the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment was introduced in March, can avail of this support payment.

It was announced on June 5th that the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) will now be extended from 9 June until Phase 5 of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business (currently scheduled to begin on 10 August). I welcome this decision which further supports students who have lost their income due to the pandemic.

Although there will now be a two level payment structure to link the Pandemic Unemployment Payment level to prior earnings, no person on the lower rate of payment will receive less on PUP than they were previously paid by their employer.

The Student Assistance Fund (SAF) provides financial assistance to students experiencing financial difficulties while attending third level. Students can be assisted towards the rent, childcare costs, transport costs and books/class materials. The total allocation for the SAF is €9.1 million which includes an additional €1m added to the Fund in 2017 for part-time students who are lone-parents or members of the other access target groups. Prior to that the fund sup-

ported full-time students only. In December 2018 a further €1 million was added to the Fund for students attending Professional Masters of Education courses, who are experiencing financial difficulty. This funding continued into 2019 and 2020. 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 a student's local Tax Office or from the Revenue Commissioners website, www.revenue.ie

Schools Building Projects

407. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the provision of new schools (details supplied); the status of same; the expected delivery times; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13975/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I can confirm that agreement in principle has been reached with a landowner for the acquisition of a site at Donaghcumper, Celbridge. This site is presently proposed to facilitate the permanent accommodation needs of St. Patrick's National School, Celbridge Community School and St. Raphael's Special School on a campus type arrangement. Work is progressing and is ongoing in respect of technical matters crucial to the delivery of the acquisition. We are continuing to actively engage regularly with Kildare Co. Co. and the Landowner - in relation to same. It remains a priority for the Department to make progress on this acquisition. Due to the commercially sensitive nature of site acquisitions in general, I am unable to elaborate further but please rest assured that this project is being given our full attention.

School Transport

408. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will make amendments to the retrospective transport scheme for low-income families whose children are accessing summer provision in special schools (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14006/20]

412. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will consider transport options for those availing of July provision as a matter of urgency in view of the fact parents are under significant strain (details supplied). [14018/20]

413. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the fact that her Department has indicated that it is unable to provide school transport for the July provision of a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14021/20]

442. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if bus transport will be provided for the students participating in the July provision programme in a school (details supplied) in circumstances in which all steps have been taken to ensure maximum participation in the programme, including safe bus transport plans which have been agreed with bus escorts, drivers and bus contractors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14253/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 408, 412, 413 and 442 together.

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 2019/20 school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €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.

Schools Building Projects

409. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the extension to a school (details supplied) under the school building programme; the timeline for the commencement and completion of the project; and if this project will be completed as a matter of urgency in view of the significant need for additional space at the school. [14007/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of Architectural Planning – Stage 2b (Detailed Design) which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents.

The Stage 2(b) report has been submitted to my Department for review by Dublin Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board, who is the client for the project.

Upon review my Department will be in contact with the client regarding the further progression of this project.

Physical Education

410. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address matters raised in correspondence (details supplied) on an athletic track or stadium for east

County Meath; and if she will set up the required meetings between her Department and Meath County Council to discuss such proposals. [14010/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has received the proposals to which he refers. However, I also wish to inform him that my Department does not provide funding for athletics facilities. I would advise him to refer the matter to the Minister for Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gael-tacht in that context.

School Staff

411. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a further appeal by a school (details supplied); if her Department will use discretion in view of the circumstances and projections to hand; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14011/20]

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 referred to 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.

Questions Nos. 412 and 413 answered with Question No. 408.

Programme for Government

414. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if she will provide documents on those costings. [14028/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The Programme for Government agreed in June 2020 includes a number of commitments that are relevant to my Department. In the months ahead, I will be developing proposals to give effect to these commitments and such proposals will be costed in the normal manner with due regard to budgetary considerations.

The briefing materials provided by Government Departments (including the Department of Education and Skills) to political parties as part of Government formation discussions have been published by the Department of the Taoiseach and the documents are located at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7b927-programme-for-government-documents/>

Special Educational Needs

415. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the policy

guidelines for the July provision programme will be reconsidered to include children in secondary school with Down's syndrome (details supplied). [14045/20]

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

Following a decision from Cabinet this week the home based summer programme is also open to children with down syndrome who are attending post primary school.

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>

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

416. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within her Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14053/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): To advance our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) programme my Department has been involved in a wide range of activities as well as organising a series of online Lunch and Learn events for staff to promote the EDI conversation in the Department.

My Department have not engaged the services of any external consultancy organisation or provider in respect of EDI programmes. All initiatives have been organised by the staff of my HR Unit and the Lunch and Learn events were carried out either by charitable organisations who have not charged us a fee, or in the case of a Women in Public Life event, by a serving Civil Servant and therefore also without cost.

Departmental Legal Costs

417. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the expenditure her Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14070/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The expenditure incurred by my Department in respect of external legal fees during the years in question is as follows:

| Year | Expenditure on external legal fees |
|------|------------------------------------|
| 2016 | €92,715.50 |
| 2017 | €46,790.62 |
| 2018 | €106,312.43 |
| 2019 | €50,336.66 |
| 2020 | €128,350.63 |

The Deputy may wish to note that fees paid in a given year may relate to work carried out in different year.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

418. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to extend the stability fund for Gaeltacht Irish summer colleges to other foreign language colleges; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14082/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): My Department understands that foreign language colleges, as private businesses, have access to a range of supports that are available to all small and medium enterprises that have been impacted by Covid 19. Details on the range of supports provided are available from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation at the following website link

<https://dbe.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/Government-supports-to-COVID-19-impacted-businesses.html>

In addition, the Wage Subsidy Scheme, operated by the Revenue Commissioners is also available as a support to continue to allow businesses affected by Covid 19 pay the wages of staff.

In May 2020, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht announced the approval of a once-off emergency measure worth €4.7m to support the stabilisation of the Gaeltacht Irish summer college sector.

The stabilisation fund is being provided as a specific once-off measure with the overall objective of ensuring the ongoing viability of the sector thereby enabling it to continue to contribute to the systematic effort being made to support the language and Gaeltacht regions in line with the overarching objectives of the Government's 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 and the accompanying 5 -Year Action Plan for the Irish Language 2018-2022

School Transport

419. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Riordáin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of school bus services and on reports of the cancellation of services by Dublin Bus for a number of schools including a school (details supplied). [14111/20]

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 2019/20 school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €219m in 2019.

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

Under the terms of the scheme, children are eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria (3.2km at primary and 4.8km at post-primary) and are attending their nearest school as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language. Distance eligibility is determined by Bus Éireann by measuring the shortest traversable route from the child's home to the relevant school.

All children who are eligible for school transport and who complete the application and payment process on time are accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation.

Bus Éireann has confirmed that the service referred to by the Deputy was a service that was operated by Dublin Bus and that Dublin Bus has withdrawn this service. This service was part of a number services operated separately by Dublin Bus and children paid fares or availed of a range of weekly tickets when travelling. These services do not fall under the remit of my Department's School Transport Scheme.

School Textbooks

420. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Riordáin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of the free schoolbooks pilot scheme scheduled for September 2020; and the additional es-

timated budget that would be required to expand the scheme to schools nationwide. [14112/20]

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

In addition additional funding of €991,424.00 was 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.

School book rental schemes have an important role to play in reducing the cost of school books for parents and in order to support the establishment of book rental schemes my Department provided €15.7 million seed capital in 2014, 2015 and 2016 to primary schools. Circa. 96% of primary schools and 68% of post-primary schools operate a book rental scheme

It is a matter for the Board of Management of each individual school to decide on its own policy in relation to the use of book grant funding in the school but they are expected to adopt a cost-conscious approach to the selection of books for use in their classes. The current arrangement relies on the local knowledge of the school in order to ensure a fair allocation of funds to those most in need. Therefore, my Department does not hold information in relation to these costs.

Indicative estimate of providing free primary and secondary school books to all pupils across all fully publicly funded schools based on a survey by Barnardos is €40M.

School Funding

421. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated value of voluntary contributions to the education sector; and the estimated required increase in the capitation grant to reasonably replace voluntary contributions for most schools. [14115/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The government has increased the capitation grant in each of the last two budgets.

I understand the need for improved capitation funding and I am pleased that a further 2.5% increase in standard capitation funding for primary and post-primary schools will apply from the start of the 2020/21 school year. This builds on last years 5% increase in capitation announced in budget 2019.

The combined increases given in 2019 and 2020 mean that circa 40% restoration will be achieved.

All schools have received the benefit of the capitation increases awarded to date. It is my intention to seek funding for further capitation increases in future budgets.

There is no information available to my Department that may be used to assess the full year cost of funding schools in order to allow them to abolish the voluntary contribution. However, in addition to the increases above the estimated cost of increasing the standard capitation for all

schools by 1%, 5% and 10% is set out in the following table.

| % increase | €m |
|------------|-------|
| 1% | 2.22 |
| 5% | 11.09 |
| 10% | 22.18 |

Departmental Programmes

422. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the functions of the proposed new education research and policy section within her Department; the effect such a body will have on the way in which education policy is directed; and the way in which the function is currently conducted. [14116/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to establish a new Education Research and Policy Section within my Department, which will be tasked with ensuring that educational policy development in Ireland is informed by a strong evidence base, is outcomes focused, and cognisant of best international practices. The arrangements for the establishment of the section are under active consideration at present.

Third Level Examinations

423. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on a matter regarding a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14124/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are academically independent and have the right to determine their own policies and procedures for academic affairs. Issues in relation to the review of examination results in HEIs are matters for the individual institution concerned in the first instance. The Department does not have any function in relation to these matters.

The Ombudsman examines complaints from the public in relation to certain actions of education providers including HEIs. Further information on the complaint procedures of the Office of the Ombudsman is contained in the link below for your information.

[https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2020-07-07_pq423-7-7-20_en.pdf] Examinations in Higher Education Institutions

Summer Works Scheme

424. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14130/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): Projects allocated funding under the 2020 Summer Works Scheme relate to applications submitted by schools in category 10 from the Summer Works Scheme 2016/17 and category 1 from the Summer Works Scheme 2020 onwards. Commensurate with the level of funding set aside for the Scheme, applications

are being assessed on a top down basis in accordance with the prioritisation criteria outlined in the Circular accompanying the Scheme. In that context, applications submitted for other works/categories, such as the one referred to by the Deputy, will be considered under future rounds of the Summer Works Scheme.

Covid-19 Pandemic

425. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the discussions her officials have had with private third-level accommodation providers regarding a refund of fees due to the Covid-19 closure of colleges; the discussions her officials have had with the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform to ensure that such providers refusing refunds are not eligible for Covid-19 supports from the State; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14132/20]

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

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

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

The eligibility criteria for businesses seeking to access to Covid-19 supports are a matter for the Department(s) administering those supports, and my Department has no role in deciding those criteria.

Schools Building Projects

426. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will be given permission to go to tender for three additional resource rooms with funding having previously been approved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14135/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that funding was approved under the Additional Accommodation Scheme 2018 to enable the school in question to build three resource rooms and complete other conversion works.

To date my Department has not received any correspondence from the school in relation to this project.

School Accommodation

427. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress being made in respect of the provision of temporary accommodation for September 2020 for a school (details supplied). [14170/20]

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 6 July, 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 Patron Body in relation to the matter.

Question No. 428 answered with Question No. 397.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

429. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a budget is in place for cleaning and PPE; if not, if it will be put in place for schools returning in September 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14174/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): On Friday 12th 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>

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. My Department will establish a drawdown framework for schools to enable the purchase by schools of supplies such as hand-sanitisers for use in the school and classroom. The procurement process for this framework is commencing immediately and it will also deal with any other potential PPE requirements. It is not envisaged that significant PPE will be required in school settings. All requirements for PPE in schools will be in line with public health advice.

Emergency Works Scheme

430. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if emergency works grant applications by schools (details supplied) will be expedited to ensure the safe reopening of the schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14175/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): In regards to Dreeny National School I am pleased to inform the Deputy that they have been approved for Emergency Works funding to address the situation caused by river erosion.

My Department’s Emergency Works Team has also received an application from the other school in question for a connection to the mains system. This is under consideration at present and a reply will issue directly to the school when a decision has been made.

School Staff

431. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the commitment will be reaffirmed not to reduce teacher numbers in schools (details supplied) for the lifetime of Tascfhórsa Uíbh Ráthaigh; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14183/20]

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 fulfil the roles, as appropriate.

School Staff

432. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will be allowed flexibility to deal practically with an exceptional staffing requirement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14184/20]

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

While the redeployment of surplus teachers to permanent teaching posts is the first mechanism used to fill teaching vacancies, it is the case that there is not always sufficient permanent

vacancies available for all teachers on the redeployment panel. In such circumstances, the redeployment arrangements set out that surplus permanent/CID holding teachers may be assigned to a year long fixed-term position. Schools are instructed that they may not fill a teaching vacancy by any other means until the Department is satisfied that the vacancy is not required for the redeployment of a teacher on the Main Panel.

The school referred to by the Deputy has a fixed-term position available for the coming school year and has been advised by my Department that it is required for the redeployment of a surplus permanent teacher on the Main Panel.

School Staff

433. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will be permitted to retain its current number of teachers in the 2020/2021 school year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14205/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I am very conscious of the staffing schedule and the need to prioritise teacher allocations in primary schools given their vital role in communities around the country. I am looking at how best to make further progress in reducing the primary teacher ratio in the context of the Programme for Government implementation.

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 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

434. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans for SNAs to transfer to classroom assistants; when this will occur; and the processes that will be involved. [14231/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The role of the SNA continues to be one to support the care needs of students and to assist classroom teachers, and special education teachers, to ensure that the student is able to access education, as set out in Section 5 of DES Circular 30/2014. There are no plans to change this role.

SNAs are recruited specifically to assist in the care needs of pupils with disabilities in an educational context. SNAs therefore do not have a teaching/pedagogical role and it would not be appropriate for pupils with special needs to be taught by unqualified personnel.

A new model for allocating Special Needs Assistants to primary and post primary schools for students in mainstream classes only was to be introduced in the 2020/21 school year as part of the phased roll out of the School Inclusion Model (SIM). In light of the ongoing Covid-19

crisis the Frontloaded Allocation Model for Special Needs Assistants has been deferred until the beginning of the 2021/22 school year. Part of the review of this model will be review SNA training needs and development outcomes.

Student Universal Support Ireland

435. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if SUSI grant criteria will be reviewed to allow funding for part-time courses in cases in which the applicant has a disability preventing them from taking a full-time course in accordance with section 8(3) of the Student Support Act 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14234/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): Under the Student Grant Scheme, eligible candidates may receive funding provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution.

Section 8(1) of the Student Support Act 2011, which defines an “approved course” for student grant purposes, requires attendance of an approved course at an approved institution on a full-time basis.

Any extension of the scope of the student Grant Scheme to provide for students pursuing part-time education courses, on a similar basis as currently exists for full-time students, must be considered having regard to overall resource constraints and other competing demands in the education sector.

However, students with disabilities are one of the target groups identified in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (NAP).

Various access supports are available to students with disabilities who are attending a part-time courses such as:

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

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

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

Schools Building Projects

436. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14236/20]

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 under my Department’s Additional Accommodation Scheme.

Department officials are aware of the urgency of this project and have made regular contact with the Principal on the matter. The school has procured a consultant who is leading the proj-

ect through the construction stage.

Schools Building Projects

437. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans for additional school places in Dublin 9 to meet increased demand. [14237/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

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

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

The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed. Details of schools listed on this programme can be found on my Department's website www.education.ie and this information is also updated regularly.

A new 16 classroom primary school (Gracepark ETNS) was established to serve the Drumcondra Marino Dublin 1 area in 2016 and is currently located in Dublin 9. In addition major building projects are planned for Rosmini Community School and Scoil Chaitriona Glasnevin Dublin 9 – which will provide a total capacity of 800 places between them at post-primary level.

The requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular will have regard to the impact of the increased roll out of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040. My Department will also continue to monitor areas where the accommodation of existing schools may need to be expanded in order to meet the needs of the local population.

School Transport

438. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) will receive a refund of school transport fees. [14238/20]

439. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if refunds will be issued to parents in cases in which the school transport system was not used since 12 March 2020; if a discount will be issued to parents affected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14243/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 438 and 439 together.

School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Depart-

ment of Education and Skills.

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

In the 2019/20 school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €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 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 be issued directly to all entitled family account holders. The refunds process has commenced and refunds to those families who paid by cheque issued last week. With regard to families who paid by card, Bus Éireann has confirmed that they will be shortly emailing all families due to receive a refund to advise them of arrangements.

Special Educational Needs

440. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to allow children with severe physical disabilities to access the July provision programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14248/20]

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

Following the decision from Cabinet this week the home based summer programme is also open to children with down syndrome who are attending post primary school.

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>

Summer Works Scheme

441. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be allocated following an appeal under the summer works scheme for urgent playground resurfacing for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14251/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The issue referred to by the Deputy is under consideration by officials in my Department.

Question No. 442 answered with Question No. 408.

Qualifications Recognition

443. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her Department will review the fact that the counselling doctorate offered by Trinity College Dublin, and fully recognised and accredited by an organisation (details supplied), does not provide payment to students unlike the doctorate in clinical psychology which is offered by the five main Irish universities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14258/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The requisite funding of these courses is a matter for the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department has no role in this regard. The Department understands that the Deputy has submitted a similar question on the funding of these courses to the Department of Health and that Department has, in turn, asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

Question No. 444 answered with Question No. 380.

School Transport

445. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if Bus Éireann will

continue to provide school transport for children with special needs; the arrangements she is making to provide these services for the period 2020 to 2025; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14291/20]

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 2019/20 school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €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, including Special Educational Needs transport services, in September 2020 will be informed by the outcome of this planning for re-opening schools.

In October 2019 my Department announced a review of the school transport scheme with a view to ensuring funds are being spent in the most effective way to meet the objectives of the scheme. Terms of reference and the scope of the review have been drafted and a Steering Group has been established. The review will encompass the Special Educational Needs Transport Scheme.

School Transport

446. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to reopen and extend the April 2020 deadline for school transport applications in view of the announcement from Dublin Bus in June 2020 to cancel all of its school bus contracts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14310/20]

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 2019/20 school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €219m in 2019.

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

Under the terms of the scheme, children are eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria (3.2km at primary and 4.8km at post-primary) and are attending their nearest school as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language. Distance eligibility is determined by Bus Éireann by measuring the shortest traversable route from the child's home to the relevant school.

All children who are eligible for school transport and who complete the application and payment process on time are accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation.

While schools have been closed since 12th March 2020 in an effort to contain the spread Covid 19, the online facility to apply for school transport for the upcoming school year has remained open to families, with the closing date for applications having been the 24th April. The option to make payment for transport for the new school year is now open with a closing date for payment on the 31st July 2020. There are no plans to extend these closing dates.

While the application deadline has passed it remains open to families wishing to avail of school transport services to apply on-line on Bus Éireann website at www.buseireann.ie. Late applications may be facilitated where spare seats exist after eligible children who completed the application and payment process on time have been accommodated.

If there are specific queries regarding eligibility or availability of services, families are advised to contact their local Bus Éireann office or School Transport Section of my Department.

Schools Building Projects

447. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeline for the refurbishment and new buildings for a school (details supplied); when these works will be completed; the level of priority these works are assigned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14317/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The Deputy may be aware that the project to which he refers has been devolved to Dublin & Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB) for delivery.

My Department is fully aware of the need to urgently progress this project. However, it is of the utmost importance that the final outcome will be the correct one for both the school authority and the pupils. In that regard, I would like to inform the Deputy that, arising from its due diligence in respect of the preparation of the revised pre-qualification process for this project, DDLETB has carried out a review of the project which puts forward an alternative option for progressing it. A report has been received from DDLETB in that respect. This report is being reviewed by my Department and due consideration given to the proposals set out therein.

Schools Building Projects

448. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on whether it is appropriate for a school (details supplied) to continually accommodate other second level schools on its grounds in temporary accommodation when it is in need of refurbishment and extension and the work is delayed due to the school continually accommodating other schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14318/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): As the Deputy may be aware that the project to which he refers has been devolved to Dublin & Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB) for delivery.

DDLETB have submitted revised proposals in respect of the approved building project at the school in question. These proposals are currently being considered by my Department and my officials will be in contact with DDLETB as quickly as possible to advance the project.

Housing other schools in this school is having no impact on the delivery of the proposed project.

Student Universal Support Ireland

449. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the SUSI grant application of a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14333/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): My officials contacted the awarding authority regarding the student grant assessment for the student in question.

The awarding authority has advised that the student in question submitted an application for a student grant on 29 April 2020.

It was advised within the application that the student's father had inherited a house in 2019 thus resulting in the student's application being refused due to the reckonable income being over the maximum threshold for the award of grant assistance.

The student appealed this decision to the SUSI Appeals Officer on 17 June 2020. This appeal was refused under Article 24 (6) of the Student Grant Scheme 2020 which confirms that the inheritance received by the applicant's father in the reference period (2019) is reckonable in the assessment for student grant funding for the 2020/2021 academic year.

The student was also advised of her further right to appeal this decision to the Student Grants Appeals Board. To date, no appeal has been received for the Board.

Student Universal Support Ireland

450. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will instruct SUSI to disregard an inheritance if it is the family home at the time of application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14334/20]

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

The decision on eligibility for student grant applications is a matter for the centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland).

All applications are assessed nationally with reference to the terms and conditions of the relevant student grant scheme. The terms and conditions of funding are applied impartially to all applicants.

In calculating reckonable income under the Student Grant Scheme, the awarding authority considers income from all sources earned inside and outside the State within a specified reference period, including income from gifts and inheritance.

Article 24(6) of the Student Grant Scheme 2020 provides that gifts or inheritances received in the reference period will be included as reckonable income. This will be taken into account for one year only. Grant assistance may not be awarded in any case where the reckonable income exceeds the prescribed income limits for the award of a grant. If any of the persons whose

income is under consideration received a gift or an inheritance in the reference period, these are included in reckonable income, unless in the case of an independent student, the gift or inheritance was between the applicant and his or her spouse, civil partner or cohabitant; or in the case of a dependent student, the gift or inheritance was between parents or to the applicant from his or her parent(s).

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by an appeals officer in SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal may be submitted to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe (i.e. not later than 30 days after the notification of the determination of the appeals officer to the applicant). Such appeals can be made by the appellant on line via www.studentgrantappeals.ie.

Special Educational Needs

451. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will extend the July provision to all children entering primary and post-primary education rather than limiting it only to students who are already in school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14336/20]

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

Following a decision from Cabinet this week the home based summer programme is also open to children with down syndrome who are attending post primary school.

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>

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 preschool children the Department of Children and Youth Affairs launched a dedicated campaign and website to support 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 preschool 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>

Education Standards

452. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions she will take to address the concerns being expressed by fifth year students concerning the next year of their education in view of the setbacks they have suffered to date in 2020; the steps she will take to address the concerns of sixth year students regarding progressing on to post-secondary school education; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14342/20]

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 well-being 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. The reopening of schools at the normal start of the academic year remains a top priority for my department.

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 well-being 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.

Additionally, the third level institutions, as part of the Transitions Reform Group, have been working in partnership with my Department to improve the transition from second level to third level. My Department has been meeting regularly with representatives from the tertiary sector in order to ensure that the third level entry process this year can progress as smoothly and equitably as possible. These meetings have involved stakeholders from my Department, the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the Central Applications Office (CAO), the State Examinations Commission (SEC), Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) and SOLAS. All bodies involved are committed to ensuring that students seeking to access tertiary education in this unprecedented time are supported in doing so.

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.

453. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the issues facing the language school sector in view of the fact that 70% of its revenue is generated during their peak season from March to September but the schools have remained closed during this time; the supports which will be put in place to assist English language teaching organisations with these issues; and when these schools can reopen in view of the fact that they have not been included in the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. [14345/20]

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.

As part of the response to the pandemic, my Department 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 the loss of revenue experienced by their members and 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://dbe.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

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 has allowed these facilities to re-open from June 29.

While guidelines specifically for the re-opening of the English language education sector will not be issued, guidance to assist the tertiary education sector more generally in planning for reopening is being prepared at present and will be available shortly. Further engagement will be undertaken 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 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.

Student Support Schemes

454. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the difficulties many students at third-level who have limited broadband capacity at home will face while attempting to partake in online lectures and study; and the provisions that can be put in place to support these students and ensure that their access to third-level education is not restricted due to poor Internet connection in their areas. [14346/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The national co-ordination group for tertiary education, which includes representatives from the Department, institutions, and providers, is meeting regularly to discuss key issues. A working group has been established to examine connectivity issues impacting on tertiary education. The group's key aims are to identify connectivity challenges in relation to broadband, data, networks and devices, to develop solutions for challenges and work through their resolution with third parties and to provide advice and guidance to other groups in relation to technology and connectivity. The group has facilitated the distribution of devices to learners in need, and the provision of student-friendly data packages for those with connectivity issues. It is also exploring with third parties, longer term provision of devices, and student-friendly mobile packages.

Special Educational Needs

455. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the situation in a school (details supplied) which is experiencing demand on special educational resources that far exceed supply of SNAs; and if she will support the application for an additional SNA allocation at the school. [14347/20]

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

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.

Detailed information on the NCSE exceptional review process is published on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie.

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

My Department has no role in making determinations in relation to SNA allocations either in the case of individual children or schools.

Special Educational Needs

456. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views regarding the situation of those children with additional learning needs who attend a school (details supplied) but due to lack of proper facilities and the ongoing delays in the completion of the new school project are accommodated almost 20km away. [14353/20]

457. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an ongoing delay at a school (details supplied); and if she will intervene to ensure this is resolved for the opening in September 2020. [14354/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 456 and 457 together.

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.

School Accommodation

458. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 230 of 23 June 2020, the basis for withdrawing approval of two temporary accommodation units in response to a school losing one teaching post at a school (details supplied); and if this decision will be reviewed. [14419/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I can confirm to the Deputy,

that my Department received an application, from the school in question, for capital funding and was given approval in principle to submit costs for interim accommodation.

Upon assessment by my officials, it was found that the school will have sufficient permanent accommodation on site to cater for their enrolments and the approval in principle for interim accommodation was withdrawn as the school is losing a teaching post with effect from September 2020. This decision was conveyed to the school authority.

I wish to advise that my Department's Capital Programme provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed. In this regard, it is open to the school in question to apply for funding under my Department's Additional School Accommodation Scheme, if their enrolments increase and they are unable to manage within their existing accommodation in the future.

Special Educational Needs

459. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the summer education programme will be extended to children with special education needs who are due to commence education in September 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14423/20]

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>

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 preschool children the Department of Children and Youth Affairs launched a dedicated campaign and website to support 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 preschool 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>

School Curriculum

460. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if African history will be introduced into the junior cycle to raise awareness of the slave trade and colonialism; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14457/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): History at Junior Cycle aims to enable students to develop the necessary conceptual understanding, disciplinary skills and subject knowledge to investigate the actions of people in the past and to come to a deeper understanding of the human condition. Students also come to see the world, and their place in it, from an historical perspective; and understand how the people and events of the past have shaped the contemporary world.

Learners have the option of exploring many different topics of personal interest whilst undertaking Junior Cycle history. Under Strand Three of the Junior Cycle history specification (The History of Europe and the Wider World), with specific reference to Learning Outcome 3.2, students should be able to evaluate the impact of conquest and colonisation on people with particular reference to Portuguese and Spanish exploration.

There are other opportunities to explore different aspects of history, such as the impact of colonialism, whilst undertaking Classroom Based Assessments (CBA's).

CBA 1 - The Past in my Place, allows students to present their findings on a study of an aspect of their home place that they consider of interest. Students have opted to study topics such as the French colonisation in North Africa for CBA 1 for instance.

CBA 2 - A Life in Time, students present their findings on a person of historical interest to them. The project is designed to allow students to follow their personal interest in a person from

the past. This person may be a well-known figure or someone from the student's home place or family, but whose story can be shown to be of historical significance or interest.

Schools Building Projects

461. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if outstanding fire remediation works have been carried out on a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14467/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I wish to advise the Deputy that the Department are currently carrying out periodic checks in a number of schools, including the school referred to by the Deputy, on the fire safety systems to ensure that the required ongoing maintenance of these systems is being kept up to date.

The Department continues to liaise with the School Principal in order to keep the school updated if further works required in the school.

Covid-19 Pandemic

462. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the impact Covid-19 has had in delaying the school building programme; the number of schools in each county in which the programme has been delayed due to Covid-19; the number of those that are in progress; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14468/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): There were circa 200 projects on site in early 2020. In line with National Public Health announcements by Government, all construction sites in relation to the education sector ceased in March 2020.

The construction sector has been re-opening on a gradual and phased basis since Monday 18 May. It will take time to remobilise and see the impact the of new working arrangements. It is too early to quantify exactly the impacts on projects due to the pandemic and as a result of these new working arrangements. A clearer picture will emerge over the next few months as projects become fully re-mobilised and we gain an increased understanding of the operational impacts of implementing Public Health guidelines in particular the social distancing rules. We will keep this under regular review. My Department is working closely with school authorities and patron bodies to ensure that contingency arrangements are in place where necessary if a school building projects is not completed in time for the start of the 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 year.

By way of information, my Department's website shows the status position on all school projects on the Capital Programme. These are listed on a county basis. The information is available at www.education.gov.ie and is updated regularly.

Springboard Programme

463. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the eligibility requirements for Springboard courses will be reviewed to allow persons enrol in more than one minor course simultaneously; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14476/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): As Springboard courses are designed to be part time, and to enable participants, depending on their circumstances, to look for employment, or continue to work while engaging in the courses, it is not permitted to undertake a second Springboard+ course in same academic year of Springboard+. It is not anticipated that there will be a review of this policy.

Springboard Programme

464. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a review will be carried out of the Springboard system to ensure courses are delivering value money for the taxpayer and persons participating; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14477/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The HEA periodically undertakes a trend analysis of the Springboard+ programme. This analysis examines, among other things, completion rates, graduation rates, and the impact of the courses on participants. The most recent trend analysis was performed in November 2016 and details are available at <https://springboardcourses.ie/reports>. The Statistics team at the HEA are currently working with the CSO on developing a report on the outcomes of Springboard+.

Schools Health and Safety

465. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional fire safety inspections are undertaken when schools are accommodated in non-purpose-built buildings; if specific fire safety inspections were carried out or requested by her Department on a building (details supplied); and if she is satisfied with the overall health and safety of the building. [14502/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The school in question was established in interim accommodation in 2014. The school patron identified alternative interim accommodation and requested approval from the Department to lease that property for the school. The Department approved this and, consistent with the usual approach with respect to this and similar circumstances, devolved securing the necessary statutory approvals and any works required in this regard to the school authorities.

In this context, the school in question commissioned a health and safety report in July 2017. This report recommend that a fire assessment be completed by the Fire Officer in the relevant local authority or equivalent. Accordingly, the relevant local authority's fire officer inspected the premises and issued a report in September 2017 which confirmed no major issues.

Schools Data

466. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the breakdown of the 280 primary and 125 post-primary schools using, or partially using, rented accommodation by area and patronage. [14504/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): Of the 3,963 schools (3,240 primary and 723 post-primary) in the State, 405 schools (280 primary and 125 post-primary) are currently using or partially using rented accommodation. The breakdown, by County, is contained in the following table. In relation to the breakdown by Patronage, this information is not held in the format requested.

I wish to advise the Deputy that, within the context of a rapidly increasing school population, my Department's priority is to ensure that every child will have access to a physical school place. In this regard, it is sometimes necessary to make use of rented temporary accommodation in order to meet the accommodation needs of schools.

Furthermore, it may also be necessary to make use of temporary rented accommodation when an immediate or short term need arises. For example, a school may require a temporary building in circumstances where a major school construction project is planned. Such temporary accommodation is removed when the major project concerned is completed. The length of time it is necessary to make use of temporary rented accommodation will vary from project to project.

My Department is taking an integrated approach with the Prefab Replacement Programme through the replacement of prefabricated units as part of large-scale and devolved projects, or as part of new projects approved under the Additional School Accommodation scheme.

Breakdown of schools by County

| | Primary | Post-Primary | Total |
|-----------|---------|--------------|-------|
| Carlow | 5 | 4 | 9 |
| Cavan | 10 | 1 | 11 |
| Clare | 9 | 3 | 12 |
| Cork | 40 | 14 | 54 |
| Donegal | 8 | 5 | 13 |
| Dublin | 62 | 18 | 80 |
| Galway | 17 | 6 | 23 |
| Kerry | 9 | 3 | 12 |
| Kildare | 10 | 11 | 21 |
| Kilkenny | 7 | 4 | 11 |
| Laois | 7 | 1 | 8 |
| Leitrim | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Limerick | 8 | 4 | 12 |
| Longford | 6 | 2 | 8 |
| Louth | 10 | 6 | 16 |
| Mayo | 6 | 6 | 12 |
| Meath | 11 | 6 | 17 |
| Monaghan | 6 | 1 | 7 |
| Offaly | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Roscommon | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| Sligo | 5 | 6 | 11 |
| Tipperary | 18 | 3 | 21 |
| Waterford | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| Westmeath | 2 | 5 | 7 |
| Wexford | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Wicklow | 8 | 7 | 15 |
| | 280 | 125 | 405 |

School Staff

467. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the teacher allocation will be brought forward for new primary schools due to open in September 2020 (details supplied). [14505/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): I am very conscious of the staffing schedule and the need to prioritise teacher allocations in primary schools given their vital role in communities around the country. I am looking at how best to make further progress in reducing the primary teacher ratio in the context of the Programme for Government implementation.

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. Details of the staffing arrangements are set out in Circular 18/2020, which is available on the Department website.

The staffing allocation of new schools is subject to the staffing schedule. Teaching posts may be applied for, on the basis of projected enrolments, through the developing post application process and/or the staffing appeals process.

The allocation of administrative principals to schools is enrolment based and the criteria are set out in Appendix B of Circular 18/2020.

Ministerial Responsibilities

468. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will publish the Departmental briefing paper on her role, remits and powers afforded to her upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14523/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): In keeping with the established practice, a comprehensive briefing document was prepared in advance of my appointment by officials in the Department of Education and Skills which was then finalised following the Taoiseach's announcement that the previous Department of Education and Skills would have its responsibilities, together with certain responsibilities previously assigned to other Departments, assigned to two Ministers in the current Government.

The briefing document provided to me represents the first phase of briefing following my appointment and as briefings are continuing I do not propose to make the briefing document available at this time. The Deputy may wish to note that, in accordance with established practice, the briefing document will be published on the Department's website in the coming weeks.

Schools Building Projects

469. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the proposed building project for a school (details supplied) will proceed to the next stage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14534/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): My Department is currently reviewing the building project to which the Deputy refers in the context of construction sites restarting and projects at tender stage progressing. Department officials will be in contact with the school shortly with regard to the next stage for this project.

Special Educational Needs

470. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of plans for the Red Door Special School in Dún Laoghaire; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14556/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The Deputy will be aware, in relation to the school to which he refers, that my Department has approved the provision of funding for a project under the Additional Accommodation Scheme. I am pleased to inform him that approval has now been given for the project to proceed to the construction stage. I understand that construction is underway in that context.

Schools Building Projects

471. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to commence the Educate Together in Dún Laoghaire; the discussions had with Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council with regards to the transfer of land for this school; if the potential of a land swap of land suitable for housing rather than a cash payment was discussed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14557/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): As the deputy is aware, the school in question commenced operation in Sept 2017 in temporary accommodation. I can confirm that officials in my Department are committed to providing a permanent accommodation solution for the school in question at the earliest possible date. Engagement with Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council is ongoing in this regard.

The potential of a land swap was proposed by Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, however, as my Department is actively seeking suitable sites for a number of additional schools in the Dun Laoghaire County area, it is not in a position to consider a land swap at this time.

Departmental Circulars

472. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will adjust Circular No. 0037/2020 regarding the implementation of the calculated grades model for the leaving certificate 2020 to make explicit reference to considerations or special exceptions for student mental health issues which may have impacted on school attendance or participation. [14576/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): The system of calculated grades is underpinned by key principles of objectivity, equity and fairness. The process has been designed to arrive at fair representations of student performance which does not favour any type of student or school.

Circular 0037/2020, which was published on 21 May, set out the detailed guidance for schools on the operation of the calculated grades process. The document provided detailed information on the process of estimating marks for students to receive calculated grades. Additional guidance to schools on the avoidance of unconscious bias and interpreting evidence of achievement in the case of students with disabilities was issued to schools on 28 May.

In line with the guidance, teachers were asked to use their professional judgement to arrive at an estimated mark for each student. The guidance required teachers to utilise a number of

records in assessing a student's performance and progress; for example, classwork and homework; class assessments; examinations in school at Christmas or summer, mock exams and also coursework.

In the case of any approved reasonable accommodations, the estimate of the student's likely performance was to be based on the assumption that this accommodation would have been available had the examinations been conducted in the normal way. Since examination accommodations are intended to reflect students' normal way of working in class, this did not require any special intervention beyond the teacher's understanding of how the student would achieve with the relevant supports in place.

In order to remain objective, and to underpin integrity in the process, the guidance was absolutely clear that the school's judgements should only take account of existing records and available evidence of a student's knowledge, skills and abilities. Teachers were asked to be alert to the issue of unconscious bias and were instructed that their judgements should not be allowed to be influenced by a student's behaviour, character, appearance, social class, or absences from school-based summative assessments due to illness, or any other subjective factors, whether positive or negative.

For the calculated grades system to be operated with integrity, and to ensure fairness to all students, estimated percentage marks could only have been based on credible, satisfactory, objective and unbiased evidence. Providing special consideration for any student, or any group of students, would undermine the principles of objectivity, equity and fairness, upon which the system had been based.

The school-based part of the system of Calculated Grades concluded on the 22nd June and the national standardisation phase has commenced. In the national standardisation phase, the school-sourced data will be combined with historical data order to generate the calculated grade for the students in their subjects. This standardisation process will be used to ensure that the calculated grades reflect standards that are properly aligned across schools and with a common national standard.

State Examinations

473. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if arrangements will be made to cater for the specific needs of students scheduled to sit the leaving certificate exams in 2021. [14577/20]

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 well-being 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. It is a top priority for my Department to work toward fullest reopening possible.

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 well-being 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.

State Examinations Commission

474. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she has spoken formally with the chief executive officer and or chairperson of State Examinations Commission since her appointment as Minister; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14578/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): Since my appointment as Minister for Education I have engaged in an extensive series of briefing discussions with senior officials of my Department across a range of education issues. These discussions, and engagements with key education bodies and stakeholders, will continue over the period ahead.

Question No. 475 answered with Question No. 364.

Special Educational Needs

476. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if children with Down's syndrome, whether attending a mainstream school or a special school, are covered by the summer provision; if not, the reason for not providing this service to all such children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14585/20]

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

Following the decision from Cabinet the home based summer programme is also open to children with down syndrome who are attending post primary school.

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>

Tionscadail Tógála Scoileanna

477. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an bhfuil i gceist aici togra tógála a cheadú do scoil speisialta (sonraí tugtha) a bhfuil géarghá aici le cóiríocht nua cheart; cén stádas atá ag an togra seo i láthair na huaire; agus an ndéanfaidh sí

ráiteas ina thaobh. [14634/20]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Norma Foley): Féadaim a dheimhniú gur chuir an scoil dár thagair an Teachta Dála iarratas faoi bhráid mo Roinne maidir le cóiríocht bhreise. Tá eolas breise iarrtha ag mo Roinn ar an scoil chomh maithe le soiléiriú ar eolas a cuireadh ar fáil ina n-iarratas. Nuair a gheofar an t-eolas seo, is féidir an t-iarratas a mheas a thuilleadh agus cuirfear an cinneadh in iúl don scoil.

Child Benefit

478. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 971 of 16 June 2020, if she will consider using her discretion in circumstances in which an application was to be made for child benefit by the father of an Irish citizen child based on a situation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13732/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Child Benefit is payable in respect of children who are ordinarily resident in the State, regardless of citizenship, provided the applicant satisfies the habitual residence condition.

As a family benefit, Child Benefit is exportable in cases where an applicant is working in Ireland but where the child is living in another EU/EEA state. However, the exportability of Child Benefit does not extend to children who are living in non-EU/EEA states, regardless of the citizenship of the child.

Under Irish legislation, child benefit is paid to the parent that the child resides with predominantly and therefore, as outlined previously, the individual referred to does not appear to satisfy the conditions for payment under domestic or EU legislation.

There are no plans at present to amend the qualifying conditions for child benefit. Child benefit is paid to an applicant in respect of a child, and therefore it is the applicant who must satisfy the qualifying conditions. This is regardless of the citizenship of the child.

Child Benefit

479. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding applications for child benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13733/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Child benefit is the main policy instrument for assisting families with the costs of raising children. It is a universal payment and is paid in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years, or to the age of 18 in respect of children who are in full-time education or who have a disability.

In order for payment to continue beyond the age of 16, proof of attendance at school or college is required and this is the case for all children, including those attending school elsewhere in Europe.

There are no conditions applying to Irish nationals over and above those applying to all child benefit recipients. For children aged under 16 it may be necessary on occasion to seek further information to establish residency, but again this applies to all customers.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Bodies

480. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reasons the Citizens Information Board and the Money Advice and Budgeting Service, MABS, restructuring plan has commenced in the south Dublin area despite the Joint Committee on Employment Affairs and Social Protection's production of a report in June 2017 (details supplied); the rationale, process and evidence of decision-making that has led to the commencement of the restructuring plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13751/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is the statutory body responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice (including money and budgeting advice) and advocacy services on a wide range of public and social services. CIB delivers on this remit through its provision of some services directly to the public and through a network of service delivery companies.

In February 2017, the CIB Board made the decision to restructure the governance arrangements of the network of 42 Citizens Information Services and 51 Money advice and Budgeting Services into 16 regional companies (8 Regional CIS and 8 Regional MABS).

This restructuring process was completed successfully in October 2018. All staff, assets and liabilities of the local companies have transferred to the 16 new regional companies. The rationale behind the restructuring process was to enhance the governance of the regional companies and to achieve administrative efficiencies.

The local CIS and MABS companies in the Dublin area have been restructured into four new regional companies, two CIS and two MABS regional companies. These are split equally with a regional CIS and a MABS company in both North Dublin and in Dublin South. Each regional company has responsibility for service provision in their respective geographic areas.

There has been no diminution of services provided by MABS or CIS in the Dublin area and there are no plans to reduce services. The aim of each regional service delivery company is to continue to deliver a high-quality information advice service to all the citizens of Dublin.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Data

481. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the length of time it is taking to process applications under the remit of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13784/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The data requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

| SCHEME | AVERAGE NO OF WEEKS TO AWARD MAY 2020 |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| State Pension (Contributory) | 4 |
| Widow(er)'s Contributory Pension | 1 |
| State Pension (Non-Contributory) | 5 |

| SCHEME | AVERAGE NO OF WEEKS TO AWARD MAY 2020 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Jobseekers Allowance | 1 |
| Jobseekers Benefit | 1 |
| One-Parent Family Payment | 2 |
| Supplementary Welfare Allowance Basi | 1 |
| Maternity Benefit | 6 |
| Paternity Benefit | 6 |
| Parent's Benefit | 1 |
| Carer's Allowance | 6 |
| Carer's Benefit | 5 |
| Disability Allowance | 7 |
| Invalidity Pension | 6 |
| Illness Benefit | 1 |
| Occupational Injury Benefit | 1 |
| Child Benefit | 2 |
| Working Family Payment | 1 |
| Domiciliary Care Allowance | 8 |
| Household Benefits | 1 |
| Free Travel | 1 |
| Treatment Benefit | 0 |

Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment

482. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if persons will receive back payment in cases in which there was a delay in receiving the pandemic unemployment payment (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13785/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The emergency Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment has been introduced as a time-limited emergency measure so that payments can be made as quickly as possible to the large number of people who have become fully unemployed due to the pandemic.

During the month of March, my Department received and processed jobseeker claims equivalent in number to a three year claim-load. These applications were processed as quickly as possible, with almost 59,000 people paid in the first week of the scheme, 283,000 people paid in the following week, and over 507,000 people in the third week of the scheme. To date, almost 7.8 million payments have issued at a cost of over €2.7 Billion.

Currently, the Department is focused on processing and managing payments to ensure that they continue to be made to all who qualify for them. The work involved in doing this is complex, with people joining and leaving the scheme each week, along with management of overlaps between the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment and the Revenue Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme.

The Department is aware that many people are due some arrears and that each person's case is unique. This means that each person's application may need to be individually reviewed.

It will take time to review all of the applications and assess for back payments. I can assure

the Deputy that all cases will be examined and where arrears arise they will be processed and claimants will be notified.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit

483. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13789/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Carer's Benefit (CARB) is a payment made to insured people who leave the workforce to care for a child or an adult in need of full-time care and attention. An increased payment can be made where full-time care is being provided to two people.

To qualify the carer must satisfy PRSI conditions, employment conditions, show that they are providing full-time care and attention and must show that the care recipient requires full-time care and attention.

One of the conditions for CARB is that one must have been employed in remunerative employment for not less than 16 hours per week / 32 hours per fortnight and for at least 8 weeks, whether consecutive or not, in the 26 week period prior to commencing caring/leaving employment to provide full time care.

The person concerned applied for CARB from 31st August 2020 to 30th May 2021. He is currently employed as a job-sharing teacher working 11 hours per week.

The claim was disallowed as he did not meet the employment conditions to qualify for CARB.

The person concerned was notified on 11th June 2020 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal. He was advised to apply for Carer's Allowance which is not a contribution based scheme.

If the person concerned wants a review of the decision to disallow CARB, it is open to him to submit additional evidence to demonstrate he satisfies the employment conditions.

Alternatively the he may appeal the decision directly to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Industrial Disputes

484. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if, further to commitments made at a meeting of the high level forum for the community and voluntary sector in April 2017, she has communicated to the Workplace Relations Commission the position regarding attendance at the WRC; if not, the reason; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13794/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The matter of Community Employment (CE) Supervisor pension claim following the 2008 Labour Court Recommendation 19293 was the subject of an extensive discussion at the Com-

munity Sector High-level Forum, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). Its role was to examine certain issues pertaining to the Community Employment sector and in particular the subject of pensions, having regard to both the costs and precedent in the context of the wider community and voluntary sector. The High-level Forum included representatives from public service management and union officials.

A detailed scoping exercise was undertaken in 2017 with input from the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) on the potential costs of providing Exchequer support for the establishment of such a pension scheme for employees across the Community and Voluntary sector in Ireland. The potential cost to the State was estimated at between €188 million and €347 million per annum depending on the numbers involved. This excludes any provision for immediate ex-gratia lump sum payment of pension as sought, which could entail a further cost of €318 million to the Exchequer.

It should be noted that CE sponsoring authorities are the legal employers of their CE supervisors, CE assistant supervisors and CE participants, the Department's role continues to be that of CE funder. The Department was not a party to the Labour Court hearing in 2008 which was between 'various community employment schemes' - funded by Fás and the 'Irish Municipal, Public and Civil Trade Union & Services Industrial Professional Technical Union'. The Labour Court recommended that Fás, as the recognised funding agency should fund the pension provision. The Department has therefore no basis or requirement to inform the WRC further on the matter.

Carer's Allowance

485. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason for long delays in assessing applications for carer's allowance; the reason a person (details supplied) has been waiting over 13 weeks; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13797/20]

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.

Means are any income belonging to the carer and their spouse, civil partner, or cohabitant, property, (except their own home) or an asset that could bring in money or provide them with an income, for example occupational pensions, or pensions or benefits from another country.

There are no delays in the processing of new carer's allowance applications with the average processing time currently at 5 weeks. Reviews can take longer, particularly at this time, where we have seen a substantial number of requests for review of entitlements received since March, due to the carer and/or spouse losing their employment throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

The person concerned is in receipt of CA since 5 October 2017. As a result of weekly means assessed this was awarded at a lower rate of pay.

On 21 March 2020 the person concerned contacted the Department to request a reassessment of her CA as her spouse's employment was terminating on 22 March 2020 due to Covid-19.

The outcome of the reassessment is that the person concerned has been awarded the maximum rate of CA from 19 March 2020. Arrears of allowance from 19 March 2020 to 2 July 2020 will issue to her nominated bank account on 2 July 2020.

The person concerned was notified on 26 June 2020 of this outcome and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Insolvency Payments Scheme

486. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 407 of 28 February 2017, if progress has been made on the review of eligibility for the insolvency payments scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13829/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The purpose of the insolvency payments scheme is to protect certain outstanding pay-related entitlements due to employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer. The scheme operates under the Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) Act 1984, which derives from EU Directive 2008/94. Payments are made from the Social Insurance Fund.

The Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) Act 1984 provides for a scheme to employees of companies that are in a formal wind-up procedure such as liquidation or receivership, or situations where the employer has died and the estate is insolvent, or an employer has been declared bankrupt.

The legislation does not provide for situations where an employer ceases to trade without engaging in any formal wind-up process. In such cases, referred to as 'informal insolvency', former employees may have monies owed to them without having a legal mechanism to claim same from the Social Insurance Fund.

In December 2018, the Supreme Court found that Ireland must provide a mechanism through which a competent authority can determine that a state of insolvency arises, without requiring a formal wind-up process, and that monies due to the employee can be claimed by them from the Social Insurance Fund.

The judgment and its ramifications are complex. Consideration must be given to:-

- how the definition of insolvency for the purposes of the Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) Act 1984 can be extended to include situations of informal insolvency and what are the implications and consequences for company law. To date the two statutory regimes - employers' insolvency on one hand and company law on the other - have been aligned.

- The determination of insolvency and by whom this determination will be made in the absence of a formal wind-up process. This will be essential in situations of informal insolvency.

- Safeguarding the Social Insurance Fund from potential abuse.

Officials in my Department are working with the Office of the Attorney General and external counsel in addressing the issues involved. Consultation with other relevant Government Departments and Offices is also underway.

Illness Benefit

487. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Pro-

tection the reason those certified as medically vulnerable have been expected to survive on standard illness benefit in view of the substantial risk to their health and potential cost to the Exchequer in the event of contracting Covid-19 instead of receiving the enhanced illness benefit or other payment at the same rate as the pandemic unemployment payment; the reason this was not made available to them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13833/20]

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.

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 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. It is due to end on 10 August 2020.

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. Standard Illness Benefit payment may be payable subject to normal certification and eligibility criteria, where a medical practitioner provides a certificate of incapacity stating that a person is incapable of work due to the medical condition. Standard illness benefit is paid at a maximum weekly personal rate of €203. Increases may also be paid for qualifying adults and children. This may be paid for an extended period, depending on the person's continued eligibility. Standard illness benefit is the primary income support payment in this State for people who are unable to attend work due to illness of any type apart from the short-term payment in respect of COVID-19.

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.

Community Employment Schemes

488. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the contracts for new community employment supervisors will be of the same duration as existing contracts; and if she will address the situation regarding job security for these supervisors. [13869/20]

489. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the contracts for currently employed community employment supervisors will be protected and renewed; and if she will address the situation regarding job security for these supervisors. [13870/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 488 and 489 together.

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 authorities that operate in the community and voluntary sector. The annual contract agreement between my Department and the CE sponsoring authorities establishes their role as an independent contractor, responsible for all purposes and all persons recruited by them.

My Department provides funding towards training and material costs in addition to CE participant and CE supervisor wages on a per capita basis. CE sponsoring authorities receive this funding in line with their annual contract with my Department.

CE supervisors are employed by CE sponsoring authorities, they are not employees of the Department. As the employer, CE sponsoring authorities provide fixed-term contracts to both new and existing CE supervisors in line with their annual contractual agreement with the Department.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

490. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding bank payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13875/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):
The Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection provides two main options for payment methods for its customers: payments in cash at post offices or payments direct to customer accounts in financial institutions. The Department intends, where possible, to continue to offer its many clients the choice of being paid in cash at the post office or directly into an account in a financial institution.

Certain jobseeker payment criteria are relaxed for persons aged 62 years and over. For ex-

ample, they are not required to engage with the compulsory activation process, may be placed on yearly signing arrangements and are given the option of being paid directly into their bank account. This has been the Department's policy for a number of years.

Accordingly, those in receipt of a Jobseeker's payment who are fully unemployed are contacted when they reach the age of 62 and offered the option of being paid directly into their bank account or continuing to be paid at the post office.

State Pensions

491. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an applicant will automatically receive the greater of the two pensions in circumstances in which they received the details of their entitlements to both a non-contributory and contributory pension; and if they must specify which pension they will to avail of (details supplied). [13883/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): State pension (contributory) is a social insurance payment made to people at pension age, who satisfy certain social insurance contribution conditions. Pension entitlement is assessed on the basis of the eligibility conditions applicable on the date an individual reaches pension age. Factors such as an individual's social insurance record, their attachment to the workforce, and their countries of employment affect the rate of pension entitlement.

State pension (non-contributory) is a means-tested, residency-based payment for people of pension age. Social welfare legislation provides that the means test takes account of the income and assets of the applicant (and spouse/civil partner/cohabitant). Income and assets include income from employment, self-employment, occupational pensions, maintenance payments as well as property owned (other than the family home) and capital such as savings, shares and other investments.

If a person applies for both of these pensions, their eligibility and rate of pension entitlement is determined based on the qualifying conditions of the respective schemes. Where an applicant qualifies for both pensions, they are paid whichever pension is more financially beneficial to them, since both schemes cannot be paid concurrently.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

School Meals Programme

492. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to extend the school meals scheme during July and August 2020 to assist families on low incomes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13884/20]

493. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to extend the operation and funding for the school meals scheme during July and August 2020 to assist families on low incomes; her plans to extend the remit of the school meals scheme to include youth and community services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13885/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 492 and 493 together.

The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to some 1,580 schools and organisations benefitting 250,000 children. The objective of the scheme is to provide regular, nutritious food to children who are unable, due to lack of good quality food, to take full advantage of the education provided to them. The programme is an important component of policies to encourage school attendance and extra educational achievement and coincides with the school year.

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.

In recent years entry to the School Meals Scheme has been confined to DEIS schools in addition to schools identified as having levels of concentrated disadvantage that would benefit from access to the School Meals Programme.

Prior to the introduction of DEIS in 2005, all schools and organisations that were part of one of a number of Department of Education and Skills' initiatives for disadvantaged schools were eligible to participate in the programme, which included Breaking the Cycle, Giving Children an Even Break, the Disadvantaged Area Scheme, Home School Community Liaison and the School Completion Programme. These schools and organisations have continued to remain in the scheme.

Any decision to extend the current provision would need to be considered in a budgetary context.

I trust that this clarifies the position.

Disability Allowance

494. **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. [13890/20]

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 6 February 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 3 March 2020. The case was referred to an Appeals Officer on 24 March 2020.

The Appeals Officer requested additional documentation from the person concerned on 26 May 2020. This documentation has not yet been received, but when the documentation is received, the Appeals Officer 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.

Employment Rights

495. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if it is legal for a company (details supplied) and employers to have control of workers' tips. [13896/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The management and distribution of tips is a matter of contract between an employer and an employee. There are currently no provisions in employment law or within any other statutory framework that oblige employers to deal with tips in a particular way. It is a matter for employers and employees to agree such terms.

In the event of a breach of contract, it is open to either party to refer the matter to the courts for determination. If the matter is a collective dispute, it may potentially be referred to the Workplace Relations Commission under the Industrial Relations Acts.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance

496. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision has been made on a disability allowance appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13898/20]

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 18 March 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 7 April 2020. The case was referred on 22 April 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.

Domiciliary Care Allowance

497. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied); and when they can expect a decision on the case. [13899/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): An application for Domiciliary Care Allowance was received from the person concerned on the 5th December 2019. The application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 24th February 2020 setting out the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

An appeal of the decision was registered by the Social Welfare Appeals Office on the 4th April 2020. As part of the appeals process, the application was re-examined by a deciding officer and the person concerned was notified on the 19th May 2020 that the review was unsuccessful. An appeal submission was prepared and forwarded to the Social Welfare Appeals Office on the 16th June 2020. The Social Welfare Appeals Office will contact the person directly about the outcome of the appeal when it is dealt with.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance

498. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the appeal lodged by a person (details supplied) in regard to a carer's allowance has commenced; when a decision will be made; if it has not yet been examined, when a result on the appeal can be expected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13906/20]

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.

Once claims are in payment, the Department periodically reviews them to ensure that there is continued entitlement. Depending on the circumstances in each case and to make best use of resources, a review may only concentrate on a specific condition of entitlement.

One of the qualifying conditions is that the means of the person concerned must be less than the statutory limit.

Following an investigation it was determined that the means of the person concerned were greater than the statutory limit and that she was therefore no longer entitled to CA.

The person concerned was notified on 16 March 2020 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The department was notified on 29 April 2020 that the person concerned had appealed this decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). A submission in support of the decision is being prepared.

Correspondence issued to the person concerned on 2 June 2020 requesting payslips. Once the information is received the decision will be reviewed. The submission is currently being prepared and will be forwarded along with the file to the SWAO for determination.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Meals-on-Wheels Services

499. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 1113 of 3 June 2020, when her officials made contact with the sponsors of the scheme; the dates and outcomes of such meetings; if the HSE was involved in the meetings; if a satisfactory outcome has been reached; if the funding is now being provided for the assistant supervisor position which was originally established in 2002; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13909/20]

7 July 2020

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Contacts between the project sponsors and this Department have been on-going since October 2019. There was also a meeting in February 2020 between an official of my department and their counterpart in the HSE to discuss the matter.

Due to Covid 19 restrictions the opportunity to meet with the scheme sponsors was not possible. However, following the easing of Covid 19 restrictions, a meeting was arranged discuss the issues in detail.

This meeting was held on Friday 3rd July 2020, and in attendance was an official of my department and the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson of the board of the Clogh/ Muckalee Community Employment Scheme.

It was agreed that the Clogh/ Muckalee Community Employment Scheme, would request approval for an additional five Community Employment positions from the department which would bring their participant number to 26.

It was further agreed that they would furnish to my department a completed application for same, together with the required union approval, in compliance with the requirement under Community Employment Procedures that specifies:

Where a project maintains an approval level of 26 or more participants, additional supervisory grant support may be allocated for an Assistant Supervisor to enable the sponsor provide assistance with additional supervision. DEASP will only consider such grant support when the Sponsor submits, with the project application, a detailed job description for the additional supervision tasks and the intended salary levels.

Once these vacancies have been filled by the project sponsor, and application may then be submitted by the company to request the approval of the appointment of an assistant supervisor, which will be given favourable consideration by my department.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Eligibility

500. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if financial aid will be provided to private homes affected by flash flooding recently; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13911/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has an important role to play in assisting households in the immediate aftermath of flooding events.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department can make an exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off, exceptional expenditure, which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. ENPs 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.

Any person whose home was affected by recent flooding events, and who is in financial difficulty as a result, should contact their local Community Welfare Service to discuss their situation

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

501. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the situation in respect of a person who was living with their partner for over seven years and the partner has died; if the surviving partner who lived with that person is entitled to pension entitlements in respect of their deceased partner; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13941/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Further to clarification received by the Deputy's office, I understand this question relates to the general policy for the Widow's, Widower's and Surviving Civil Partner's pension.

This pension is a weekly pension paid to the husband, wife or surviving civil partner of a deceased person and is available to those who satisfy the necessary PRSI contribution conditions, either on their own record or on that of the deceased spouse or civil partner, subject to eligibility criteria.

The legal context governing relationships such as marriage is the responsibility of the Department of Justice and Equality. Entering into a marriage or civil partnership is a legal act, which confers both rights and obligations on both parties that do not exist in law between cohabiting couples. Widows, widowers and surviving civil partners, on becoming bereaved, therefore, lose someone who had legal duties towards them, and the social welfare code may recognise this by providing a pension to them, subject to certain conditions.

It was for these reasons that the social welfare supports for widows and widowers were extended to surviving civil partners from 1 January 2011, when the provisions of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010 came into force.

Aside from the wider legal issues regarding the status of marriage and civil partnerships, which is a much broader policy area than its implications under the remit of my Department, extending the current provisions to people who have not undertaken equivalent legal obligations would carry significant costs, and would also raise significant issues about criteria if it were to be based upon cohabitation.

Any possible changes to eligibility for social welfare supports for widows, widowers and surviving civil partners to be awarded in cases in which the surviving partner was not married to the deceased but cohabited for a number of years, would have to be considered in the overall budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card

502. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which a person can arrange an appointment for a public services card in view of Covid-19 restrictions. [13952/20]

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 to comply with HSE and WHO guide-

lines 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 is currently resuming SAFE registration work on a phased basis in Intreo Centres and this will be done in accordance with all relevant Health and Safety and Government guidelines to ensure the health and safety of the Department's customers and staff. I would expect that SAFE registrations will be resumed nationwide over the coming weeks.

In the meantime, anyone who has lost their PSC may contact the Department and a replacement will be issued.

Where the Department has written to a person inviting them to renew their PSC, they may do so by post.

It should also be noted that the National Transport Authority has confirmed that expired Free Travel PSC's will be accepted on public transport for the time being.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

503. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding the application for a contributory pension and arrears that may have issued or are due in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13977/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The person concerned reached pension age on 13 May 2020. They applied for State pension (contributory) on 5 June 2020. The person has a contribution record of 340 paid full-rate social insurance contributions. As their contributions fall short of the required 520 paid full-rate contributions to qualify for standard State pension (contributory), their claim was disallowed. The person was notified in writing of this decision on 18 June 2020, and provided with a copy of their social insurance record on which the decision was based.

Provisions exist for the award of a mixed insurance pro rata state pension, where a person has periods of PRSI coverage from employment in the public or civil service. The pro rata pension entitlement of the person concerned was assessed as 20.45% of the maximum pension rate, based on their combined social insurance record of 486 full-rate contributions and credits plus 1,890 modified-rate contributions and credits. This is the correct rate of pension commensurate with their contribution history. In the calculation formula for a mixed insurance pro rata state pension, the more full-rate contributions that a person has, the higher the rate of state pension payable. Conversely, the more modified contributions used in the calculation, the lower the rate of pension payable.

The person concerned has been notified in writing of this decision on 26 June 2020. Payment and arrears have issued for collection in the person's designated post office.

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 IQA on 5 June 2020 with their pension application. Additional information regarding means was requested on 18 June 2020. When this information is received, a decision can be made regarding eligibility for the IQA payment. They will be notified of the outcome in writing.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment

504. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a Covid-19 payment will be made available in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13987/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I refer the Deputy to the answer provided under Dáil Question No. 1014.

The Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) was introduced by my Department in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is an income support payment for both employees and the self-employed who have become fully unemployed due to a downturn in economic activity related to Covid-19. One of the qualifying criteria for this payment is that the person is aged between 18 and 66 years. Unfortunately on this basis the person concerned does not qualify for this income support.

According to the records of my Department, the person concerned is currently in receipt of a State Pension (contributory).

If the person concerned is experiencing financial difficulties it is open to him to contact his local Community Welfare Service in the Newbridge Intreo Centre where his circumstances will be assessed. Under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme, my Department can make a single Exceptional Needs Payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure, which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. There is no automatic entitlement to these payments which are payable at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme, taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case, in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance.

The Community Welfare Service can be contacted by phone at 045 491500 (option 5).

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment

505. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person who takes employment under the July provision scheme but is not paid until October 2020 will retain their Covid-19 payments. [14004/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Where a person in receipt of the pandemic unemployment payment returns to work they should notify the Department of the date they resume working as they are not entitled to the payment when in work. Although the payment is closed from the day the person returns to work they will receive their final payment the following week as it is payable a week in arrears. Where a person will not receive a payment from their employer for a number of weeks they can apply for

Supplementary Welfare Allowance. In order to qualify for Supplementary Welfare Allowance a person must undergo a means test and satisfy the schemes eligibility criteria.

I trust that this clarifies the matter.

Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment

506. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of pandemic unemployment payments cancelled to date due to not meeting the criteria to receive the payment in the first place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14017/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since the start of the pandemic unemployment payment on March 16th 2020, approximately 174,000 cases did not satisfy the conditions of payment for the reasons listed in the table below.

Note that this is a count of specific cases, and not a count of individual customers who have applied for but did not receive a PUP.

| Reason | % |
|--|------|
| Overlap with Revenue Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme | 29.0 |
| Not employed in the period | 19.0 |
| Other/Customer requested | 15.9 |
| Incorrect details provided | 15.1 |
| Overlapping social protection payment | 15.1 |
| Still in employment | 2.9 |
| Customer not in the State | 1.6 |
| Customer outside age bands | 1.3 |

Programme for Government

507. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if she will provide documents on those costings. [14029/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): During the course of Government formation talks, the Department provided briefing material and costings related to various policy proposals. These were published on 3 July 2020 by the Department of the Taoiseach and can be found at

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7b927-programme-for-government-documents/#the-department-employment-affairs-and-social-protection>

Costings for the specific Programme for Government commitments related to this Department will be explored over the coming months in the context of estimates and budgetary discussions.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

508. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the supports available to older persons and those that had to cocoon during the Covid-19 emergency and generated greater than average household costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14046/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The primary State income support in respect of people who are aged 66 years or over is the State Pension – either the contributory State pension or the non-contributory pension, which is means tested.

Recipients of State pension payments may, subject to satisfying eligibility conditions, have access to a range of additional supports. These supports include the living alone increase, household benefits, telephone support allowance, fuel allowance and free travel.

A pensioner who is living alone can receive the living-alone increase, which was increased from €9 to €14 per week at the beginning of the year.

The household benefits package (HHB) 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. My Department will spend approximately €265 million this year on HHB. It consists of the gas / electricity element of the package (€35 a month) and the free TV licence element.

The Fuel Allowance which was increased by €2 in Budget 2020 is a payment of €24.50 per week for 28 weeks (a total of €686 for the fuel season) from October to April at an estimated cost of €261 million in 2020. The purpose of this payment is to assist qualifying households with their energy costs.

During the COVID-19 emergency, the Government has been seeking to implement and operate supports that are targeted where most needed, to ensure continued economic activity and reduce the risk of poverty. In March, as part of Government COVID-19 response measures, the Fuel Allowance scheme was extended by four weeks until Friday, 8th May 2020. At a cost of €36.61 million, the extension of the fuel season for over 369,000 existing eligible households was put in place, to ensure that the most vulnerable groups, particularly older people in receipt of State pensions, were provided with additional targeted financial supports. This extension meant that the 2019/2020 Fuel Season ran to the latest end date of any season in the last 30 years.

The telephone support allowance (TSA) is a weekly payment of €2.50. The estimated full year cost of the scheme is over €17.5 million. To receive the allowance a customer of my Department must be in receipt of a qualifying payment such as the State pension and also in receipt of the Living Alone Allowance and the Fuel Allowance and the scheme supports recipients by assisting with the cost of communications and/or home security solutions.

While I fully understand that these are difficult and distressing times for many people, especially for the vulnerable and the elderly, any further economic measures can only be considered while taking account of the overall budgetary context and the availability of financial resources.

Furthermore, my Department operates both Exceptional and Urgent Needs Payments as part of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme for people of any age, who have an urgent need which they cannot meet from their own resources. These payments are available through our Community Welfare Officers.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Consultancy Contracts

509. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within her Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14054/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The procurement of consultancy services supports my Department in providing diversity and inclusion training. Details of the consultancy service providers engaged by my Department since 2018 are set out in the following table:

External Training / Learning

| Date Payable | Supplier / Provider | Description | Amount |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|---|-----------|
| 15/02/2018 | Institute of Public Administration. | MIS1 Leadership Masterclass - Building an Inclusive Culture | €195.00 |
| 06/09/2018 | Phoenix Rize Consulting | MIS1 Diversity Workshop | €200.00 |
| 29/07/2019 | Immigrant Council of Ireland | Training on Immigrant Council 22/2/19 - 1/5/19 | €2,500.00 |
| 08/05/2018 | Public Policy Exchange Limited | MIS1 Fighting Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe: Promoting and Equal, Open and Inclusive Society | €316.00 |
| Total | | | €3,211.00 |

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Legal Costs

510. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the expenditure her Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14071/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Department incurs expenditure on costs associated with legal cases from Vote 37 (Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection) and the Social Insurance Fund.

Some costs are borne by the Chief State Solicitor's Office.

The following table sets out the amount paid by the Department for external legal services for the period since January 2016 to date:

| Year | Amount (€000) |
|--------------|---------------|
| 2020 to date | 605 |

| | |
|------|-------|
| 2019 | 2,721 |
| 2018 | 4,115 |
| 2017 | 1,756 |
| 2016 | 1,017 |

Employment Data

511. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of notified job vacancies in Drogheda town by month from 2016 to date in tabular form; if the figures are available through employment services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14118/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The main reservoir of data of vacancies posted to the Department for jobseekers and others seeking employment is held on the Department's JobsIreland online recruitment platform. *JobsIreland.ie* is a free, easy to use and is provided by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection which is available to employers across the country to advertise their vacancies and to jobseekers to identify vacancies of interest to them.

The number of vacancies in Drogheda advertised on the Department's online recruitment service, *JobsIreland.ie*, is available from June 2016 to June 2020 and is presented by month in the following tables.

JobsIreland Vacancies (Including Schemes) in Drogheda

| | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | Grand Total |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|-------------|
| January | | 36 | 30 | 34 | 30 | |
| February | | 23 | 16 | 35 | 20 | |
| March | | 24 | 22 | 46 | 12 | |
| April | | 23 | 20 | 30 | 4 | |
| May | | 17 | 43 | 56 | 4 | |
| June | 14 | 21 | 21 | 15 | 34 | |
| July | 19 | 16 | 21 | 26 | | |
| August | 59 | 16 | 24 | 31 | | |
| September | 50 | 33 | 29 | 21 | | |
| October | 32 | 21 | 18 | 38 | | |
| November | 33 | 24 | 30 | 25 | | |
| December | 18 | 10 | 7 | 16 | | |
| Total | 225 | 264 | 281 | 373 | 104 | 1247 |

JobsIreland Vacancies (Excluding Schemes) in Drogheda

| | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | Grand Total |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|-------------|
| January | | 20 | 10 | 13 | 6 | |
| February | | 19 | 11 | 19 | 8 | |
| March | | 10 | 8 | 31 | 7 | |
| April | | 18 | 13 | 15 | 4 | |
| May | | 13 | 24 | 37 | 4 | |
| June | 6 | 5 | 8 | 7 | 8 | |
| July | 9 | 12 | 9 | 12 | | |
| August | 30 | 10 | 16 | 16 | | |
| September | 26 | 29 | 16 | 6 | | |
| October | 24 | 17 | 11 | 15 | | |
| November | 22 | 11 | 19 | 14 | | |
| December | 11 | 7 | 3 | 8 | | |
| Total | 128 | 171 | 148 | 193 | 37 | 677 |

In addition to the vacancies advertised on *JobsIreland.ie*, recruitment services are also delivered by Intreo employment services personnel around the country and contracted providers in addition to recruitment achieved by many candidates through own personal efforts and networks and through commercial recruitment companies.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Eligibility

512. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person over the age of 66 who could not receive the Covid-19 payment but who still has significant financial responsibilities will receive some form of financial relief; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14168/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The COVID 19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment is a time-limited payment available to people aged between 18 and 66 years, and the age range is consistent with other jobseeker and social protection income supports paid to working age people. 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.

People 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 66 or over 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.

People aged 66 and over 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 people of 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 that this clarifies the position.

Public Services Card

513. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which a person can acquire a public services card at present. [14169/20]

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 is currently resuming SAFE registration work on a phased basis in Intreo Centres 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 registrations will be resumed nationwide over the coming weeks.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance

514. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in making a decision on the application which was lodged in July 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14206/20]

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.

Means are any income belonging to the carer and their spouse, civil partner, or cohabitant,

property, (except their own home) or an asset that could bring in money or provide them with an income, for example occupational pensions, or pensions or benefits from another country.

A person can be considered to be providing full-time care and attention where they are engaged in employment, self-employment or on training courses outside the home for a maximum of 18.5 hours per week, provided that they can show to the satisfaction of a deciding officer that adequate care has been provided for the care recipient in their absence.

I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 1 October 2019.

The file was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) on 3 October 2019 to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

The SWI report was received by the Deciding Officer, on foot of which further clarifications were requested from the SWI on 11 June 2020 in relation to his report. A reminder issued to the SWI on 01 July 2020.

Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance

515. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to increase the income threshold to qualify for the carer's allowance; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the means test disregard has not changed since 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14223/20]

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 Domiciliary Care Allowance and the Carer's Support Grant. Combined spending on these payments to carers in 2020 is expected to exceed €1.3 billion.

Carer's Allowance is a means-tested payment for carers who look after certain people in need of full-time care and attention on a full time basis. The means test for Carer's Allowance is one of the most generous means tests in the social welfare system, most notably with regard to spouse's earnings. The amount of weekly earnings disregarded is €332.50 per week for a single person and €665 per week for a couple. This means that a couple with two children can earn in the region of €37,500 and qualify for the maximum rate of Carer's Allowance. A half-rate carer's allowance is also payable with other social welfare payments e.g. pensions and disability payments.

The conditions attached to payments of Carer's Allowance are consistent with the overall conditions that apply to social assistance payments generally. This system of social assistance supports provides payments based on an income need with the means test playing the critical role in determining whether or not an income need arises as a consequence of a particular

contingency – be that illness, disability, unemployment or caring. Carer's Allowance acts as an income support for those who cannot earn an income in the open labour market due to their caring responsibilities. The continued application of the means test not only ensures that the recipient has a verifiable income need but that resources are targeted to those with greatest need.

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 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.

Social Insurance

516. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated additional revenue that would be generated in a full year if the class S PRSI rate increased by 0.6%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14302/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): It is estimated that an additional €78 million in revenue would be generated in a full year from an increase to the current Class S rate of PRSI of 4% to 4.6%.

This estimate is based on the latest available data and reflects macro-economic indicators for 2020.

The estimate does not take into account any possible changes in contributor behaviour arising from increasing the rate of contribution.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes

517. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a PPSN, personal public service number, will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14306/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I can confirm that my Department has allocated a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) to this individual and issued a letter advising the person of their PPSN on 2nd July 2020.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes

518. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Pro-

tection if the standard 19.5 hour community employment scheme weekly placement will be made available to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14308/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):

The person concerned had an interview on 02/07/2020, for an alternative CE scheme of 19.5 hours per week. It is my understanding that the person concerned is willing to participate on this scheme.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment

519. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the pandemic payment a person who is unable to return to work is entitled to in view of the fact they have an underlying health condition and are cocooning; if she will examine the specific case of a person (details supplied) in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14325/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):

The COVID-19 enhanced Illness Benefit payment applies to a person who is incapable of work by virtue of being certified by a registered medical practitioner as being 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 either been certified by their Doctor or will have received the HSE text notification (i.e. where they are contact-traced or otherwise personally identified and advised by the HSE as being a probable source of infection).

A person who is diagnosed with COVID-19 and meets the conditions for payment is entitled to a maximum of 10 weeks enhanced IB. A person who is a probable source of infection of COVID 19 and is self-isolating is entitled to a maximum of 2 weeks enhanced Illness Benefit in respect of one claim. If the person has two 14-day contiguous periods where they are a probable source of infection, they must submit separate claims in relation to each of the two 14 day periods.

Persons who are self-isolating due to an underlying medical condition may qualify for regular Illness Benefit, provided they satisfy the relevant eligibility requirements and the have the required medical certification.

The person concerned received enhanced illness benefit for the maximum period of 4 weeks at a rate of €350 per week.

He is currently being paid regular illness benefit at a rate of €203 per week, and he has been paid fully up to date.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Personal Public Service Numbers

520. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion if she will consider a simple procedure for fathers to gain access to their child's PPSN, personal public service number, for housing purposes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14331/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):

A person can find their Personal Public Services Number (PPSN), or that of their child, on documents such as a Public Services Card, a Medical Card or GP Visit Card, a European Health Insurance Card, or a Drugs Payment Scheme Card.

Any parent who wishes to confirm the PPSN of their child can do so by calling my Department at Lo Call 1890 927 999.

They will be asked a series of questions to verify their identity, before being provided with their child's PPSN.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance

521. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will remove the means test for the carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14337/20]

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, Domiciliary Care Allowance and the Carer's Support Grant. Combined spending on these payments to carers in 2020 is expected to exceed €1.3 billion.

Carer's Allowance is a means-tested payment for carers who look after certain people in need of full-time care and attention on a full time basis. The means test for Carer's Allowance is one of the most generous in the social welfare system, most notably with regard to spouse's earnings. The amount of weekly earnings disregarded is €332.50 for a single person and €665 for a couple. This means that a couple with two children can earn in the region of €37,500 and qualify for the maximum rate of Carer's Allowance. A half-rate carer's allowance is also payable with other social welfare payments e.g. pensions and disability payments.

The conditions attached to payments of Carer's Allowance are consistent with the overall conditions that apply to social assistance payments generally. This system of social assistance supports provides payments based on an income need with the means test playing the critical role in determining whether or not an income need arises as a consequence of a particular contingency – be that illness, disability, unemployment or caring.

The continued application of the means test not only ensures that the recipient has a verifiable income need but that resources are targeted to those with greatest need.

Based on the number of carers identified as part of Census 2016, it is estimated that a universal (non-means tested) carer's payment could cost up to an additional €1.2 billion per annum.

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 seek to improve the supports available for carers, any changes must be considered in an overall budgetary context.

I trust that this clarifies the matter.

Illness Benefit

522. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) is only receiving four weeks of the enhanced illness benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14352/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The enhanced Illness Benefit payment for cases in which a person is self-isolating on the instruction of a doctor or the HSE due to being a probable source of infection of Covid-19 is paid for a maximum of 4 weeks.

If a person receives a positive diagnosis of Covid-19, they may receive enhanced Illness benefit for a further 10 weeks. If a person has received the maximum of 4 weeks enhanced payment for self-isolation but does not have a confirmed diagnosis of Covid-19, the payment will revert to the normal Illness Benefit rate of payment providing a person qualifies for payment under existing Illness Benefit eligibility requirements and has medical certification from their GP.

The person concerned was paid for 4 weeks of enhanced Illness benefit for self-isolation from the 23rd March 2020 to the 18th April 2020. She did not qualify for further payment of regular Illness benefit after this based on her PRSI contributions.

In order to qualify for regular illness benefit, a person must have a total of 104 PRSI contributions paid. A person also must have 39 weeks of PRSI contributions paid or credited in the relevant tax year, of which 13 must be paid contributions at class A, E, H or P. Alternatively, a person may have 26 weeks of PRSI contributions paid in the relevant tax year, and 26 weeks of PRSI contributions paid in the tax year immediately before the relevant tax year with all such contributions at class A, E, H or P.

The person concerned does not have 104 total PRSI contributions paid, and has only 21 contributions paid on 2018, so they do not qualify for payment of normal Illness benefit.

If the person concerned is in need of financial assistance, it is open for them to contact their local community welfare officer and apply for Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Enterprise Support Services

523. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if taxi drivers are eligible for the enterprise support grant for small businesses. [14367/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Enterprise Support Grant is being extended to assist eligible self-employed recipients who are exiting the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment scheme after 25th June 2020 to re-start their business. A once-off grant will be awarded for 80% of eligible costs up to a maximum of €1,000 covering vouched costs associated with re-opening a business which was closed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The grant will be available to tax compliant self-employed individuals who satisfy the scheme conditions including, employing fewer than 10 people, having an annual turnover of less than €1 million and not being liable for commercial rates. This grant is available for micro enterprises that are not eligible for other similar COVID business re-start grants from other Government Departments. The grant will be available to business owners who satisfy these conditions, which could include taxi drivers.

Funding of €12 million has been provided for this grant and my Department is developing the systems to put this grant into effect and will communicate how to access the grant over the coming weeks.

I trust that this clarifies the position at this time.

Employment Rights

524. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the measures in place to stop employers from terminating employment contracts and rehiring the same employees on reduced terms and conditions; if she will consider introducing new employment laws in line with the proposed employment dismissal and re-employment Bill in the UK; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14379/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Current legislation already provides considerable protections for employees.

The Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977 to 2015 provide protection for employees from being unfairly dismissed from their jobs by laying down criteria on which the fairness or otherwise of dismissals can be judged, and by providing an adjudication system and redress for an employee whose dismissal has been found to be unjustified.

The Acts provide that every dismissal of an employee will be presumed to have been unfair unless the employer can show substantial grounds justifying the dismissal. The Acts apply to employees who (with certain exceptions) have had at least one year’s continuous service with the same employer.

If an employee considers that he or she has been unfairly dismissed, he or she may apply to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) for a hearing by a WRC Adjudication Officer of a case under the Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977 to 2015. If the Adjudication Officer finds that the dismissal was unfair, redress can take the form of either financial compensation, re-instatement or re-engagement. A WRC Adjudication Officer’s decision may be appealed by either party to the Labour Court.

The Terms of Employment (Information) Act 1994 provides that an employer must provide its employee with a written statement of the particulars of the employee’s terms of employment. It also provides that an employer must notify the employee of any changes in the particulars given in the statement. The Act provides a right of complaint to the WRC where an employer fails to comply with either of the above.

While an employer may renegotiate the terms and conditions of the contract of employment with an employee, it may not reduce any term or condition to a level lower than statutory entitlement. It is best practice that any such renegotiation should be undertaken in consultation with the affected employee, and taking a long-term view of the employment relationship.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment

525. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of the Covid-19 payment by county and age cohort in ten-year intervals in tabular form. [14427/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The information requested by the Deputy is presented in the following table. The data refers to people who received a Pandemic Unemployment Payment on 30th June 2020.

| | Under 20 | 20 - 29 | 30 - 39 | 40 - 49 | 50 - 59 | 60 + |
|-----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------|
| Carlow | 227 | 1486 | 1245 | 1183 | 813 | 343 |
| Cavan | 328 | 1673 | 1487 | 1424 | 1082 | 445 |
| Clare | 573 | 2899 | 2119 | 2357 | 2099 | 814 |
| Cork | 2193 | 12936 | 9778 | 8897 | 7028 | 3083 |
| Donegal | 1012 | 4369 | 3361 | 3348 | 2700 | 1081 |
| Dublin | 6028 | 44419 | 35950 | 26004 | 18693 | 7502 |
| Galway | 1067 | 6779 | 5452 | 5327 | 3920 | 1675 |
| Kerry | 754 | 4120 | 3476 | 3742 | 2990 | 1354 |
| Kildare | 1079 | 5229 | 4081 | 4125 | 3012 | 1135 |
| Kilkenny | 383 | 1904 | 1596 | 1725 | 1281 | 533 |
| Laois | 298 | 1594 | 1437 | 1335 | 925 | 383 |
| Leitrim | 184 | 717 | 582 | 651 | 530 | 233 |
| Limerick | 725 | 4861 | 3775 | 3255 | 2400 | 1027 |
| Longford | 135 | 759 | 768 | 716 | 593 | 203 |
| Louth | 702 | 3444 | 2872 | 2768 | 2250 | 742 |
| Mayo | 623 | 3090 | 2457 | 2349 | 2115 | 976 |
| Meath | 944 | 4385 | 3733 | 4165 | 3054 | 1134 |
| Monaghan | 302 | 1522 | 1287 | 1185 | 918 | 432 |
| Offaly | 310 | 1623 | 1396 | 1273 | 965 | 405 |
| Roscommon | 282 | 1156 | 1022 | 1110 | 894 | 413 |
| Sligo | 347 | 1606 | 1254 | 1140 | 904 | 454 |
| Tipperary | 643 | 3378 | 2692 | 2574 | 2268 | 990 |
| Waterford | 517 | 2808 | 2197 | 2157 | 1744 | 725 |
| Westmeath | 395 | 2302 | 1669 | 1687 | 1323 | 559 |
| Wexford | 661 | 3619 | 3063 | 2926 | 2375 | 957 |
| Wicklow | 730 | 3606 | 2927 | 3021 | 2407 | 950 |
| Unknown | 32 | 366 | 326 | 225 | 206 | 101 |

Carer's Allowance

526. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the carer's allowance is means-tested; if the means test disregard has not changed since 2008; her plans to alter this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14430/20]

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, Domiciliary Care Allowance and the Carer's Support Grant. Combined spending on these payments to carers in 2020 is expected to exceed €1.3 billion.

Carer's Allowance is a means-tested payment for carers who look after certain people in need of full-time care and attention on a full time basis. The means test for Carer's Allowance is one of the most generous means tests in the social welfare system, most notably with regard to spouse's earnings. The amount of weekly earnings disregarded is €332.50 per week for a single person and €665 per week for a couple. This means that a couple with two children can earn in the region of €37,500 and qualify for the maximum rate of Carer's Allowance. A half-rate carer's allowance is also payable with other social welfare payments e.g. pensions and disability payments.

The conditions attached to payments of Carer's Allowance are consistent with the overall conditions that apply to social assistance payments generally. This system of social assistance supports provides payments based on an income need with the means test playing the critical role in determining whether or not an income need arises as a consequence of a particular contingency – be that illness, disability, unemployment or caring. Carer's Allowance acts as an income support for those who cannot earn an income in the open labour market due to their caring responsibilities. The continued application of the means test not only ensures that the recipient has a verifiable income need but that resources are targeted to those with greatest need.

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 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.

State Pensions

527. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) has not received their pension entitlements since retiring from Connolly hospital in January 2020 on health grounds. [14449/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): 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.

The department received a claim for IP for this lady on 27 November 2019. It was awarded on the 11 January 2020 and her first payment issued to her nominated bank account on the 30 January 2020.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Gender Recognition

528. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of revocations of gender recognition certificates made by her pursuant to section 14 of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14454/20]

529. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of inquiries initiated under section 14 of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; the number of such investigations which are ongoing; the number of such investigations which have now concluded; the investigations which have concluded; the number concluded with a decision to revoke; the number concluded with a decision not to revoke; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14455/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 528 and 529 together.

Section 14 of the Gender Recognition Act 2015 provides for the revocation of a Gender Recognition Certificate if information or facts come to notice that would have led to a refusal of the application. The legislation provides that where it is proposed to revoke a certificate, the person concerned may make representations in the matter within a period of 30 days.

Where a Gender Recognition Certificate is revoked under this section, the certificate must be surrendered and it is deemed always to have been void and of no effect.

I can confirm to the Deputy that, to date, there have been no revocations or investigations carried out under this section of the 2015 Act.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance

530. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason and criteria under which a person was refused an oral appeal regarding the decision to refuse a carer's allowance. [14482/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):
I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, decided to disallow the carer's allowance appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The question under appeal was whether the caree required full-time care and attention. The person concerned was notified of the Appeals Officer's decision on 25 June 2020.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office has also advised me that as a result of the current Covid-19 restrictions and in order to safeguard the health and safety of both appellants and staff the Social Welfare Appeals Office has not held any oral appeal hearings since 13th March 2020. No such hearings can be scheduled until further notice. Furthermore, in respect of this particular appeal, having considered all of the available evidence, the Appeals Officer decided that a decision on this case could be made on a summary basis and that an oral hearing was not required.

The decision of an Appeals Officer is normally final and conclusive. However, it may be reviewed in accordance with the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, under Section 317 (where additional evidence/facts are received that were not before the Appeals Officer when he/she made his/her decision) or by the Chief Appeals Officer under Section 318 (where grounds are put forward that indicate the Appeals Officer erred in fact and/or law in his/her decision).

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.

Ministerial Responsibilities

531. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will publish the Departmental briefing paper on her role, remits and powers afforded to her upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14524/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): On my first day as Minister, I received a comprehensive briefing document on the many policy responsibilities for which I am responsible in this Department. As has been the policy of the Department, it is intended that the briefing material will be published in the coming weeks.

Departmental Budgets

532. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost in 2021 if the budget for the youth employment support scheme increased by 20%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14538/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) was introduced on 1st October 2018. YESS is targeted at young jobseekers aged between 18 and 24 who are long-term unemployed or who face barriers to employment. The scheme aims to provide jobseekers with the opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement. YESS will provide a supportive structure for participants, including case worker support for both placement hosts and jobseekers.

Since the scheme's inception, a total of 797 people have commenced a placement, while in 2020 to date, a total of 152 young people started on the YESS. The COVID-19 pandemic emergency has impacted significantly on the scheme and as a result, a total of 149 YESS placements were temporarily suspended. Of these, 64 have recommenced in recent weeks, while it is anticipated that more will also re-start as each phase of the current Covid-19 restrictions are lifted. Staff engagement with potential jobseekers recommenced recently to re-start recruitment to the scheme.

A budget of €3.35million has been allocated to the YESS for 2020. An increase in the budget of 20% would amount to €4.02m. The funding available to date has not been a barrier to participation and additional funding of itself will not be the only driver to grow the take up of YESS placements. The scheme is built around the voluntary engagement of participants and host organisations. A critical element is that the participant has an interest in developing a career in a particular role or sector and that they can be matched with a host who is willing and able to

provide a placement including that they have the capacity to provide time, support and training for the participant. The availability of good matches between participants and hosts locally has also been a driver for take up of the scheme.

As the economy reopens and activation services to jobseekers increase it is planned to increase the use of the scheme to provide valuable work experience and training to young people who have been heavily impacted by the Covid-19 crisis. Any necessary changes will be considered as part of the July Jobs Initiative and broader national plans for economic recovery.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment

533. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of the pandemic unemployment payment for the weeks ending 5 June, 12 June, 19 June, 26 June and 3 July 2020, respectively; the numbers that have ceased receiving the payment with details of whether these were due to return to work or moving to another payment for another reason; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14555/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As published each Monday on gov.ie at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f4c60c-covid-19-statistics/>, the number of people in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) during the weeks specified by the Deputy are set out in Table 1.

The ‘Total Outflow’ column refers to the overall outflow from PUP in a given week. All closed claims are part of this outflow.

The ‘Total Closed’ numbers refer to customers who have closed their PUP claims; and the ‘Returned to Work’ numbers refer to customers who closed their claim who reported that returning to work was the reason for the closure.

Note that the differences between the total outflows and the total who have closed their account are due to interactions with the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme

Table 1 - Closed PUP and PUP Outflow

| PUP Payment Date | People in receipt of a PUP | Total PUP Outflow | Total PUP claims closed | Closed - to work | Closed - to other social protection payment | Closed - Other |
|------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------|---|----------------|
| 02 June 2020 | 542,742 | 45,410 | 42,741 | 38,868 | 305 | 3,568 |
| 09 June 2020 | 517,632 | 32,795 | 30,165 | 27,447 | 268 | 2,450 |
| 16 June 2020 | 498,750 | 24,781 | 22,132 | 20,264 | 121 | 1,747 |
| 23 June 2020 | 465,878 | 38,143 | 35,910 | 31,438 | 269 | 4,203 |
| 30 June 2020 | 438,933 | 31,368 | 27,206 | 23,341 | 203 | 3,663 |

Carer’s Allowance

534. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will allow persons to exclude savings for a specific purposes, for example, to purchase a home, to be excluded from means-testing for the carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14572/20]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The system of social assistance supports provides payments based on an income need. The means test plays a critical role in determining whether or not an income need arises as a consequence of a particular contingency – such as disability, unemployment or caring. This ensures that the recipient has a verifiable income need and that resources are targeted to those who need them most.

By its nature, the means test takes account of the income a person or couple has in terms of cash, property - other than the family home - and capital.

For the Carer's Allowance means test, the first €20,000 of capital is fully disregarded; the next €10,000 assessed at €1 per thousand, the next €10,000 is assessed at €2 per thousand, with the remainder assessed at €4 per thousand.

The assessment of capital reflects the fact that there is an expectation that people with reasonable amounts of capital and property are in a position to use that capital or to realise the value of property to support themselves without having to rely solely on a means tested welfare payment.

Disregarding savings or other capital which a person intends to use for specific purposes, such as to purchase a home, would have significant budgetary implications and would give rise to inconsistencies in how means tests are applied across schemes. It would also significantly increase the complexity of the means assessment, in terms of identifying the amount of capital to be disregarded for a specific purpose, as well as ensuring that the capital is used for that specified purpose.

Carers may be entitled to other supports, such as rent supplement or housing assistance payment, to help meet housing expenses.

Any proposals to change the capital means assessment for means-tested social assistance schemes would have to be considered in the overall budgetary context.

Covid-19 Pandemic

535. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the measures that need to be in place for community centres to reopen after Covid-19 closure (details supplied). [13819/20]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am aware that community centres and voluntary organisations are currently making important preparations for reopening facilities across Ireland.

Public health guidance has been issued by Government, the HSE, the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HSPC), the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and others. This guidance should be carefully considered and should form the basis for any COVID-19 related plans.

Further guidance has been developed by my Department in conjunction with Pobal for the community and voluntary sector to help them with reopening, and this is available here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/fd1c9-guidance-for-reopening-community-sector/>

If community centres run by volunteers have paid workers on their premises, they should follow the Return to Work Safely Protocol which is on the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/22829a-return-to-work-safely-protocol/>. The employer is responsible for putting in place control measures, in consultation with a worker representative.

In cases where all involved are unpaid volunteers, and therefore the Health and Safety Authority would not have a role, a responsible person within the organisation should put in place appropriate measures before reopening.

As each facility and activity is different, there is an emphasis on personal responsibility and the need for people and organisations to exercise judgement in their activities. My Department encourages community and voluntary groups, regardless of the activity that they are involved in, to consider how the published information applies to them, and to put in place the appropriate measures when reopening facilities.

National Broadband Plan

536. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the way in which a project (details supplied) links in with the national broadband plan; her plans to expand the project to other locations outside of the five chosen as bases to deploy the scheme; the way in which the five bases were selected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13963/20]

537. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the costs incurred to date with a project (details supplied); if she consulted with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment on the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13964/20]

538. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the duration of the contract with a supplier (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13965/20]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 536 to 538, inclusive, together.

The initiative which the Deputy refers to is an exploratory project involving my Department, the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and Microsoft Ireland, to explore the possibility of using a new technology to deliver free broadband to second-level students from disadvantaged backgrounds in their Leaving Cert. cycle.

The initiative will explore the capacity to use the existing high-speed broadband connection in a public libraries across each of five counties - Carlow, Donegal, Kilkenny, Mayo and Waterford - as a conduit to connect students in households which currently do not have adequate internet access. The initiative will be targeted primarily at students enrolled in Delivering Equality of Opportunity (DEIS) schools.

The five counties to participate in the trial initiative were selected on the basis of a number of criteria, including the internet capacity of public libraries within each county and the proximity of public libraries in those counties to DEIS schools. The selection of these locations was a collaborative process between my Department and the LGMA.

The individual library branches and specific schools for participation within these counties have yet to be finalised, and the final decisions will involve a range of stakeholders including my Department, the LGMA and the Department of Education and Skills in the context of identifying suitable DEIS schools.

The trial initiative will last for a maximum of 24 months, with a progress evaluation to be conducted every six months by an Evaluation Board. The outcomes of the trial initiative will determine the potential to expand the project into other locations.

No costs have been incurred to date. Any physical assets required for the trial initiative will be provided by Microsoft, and the project will not seek to recover any monies from participant households. Any other incidental costs which might arise as the project progresses are expected to be negligible.

As an exploratory trial project, initiative is a collaboration between a number of public and private sector bodies on a not-for-profit basis and will not in any way impact on the contracts for the National Broadband Plan or the Broadband Connection Points.

My officials are in regular contact with their colleagues in the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment on a range of telecommunications-related matters and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment was aware of this initiative.

Grant Payments

539. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the grant aid available to churches, church organisations, charity organisations and so on which have accrued large expenses while they were closed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14009/20]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Government is aware of the challenges facing communities and is committed to working closely with the sector in managing through these, recognising that it will require a whole of Government approach.

In that context my Department is providing funding supports to organisations through the Community and Voluntary Sector Covid-19 Stability Fund. This fund is intended to be a targeted once-off cash injection for organisations and groups currently delivering critical front-line services to the most at need in our society and in danger of imminent closure due to lost fund-raised or traded income as a direct result of restrictions to counter the spread of COVID-19.

This fund will provide up to €35million of funding through the Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF) and the criteria align with DAF objectives to support:

1. The personal and social development of persons who are economically or socially disadvantaged; or
2. The educational development of persons who are educationally disadvantaged; or
3. Persons with a disability.

Over one thousand applications were received during the application period. Due to the considerable interest in the Stability Scheme and in order to ensure that funding is released as quickly as possible, applicants were considered in smaller groupings.

The first tranche of funding was announced on Friday 26 June with 179 organisations being awarded €10.5 million in funding, the full list can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/3957e-covid-19-stability-fund-successful-applicants/>

It is expected that further tranches of funding will be announced in the coming weeks.

Programme for Government

540. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if she will provide documents on those costings. [14036/20]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Department of the Taoiseach facilitated the provision of briefing materials from Government Departments to parties engaged in Government formation discussions. I am aware that these briefing materials, including those provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development, have been published by the Department of the Taoiseach and are available at

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7b927-programme-for-government-documents/>

There are a range of commitments in the Programme for Government – Our Shared Future that relate to, or interact strongly with, rural and community development policy. These build on the progress to date in terms of our investment programmes for rural and community development and recent and emerging policy development work within both areas. It is fully recognised that further detailed consideration of measures, often in co-operation with other Government Departments and our external stakeholders, will be required as implementation of the programme progresses.

Consultancy Contracts

541. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within her Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14061/20]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is strongly committed to diversity and inclusion and enabling the achievement of equality of opportunity in all employment practices. My Department has not yet delivered diversity and inclusion training. The Department was in the process of procuring training for all staff, which was put on hold due to COVID-19 restrictions. My Department will be providing Disability awareness training to all staff in last quarter of 2020.

The Department has a designated Disability Liaison Officer in place to assist and support staff with disabilities, and their line managers, by the provision of necessary information and guidance as needed.

My Department continues to take active measures to promote and advance diversity and inclusion in both the promotion of relevant policies and active engagement with staff to encourage a culture of a diversity and inclusion where all staff are valued in the workplace.

Departmental Legal Costs

542. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the expenditure her Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14078/20]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department was established on 19 July 2017. Since that date it incurred expenditure in respect of legal fees of €2,655 in 2018 and €1,855 in 2019.

In 2018, the Department was assigned a designated point of contact for the provision of legal advice through the Office of the Attorney General, and it is intended that this service provides for the majority of our ongoing requirements in this regard.

Departmental Funding

543. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if resource centres that are not in receipt of core funding will have their funding streams improved from the phased roll-out of projects similar in approach to community development plans as outlined in the programme for Government; and if the introduction of a five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector as outlined in the programme for Government will also result in improved funding streams for resource centres not in receipt of core funding. [14344/20]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In August 2019, the Department launched Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. This Strategy sets a general direction of travel for Government policy in relation to community development, local development and the community and voluntary sector and will be implemented in partnership with sectorial stakeholders over the next five years and beyond.

The sector participated in comprehensive consultation with my Department to support the strategy development process and the issues of core funding arose as part of those consultations. The strategy recognises the impact of previous policy and resource decisions on the sector and seeks to address these through its 11 high-level objectives and associated actions. The strategy aims to empower communities, their representative organisations, and the community and voluntary sector, to inform and shape responses to their needs into the future.

This is an ambitious strategy and will take time to implement. While implementation of all of the actions will begin during the strategy period, there are some that will continue to be progressed and built upon beyond the life of the current strategy, particularly those that address the development of a sustainable funding model. These actions are no less a priority because they will take longer to implement fully. On the contrary, I recognise that these actions are crucial to a sustainable community and voluntary sector and will underpin support for the sector for many years to come. The disruption brought by COVID19 has inevitably delayed some implementation work this year, however, my Department is committed to the full implementation of the Strategy and I look forward to working closely with the sector to support its implementation.

While recognising that the social recovery of Ireland post COVID-19 will require a whole of Government approach, my Department will continue to work with relevant stakeholders, including Local Authorities, LCDCs, Local Development Companies, Community and Voluntary organisations and representatives of the sector to determine how we can all support communi-

ties across the country during the recovery process and beyond.

Community facilities can access funding from a range of different sources across different Government Departments and agencies. Supports provided by my Department help people to participate in the development of their communities and also to improve community facilities.

These supports include the Community Services Programme (CSP), the Community Enhancement Programme the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and the LEADER Programme. Details regarding all these schemes can be found on my Departments website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/216837-the-rural-development-and-regional-affairs-division/>

Community Development Initiatives

544. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the breakdown of the full year budget allocation of her Department for the Dublin north-east inner city initiative as of 1 January 2020. [14433/20]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department provides funding towards the regeneration of Dublin's North East Inner City (NEIC) to support the implementation of the Mulvey Report "Creating a Brighter Future" and the NEIC Strategic Plan 2020 – 2022.

Funding of €6.5m will be provided by my Department in 2020 towards this initiative.

The funding allocation for the NEIC Initiative is decided on a year-to-year basis as part of the Estimates process. Once notified of the NEIC Initiative's funding allocation for a given year, the NEIC Programme Implementation Board (PIB) invites proposals for the distribution of the funding which are then considered via a sub-group structure and submitted to the PIB for approval. This process is currently underway. A full breakdown of how the overall allocation is distributed within the NEIC will therefore be available at year end.

CLÁR Programme

545. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress to date in reviewing the CLÁR programme; if there are plans to extend the areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14516/20]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructure projects in designated rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population.

The areas originally designated for CLÁR were selected in 2001 based on the level of population decline in each area between 1926 and 1996. The Cooley Peninsula was also included on the basis of the serious difficulties caused in that area by Foot and Mouth disease at that time. The average population loss in the original CLÁR areas over the period 1926 to 1996 was 50%.

In 2006, an analysis of the 2002 Census data was carried out by the NIRSA Institute (National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis) at Maynooth University and the programme was extended to include areas with an average population loss of 35% between 1926 and 2002.

A full review of the CLÁR programme has been initiated by my Department with the Na-

tional Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA), NUI, Maynooth. This will examine the most recent changes in population patterns throughout the country on the basis of 2016 Census data. The review will also consider whether any factors other than depopulation should be taken into account in determining CLÁR areas in the future.

I expect the review to be completed in the coming months. Once completed, and following consultation with relevant stakeholders, the review will help to inform the design of future CLÁR programmes.

Ministerial Responsibilities

546. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will publish the Departmental briefing paper on her role, remits and powers afforded to her upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14531/20]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I can confirm that the Department briefing provided to me upon my appointment will be published on my Department's website in the coming weeks.

National Broadband Plan

547. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the way in which the sites for the Airband technology exploratory initiative were chosen. [14570/20]

548. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will include a site in west County Cork in the Airband technology exploratory initiative. [14571/20]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 547 and 548 together.

The Airband initiative is an exploratory project involving my Department, the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and Microsoft Ireland, to explore the possibility of using a new technology to deliver free broadband to second-level students from disadvantaged backgrounds in their Leaving Cert. cycle.

The initiative will explore the capacity to use the existing high-speed broadband connection in a public libraries across each of five counties - Carlow, Donegal, Kilkenny, Mayo and Waterford - as a conduit to connect students in households which currently do not have adequate internet access. The initiative will be targeted primarily at students enrolled in Delivering Equality of Opportunity (DEIS) schools.

The five counties to participate in the trial initiative were selected on the basis of a number of criteria, including the internet capacity of public libraries within each county and the proximity of public libraries in those counties to DEIS schools. The selection of these locations was a collaborative process between my Department and the LGMA.

The individual library branches and specific schools for participation within these counties have yet to be finalised, and the final decisions will involve a range of stakeholders including my Department, the LGMA and the Department of Education and Skills in the context of identifying suitable DEIS schools.

The trial initiative will last for a maximum of 24 months, with a progress evaluation to be conducted every six months by an Evaluation Board. The outcomes of the trial initiative will determine the potential to expand the project into other locations.

Agriculture Schemes

549. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ensure basic payment scheme, BPS, beef environmental efficiency pilot, BEEP, and beef data and genomics programme, BGDG for 2019 are awarded to a person (details supplied) following appeal. [13752/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): Officials from my Department have been in direct contact with the person named, and have advised him of the required information he must now submit in order to progress this matter.

Once the required information has been received, it will be examined accordingly.

Animal Sales

550. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to take action to deal with the widespread non-compliance with the Animal Health and Welfare (Sale or Supply of Pet Animals) Regulations 2019, in view of the fact that the majority of advertisements for dogs on a website (details supplied) breach the regulations as highlighted to him in correspondence from a number of animal welfare organisations, Deputies and MEPs. [13779/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): I acknowledge receipt of correspondence of 25 June, of which the Deputy is a signatory, on the Animal Health and Welfare (Sale or Supply of Pet Animals) Regulations (SI 681 of 2019).

You will recall that in 2018 my Department launched a public consultation on matters relating to the sale and advertisement of pet animals. The consultation asked specifically for the public's views on a voluntary Code of Practice for Pet Shops, and whether further legislation was needed regarding the advertisement and sale of pet animals. Following on from this consultation, my Department issued a voluntary Code of Practice for use by sellers or suppliers of pet animals in 2019. The Code, which contains guidelines on animal welfare for a range of species, was sent to all pet shops in the country, and is available on my Department's website.

Furthermore, again in 2019, my Department brought forward the Animal Health and Welfare (Sale or Supply of Pet Animals) Regulations (SI 681 of 2019), with a view to further controlling the sale and supply of pet animals, in the interests of supporting the welfare of animals and bringing greater transparency to the sale and supply of pets. The Regulations require anyone selling or supplying more than six pet animals a year to register with my Department. Advertisements of pet animals are required to contain certain information about the animals. These Regulations, which were welcomed by the ISPCA on their introduction, are part of the on-going work of my Department towards improved animal health and welfare.

These initiatives are aimed at improving the welfare of animals in the context of their sale and supply. They are in addition to general animal health and welfare legislative requirement, as well as in the case of dogs, controls under the Dog Breeding Establishment legislation, where applicable.

My Department takes an active role in the issue of the welfare of pets being sold and supplied at the European level, as a member of a group of a number of EU Member States and animal welfare charities established to consider issues relating to the pet trade. The Department participates in the Irish Pet Advertising Advisory Group (IPAAG), a group formed in 2015 by a number of animal welfare organisations, veterinary professionals and classified advertising websites to address irresponsible advertising of pets online. Officials of my Department have engaged and will continue to engage constructively with members of IPAAG, on the issue of online advertising and enforcement of the new Regulations.

The recent communication has raised a number of matters as to the operations of these new initiatives. Officials of my Department are currently studying the matters raised.

Beef Environmental Efficiency Scheme

551. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a late beef environmental efficiency pilot, BEEP, application will be accepted from a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13806/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): The closing date for receipt of applications Beef Environmental Efficiency Programme - Sucklers was 15th May 2020. No application was received from the person named.

A letter from the person named requesting a review of their participation in the scheme was received on 24th June 2020. A review was carried out and a letter detailing the outcome of that review issued to the person named on 26th June 2020.

If the person named is not satisfied with the outcome of the review, they retain the right to appeal the matter to the Agriculture Appeals Office.

Bord na gCon

552. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an interest free loan reported to be €250,000 from the Irish Greyhound Board to the private operators of Clonmel greyhound stadium has been repaid; and the details of all current IGB loans to tracks and outstanding repayments. [13831/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The question raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for Bord na gCon and therefore the question has been referred to the body for direct reply.

Greyhound Industry

553. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will order the immediate closure of Enniscorthy, Youghal, Thurles and Kilkenny greyhound tracks in view of fire safety concerns highlighted in two Indecon reports (details supplied).

[13832/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The question raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for Bord na gCon and therefore the question has been referred to the body for direct reply.

Live Exports

554. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of cattle live exported to Northern Ireland for slaughter since Covid-19 in tabular form; and the number exported in each of the years 2017 to 2019. [13837/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): The following table shows the numbers of cattle (including both calves and adult cattle) exported to Northern Ireland from week 13 (w/c 30/03/20) to week 25 (w/c 22/06/20), with comparative data for previous years. My Department does not have data on the number of these animals slaughtered in Northern Ireland.

Exports to Northern Ireland of 14,321 live cattle between weeks 13 and 25 can be compared to total cattle slaughtering in Ireland in the same period of over 382,000.

| Live Exports to NI | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| (Cattle & Calves) | | | | |
| Week 13 | 482 | 247 | 909 | 426 |
| Week 14 | 657 | 465 | 989 | 397 |
| Week 15 | 725 | 431 | 1,097 | 597 |
| Week 16 | 607 | 371 | 945 | 661 |
| Week 17 | 642 | 479 | 827 | 812 |
| Week 18 | 791 | 419 | 999 | 977 |
| Week 19 | 666 | 612 | 910 | 826 |
| Week 20 | 548 | 530 | 785 | 1,249 |
| Week 21 | 486 | 341 | 616 | 1,274 |
| Week 22 | 602 | 385 | 650 | 1,279 |
| Week 23 | 381 | 359 | 508 | 1,955 |
| Week 24 | 591 | 339 | 436 | 1,842 |
| Week 25 | 293 | 338 | 464 | 2,026 |
| Subtotal Week 13-25 | 7,471 | 5,316 | 10,135 | 14,321 |
| Annual Total | 26,071 | 24,627 | 33,506 | |

Note that information on live exports and other metrics for beef and other meats is available in the weekly Meat Market Reports located here:

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmingsectors/beef/beeffactorypricesweeklyreports/2020/meatmarketreportsweeklyupdates/>

Live Exports

555. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the locations cattle were exported from to Northern Ireland for slaughter since Covid-19; the locations these cattle went after slaughter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13838/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): Data on cattle movements to Northern Ireland in the Covid19 period to date has been already been supplied to the Deputy. My Department does not have data on cattle movements within Northern Ireland.

Queries related to the movement of cattle within another jurisdiction should be addressed to the relevant competent authority which, in the case of Northern Ireland, is the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

Beef Industry

556. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the stakeholders in the beef industry he will be engaging with, aside from the beef taskforce, to ensure the best possible supports are put in place in view of the announcement on 25 June 2020 of €50 million to be made available for beef finishing farms; the estimated level of support which will be made available to each individual applicant; the potential qualifying criteria that will be applied; when he expects to be in a position to apply to the EU for the necessary state aid approval under the Covid-19 temporary state aid framework; when he expects to be in a position to formally roll out the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13922/20]

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. The scheme is being designed to be as farmer friendly as possible to ensure that the support can be most effectively targeted where it is needed.

My Department officials have engaged with farming stakeholders, who were also invited to make written submissions regarding the development of the scheme. These submissions are now under consideration.

The measure is required to be notified to the European Commission under the new COVID-19 temporary exceptional aid framework. My Department is currently finalising the required documentation and expects to be in a position to submit the formal notification shortly.

I hope to be in a position to announce details of the measure, including terms and conditions, in August.

Programme for Government

557. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if he will provide documents on

those costings. [14022/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): The Agriculture and Food chapter of the Programme for Government commits to supporting farmers and food businesses, which underpin the vitality of rural villages and towns across the country. It acknowledges that the sector has come through a difficult number of years, dealing with many challenges such as Brexit, COVID-19, significant market disruption in the beef sector and extreme weather events. It also emphasises that farm families and food businesses are the heartbeat of rural Ireland, and that the Government will work with the sector to improve farm incomes and protect the family farm for future generations. It also seeks to drive innovation and improvements in land management to reduce emissions and build on Ireland's green reputation for producing high-quality and sustainable produce at the least environmental cost, ensuring the long-term outlook for the agrifood industry remains positive and vibrant.

The available Programme for Government briefing documents have been published and can be found at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7b927-programme-for-government-documents/>.

Consultancy Contracts

558. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within his Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14047/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): My Department is committed to promoting and maintaining an inclusive and diverse workplace for all and has a Diversity, Equality and Inclusion policy in place. This policy, which was launched in 2018, embraces, promotes and builds on my Department's core values in the areas of diversity, equality and inclusion for all employees.

In October 2019, following public procurement procedures, my Department awarded a contract to Aurion Learning for the delivery of an 'Equality and Diversity in the Workplace eLearning Resource' for its staff. A payment in excess of €10,000 was issued by to Aurion Learning following successful completion of the eLearning resource.

Departmental Legal Costs

559. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the expenditure his Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14064/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department generally avails of the legal services of the Chief State Solicitor's Office and its own Legal Services Division. However, occasionally it engages private Solicitor firms and Junior and Senior Counsel for external legal advice. The amount spent by my Department on external legal fees for the specified years is set out in the following table.

| Year | Expenditure incurred on External Legal Fees |
|------|---|
| 2016 | €37,574 |

| | |
|------|---------|
| 2017 | Nil |
| 2018 | €14,404 |
| 2019 | €53,914 |
| 2020 | Nil |

Bord na gCon

560. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an itemised schedule including headings of grants and or funding provided to the Irish Greyhound Board in 2019 and 2020 will be provided; the way in which funding is released to the board; the measures in place to ensure funding is used correctly; and the terms and conditions attached to the funding. [14088/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): Bord na gCon (BnG) is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. BnG is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

All Exchequer funding for BnG for the years 2019 and 2020 was provided under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund (the Fund).

Monies from the Fund are provided to BnG under certain conditions and these were as follows for the years 2019 and 2020:-

- BnG must comply with its obligations under legislation and the various codes and directives issued by Government and by my Department.

- In addition, BnG must comply with sections 14 & 15 of the Horse Racing Ireland Act 2016 which emphasise the link between funding and delivery on strategic plans, good governance and reporting.

- BnG must not enter into future significant capital commitments without the prior approval of my Department.

- BnG must not dispose of publicly funded assets without the prior approval of my Department.

- BnG must comply with the provisions of DPER Circular 13/2014- Management of and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer Funds – Section 5 refers, copy attached and to the Public Spending Code (<http://publicspendingcode.per.gov.ie/>).

BnG was obliged to provide my Department with the following documents :

- Draft unaudited annual accounts for the preceding year, by the end of February of the current year, following their presentation to the BnG Board.

- Cumulative Profit and loss account on a monthly basis (together with supporting documentation breaking out figures into Tote & Track operations), to be supplied to my Department the day following their presentation to the BnG Board.

- Cumulative Balance Sheet & Cash Flow Statement to be provided on a quarterly basis the day following their presentation to the BnG Board, e.g. Reports in respect of Q1 of the current year will be forwarded to my Department following the April Board meeting.

- A certificate of assurance, (signed by the CEO & CFO, or equivalent executives) certifying that the funding provided in the previous year was used in accordance with the conditions under which it was granted, should be provided to my Department after all the money provided has been expended.

- In addition to the €500k which BnG currently allocates to addressing the pension liability, a further sum of €800k from the 2019 and 2020 allocation from the Fund is to be reserved to address the pension liability.

- In addition, there is considerable emphasis on governance; the Annual Report of BnG must be noted by the Cabinet and laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas. This Report would have been subject to audit and clearance by both BnG's internal auditors and the C&AG.

- My Department and BnG sign an annual Performance and Oversight Agreement and a Division within my Department monitor the achievement of the goals and targets set out in that Agreement.

- Finally, there are regular bilateral governance meetings at higher management and Ministerial level to discuss the policies, performance and funding of BnG.

In addition to the conditions and arrangements outlined above, my Department instructed BnG to apply the Fund in the following manner for 2019;

| Category | Not more than % set out below |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Prize money | 60% |
| Operational grants to private tracks | 3% |
| Regulatory & administrative costs of BnG and other statutory functions of Bord na gCon | 37% |

Support was provided to BnG in accordance with the following agreed 2019 drawdown schedule; January: €8.4m - March: €4.2m – May: €2.1m – September: €2.1m Total: €16.8m.

My Department instructed BnG to apply the 2020 Fund in the following manner:

A minimum of 10% of the total fund to be spent on welfare and integrity with the remainder as set out below.

| Category | Not more than % set out below |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Prize money | 60% |
| Operational grants to private tracks | 3% |
| Regulatory & administrative costs of BnG and other statutory functions of Bord na gCon | 27% |

The following drawdown schedule of payments was agreed between BnG and my Department in relation to disbursement of the 2020 Fund: January: €8.4m - March: €4.2m – May: €2.1m – September: €2.1m Total: €16.8m.

561. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 925 of 5 March 2020, the number of investigative officials in his Department in 2018, 2019 and 2020; the locations of the office of each; the number of investigations carried out in each of the years; the number that were successfully prosecuted; the number that failed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14209/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): Investigations and prosecutions are carried out by many Line Divisions in the Department but Investigations Division is the Specialist Division taking the more complex and serious cases through the courts. The Division is a key element of the Department's enforcement capability, underpinning the quality and traceability standards which facilitate trade and provide reassurance to consumers and customers. The Division investigates alleged wrongdoing across all areas of the Department.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the Division is as follows:

| Year | Lead Investigators @ 1 January | Headquarters of investigators | Cases logged | Prosecutions | Successful prosecutions | Unsuccessful prosecutions |
|------|--------------------------------|---|--------------|--------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2018 | 4 | 3 in Back-weston Campus, Kildare; 1 in Kilkenny DVO | 29 | 9 | 8 | 1 |
| 2019 | 4 | 3 in Back-weston Campus, Kildare; 1 in Kilkenny DVO | 31 | 10 | 10 | 0 |
| 2020 | 4 | 3 in Back-weston Campus, Kildare; 1 in Kilkenny DVO | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Prosecution figures relate to cases finalised each year; the cases would have been initiated in previous years. Prosecutions in 2020 have been impacted by delays in the Courts which arise as a consequence of COVID-19.

Lead investigators are supported by other Investigations Division staff and colleagues from other areas of the Department as required. Staff numbers in the Division are static overall with short term fluctuations to facilitate mobility and retirements.

Basic Payment Scheme

562. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the 2020 basic payment scheme entitlements of a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [14229/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): The above named is the transferee on five separate Transfer of Entitlements applications for 2020. Four of the transfer of entitlement applications have been completed. Further information is required in relation to the fifth transfer application and officials in my Department have contacted the party concerned.

Once the required information is received, the final transfer of entitlement application will be processed without delay.

Food Industry

563. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the promised food ombudsman will be appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14339/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): The Programme for Government includes a commitment to the establishment of a new authority to be called the National Food Ombudsman to enforce Directive (EU) No. 2019/633 on Unfair Trading Practices.

My Department has been preparing for the transposition of the Unfair Trading Practices Directive into national legislation before the 1 May 2021 deadline. The preparations included the launch of a public consultation process in October 2019 which resulted in over 650 submissions received from individuals, stakeholder organisations and public representatives.

My Department is also in consultation with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment which has responsibility for certain related national legislation, namely the Consumer Protection Act 2007 S.I. No. 35/2016 (Grocery Goods Undertakings) Regulations 2016. The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC), under the aegis of that Department, is the enforcement authority for S.I. No. 35/2016.

Following the completion of the required assessment of the legal and operational matters associated with the Directive and the commitment in the Programme for Government, I will be in a better position as to advise of the timeframe for the establishment of the new office of National Food Ombudsman.

Agriculture Schemes

564. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will establish a BEAM, beef exceptional aid measure, type scheme for sheep; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14341/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): The sheep sector is an important element of the Irish economy and I am conscious of the importance that this sector plays in rural Ireland, especially during this difficult period.

My officials and I have ongoing contact with all the key stakeholders across the agrifood sector since the start of the pandemic. My Department and I are working to ensure that business and services to farmers can continue, keeping food and other processing facilities operational, and ensuring that payments and commercial activities that are necessary to protect farm incomes can continue.

It should be noted that, for the sheep sector, national average price and slaughter volumes in 2020 to date are above 2019 levels. I believe that the current range of supports available to sheep farmers, together with ensuring market access to as many markets as possible, are appropriate supports for the continued development of the sector. My Department will nevertheless continue to monitor closely developments across the entire sector.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

565. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a beef data and genomics programme herd payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14431/20]

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.

Felling Licences

566. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a felling licence application (details supplied); if the licence will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14443/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): An application for a tree felling licence was received for the reference given 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. A project management approach to clearing the backlog, by best and most targeted use of resources, is being put in place.

On initial examination of this application, it was determined that five 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 applicant 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 considerably speed up assessment of the file. If the applicant wishes to complete a NIS, they should contact my Department for guidance.

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.

Animal Diseases

567. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the decision of the Dutch Government to ban mink farming in view of recent studies that showed an increasing rate of Covid-19 infection amongst mink at Dutch fur farms and the discovery that the animals may have transmitted the virus to farm employees; if he has examined Irish mink farms in response to these findings; his plans to review the operation of those farms accordingly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14470/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) has written to mink farms in Ireland to provide information on SARS-CoV-2 infection in mink and to advise on the precautions that should be taken to prevent their mink being exposed to the virus. This advice includes strict adherence to the HSE public health guidelines on COVID 19.

It is most important to recognise that COVID-19 is predominantly a disease of humans. It is our understanding that the Department of Health is not aware of any human cases of COVID-19 associated on mink farms. The experience to date during the global pandemic is that while certain animal species, including dogs, cats, ferrets and mink, are susceptible to SARS-CoV-2 virus, the number of positive cases in animals worldwide remains very low. DAFM has composed a Frequently Asked Questions document for animal owners in line with current public health advice which is available to view at <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/customerservice/coronavirus-covid-19/faqs-regarding-covid-19-for-animal-owners/>.

The Programme for Government 2020 contains a clear commitment regarding the prohibition of fur farming and Department officials are currently preparing the appropriate draft heads of a Bill to facilitate the achievement of this objective with a view to seeking Government authority at an early date.

Ministerial Responsibilities

568. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will publish the Departmental briefing paper on his role, remits and powers afforded to him upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14517/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): I wish to advise the Deputy that the briefing material I received on my appointment as Minister will be published on my Department's website in the coming days.

Beef Industry

569. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason determined by his Department for the large discrepancy in prices secured by beef farmers from processors in this State compared to those in British markets; if he will conduct research into this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14542/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): The Irish beef sector is export oriented, with up to 90% of production exported. Almost half of Irish beef by volume is exported to the UK market.

The price paid for cattle is a matter for suppliers and sellers.

Demand and supply, currency valuation, transport and processing costs, national consumer preferences for domestic product and other external factors such as COVID, the relative price of alternative protein sources and the strength of the economy, are all factors that feed into determining the price of cattle and other agrifood products.

In line with a recommendation in the Beef Stakeholder Agreement reached last September, Bord Bia now publishes a detailed weekly “Beef Market Tracking” update which presents data on a range of indicators in an accessible format. This includes price comparisons, a comparison of Irish composite prices (for all product, and for prime cattle) with an ‘export benchmark price’, which reflects the relative importance of key markets for Irish beef; an index of wholesale and retail prices; and a by-product market indicator.

This analysis is available at:

<https://www.bordbia.ie/farmers-growers/prices-markets/cattle-trade-prices/beef-market-tracking/>

Agriculture Schemes

570. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to encourage younger entrants into the farming sector considering that the latest Teagasc figures suggest that one in three farmers is over sixty years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14543/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): The National Farm Survey figures just released by Teagasc reflect an ageing demographic trend in farming that is EU-wide. My Department has a range of measures in place to support young farmers and generational renewal, as part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and nationally.

Under the CAP, the National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme provides financial support to young farmers and new entrants to farming during the crucial early years immediately following the setting up of a farm enterprise. Under the Basic Payment Scheme, farmers can apply to the National Reserve for an allocation of entitlements or a top-up to their low value entitlements. Successful applicants can receive support up to the national average unit value per entitlement, which works out at approximately €260 per hectare including greening. Since 2015, the National Reserve has provided almost 8,000 young farmers with a new allocation of entitlements, or a top-up to the value of their existing entitlements. These are allocated on a permanent basis. For example, if a farmer is allocated entitlements from the National Reserve in 2015 worth €5,000, this allocation would have been made in all Basic Payment years from 2015 to 2019, totalling €25,000 over those years. The cumulative effect of these payments from

the National Reserve amounts to approximately €137 million over this period.

The Young Farmers Scheme provides a further additional payment to eligible farmers, which comes from an allocation within the national direct payments ceiling. This Scheme was established in 2015 to encourage the participation of younger farmers in agriculture in the initial stages of their career and provided payments of €68 extra per payment entitlement, for a maximum of 5 years, based on activated entitlements. Almost €100m has been distributed to over 8,000 successful applicants each year under the Young Farmer scheme with an average annual payment per young farmer of approximately €2,300.

Additionally, under the TAMS II Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme, co-funded under the Rural Development Programme, young farmers can avail of the enhanced grant rate of 60% as compared to the standard rate of 40%. Some €101 million has been paid under this Scheme.

There are also a number of national taxation measures aimed at young farmers, specifically the ‘100% Stock Relief on Income Tax for Certain Young Trained Farmers’ (530 claims costing €1.6million in 2017) and the ‘Stamp Duty Exemption on Transfers of Land to Young Trained Farmers’ (1,056 claims costing €16.8 million in 2018). Both of these measures assist farm succession and transfer. Other measures such as the relief from income tax for long-term leasing also benefit young farmers by increasing land mobility.

In addition, in 2017, the ‘Succession Farm Partnership Scheme’ was launched. This provides for a €25,000 tax credit over five years to further assist with the transfer of farms within a partnership structure, promoting and supporting the earlier intergenerational transfer of family farms. This Scheme also encourages important conversations within farm families regarding succession planning.

Teagasc’s recent publication “Teagasc Education Vision – meeting future needs” outlines the importance of education for young farmers and the development of their skills through education and training. This core function of Teagasc is supported and funded by my Department.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme also provides a source of finance for young and new entrant farmers, especially the cohort that do not have high levels of security. A new tranche of funding under this Scheme will be made available shortly.

Supporting young farmers and generational renewal continues to be a priority for my Department and will form an important part of the CAP post-2020. These negotiations are ongoing but the designation of supporting generational renewal as a key objective of the new CAP reflects the importance and determination to address this challenge, and my Department and I will continue to actively engage on these issues.

Agriculture Schemes

571. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a financial support scheme to those poultry farmers who were affected by Avian influenza; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14544/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department will provide a once-off financial support scheme for a number of poultry flocks impacted by an outbreak of low pathogenic avian influenza this year.

This particular strain of avian influenza (subtype H6N1) has no food safety implications, but

does impact on flock productivity.

I want to acknowledge that the flock owners in question have taken the correct action in depopulating their flocks for the greater good of the sector. In light of the significant economic impact this has had on their business, I am pleased to be able to provide some assistance towards the costs of depopulation which they have incurred.

The affected flock owners will receive details of the scheme including terms and conditions in the coming days.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

572. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 611 of 30 June 2020, if he will provide the evidence on which the statement is based (details supplied). [14581/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): In order to provide a safety net support scheme to fishermen during a period of market disruption caused by the Covid 19 Pandemic, complementing the income supports available from Government through the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and Wage Subsidy Scheme, and at the unanimous request of representatives of fishermen, a Temporary Fleet Tie-up Scheme was introduced with effect from June 2020. The Scheme adds to the income supports already available by supporting the fixed costs of fishermen who choose to avail of this safety net scheme by ceasing fishing for a one or two month period. Supports ranged from €500 per month for the smallest vessels under 8 metres to €6,000 per month for the very largest vessels over 24 metres.

Similar to fishing vessels from other EU member states including Spain, France and UK that continued to fish in the Irish EEZ, the vast majority of the Irish fishing fleet clearly considered it worthwhile to fish and just 66 vessel owners opted to tie-up their vessel in June.

Cuanta agus Céanna

573. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén fáth ar fágadh tuairisc a rinne comhlacht (sonraí tugtha) don Roinn maidir le Cé Ros a'Mhíl gan foilsiú ar feadh trí bliana; an bhfuil i gceist aige anois gníomhú ar mholtaí dearfacha na tuarascála agus cinneadh a dhéanamh airgead a chur ar fáil leis an gcé dhomhainmhara a thógáil; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [14633/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Barry Cowen): Tá sé Lárionad Cuain Iascaigh ainmnithe faoi úinéireacht an stáit (FHC) atá suite i mBaile Chaisleáin Bhéarra, Daingean Uí Chúis, an Dún Mór Thoir, Binn Éadair, na Cealla Beaga agus Ros an Mhíl, faoi úinéireacht ag mo Roinnse agus déanann an Roinn iad a chothabháil agus a chur i bhfeidhm, faoi reacht.

Cuireann an Roinn maoiniú ar fáil ar bhonn bliantúil do na Lárionaid Chuain Iascaigh, lena n-áirítear Ros an Mhíl, faoin gClár Forbartha Infreastruchtúir Cuanta Iascaigh agus Cósta. Tá dul chun cinn déanta le blianta anuas ar chlár céimnithe chun bonneagar Lárionad Cuain Iascaigh Ros an Mhíl a fhorbairt agus tá infheistíocht shuntasach déanta ann. Ar an iomlán, rinneadh tuairim is €31m a infheistiú i bhforbairtí caipitil i Lárionad Cuain Iascaigh Ros an Mhíl idir 2000 agus 2019. Ina theannta sin, tá breis is €1.5m leithroinnte chun oibreacha caipitil a dhéanamh sa chalafort in 2020.

Tá an fhéidearthacht maidir le tionscadal beart domhainmhara ag Lárionad Cuain Iascaigh Ros an Mhíl á mheas ag an Roinn le tamall anuas. Choimisiúnaigh an Roinn comhairleoirí DKM chun Anailís Costais is Tairbhe a dhéanamh ar a bheadh i gceist le céibh domhainmhara a fhorbairt ag Ros an Mhíl. Cuireadh dréacht-tuarascáil ar aghaidh chuig an Roinn i Meitheamh 2017. Rinneadh an tuarascáil a mheas ach níor glacadh léi go foirmeálta riamh.

Ó dréachtaíodh an tuarascáil sin, tá athrú tagtha ar roinnt de na bunphrionsabail a bhí mar thaca leis an gcéad anailís a rinneadh. In 2018, choimisiúnaigh an Roinn comhairleoirí in-nealtóireachta ina dhiaidh sin chun athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar na réitigh dearaidh, ar na roghanna scoipeála agus ar ghnéithe oibríochta a d'fhéadfadh a bheith i gceist lena leithéid de thogra amach anseo. Fuarthas an tuarascáil sin in Aibreán 2019 agus tá sí á meas go hiomlán faoi láthair ag an Roinn; ach, aithníodh sa tuarascáil an gá atá le fiosruithe eile suímh a dhéanamh ag Ros an Mhíl.

Chuathas i mbun na n-oibreacha i ndáil le fiosrú suímh i Lúnasa/Meán Fómhair 2019 agus tá siad sin tugtha chun críche anois. Táthar ag súil go bhfoilseofar an tuarascáil deiridh sna seachtainí amach romhainn. Tacóidh torthaí na tuarascála seo chomh maith leis an measúnú foriomlán ar na réitigh dearthóireachta agus roghanna scoipeála a d'fhéadfadh a bheith i gceist chomh maith le heolas a dhéanamh ar aon chinneadh eile a bhaineann leis an tionscadal seo amach anseo.

Mar a bhíonn le gach forbairt sna sé Lárionad Cuain Iascaigh, ní dhéanfar aon chinneadh eile amach anseo i ndáil le tús a chur leis an tionscadal seo i Ros an Mhíl a mheas ach ar an mbonn maoiniú státchiste agus tosaíochtaí náisiúnta iomaíochta a bheith ar fáil.

Covid-19 Pandemic

574. Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason a group (details supplied) has been excluded from the childcare sub-committee convened in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic to discuss the impacts on the childcare sector and plan for the future reopening of service; and if it will be included in future committee discussions. [13737/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): An Advisory Group on the Phased Reopening of the early learning and care sector was established in May 2020 to provide expert advice and guidance to my Department in preparing for the reopening of the sector. The Advisory Group has met on a weekly basis since its first meeting on 13 May.

In establishing the Advisory Group, six places were provided for sectorial representatives, which were filled by members of the Early Years Forum Plus group (EY Forum plus), which is made of stakeholders, including representatives of childcare providers, children and parents. The group referred to by the Deputy is a member of the EY Forum plus.

The EY Forum plus decided on its nominees to the Advisory Group and these include representatives from the Association of Childhood Professionals, PLÉ, Seas Suas, Early Childhood Ireland, the National Childhood Network and the National Community Forum. Five of these groups are representatives of childcare providers, in both the private and community sectors.

Childminding Ireland and SIPTU were added as members of the group, as they represent other key stakeholders, childcare staff and childminders. Pobal, Tusla and Childcare Committees Ireland, the representative group of the County Childcare Committees, are also members of the Advisory Group.

A number of provider representative groups contacted my Department seeking to be added to the membership of the Advisory Group. It was decided not to expand the membership of the Advisory Group, as it was working effectively as a small focused group. The Minister instead established a Reference Group, to supplement the work of the Advisory Group. The Reference Group includes representatives from the Federation of Early Childhood Providers, the Association of Full-time Day Care Providers, St Nicholas Montessori and a number of service providers.

Contributions from the membership of both Groups have informed my Department's strategy and decision making process for the reopening of the ELC and SAC sector from 29 June. I look forward to meeting and working with the groups in the coming weeks, especially the Early Years Forum Plus, who I am due to meet with next week.

National Lottery Funding

575. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount made available to organisations through national lottery funding during the first year his Department provided such funding; the amount that will be made available to organisations through National Lottery funding in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13774/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The Department of Children and Youth Affairs operated a discretionary National Lottery Funding Scheme some years ago in which grants were allocated to community groups and programmes to support children, young people and families. The scheme closed in 2014.

However, my Department currently has resource provisions for Youth Programmes and Services which are allocated under a distinct Subhead which is “part-funded by the National Lottery”. Under this arrangement the dedicated resource allocation contains a combination of Exchequer and National Lottery funding.

It is not possible, however, for my Department to differentiate between the value of the Exchequer and National Lottery components of the funding resource. It is also therefore not possible to give the Deputy a breakdown by year as requested.

Early Childhood Care and Education

576. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if ECCE, early childhood care and education, funding will be reinstated in July and August 2020 to allow childcare providers to make up for lost time. [13791/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme is a universal two-year pre-school programme available to all children within the eligible age range. The programme is provided for three hours per day, five days per week over 38 weeks per year. The programme year runs from September to June each year, and is aligned with the primary school calendar.

The 2019/20 ECCE programme year is now closed, and I do not propose reopening the programme in July and August.

Details of the 2020/21 ECCE Programme will be released in the coming weeks.

Childcare Costs

577. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he has examined reducing childcare costs for parents in cases in which children are sent home from the childcare setting if they may have symptoms (details supplied) in view of the fact that this is likely to happen more often in view of the precautions against Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13845/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): Early learning and care services are provided by private enterprises, either privately owned or operated by community organisations. Services are contracted by my Department to provide services at a subsidised rate to parents.

Where a child is absent from a service, my Department continues to pay subvention for that child for a period of four weeks, which can be increased to 12 weeks in the case of certified illness of the child or parent.

Parents enter into contracts with the service provider for the delivery of childcare services to their child, and it is for parents and providers to agree the policy for charging parental fees in the case of absence of the child, for illness and other reasons.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

578. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if childcare providers have to provide childcare five days per week in order to qualify for the new funding package to support them reopening post-Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13846/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): Early learning and care services which reopen in the summer months do not need to provide services on five days a week to avail of supports under the Government’s €75million support package for the childcare sector, including the €14.2million Covid Capital grant and the continuation of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme. However services which reopen for a minimum period of time over the summer months may get an increase Reopening Support Payment (RSP) if they are open on a full time basis. The total value of the RSP is €18million.

Enhanced RSP is worth twice as much as standard RSP and is available to all services who operate for more than 5 hours per day, 5 days per week, for 6 of the 8 weeks between 29 June and 23 August 2020, with at least one child who is registered on a Department funded scheme attending regularly during that period.

Standard RSP is available for all other services that open for 6 of the 16 weeks between 29 June and 16 October 2020, with at least one child who is registered on a Department funded scheme attending regularly during that period.

The value of the Reopening Support Payment grants is set out in the following table:

| Number of DCYA registered children in each service | Enhanced payment | Standard payment |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| 1-11 | €2,000 | €1,000 |
| 12-40 | €4,000 | €2,000 |

| Number of DCYA registered children in each service | Enhanced payment | Standard payment |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| 41-100 | €7,000 | €3,500 |
| 100+ | €10,000 | €5,000 |

IN addition to the Reopening Support Payment.

Early Childhood Care and Education

579. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 1096 of 13 May 2020, if an exception will be made for a child (details supplied) in County Mayo to allow them to avail of their entitlement of two years ECCE, early childhood care and education; if the supporting documentation in the form of medical evidence was examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13850/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): Officials from my Department have reviewed the appeal referred to by the Deputy, having regard to the eligibility criteria for the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. An overage exemption has been approved, due to the exceptional circumstances of the case.

This decision has been communicated to the parents of the child referred to.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

580. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost to date of the Commission of Inquiry into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related matters; and the cost of the collaborative forum and the homes institutions represented at same. [13861/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters was established by Government on 17th February 2015 (S.I. No. 57 of 2015). In establishing the Commission, the Government noted that the investigation and associated additional demands on the Department of Children and Youth Affairs were estimated to cost €21.5m, exclusive of third party legal costs.

Since its establishment, expenditure of approximately €10.87m has been incurred (to mid June 2020) to support salaries, fees and other operational costs relating to the work of the independent Commission and its engagement with former residents and other witnesses.

| Year | Commission Expenditure |
|-------|------------------------|
| 2020* | €0.8m |
| 2019 | €2.22m |
| 2018 | €2.25m |
| 2017 | €2.1m |
| 2016 | €2m |
| 2015 | €1.5m |

*16 June 2020

In addition, the Department has also directly incurred costs of approximately €2.42 million for the same period in supporting this work and responding to the Commission's interim reports. This includes the costs associated with the separate Collaborative Forum process to facilitate former residents of these institutions to engage on the issues of concern to them and their families. Costs for this process include an extensive public information campaign to support the call for expressions of interest from former residents, operational costs such as meeting facilities and participant travel, and external facilitation and related supports.

Grant Payments

581. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will review the need to provide grants to new ECCE, early childhood care and education, preschool groups and afterschool facilities (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13868/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): My Department funds Tusla registered childcare services to provide both the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) and the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme to eligible children. New Tusla registered early learning and care and school age childcare services are eligible to participate in both ECCE and the NCS.

My Department funds the City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) who offer a wide variety of services locally including, advice on setting up a childcare business, and support on applying for the various funding schemes administered by the Department. Contact details for all of the CCCs are available at *myccc.ie*.

Early Childhood Care and Education

582. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if an appeal submitted by the family of a person (details supplied) regarding the refusal of an application made for an overage exemption and extension to upper age limit for the ECCE, early childhood care and education, programme will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13973/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): Officials from my Department have reviewed this appeal with regard to the eligibility criteria for the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. An overage exemption cannot be granted to the child referred to by the Deputy, as she has already completed two years of ECCE and if the child undertook an additional ECCE year she would be over the age of 6 years starting primary school. The Department has been advised by an expert group that it is in children's best interests to progress to primary school with their age cohort.

This decision has been communicated to the parents of the child and have been encouraged to make contact with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to ensure that adequate preparations are in place for their child to begin primary education in September 2020.

Childcare Services

583. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the supports available for healthcare workers who cannot avail of crèche places due to capacity demand.

[13974/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): Early learning and care services providers who signed up to the Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme (TWSCS) agreed that they would retain the place of each child who was registered with their service on 12 March 2020.

If capacity is limited when services reopen, they have been asked to prioritise the children of health care and other front-line workers, and vulnerable and disabled children, when allocating places.

If parents or guardians are having difficulty in accessing childcare, they should contact their local County Childcare Committees (CCCs), who will provide them with advice and support on accessing both centre based care and home based options, such as childminders. The contract details for all CCCs can be found on www.myccc.ie.

Children in Care

584. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children and young persons in a foster care placement, including kinship or relative foster care placements with other family members, by month in 2019 and to date in 2020. [13988/20]

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. I can advise the Deputy that Tusla has a Performance and Activity Reporting Site, which can be found at the following address: <https://data.tusla.ie/> The site seeks to deliver on the Government Open Data Strategy 2017-2022 by making published performance and activity related data held by Tusla easily accessible in an online format while promoting innovation, research, analysis and transparency through the publication of Public Sector data. The data on Tusla’s Performance and Activity Reporting Site is continuously updated and is available across the following five service categories: Child Protection and Welfare; Alternative Care and Adoption; Prevention, Partnership and Family Support; Tusla Education Support Service; Regulatory Services.

Children in Care

585. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of foster carers registered with Tusla by month in 2019 and to date in 2020. [13989/20]

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. I can advise the Deputy that Tusla has a Performance and Activity Reporting Site, which can be found at the following address: <https://data.tusla.ie/> The site seeks to deliver on the Government Open Data Strategy 2017-2022 by making published performance and activity related data held by Tusla easily accessible in an online format while promoting innovation, research, analysis and transparency through the publication of Public Sector data. The data on Tusla’s Performance and Activity Reporting Site is continuously updated and is available across the following five service categories: Child Protection and Welfare; Alternative Care and Adoption; Prevention, Partnership and Family Support; Tusla Education Support Service; Regulatory Services.

Children in Care

586. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children and young persons subject to care orders and child protection orders by month in 2019 and to date in 2020.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13990/20]

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 Protection

587. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children and young persons referred to him due to concerns regarding abuse and neglect by month in 2019 and to date in 2020. [13991/20]

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.

Children in Care

588. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children and young persons who entered residential care and children’s homes by month in 2019 and to date in 2020. [13992/20]

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.

Asylum Seekers

589. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of separated children seeking asylum; the number who live in foster placements; the number who live in supported accommodation; and the number who live in a residential unit such as a childrens’ home by month in 2019 and to date in 2020. [13993/20]

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.

Children in Care

590. **Deputy Darren O’Rourke** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated cost in 2021 if the foster care allowance of €325 per week per child aged under 12 years of age was increased to €340 and for children aged over 12 years of age increased from €352 per week per child to €377 per week per child. [14002/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): I wish to thank

the Deputy for his question, and can confirm that I have referred the matter to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for their direct reply.

Programme for Government

591. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if he will provide documents on those costings. [14024/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The Department of an Taoiseach has published briefing material provided by Departments, including my Department, which were used in the context of the Programme for Government discussions.

The material supplied by my Department, which includes some detail on the costs of existing measures, is available at the link:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7b927-programme-for-government-documents/#the-department-of-children-and-youth-affairs>

No specific costings have been undertaken by my Department in respect of the Programme for Government. Funding provisions for all Government commitments across my Department’s brief will be considered in the context of the 2021 Budget and Revised Estimates process.

Consultancy Contracts

592. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within his Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14049/20]

593. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within his Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14051/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): I propose to take Questions Nos. 592 and 593 together.

In relation to my Department, I can confirm to the Deputy that Think People Consulting has provided diversity and unconscious bias training and this training includes elements of inclusion training. From 2018 to date the cost associated with these services is €12,684.60 .

Departmental Legal Costs

594. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the expenditure his Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14066/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The information requested in relation to the expenditure incurred by my Department since 2016 towards the provision of external legal services is set out in the table below. These costs refer, in the main,

to legal fees in respect of the Irish Youth Justice Service and the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes, with the exception of 2018, where costs relating to the Children Referendum arose. Certain costs incurred by the Irish Youth Justice Service include settlement fees. Legal fees as set out in the following table exclude any costs incurred directly by my Department's agencies.

| Year | Cost (€) |
|------------|-----------|
| 2016 | 253,688 |
| 2017 | 288,598 |
| 2018 | 1,059,732 |
| 2019 | 614,731 |
| 2020 (ytd) | 125,029 |

Ministerial Responsibilities

595. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide the Departmental briefing paper given to him by his officials; and the delegated powers assigned to him as Minister. [14129/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): My Department will shortly arrange for publication of the brief provided to me upon my appointment.

Childcare Services

596. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if funding will be made available to a group (details supplied) to enable it to continue to provide the service while making a move to temporary accommodation and to a permanent location; the actions taken to date to support the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14244/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): On 10 June 2020, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs announced a major funding package to facilitate the reopening of Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) services.

A key policy priority for the DCYA is the sustainability of the ELC and SAC sector and hence it has and continues to work intensively to support services to re-open after COVID-19. The reopening funding aims to support providers to reopen, staff to remain in the sector, parents to resume work, and children to benefit from quality ELC and SAC.

The new funding package contains four significant elements:

1. A once-off reopening support payment for DCYA-funded providers opening between 29 June and early September.
2. A once-off COVID-19 capital grant for DCYA-funded providers opening between 29 June and early September.
3. Continued access for eligible providers to the Revenue-operated Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS)
4. Resumption of DCYA ELC and SAC programmes. NCS, CCSP and TEC will be avail-

able again for children attending ELC and SAC services from 29 June.

It is hoped that this funding package will act as a significant sustainability measure for ELC and SAC service providers anticipating to reopen from 29 June.

However, a number of supports were available before the COVID-19 pandemic to improve the sustainability of services during normal times, and these remain available now. The Department oversees a Case Management process through which local CCCs and Pobal work together to assess and provide support to early learning and care services. This can include help with completing and interpreting analysis of staff ratios, fee setting and cash flow, as well as more specialised advice and support appropriate to individual circumstances. Financial supports, which are also accessed through Case Management, are available for community services presenting with sustainability issues following a financial assessment by Pobal. Pobal co-ordinate the overall case management process with the CCC administering initial, and on-going, case management assistance. All services who require support should contact their local CCC in the first instance.

I understand that the service in question has already done so and is currently exploring solutions with their local CCC and Pobal Case Management. Pobal is currently carrying out the necessary assessment, and a request for additional support will be considered by my Department once this is completed.

Ministerial Responsibilities

597. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of young persons involved in youth organisations due to the loss of the youth affairs title in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14343/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): While I am aware of some concerns along the lines outlined I can assure the Deputy that, despite ‘Youth Affairs’ not appearing in the title of the Department, it very much remains central to the remit of my Department. Funding to the Youth sector has been protected through the current period of financial challenge and I will strive to ensure that the profile of young people and their needs remains high throughout my time in office.

I am particularly keen to ensure that the needs of vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged young people are taken into account, with specific consideration of how these needs have been impacted or exacerbated by Covid-19 and the resulting restrictions.

My officials and I will continue to work closely with sectorial representatives and young people themselves to ensure that strategy and resourcing is planned carefully to support the needs of young people in an optimum way.

Disability Support Services

598. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the LINC, Leadership for INclusion in the Early Years, programme which is designed to support the inclusion of children with additional needs in the early years; when applications for funding will be reopened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14401/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The goal of

AIM is to support pre-school providers to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience for children and families. AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, based on the needs and strengths of the child and the pre-school setting.

The LINC (Leadership for Inclusion) training programme is part of AIM. LINC is a one-year higher education programme (at Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications) that prepares practitioners to take on the role of Inclusion Co-ordinator in their pre-school setting. In the four years since it began in 2016/17, the LINC programme has had over 3,100 registered students. So far 2,230 practitioners have graduated from the programme, of whom more than 1,900 have gone on to be Inclusion Co-ordinators working in ECCE pre-school settings. Students from the 4th year of LINC are expected to graduate in the coming months.

My Department is currently in the final stages of a procurement process for the provision of the next three years of delivery of a Level 6 Special Purpose Award training programme for the role of Inclusion Co-ordinator. Applications for entry onto the course for the academic year 2020/21 will open following completion of the procurement process.

Settings with a qualified Inclusion Coordinator in post are eligible for additional capitation payments as part of the ECCE pre-school programme. Plans for the reopening of the ECCE and AIM programmes for the 2020/21 programme year will be announced in the coming weeks. Information on 2020/21 additional capitation for Inclusion Coordinator posts will then be made available.

Applications for funding for the 2020/21 pre-school year under AIM Levels 5 (equipment and minor alterations) and 7 (additional assistance in the pre-school room) are already open.

Child Abuse

599. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of retrospective reports of child sexual violence which Tusla has categorised as founded and unfounded for each of the past 12 months of 2019, in tabular form from the data in the NIIS, national immunisation information system, in each of the three categories in which this data is recorded; the intake record, initial assessment form and referral record screen; if this information is not available, the reason the NIIS is not being completed and these figures not available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14408/20]

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 Abuse

600. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of referrals relating to children concerning child sexual violence which Tusla has categorised as founded and unfounded for each of the past 12 months of 2019, in tabular form from the data in the NIIS, national immunisation information system, in each of the three categories in which this data is recorded, that is, the intake record, initial assessment form and referral record screen; if this information is not available, the reason the NIIS is not being completed and these figures not available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14409/20]

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.

Childcare Costs

601. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if childcare providers that are drawing down Covid-19 supports are permitted to increase fees to parents from September 2020 onwards for crèches that experience a fall in the number of children returning on 29 June 2020; the supports available if they cannot afford to cover costs and are already drawing down funding from his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14460/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): Early learning and care and school age childcare services are all private enterprises with 25% of them operating on a not for profit basis. The majority of services are contracted with my Department to provide schemes which subsidise the cost of the service to eligible parents, or in the case of the universal pre-school programme, ECCE, to provide these 15 hours per week at no cost to the parent. Providers are generally free to set their own policies regarding the charging of fees for services other than ECCE.

Two recent exceptions to the general freedom of services to set their own fees policies were:

- the requirement that services in receipt of the Temporary Wage Subsidy for Childcare Scheme (over April, May and June) could not charge any fees to parents, and
- the requirement that services which are reopening over the summer, and are in receipt of a Reopening Support Payment, cannot increase their fees above the level which was charged in March 2020, before the Covid closures.

Now that a majority of childcare services that normally open over the summer have reopened, my Department, together with representatives of the sector, is currently reviewing proposals for the full reopening of the sector in late August / early September. This review includes consideration of potential State supports for the sector to assist it to retain capacity in the short term as the economy recovers and more people return to work and require childcare. Just as my Department has done since creches were closed on March 12, we are committed to providing any essential financial support to ensure that businesses remain sustainable. We hope to finalise our assessment of essential need and to develop a proposal for Government approval within the coming weeks. It is our intention that this proposed funding will cover any additional costs arising from COVID and prevent services having to pass on any increased costs to parents.

Separately, any service provider in financial difficulty can request State support and advice through a Case Management process which my Department delivers through the local County Childcare Committees (CCC’s) and Pobal. This can include help with completing and interpreting analysis of staff ratios, fee setting and cash flow, as well as more specialised advice and support appropriate to individual circumstances. Financial supports are available for community services which are facing sustainability issues. Providers in need of support should contact their local CCC in the first instance.

Childcare Costs

602. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some childcare providers are asking parents to sign a contract for a childcare service which includes the clause that parents must pay during mandated closures as directed by the HSE or another agency; if childcare providers are entitled to insert this clause if drawing down Covid-19 payments recently announced by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14461/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): My Department does not provide early learning and care services. Childcare services are provided by private enterprises, either privately owned or operated by community organisations. Services are contracted by my Department to provide services at a subsidised rate to parents. Providers are free to set their own policies regarding the charging of fees. The current contracts between the Department and providers do not deal with the issue of services charging fees during periods when the services are closed.

With regard to the charging of fees during the March-June Covid related closure period, services which signed up to my Department’s Temporary Wage Subsidy for Childcare Scheme (TWSGS), were not permitted to charge any fees during the closure period.

I would encourage parents who are experiencing difficulties with any aspect of service provision to contact their local City or County Childcare Committee (CCC) for assistance. Contact details for all of the CCCs are available at www.myccc.ie.

Childcare Services

603. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the situation facing a childcare facility (details supplied) whose childcare capital grant application was suspended will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14472/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): My Department has, since 2015, administered an annual capital funding programme, under which early learning and care (ELC) and school-age childcare (SAC) services providers are invited to apply for capital funding to increase capacity and to maintain and improve their services.

The 2020 Capital programme was launched on 26 February with a budget of €7.2million. However, it was necessary, as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic, to suspend the 2020 Capital programme on March 26.

On 10 June 2020 a major funding package to facilitate the reopening of early learning and care services which included an additional €7m in Capital funding, resulting in a total budget of €14.2 million which was shared between all services.

A key policy priority for my department is the sustainability of the sector and I believe the best use of capital funding in 2020 will be made through supporting existing services to reopen after the closure period, and to support them meet the reopening guidance.

The application process for the 2020 Capital programme, which is administered by Pobal, is open for applications on the Early Years Platform the (Hive) until 28 August 2020.

Ministerial Responsibilities

604. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on

the removal of youth affairs from the title of his Department; his further views on whether this will result in a lack of focus on young persons under 25 years of age who will bear a considerable burden of Covid-19 in particular those from disadvantaged communities(details supplied) [14499/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): I want to assure the Deputy that, despite ‘Youth Affairs’ not appearing in the title of the new Department, it very much remains central to the remit of my Department. Funding to the Youth sector has been protected through the current period of financial challenge and I will strive to ensure that the profile of young people and their needs remains high throughout my time in office.

I am particularly keen to ensure that the needs of vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged young people are taken into account, with specific consideration of how these needs have been impacted or exacerbated by Covid-19 and the resulting restrictions.

My officials and I will continue to work closely with sectorial representatives and young people themselves to ensure that strategy and resourcing is planned carefully to support the needs of young people in an optimum way.

Youth Services

605. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the evidence for the commitment to support youth, that is, young persons between ten and 25 years of age who are most marginalised in society when Covid-19 passes (details supplied) [14500/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): I am pleased to report that funding to the youth sector has been protected through the recent period of extraordinary challenge. I want to assure the Deputy of my commitment to young people and the youth sector that provides such crucial support to them.

I am particularly keen to ensure that the needs of vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged young people are taken into account, with specific consideration of how these needs have been impacted or exacerbated by Covid-19 and the resulting restrictions.

The Deputy will be aware that my Department funds UBU - Your Place Your Space which opened on 1st July. This new scheme provides funding, in the region of €39 million annually, to youth services which support young people. The scheme targets young people aged between 10 – 24 years who are vulnerable, disadvantaged or marginalised. The first cycle of UBU - Your Place Your Space runs to December 2023, incorporating a new reporting and continuous improvement approach as part of the model. My Department also funds more universally focussed, volunteer led, youth work through the Youth Service Grant Scheme.

The youth sector has responded quickly to the current crisis, adapting and innovating in order to maintain supports for vulnerable young people. I greatly appreciate the efforts of key representatives from the youth sector in assisting my Department to develop and update Guidance for Youth Organisations on Resuming Full Services after Covid-19, in line with the Government Roadmap .

The Department has also worked with a Youth Advisory Group to design a national consultation with young people on health and well-being as we learn to live with COVID-19. The consultation, ‘How’s Your Head – Young Voices during Covid-19’ will assist in providing a deeper understanding of what young people have found difficult during COVID-19, what changes in their lives they would like to keep going forward, and what would help young people

to improve their mental health and well-being over the coming summer months and beyond. The findings from the consultation will be documented to inform relevant service design and delivery for young people. It will also assist Government in developing other appropriate policy responses on the issues raised by young people leading to a more informed whole of society response to COVID-19 as relevant to the lives of young people.

Ministerial Responsibilities

606. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will publish the Departmental briefing paper on his role, remits and powers afforded to him upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14519/20]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): My Department will shortly arrange for publication of the brief provided to me upon my appointment.

Parental Leave

607. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to draft an order to extend parents leave to nine weeks as outlined in section 5, Part 8 of the Parent’s Leave and Benefit Act 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14005/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): I am conscious of demands on parents at this time and hope that the additional measures to support working parents that my department has 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.

Presently, each parent may 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. The Programme for Government contains a commitment to increase parent’s leave and this matter is currently under consideration.

Ministerial Responsibilities

608. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the Minister and Department responsible for immigration. [14093/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): My Department is currently responsible for the management and delivery of immigration and decisions on international protection for the State and these functions will remain under my remit.

However, as announced by the Taoiseach on the 27th June, some of the responsibilities of my Department will be changing in the coming weeks and months. The responsibility for provision and coordination of State supports to international protection applicants, managed by the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) of my Department, is to transfer to the Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration.

Any transfer of functions between Departments is guided by the Government handbook “Transfer of Functions and Best Practice Handbook.” To ensure a smooth transition, and in accordance with the Handbook, my Department has established a working group, to identify functions to be transferred on foot of the new allocation of responsibilities between Departments.

Garda Districts

609. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if discussions have taken place between her Department and the Garda Commissioner to examine the current divisional boundaries that separate adjoining estates and areas in Drogheda, County Louth, and County Meath, respectively (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13748/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): As the Deputy will be aware, under Section 26 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the administration and operations of An Garda Síochána. As assigning divisional boundaries is an operational matter, the Commissioner is responsible and I as Minister have no direct role in these matters.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that at a recent Louth JPC meeting which the Commissioner attended on 6 March 2020, he indicated that the matters raised in respect of the boundary alignment would be considered as part of the phased rollout of the new Garda Operating Model.

The current Garda divisions of Louth and Meath were created in 2008 alignment to align with the local authority boundaries. As the Deputy will be aware, while the Meath county boundary in the main falls on the southern side of the river Boyne, there are sections where the Louth county boundary crosses the river to the south bank. These areas are urbanised and form part of the town of Drogheda. There are some areas, which have been developed over the years leading to the expansion of Drogheda into County Meath. The areas featured include the M1 Retail Park, Avourwen Meadow, Copi Cross, Platin Road, Lagavooreen and Grangerath. These locations, although within the Meath Division, are served from Drogheda Garda station by way of local policing arrangement between management in both Garda Divisions.

As the Deputy will be aware, the new operating model for An Garda Síochána was recommended by independent policing specialists, including the Garda Síochána Inspectorate, and in the Report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland (CoFPI). Rollout of this new model meets a key commitment in A Policing Service for the Future, the four year implementation plan giving effect to the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland.

I understand from the Garda authorities that the new model is being implemented on a phased basis throughout 2020 and that the Commissioner and his team are meeting with Joint Policing Committees across Ireland, providing opportunities for detailed engagement at the local level.

Legal Services Regulation

610. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the recourse available to a person who did not receive a satisfactory response to a complaint to a body (details supplied); if the State can appoint representation to a person in a such a case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13809/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): Since commencement of the relevant provisions on 7 October 2019, the first point of contact for new complaints in relation to the professional conduct of solicitors and barristers is the Legal Services Regulatory Authority (LSRA) which is the independent regulator for the provision of legal services in the State.

I am assuming from the overall context of the Deputy's question, however, that the complaint in question was lodged under the preceding regulatory framework which applies under the relevant provisions of the Solicitors' Acts. Under that legislation, the Law Society is the designated regulatory body for solicitors and the following procedures will apply to any ongoing complaints the Society has on hand:

The Law Society, the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator are the independent statutory bodies charged with investigating or resolving complaints against solicitors under the Solicitors Acts 1954-2015 and their attendant regulations.

I wish to point out that it would not be appropriate for any member of the Government or Department Officials to intervene, either directly or indirectly, in this statutory process or any related quasi-judicial proceedings that come before the Solicitors' Disciplinary Tribunal.

Under the Solicitors' Acts, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator also provides an independent forum to which members of the public may apply if they are dissatisfied with the manner in which the Law Society has dealt with any complaint made by or on behalf of any client against their solicitor. The role of the Independent Adjudicator is:

1. to ensure that complaints about the conduct of a solicitor are dealt with fairly and impartially by the Law Society;
2. to review complaints about any decision by the Law Society concerning an application for a grant from the Law Society's Compensation Fund;
3. to recommend any changes in the Law Society's complaints procedures which are, in the Independent Adjudicator's view, necessary to maintain the highest standards.

The holder of the Office cannot be a practising solicitor, a member of the Law Society or a practising barrister and shall be independent in the exercise of his or her functions. At the same time, it is important to note that the Adjudicator's role is to investigate the handling of the complaint by the Law Society and not to investigate the substance of the complaint itself.

The Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal deals with complaints of serious misconduct and such complaints are either referred to it by the Law Society or have been made directly to the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal by members of the public. The Tribunal members are appointed by the President of the High Court and act independently of the Law Society. I would point out that, subject to the relevant provisions of the Solicitors' Acts, it is open to any person who has made a complaint to the Solicitors' Disciplinary Tribunal to make an appeal to the High Court where the Tribunal has not made a finding of misconduct in respect of the solicitor against whom that complaint has been made.

In addition to the remedies available under the statutory complaints handling framework that I have just outlined, it is important to be aware that aggrieved clients of solicitors may also choose to seek redress through the courts. This typically arises in cases of alleged negligence on the part of a solicitor which have had serious negative consequences for the client concerned. As with any court proceedings, it is considered prudent that persons considering taking such legal action seek independent legal advice on the strength or otherwise of their case, any limitations that may apply in relation to the passing of time and its possible legal costs implications. Ultimately, it will be a matter for the aggrieved client concerned to decide which course of action might be best suited to the circumstances of their particular case.

611. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the proposed new restrictions by the EU member states on incoming flights from the United States of America due to Covid-19 mitigation measures will include a ban on EU citizens accessing the EU from destinations in the United States of America; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13821/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Deputy is referring to the recent European Council decision on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel in the EU and the possible lifting of such restriction. The measure in question constitutes a development of the Schengen Acquis in which Ireland does not participate, therefore Ireland is not taking part in its adoption. The Deputy may wish to note however that the recommendation clearly states that EU citizens are exempt from any restrictions and can travel to EU states from third countries.

While not a matter specific to my Department, the Government is giving consideration to a possible roadmap for the resumption of safe international travel. In accordance with Government policy, which is based on the official public health advice, the Department of Foreign Affairs continues to advise against all non-essential travel overseas. This includes Great Britain but does not apply to Northern Ireland.

Courts Service

612. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention been drawn to the significant delays in the court system; if priority is being given to the scheduling of violent and sexual assault cases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13880/20]

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 have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has provided the following update on this matter.

The Courts Service is working in cooperation with the judiciary and other stakeholders to increase the amount of criminal business being dealt with by the courts, whilst ensuring appropriate social distancing for staff, judges, legal practitioners, jurors, Gardaí and others associated with criminal prosecutions. The Courts Service is in the process of identifying suitable venues where jury call-overs and jury trials can be held and is assessing the maximum numbers that can safely attend each courtroom and courthouse throughout the country.

The Courts Service is planning to have jury trials commencing in the Central Criminal Court and Circuit Criminal Court from September. The prioritisation of cases is a matter for the relevant court to decide.

On the broader reform agenda in this area, the review of the investigation and prosecution of sexual offences is being carried out by a working group chaired by Tom O' Malley, Senior Lecturer in Law at the National University of Ireland, Galway and member of the Law Reform Commission. The working group includes representatives of the Garda Síochána, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Probation Service, the Courts Service and the Department of Justice and Equality. The review is examining the adequacy of measures available to protect vulnerable witnesses during the investigation and prosecution of sexual offences, to help ensure the best

quality evidence is available to the jury in making their decision, while respecting the dignity of the victim and their right not to be re-victimised by the investigation or trial process itself. It is examining the entire legal process around sexual offences, from the initial reporting of an offence through to the end of any court proceedings, including the causes of delay in sexual offence trials, and the effect of delay upon vulnerable witnesses. The review is particularly concerned with the treatment of complainants and vulnerable witnesses throughout this process.

The process is now at the final stages and a report is expected to be received by my Department in the very near future.

The recommendations of the review, when complete, will be given very careful consideration alongside the recent work of the Law Reform Commission on Consent in Rape Law.

Parental Leave

613. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will consider increasing the upper age limit for parental leave by one year, with particular reference to the ongoing restrictions concerning Covid-19 and the fact that parents who currently have saved parental leave to use may not get a chance to use it due to their child reaching 12 years of age before the end of the pandemic; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13888/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): I am conscious of demands on parents at this time and hope that the additional measures to support working parents that my department has 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.

When the first Parental Leave Act was enacted in 1998, parental leave ended on the day on which the child concerned attained the age of 5 years. This age limit was increased in 2006 to 8 years by the Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2006 and further increased in 2019 to 12 years by the Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2019. There are currently no plans to increase this age limit.

It should be noted too that, in addition to parental 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. The Programme for Government contains a commitment to increase parent's leave and this matter is currently under consideration.

Court Accommodation

614. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the re-opening of Wicklow courthouse; the stage the refurbishment works are at; when it is anticipated that these works will be complete; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13897/20]

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 have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has provided the following update on this matter.

A number of projects in relation to Courts Service accommodation requirements are out-

lined in the Government's National Development Plan 2018 - 2027. They include the:

1. Provision of further new or refurbished courthouses in provincial cities and county towns where facilities remain sub-standard (including Galway city, Wicklow town, Portlaoise, Tralee and Roscommon) and further provincial locations such as An Clochán Liath (Dungloe) to serve as the Gaeltacht Court for the region, and Tuam.
2. Family Law and Children Court complex at Hammond Lane.
3. Redevelopment and modernisation of the Four Courts following completion of the Hammond Lane project as a campus for Civil courts.
4. Construction of standard county town type court facilities at a number of locations in county Dublin (outside of the city centre) and also in North Kildare, Bray and Navan.
5. Regional Family Law centres.

The precise allocation and timing of additional funding over the entire ten year period of the plan remains to be fully determined. It will be dependent on the outcome of further detailed planning and analysis of costs which will determine prioritisation of projects from a timing and budgetary perspective. At present, the Hammond Lane project is the priority project. In relation to the provision of new/refurbished courthouse facilities at Wicklow and the four other provincial city/county towns mentioned above, once the necessary funding is allocated and allowing time for planning, procurement and construction, a time-frame in the region of 5 years could be anticipated for delivery of these five provincial city/county town projects. Specifically, in relation to Wicklow, the existing courthouse comprising 2 courtrooms is in poor condition and has been closed for a number of years on health and safety grounds. The Courts Service has indicated that while detailed planning or design work has not yet commenced, it has purchased a number of adjacent properties, some of which will be demolished in order to create a larger site capable of accommodating a courthouse building on the scale envisaged. Pending commencement of the overall project and in order to deal with some remedial issues, the assistance of the Office of Public Works has been sought by the Courts Service to bring forward some of this demolition work.

Court Accommodation

615. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to develop the old courthouse on the Boghall Road, Bray, County Wicklow; the stage they are at; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13900/20]

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 have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has provided the following update on this matter.

The Courts Service has no plans at present to develop the former courthouse situated on Boghall Road, which has been vacant since 2006, when court sittings and services were relocated to alternative accommodation leased by the Courts Service in the town centre.

While the construction of a county town type courthouse facility at Bray is included amongst

the Courts Service projects in the National Development Plan, the current Boghall Road site is considered unsuitable for such a development in terms of size or location.

Immigration Status

616. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of the case of a person (details supplied) pursuant to section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13966/20]

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), the persons concerned have submitted written representations.

Their position in the State will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation. All representations submitted will be fully considered in advance of a final decision being made.

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

Wards of Court

617. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of recent deaths out of the total of 85 wards of court that occurred in nursing homes; the number of deaths in the reported 85 that died due to Covid-19; the number of the 85 that came under the remit of the general solicitor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13997/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): I am informed that sadly, in the period from 12 March 2020 to 29 June 2020, 111 wards of court died, 86 of whom were resident in nursing homes or community hospital settings. The General Solicitor for Minors and Wards of Court was Committee for 19 of those 86 wards.

The Wards of Court Office does not always receive the cause of death. However, the Office has been informed that Covid-19 played a role in the deaths of 17 of these wards of court.

Wards of Court

618. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of wards of court who come under the remit of the general solicitor; if there was a family or family member that could have acted as their committee in each case; the average length of time probate takes in such cases by reference to past cases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13998/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): The General Solicitor for Minors and Wards of Court is committee or guardian to 624 wards of court, including 10 minor wards of court.

The General Solicitor is appointed as committee or guardian when there is no family member available to act, willing or in a position to act. The General Solicitor may be appointed as committee where the family are unable to agree who will act as committee. The General Solicitor may be appointed by the Court if the Court believes it is appropriate to do so in the absence of an appropriate family member and in the best interest of the ward.

The General Solicitor's Office would only deal with a Probate application in very rare circumstances. It is not possible to quantify the time a probate application would take as each individual estate is different and will have different requirements and complexity.

Programme for Government

619. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the costings carried out on the programme for Government; and if she will provide documents on those costings. [14034/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Programme for Government has wide-ranging implications for the work of my Department, and a detailed analysis of the measures included in it is ongoing. Work is also ongoing to implement the changes in the allocation of responsibilities between Departments that have been announced.

The Deputy may wish to note that the briefing notes prepared by all Departments to assist in the Government formation process have been made available by the Department of the Taoiseach on their website:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7b927-programme-for-government-documents/>.

Consultancy Contracts

620. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within her Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14059/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): I wish to inform the Deputy that my Department has not engaged any external consultancy organisation or provider to deliver diversity and inclusion training within the Department from 2018 to date.

My Department has established an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and members of this Committee will participate in diversity and inclusion training during the year. Diversity and inclusion information is included as part of our monthly induction sessions with new starters to the Department.

My Department is currently working with autism support body As I Am, with a view to rolling out an online module on autism awareness to all staff. My Department is researching options for the delivery of disability awareness training that will fulfil our commitments under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy. Furthermore, an Access Officer has been appointed in accordance with Section 26(2) of the Disability Act.

The Access Officer is responsible for providing, arranging or co-ordinating assistance to persons with disabilities who wish to access the services provided by the Department of Justice and Equality. The Access Officer also acts as a point of contact for persons with disabilities who

wish to access such services.

My Department's LGBT+ Staff Network was established by staff to make the Department a more inclusive place for all through education and awareness raising. Since its foundation, it has run various initiatives, including on how to be a good ally in the workplace, the coming out process and how to support colleagues, and, most recently, to mark the start of Pride month.

My Department also provides guidance and briefings to our internal Interview boards on diversity and inclusion, unconscious bias awareness and applicable law in respect of non-discrimination.

Departmental Legal Costs

621. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the expenditure her Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14076/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): I wish to advise the Deputy that the information sought cannot be provided in the time allowed. As soon as the information has been collated I will write to the Deputy on the matter.

International Protection

622. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the average wait time between an IPO decision and her letter of confirmation since the establishment of the IPO in 2017; the average wait time in the each of the years 2017 to 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14081/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Ministerial Decisions Unit (MDU) of my Department processes the recommendations received from the International Protection Office (IPO) and the decisions of the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT).

Procedural enhancements within MDU are currently being introduced and are expected to reduce processing time for individual grants of international protection to approximately one week following receipt of a recommendation from the IPO or IPAT.

The following table provides the average processing time for decisions by MDU for each of the years 2017 to 2019.

| Year | Average Processing Time for Decision by MDU |
|------|---|
| 2017 | 26 Days |
| 2018 | 58 Days |
| 2019 | 79 Days |

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation there have been delays to the time frame for the issuing of international protection decisions. All applicants for international protection who are in receipt of recommendations from the IPO or the IPAT, will hear from the Ministerial Decision Unit in due course in relation to the outcome of their applications and their position in the State. In the meantime, they remain applicants under the International Protection Act 2015.

They have been advised that if their Temporary Residence Card (TRC) is due to expire, they should consult the IPO website <http://www.ipo.gov.ie/> or contact the IPO. Resumption of normal timeframes remains under constant review subject to the advice of the HSE and the Chief Medical Officer and once commenced, decisions will be issued as quickly as possible.

Assisted Decision-Making

623. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans regarding the prompt roll-out and full funding of the decision support service and further to same, the abolition of the ward of court system in view of commitments made by her predecessor to roll out the new decision support service. [14098/20]

630. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the decision support service will be established and operational; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14220/20]

633. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the decision support service in the context of wards of court; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14267/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 623, 630 and 633 together.

The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (“the 2015 Act”) provides a modern statutory framework to support decision-making by adults with capacity difficulties. The 2015 Act was signed into law on 30 December 2015 but has not yet been fully commenced. The Act provides for the establishment of new administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service (DSS) within the Mental Health Commission (a body under the Department of Health).

A number of provisions of the 2015 Act were commenced in October 2016 in order to progress the setting up of the Decision Support Service and enable the recruitment of the Director of the DSS. Ms Áine Flynn was appointed Director of the DSS on 2 October 2017. The commencement of Part 8 of the Act, which provides a legislative framework for advance healthcare directives, is a matter for the Minister for Health.

Part 6 of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 provides for the phased transition from adult wardship to the new decision-making support arrangements that will be available under the 2015 Act. It provides for the review by the wardship court of the capacity of all current adult wards of court within three years of the commencement of Part 6 of the 2015 Act. In each case, the ward shall be discharged from wardship and the court shall order that the property of the former ward be returned to him or her. The safeguards and procedures of the 2015 Act will apply to a former ward who transitions to any of the new decision-making support arrangements available under the 2015 Act. The current wards of court system will continue to operate until Part 6 of the 2015 Act is commenced. It is not possible to commence Part 6 of the Act until the DSS is operational and ready to roll out the new decision-making support options that will be available under the 2015 Act.

The implementation of the 2015 Act requires that the DSS is fully operational and in a position to offer services including the new decision-making support options. A high-level Steering Group comprising senior officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health, the Mental Health Commission, the Courts Service and the HSE, together with the Director of the DSS, is overseeing the establishment and commissioning of the DSS and this

work is ongoing. The Steering Group has given detailed consideration to the feasibility of commencing the remaining uncommenced provisions of the Act however, due to the complexity of the Act and the interconnectivity of its provisions, it is not possible to make any further commencement orders until the DSS is operational. The DSS, led by its Director, is working tirelessly to put in place the necessary infrastructure to support the full commencement of the Act. The infrastructure required includes, amongst many other elements, ICT capability for the DSS. These key preparations are being put in place under the oversight of the Steering Group and will allow for commencement orders for the main operative provisions of the 2015 Act to be made when the necessary preparations have been completed to enable the DSS to roll out the new decision-making support options.

The Department of Justice and Equality has sought and received funding, through the Estimates process, over the last three years to assist the DSS in delivering on its mandate. Further funding will be sought through the Estimates process in 2020 and 2021 but this will of course be subject to available exchequer funding through that process. In the interim, and subject to the funding allocation, the Department of Justice and Equality, in conjunction with the DSS, the Mental Health Commission and other stakeholders have agreed to an implementation plan which anticipates commencement of DSS services in mid-2022. There are also critical dependencies for the DSS on other organisations, including for example the Courts Service and the HSE, Departments of Health amongst others, which need to be delivered in order to achieve this timeline. The Steering Group has been meeting regularly to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the implementation of this project.

Naturalisation Applications

624. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when consideration will be given to naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14119/20]

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 persons 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 final decisions being made.

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

Citizenship Applications

625. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for citizenship in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14136/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to continues to be processed with a view to establishing if they meet the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

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

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

Immigration Status

626. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason an application for stamp 5 has been refused in the case of a person (details supplied); the most appropriate steps to take now in order to keep their status updated in view of the fact their most current one is due to expire in August 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14148/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): In order to qualify for this endorsement, a person must have eight years (96 months) legal residency in the State excluding periods spent as a student. The person concerned did not meet this requirement.

Legal residency is calculated solely on the basis of immigration endorsements in a passport(s) and not on the time that an individual may have been physically in the State. However, it is open to the person concerned to make a new application when they have completed 96 months legal residency in the State.

The person's permission to remain in the State on stamp 3 conditions expires on 15 August 2020. The onus is on the person to keep their permission to remain in the State up to date at all times. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions the Registration Office in Burgh Quay and all Registration Offices for non-Dublin residents operated by An Garda Síochána remain temporarily closed. Consequently, the requirement to present at a registration office to register a new permission or renew a current permission is also temporarily suspended.

The individual concerned can write to the Registration Office at burghquayregoffice@justice.ie for more details on renewing their current permission. Please also note that updates will be provided on the Immigration Service website regarding the reopening of the Registration Office Burgh Quay to registration and renewal of permissions, and I would encourage the Deputy and the person concerned to view the updates on the Immigration Service website at:

<http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/COVID-19-updates-and-announcements>.

Direct Provision System

627. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the criteria applied to Garda vetting for direct provision centres in view of the fact that friends of some residents have been denied access to centres due to the lack of Garda vetting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14214/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): My Department welcomes and supports interaction between the local community and residents in our Accommodation Centres. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our centres were closed to visitors for a number of months, in order to protect our residents and staff.

In line with the phased re-opening of society and gradual lifting of public health restrictions, our centres reopened to certain categories of visitors on Monday 22nd June 2020. These categories included Migrant NGOs, members of Friends of the Centre groups (established in cooperation with the centre management team and International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS), Department of Justice officials and contractors visiting centres for inspections, maintenance and general network management, and other State officials providing services to residents.

The opening up of centres to other categories of visitors including friends and acquaintances from the local community and persons acting in an official capacity requiring one to one contact (e.g. legal representatives and IPAS officials conducting resident clinics) will happen in subsequent phases over the coming weeks in accordance with ongoing consultation with public health officials.

As per the Government guidelines on the further easing of restrictions on movement outside the home, residents can of course meet with anyone from the local community outside of the centre, but in doing so are encouraged to continue following the guidelines on hand hygiene, cough and sneeze etiquette, and social distancing.

In relation to Garda vetting for NGOs and volunteers, this must be done through their own organisation who can then confirm to centre managers that volunteers have up to date and appropriate vetting disclosures.

Individuals not affiliated with an organisation and who wish to volunteer in a centre should contact Volunteer Ireland for advice on how to obtain a Vetting Disclosure. Personal friends and acquaintances of residents do not require Garda vetting.

IPAS has contacted management in a specific centre to clarify the position.

Court Procedures

628. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if additional funding will be provided to ensure that swearing in of juries can be conducted while adhering to public health Covid-19 guidelines. [14215/20]

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 have had enquiries made and the

Courts Service has provided the following update on this matter.

The priority for the Courts Service at this time is protecting the health, safety and welfare of all court users in line with current government health advice. A review of all Circuit and Central Criminal Courts is under way and a crime business recovery roadmap will be published by the Presidents of the Courts in the coming weeks. It is hoped that there will be a return to Jury Trials in suitable venues in September and a further phase 2 for the Michaelmas term. The Courts Service has indicated that, in the first instance, trials will be prioritised in county town venues of sufficient size to safely host jury trials.

Departmental Funding

629. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her Department will meet with the women in a group (details supplied) to discuss matching the funds raised by their release of a single; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14217/20]

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.

Officials in my Department are in regular contact with stakeholders in the community and frontline services in relation to domestic abuse, including Safe Ireland, which is the organisation benefiting from the fundraising exercise referred to. These interactions and engagements will continue across a number of fora. I am not aware of any meeting request from the group referred to by the Deputy as of yet, but I would of course consider it if received. I would point out that my Department has also provided additional funding directly to Safe Ireland and other organisations, to enable them to adapt their services and continue to operate during the Covid-19 pandemic.

On that point, 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 continues 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:

- Safe Ireland: €36,000 for additional personnel capacity and communicating with their service users, as referred to above;

- 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;

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- 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;

- 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.

The Deputy may also wish to note that rent supplements are being 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.

Question No. 630 answered with Question No. 623.

Immigration Status

631. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); when they will be granted permission to work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14232/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): My Department is actively considering the immigration case of the person concerned and requested the submission of additional information and documentation on 10 June 2020. This documentation has not yet been received.

I note from the details you supplied that further documentation has been submitted by the individual concerned. Receipt of the documentation may have been impacted by the limited opening hours in some of our offices due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This practice is in line with Government public health policy on social and physical distancing which has caused disruption to postal flows to and from our offices.

I can confirm that as soon as the information and documentation referred to has been acknowledged by my officials, every effort will be made to progress the immigration case of the person concerned to finality at the earliest possible date.

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 with-

out the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Naturalisation Applications

632. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for naturalisation by a person (details supplied); and if she will request her officials to treat this application as a priority. [14259/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to continues to be processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation and a decision will be made as expeditiously as possible.

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

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. However, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time. The applicant may contact the Citizenship Division by email at citizenshipinfo@justice.ie for updates on their application.

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

Question No. 633 answered with Question No. 623.

Court Accommodation

634. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the courtrooms that have full video link facilities and the capacity to take CCTV evidence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14292/20]

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 have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that it has installed the following Courtroom video technologies;

- 59 Courtrooms nationwide are equipped with combined video link and video evidence

display (includes CCTV viewing) facilities.

- 25 Courtrooms are equipped with video evidence display (includes CCTV viewing) facilities only.

- 2 mobile video evidence display (includes CCTV viewing) solutions for deployment to any Courtroom nationwide.

The Courts Service has also approved and initiated a project to install and provide combined video link and evidence display (includes CCTV viewing) facilities in a further 6 new Courtroom locations in the Four Courts, the Circuit Family Law Court in Smithfield and in Drogheda Courthouse. This project is scheduled for completion in August. The Courts Service continues to review its video technologies capacity and is examining options to install these facilities in other courthouses in the future. An itemised list showing the locations of the above solutions is attached in the following link.

[Video Link and CCTV]

Domestic Violence

635. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of cases of domestic violence reported to An Garda Síochána in County Donegal in each of the years 2018, 2019 and to date in 2020, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14293/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): Combatting domestic abuse is a priority for me and my Department. It is an important aspect of the National Strategy for Women and Girls and the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence and a range of actions are being taken in that regard, including public awareness raising campaigns. My Department developed an inter-agency plan to address domestic abuse during the Covid-19 pandemic and, in addition to the funding already allocated for 2020, has to date provided an additional €285,000 to date to organisations in the sector, to support and extend the existing services they offer during this period of the Covid-19 crisis.

I am informed by the Commissioner that An Garda Síochána too attaches the highest priority to domestic abuse incidents. This continues to be the case during the current Covid-19 pandemic and indeed a targeted, proactive operation, Operation Faoiseamh, has been established to ensure that victims of domestic abuse are supported and protected during this extraordinary time and to ensure that any domestic abuse incidents receive the highest priority response.

In its first phase, Garda Victim Services Offices nationwide made proactive contact with victims who have reported domestic abuse in the past, to identify any existing issues of concern. I am informed that over 8,200 contacts or attempts at contact to victims of domestic abuse were recorded by Gardaí as part of that work (between 1 January 2020 and 25 May 2020). I am further informed that Phase II of the operation began in mid-May and this involves a focus on targeting perpetrators - and in particular, cases of persistent breaches of protection, safety and barring orders under the Domestic Violence Act.

Gardaí also continue to develop their specialist services in this area and I understand that a total of 16 Divisional Protective Services Units have now been rolled out nationwide. This process is continuing and when complete, will meet a key action under 'A Policing Service for the Future', the implementation plan for the Report of the Commission on the Future of Polic-

ing in Ireland.

In relation to statistics on the number of incidents in Donegal as requested by the Deputy, I would first point out that the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, is responsible for the compilation and publication of all crime statistics. The CSO produces these statistics using data including data recorded on An Garda Síochána's PULSE system and makes regular releases under reservation in relation to various crime statistics, including recorded and detected crime. The CSO also continues to work with An Garda Síochána to address quality issues in the underlying sources used to compile the statistics.

However and in general, the Garda authorities have provided my Department with initial, provisional and operational data which shows that nationwide and in total, domestic abuse related calls have increased by 24% in the year to date; and that breaches of Domestic Violence Order Incidents have increased by 10% in comparison to the same time period last year.

Further and in response to the Deputy's specific query in relation to Donegal, the Garda authorities have informed my Department that there were a total of 1044 domestic abuse incident reports in the Donegal Division in 2019; and that this year, from 1 January to 1 July 2020, there were a total of 560 such incident reports in the Donegal Division. I am informed that figures for 2018 are not comparable as the methodology at the time was different.

It is important to note that this is provisional, operational data and is subject to change. The Garda authorities inform me that these figures were arrived at through searches of the Pulse system to include incidents of the following categories: Breach of Interim Barring Order, Breach of Protection Order, Breach of Barring Order, Breach of Safety Order, Domestic Dispute - No Offence Disclosed, Breach of Emergency Barring Order, or any other incident type, with a recorded motive in Pulse of 'Domestic Abuse' and incidents recorded on PULSE where the dispatcher assigned the type as 'DVSA' (Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault).

Garda Equipment

636. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when each piece of Garda public order uniform and equipment was last updated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14294/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): As the Deputy will be aware, the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána by law is responsible for the administration and management of An Garda Síochána, including the updating and distribution of Garda public order uniform and equipment, and I as Minister have no role in the matter.

With regard to the specific nature of your query, I have referred this matter to An Garda Síochána and will respond to the Deputy accordingly upon receipt of this information.

Garda Deployment

637. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí by rank attached to each divisional protection services unit that have been established to date in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14296/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): Under the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner has responsibility for management of An Garda Síochána and for the allocation and efficient use of Garda resources. This includes responsibil-

ity for the distribution of personnel across the various Garda Divisions. As Minister I have no direct role in these matters.

I am assured that An Garda Síochána continues to implement the roll-out of DPSUs nationwide and aims to ensure that a DPSU will be in operation within every Garda Síochána division as soon as possible. Roll-out of these Units will meet a key commitment in A Policing Service for the Future, the four-year implementation plan giving effect to the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the table below shows the number of Gardaí attached to Protective Services Units as at 2 July 2020. CSI indicates Child Specialist Interviewers.

| 02/07/2020 | GD | SG | INS | SU | CS |
|-------------------|------------|----|-----|----|----|
| G.N.P.S.B. | 42 | 15 | 6 | 3 | 1 |
| DMR East | 10 | 2 | 1 | | |
| DMR South | 18 | 4 | | | |
| DMR South Central | 14 | 3 | 1 | | |
| DMR West | 25 | 4 | 1 | | |
| Kilkenny/Carlow | 13 | 2 | 1 | | |
| Waterford | 12 + 2 CSI | 2 | | | |
| Wicklow | 6 | 2 | | | |
| Galway | 15 | 2 | | | |
| Louth | 10 | 2 | | | |
| Clare | 7 | 1 | | | |
| Cork City | 11 | 2 | | | |
| Cork West | 5 | 1 | | | |
| Kerry | 9 | 2 | 1 | | |
| Limerick | 11 | 2 | | | |
| Tipperary | 5 + 2 CSI | 1 | | | |

The resourcing of each Garda region and division is fully considered within the overall context of the needs and requirements of Garda regions throughout the country, including the Protective Services Units. Garda personnel assigned throughout the country, together with overall policing arrangements and operational strategies, are continually monitored and reviewed. Such monitoring ensures that optimum use is made of Garda Resources and the best possible Garda service is provided to the general public.

The allocation and transfer of Garda Personnel is determined by a number of factors, including crime and non-crime workload, minimum establishment, population, area, policing arrangements, operational strategies and transfers applications, including welfare issues. When allocations are taking place, comprehensive consultation is carried out with Local Management during which all factors are taken into consideration. Where a deficiency in resources is identified the matter is considered fully and addressed accordingly.

Garda Transport Provision

638. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of unmarked Garda vans that came into the fleet in 2019 and to date in 2020; the number of un-

marked Garda vans withdrawn from the fleet in 2019 and to date in 2020, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14297/20]

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. Further, 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 30 June 2020, there were 2,961 vehicles attached to the Garda Fleet including 501 vans. I understand that this compares to a total of 2,794 vehicles as of end December 2019.

The following table, furnished to me by the Garda authorities, set out the number of un-marked vans allocated to and removed from the fleet in 2019 and 2020.

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| 2019 | Total |
| Allocations | 19 |
| Removals | 13 |
| 2020 (to 30 June) | Total |
| Allocations | 8 |
| Removals | 1 |

As is standard, the Garda authorities indicate that allocations to the fleet may include vehicles which were purchased in the previous year, but in relation to which the technical fit-out process was not completed until the following year.

Finally and for clarity, it may be noted that these figures do 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.

Courts Service

639. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will clarify the requirement to uphold shared care of children arrangements under the current Covid-19 restrictions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14338/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): I appreciate the concerns that the public health emergency is causing for many families in relation to court orders for access. The welfare of the child is paramount and parents continue to be responsible for ensuring their children's welfare.

While setting the terms of court orders and related proceedings are matters proper to the courts, which neither I nor my Department are involved in, it is important to point out 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 has 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, while other free parent support services which provide help and advice are available from www.onefamily.ie and www.treoir.ie.

In relation to recourse to the courts, the President of the District Court announced on 8 May that Applications and hearings for breach of maintenance or access that have occurred during the emergency period or applications and hearings for temporary guardianship orders can now be dealt with.

The Courts Service is also developing a family law business roadmap which has the aim of expanding the amount of business that can be safely transacted in the family courts later in the year. Court offices remain open by appointment only for essential business but are available to answer phone and e-mail queries.

Citizenship Ceremonies

640. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of approved applications for naturalisation that are awaiting a citizenship ceremony; if there are plans in place to clear the backlog in a safe way in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14359/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): Following on from the necessary postponement of the citizenship ceremonies scheduled for this month 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 intention that large scale ceremonies will recommence once circumstances allow.

There are currently 5,869 applications at the final stages of processing with 2,347 already approved, where my predecessor indicated his intention to grant a certificate of naturalisation, subject to the outstanding conditions being satisfied.

While applications for naturalisation continue to be processed and alternative methods of work delivery have been implemented, restrictions imposed to protect against COVID 19 are presenting significant challenges resulting in delays in the processing of applications.

Departmental Functions

641. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the new functions, units or work areas her Department has gained; the functions, units and work areas have been moved to other Departments; the destination for same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14370/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): The transfer of functions between Departments is governed by the Ministers and Secretaries Acts 1924-2017, and will be determined by a Government decision and resulting Transfer of Functions Order.

The implementation of the transfer of functions is also guided by the Transfer of Functions Guidelines and Best Practice Handbook developed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This is available online at

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a490d1-transfer-of-functions-guidelines-and-best-practice-handbook/>

In line with the Guidelines, a working group has been established within my Department to arrange the transfer of functions on foot of the new allocation of responsibilities. This group is working with officials in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to make appropriate arrangements for the transfer.

I expect that final arrangements will be agreed, subject to Government approval, within the timelines set out under the Guidelines.

Maternity Benefit

642. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to increase maternity benefit for mothers in the lifetime of the Government; if so, the estimated increase; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14397/20]

643. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the provision for temporary extension of maternity leave and benefit for mothers impacted by the Covid-19 lockdown during which social interactions for new babies was greatly restricted will be considered; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14400/20]

644. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will advance her support for the campaign to temporarily extend maternity leave and maternity benefit by three months for those whose maternity leave has or will expire during the public health restrictions. [14434/20]

647. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a temporary extension of maternity leave from six to nine months will be considered for mothers whose benefit claim expired during the Covid-19 lockdown. [14448/20]

650. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will revisit the issue of extending maternity leave for new mothers that are due to return to work but have lost out on precious time with their babies due to the Covid-19 pandemic. [14479/20]

654. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if maternity leave will be extended for women due to the Covid-19 crisis. [14503/20]

657. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if clarity will be provided on the measures to temporarily extend maternity leave and maternity benefit by three months for those that are currently on maternity leave in view of Covid-19. [14580/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 642 to 644, inclusive, 647, 650, 654 and 657 together.

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.

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 currently being given to these 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.

National Advocacy Service

645. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 400 of 16 June 2020, if the National Advocacy Service has been contacted by her officials to assist residents of a nursing home (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14444/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): As the Deputy is aware, having reviewed the records held by the Restorative Justice Implementation Unit, we have confirmed that there were a number of applicants who were resident in St. Margaret's nursing home, Donnybrook and all of these residents were linked to the National Advocacy Service when applying to the ex-gratia scheme. However, it is understood that this institution has now closed, and that the residents transferred to other nursing homes, which might include the nursing home mentioned by the Deputy. We do not have any records of applicants to the ex-gratia scheme residing at this location.

In line with the commitment given in response to your previous question (PQ no. 400 16 June 2020) I can confirm that my officials made contact with both the nursing home concerned, and with the National Advocacy Service. Both organisations been appraised of the potential that there may be former residents of Magdalen institutions now residing in this nursing home, and that the Department is keen to ensure that all such residents are provided with access to appropriate advocates to ensure their best interests are represented over the period ahead. I understand that the National Advocacy Service also intends to liaise directly with the nursing home concerned, and officials of my Department remain available to provide any further assistance necessary in relation to this matter.

Garda Operations

646. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the implementation of the An Garda Síochána drug-related intimidation reporting programme; and the number of persons by county who have availed of the programme each year since it was launched. [14445/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): I can assure the Deputy that proactively tackling all forms of drug crime is a priority for An Garda Síochána. The Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau (GNDOCB) is having significant success in disrupting drug trafficking and the supply of illicit drugs by organised crime groups. Its work is supported by Divisional Drugs Units nationwide, and by all Gardaí working in local communities. It also works closely and productively with international law enforcement partners.

The Deputy will be familiar with the National Drugs Strategy, "Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery - a health led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025". The Strategy is unique among national drugs strategies across EU Member States in recognising the need to address drug-related debt intimidation at a community level.

The Strategy includes an action (4.1.42) which specifically relates to strengthening the effectiveness of the Drug-Related Intimidation Reporting Programme. The programme, which

was developed by An Garda Síochána in partnership with the National Family Support Network (NFSN) to respond to the needs of drug users and family members who may be subject to the threat of drug related intimidation, has been implemented on a national level since 2013.

An Garda Síochána regard drug-related intimidation as a hugely serious issue which impacts significantly on communities throughout Ireland. An Garda Síochána advise people to seek help and support from their local Gardaí even where a person has felt compelled to pay money to those who engage in drug related intimidation.

Cases are dealt with in a confidential and secure manner and, insofar as is possible, An Garda Síochána provides practical personal security and safety information and advice in relation to particular threats or instances of intimidation, along with information on appropriate drug support services for any member of a family who is accruing drug debts, while also providing information regarding the process involved in making a formal complaint relating to alleged intimidation.

In line with the Strategy, the GNDOCB has briefed senior Garda managers throughout the country in relation to the most effective handling of suspected incidents of drug-related intimidation and, in particular, the potential role of the programme in this regard.

Seminars are delivered by the GNDOCB and the NFSN to the Garda Inspectors assigned in each division to ensure appropriate implementation of the programme. Attendees at these seminars also include members of Drugs & Alcohol Task Forces as well as Gardaí in local drugs units.

Awareness of the programme is also promoted to all Gardaí and regional management through the GNDOCB and - with the assistance of the NFSN, relevant agencies, Regional and Local Drug & Alcohol Task Forces and community groups - in communities throughout the country.

Information in relation to the Drug Related Intimidation Reporting Programme and a list of the nominated Inspectors countrywide is available on the Garda Síochána Website, *www.garda.ie*, the National Family Support Network website and the *www.Drugs.ie* website.

I am informed that, due to the requirement to afford anonymity to participants, it is not the practice to publish data in relation to participation rates.

Question No. 647 answered with Question No. 642.

Garda Deployment

648. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí by rank attached to K district community policing unit in each of the years 2016 to 2019 and to date in 2020, in tabular form [14452/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): As the Deputy will appreciate, in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the management and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. Further, the allocation of Garda resources is made in light of identified operational demand. This includes deployment of personnel among the various Garda Divisions. As Minister, I have no direct role in the matter. I am assured however that Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use. I understand that it is a matter for the Divisional Chief

Superintendent to determine the optimum distribution of duties among the personnel available to him or her, having regard to the profile of each area within the Division and its specific needs.

It is however important to note that community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána and that all Gardaí have a role to play in community policing in carrying out their duties. To date, the official categorisation as a Community Garda has simply referred to those who are exclusively assigned to building relationships with local communities and civil society including giving talks to schools, community groups and others.

The area referred to by the Deputy is located within the DMR West Division. The following table, as provided to me by the Garda authorities, sets out the number of Community Gardaí assigned to the DMR West Division by rank for the years requested.

| Community Gardaí assigned to DMR WEST | Sergeant | Garda | Total |
|---------------------------------------|----------|-------|-------|
| 2020 (up to 31 May) | 8 | 69 | 77 |
| 2019 | 7 | 59 | 66 |
| 2018 | 5 | 58 | 63 |
| 2017 | 5 | 59 | 64 |
| 2016 | 5 | 48 | 53 |

The K District refers to the Garda stations located at Blanchardstown, Finglas and Cabra.

The following table sets out the number of Community Gardaí assigned to the K District for the years requested by the Deputy.

| Community Gardaí assigned to the K District (Cabra, Blanchardstown & Finglas Garda stations) | Sergeant | Garda | Total |
|--|----------|-------|-------|
| 2020 (up to 31 May) | 3 | 36 | 39 |
| 2019 | 3 | 33 | 36 |
| 2018 | 3 | 29 | 32 |
| 2017 | 2 | 32 | 34 |
| 2016 | 2 | 25 | 27 |

Further, and as the Deputy will be aware, implementation of this Community Policing Framework takes place in the wider context of implementation of A Policing Service for the Future, the four year implementation plan giving effect to the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland. In its report published in September 2018, the Commission outlined a vision and roadmap for strengthening An Garda Síochána and the broader national framework for policing, security and community safety. The report followed extensive consultations with communities and a wide range of stakeholders over fifteen months.

It is important to note that the Community Policing Framework is being piloted in tandem with the roll-out of An Garda Síochána's new Operational Model, which meets a key commitment in A Policing Service for the Future. The Garda Operating Model reorganises resources

around the delivery of frontline policing, placing an increased emphasis on engaging with communities and supporting victims of crime. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that in each Division, there will be a dedicated Superintendent leading a community engagement team. I am confident that this reorganisation will further strengthen community policing and engagement, and provide a more localised, responsive policing service for each Division nationwide.

In a broader sense, the Deputy might also wish to note that implementation of A Policing Service for the Future will see the Garda Síochána Act 2005 repealed and replaced by a Policing and Community Safety Act. My Department is progressing work on the preparation of a Policing and Community Safety Bill as a matter of priority.

In addition to setting out a new governance and oversight framework for policing, it will redefine the functions of An Garda Síochána to include prevention of harm to those who are vulnerable, place an obligation on relevant state agencies to cooperate with An Garda Síochána in relation to the broader issue of community safety and refine local structures supporting local accountability for policing. In that context, my Department is currently in the process of finalising the most appropriate model to achieve this. All existing structures and approaches to community safety have been considered as part of this work and in line with the recommendation of the Commission on the Future of Policing that community policing and community engagement should be at the heart of new structures and policing arrangements.

As I have indicated to the Deputy, work is well advanced on the preparation of the General Scheme of the Bill. Once it is finalised, I intend to bring it before the Government for approval and publication in the normal manner.

Garda Operations

649. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to establish a task force similar to the one in Dublin's north inner city in the Dublin metropolitan region northern division. [14459/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): Tackling serious crime in the North Dublin region is a priority for myself, my Department and across the whole of government.

The then Taoiseach and my predecessor as Minister previously met with the Garda Commissioner and members of his senior management team in relation to serious crime incidents in the DMR North and the coordinated response mounted by An Garda Síochána to tackle them - including community safety, intelligence and drugs and organised crime. I will continue to be regularly briefed by the Commissioner and senior Gardaí on progress made in relation to various investigations being handled by the Division, as my predecessor was.

Gardaí are undertaking significant activity to counter drug crime at the local level, supporting communities through various preventative and detection initiatives. This includes engagement with Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces; the Garda Youth Diversion Programme and Projects; the Garda Schools Programme; the Joint Policing Committees and Community Policing Fora. Debt and debt intimidation are also getting focused attention: the Drug Related Intimidation Reporting Programme, developed by Gardaí and the National Family Support Network, has been in place since 2013 to respond to the needs of drug users and family members experiencing drug related intimidation.

In addition Garda resources in the Division have been increased significantly. I understand from the Garda authorities that there are 804 Gardaí assigned to the DMR North at the end of

April 2020, representing a 20% increase compared to the end of 2015. Of these, there are 247 Gardaí assigned to the Coolock District representing a 25% increase compared to the end of 2015. Members in DMR include those assigned to Divisional specialist units such as Drugs and Community Policing. There are now also 62 Garda staff, an increase of 63% in the same time period. Taken together, this increase in the Garda workforce represents a very significant increase in operational policing hours in the DMR North. These Garda members and staff are of course supported and supplemented by personnel from the national and regional units, when required.

In relation to specific issues being experienced by some communities in the Division, I understand that liaison is ongoing with relevant stakeholders, including the Local Authorities, Tusla and the HSE.

Further, as the Deputy may be aware, Dublin City Council is examining the broad needs of the area including the need for a coordinated approach to address specific issues within the area. I understand that this work is ongoing and a report including recommendations is expected in the Autumn. As Minister, I am looking forward to reviewing the report and engaging with any recommendations falling within the remit of the Department.

Finally, I note that a key principle arising from the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing is that policing is not the responsibility of the police alone, but also involves other agencies of Government, such as health or social services, as well as other sectors of society. This principle is at the centre of a new policy on community safety which is being developed in my Department. The policy, which will be given a statutory basis in the new Policing and Community Safety Bill, proposes to establish and support a system of community safety at local level across the country. Through cross-sectoral collaboration, and by drawing on the available services, these systems will be best placed to identify, support and implement, community safety according to the needs of the local community.

Question No. 650 answered with Question No. 642.

Prison Staff

651. Deputy Sorca Clarke asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the ratio of nurses and general practitioners to prisoners in each prison in February 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14486/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): Provision of safe and secure custody and dignity of care to persons in the penal system in Ireland is a priority for my Department and the Prison Service.

I understand that the prison healthcare service provides prisoners with access to the same range of quality of healthcare services as available under the medical card scheme in the community. The Prison Service Health Care Standards guide the provision of these health services to prisoners, reflecting the prison context and good clinical practice. These Standards have been published and further information is available on the Irish Prison Service website www.irishprisons.ie.

In total, I am informed that the Irish Prison Service currently has 13.6 General Practitioners (WTE) and 141 nurses employed across the prisons estate.

The following table, furnished to me by the Irish Prison Service, sets out the information requested by the Deputy on the ratio of nurses and general practitioners in Irish prisons and

represents the position as at 29 February 2020.

It is important to note however that the Irish Prison Service states that the level of healthcare resources assigned to an individual prison is determined by the clinical needs of the population and is not solely based on the number of prisoners in that individual institution.

| Prison | Number in Custody | Nurses | Ratio Nurses to prisoners | General Practitioners | Ratio GPs to Prisoners |
|---------------|-------------------|--------|--|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Portlaoise | 241 | 8 | 1:30 | 1 | 1:241 |
| Shelton Abbey | 100 | 2 | 1:50 | 0.23 WTE | 1:435 |
| Dochas Centre | 148 | 7 | 1:21 | 0.5 | 1:296 |
| Wheat-field | 536 | 18 | 1:30 | 1 | 1:536 |
| Arbour Hill | 136 | 6 | 1:23 | 0.26 WTE | 1:523 |
| Cloverhill | 400 | 18 | 1:22 | 2 | 1:200 |
| Mountjoy | 704 | 25 | 1:28 | 2.4 | 1:293 |
| Midlands | 889 | 22 | 1:40 *supported by 5 Health Care Assistants | 3 | 1:296 |
| Limerick | 266 | 11 | 1:24 | 0.43 WTE | 1:619 |
| Cork | 327 | 11 | 1:30 | 1 | 1:327 |
| Castlerea | 323 | 11 | 1:29 | 1 | 1:323 |
| Loughan House | 135 | 2 | 1:68 | 0.77 WTE | 1:175 |

Prison Staff

652. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the ratio of psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and addiction counsellors per prisoner per prison in February 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14487/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): Provision of safe and secure custody and dignity of care to persons in the penal system in Ireland is a priority for my Department and the Prison Service.

I understand that the prison healthcare service provides prisoners with access to the same range of quality of healthcare services as available under the medical card scheme in the community. The Prison Service Health Care Standards guide the provision of these health services to prisoners, reflecting the prison context and good clinical practice. These Standards have been published and further information is available on the Irish Prison Service website www.irishprisons.ie.

Specific attention is also paid to psychology and mental health. I understand that the Prison Service Psychology Service makes up part of the clinical and operational multi-disciplinary

team in each prison and provides tailored psychological assessment and intervention services for people in custody. Psychological interventions include both individual and group based approaches, and are provided through a Stepped Model of Care.

I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Irish Prison Service and they have in turn requested certain of these details from the Health Service Executive. I will write directly to the Deputy when I receive the information.

Prisoner Data

653. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prisoners on waiting lists to access prison psychology services and addiction services in February 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14488/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): Provision of safe and secure custody and dignity of care to persons in the penal system in Ireland is a priority for my Department and the Prison Service.

I understand that the prison healthcare service provides prisoners with access to the same range of quality of healthcare services as available under the medical card scheme in the community. The Prison Service Health Care Standards guide the provision of these health services to prisoners, reflecting the prison context and good clinical practice. These Standards have been published and further information is available on the Irish Prison Service website www.irishprisons.ie.

Specific attention is also paid to psychology and mental health. I understand that the Prison Service Psychology Service makes up part of the clinical and operational multi-disciplinary team in each prison and provides tailored psychological assessment and intervention services for people in custody. Psychological interventions include both individual and group based approaches, and are provided through a Stepped Model of Care.

I understand that in addition to working with prison operational staff, the Psychology Service work closely with other multi-disciplinary team members to facilitate cohesive and streamlined care for prisoners, including Healthcare (GPs and Nursing Staff), In-reach Psychiatric Services (Consultant Psychiatrists, Registrars and Psychiatric Nurses), Chaplaincy, the Probation Service, Social Workers, Resettlement Officers and Training and Employment Officers as well as Addiction Counselling Services.

I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Irish Prison Service. Unfortunately it was not possible to compile it in the timeframe available but I will write directly to the Deputy when I receive the information.

Question No. 654 answered with Question No. 642.

Ministerial Responsibilities

655. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will publish the Departmental briefing paper on her role, remits and powers afforded to her upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14529/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department intends to publish the briefing material provided to the Minister and Min-

ister of State, subject to appropriate redaction guided by the Freedom of Information Act, and will provide the Deputy with a copy of this as soon as it is available.

Garda Reserve

656. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the percentage of the Garda Reserve members as of 31 December 2019 that completed the minimum of 208 annual hours per year duty obligations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14537/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

As the Deputy will be aware, service in the Reserve is voluntary and unpaid. However, an allowance is payable to Reserve members who complete a minimum of 208 hours of duty annually as a contribution towards expenses incurred in performing their duties. The allowance is currently set at €1,000 per annum. Reserves are also reimbursed for expenses incurred while attending court in respect of their service as a Reserve.

I have requested the details of the percentage of Garda Reserves who completed 208 hours of service or more as of 31 December 2019 from the Commissioner and I will write to the Deputy on receipt of same.

Question No. 657 answered with Question No. 642.

Personal Insolvency Arrangements

658. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to reform personal insolvency legislation and ensure that sufficient supports are in place for mortgage holders with repayment difficulties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14611/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Insolvency Acts 2012 to 2015 already provide for a number of mechanisms to help individuals who are unable to pay their debts by reason of insolvency, namely Debt Relief Notices, Debt Settlement Arrangements, and Personal Insolvency Arrangements (which apply to people with secured debts such as mortgages and unsecured debt).

In practice, the insolvency legislation and infrastructure has already been extensively reviewed and developed since 2012. Key reforms introduced include the section 115A court review process (which removed the so-called ‘bank veto’) enacted in 2015, interlocking reforms to bankruptcy legislation also enacted in 2015, and the introduction in 2016, and extension in 2019, of the Abhaile Mortgage Resolution Service, which in effect ensures that borrowers at risk of losing their homes due to mortgage arrears can access free independent expert financial and legal advice and in certain cases legal aid.

My Department will keep this important legislation under review, and will take any further action needed to ensure that it operates effectively. My Department is currently engaged in preparatory work for two sets of legislative changes to the legislation.

Firstly, my officials are considering certain statutory requirements which may be difficult

or impracticable to comply with in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic including a small number of requirements under the Personal Insolvency Acts. My intention is to bring forward for Government approval, a short urgent Bill in order to make any necessary amendments as soon as possible.

Secondly, my officials are working to complete the major statutory review of the Personal Insolvency Acts, following the earlier public consultation held, and now, in addition, to ensure that this review will also take full account of the latest developments and particularly, the significant economic effects of the Covid-19 outbreak.

I expect the review report to be finalised by September, following further consultations with the Department of Finance, as required by s. 141 of the Acts, and with the Office of the Attorney General.

Direct Provision System

659. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to the nature, duration and extent of an agreement between a hotel (details supplied) and her Department; the length of time the arrangement will last; the purpose of the arrangement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14632/20]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Helen McEntee): In early March 2020, as part of my Department's rapid response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, an examination of all offers of suitable accommodation was undertaken. This included the premises mentioned by the Deputy, which had previously been visited by a senior official.

A range of accommodation options were urgently brought on stream to reduce density in our centres and to protect anyone who may have been at risk. A number of new permanent accommodation centres were opened and a number of hotels were contracted to offer additional capacity as a temporary measure.

In addition, my Department, in conjunction with the HSE, opened four self-isolation facilities in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Dundalk. These facilities offer increased supports, including medical and social service supports, to residents who may be at risk and/or need to self isolate.

Initial contracts are on a renewable roll over basis for three months at a time. This remains under review and will be subject to demand for suitable accommodation and the evolution of the pandemic response.

Medical Inquiries

660. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the advice received in 2016 regarding the missing samples from persons (details supplied) which led to the decision not to hold an enquiry; and the person or body that gave the advice. [14247/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): In 2016 the Minister for Health was provided with background information on the subject matter of correspondence received from the family concerned. Based on this information, which was compiled by Department officials, a response was conveyed to the family in letters subsequently issued in September and October of 2016.

Disability Services Provision

661. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health when physiotherapy, speech and language therapy and so on for children with intellectual and physical disabilities will be returned to a facility (details supplied) which is being used for Covid-19 related uses. [14447/20]

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

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.

Commissions of Investigation

662. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Health the status of an investigation (details supplied); the cost to the State for the commission of investigation to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14462/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Commission of Investigation (certain matters relative to a disability service in the South East and related matters) ("the Farrelly Commission") is an independent statutory Commission of Investigation. The Commission commenced its Phase 1 investigation in May 2017. The first phase of the Commission's work is to investigate the role of public authorities in the care and protection of 'Grace' (pseudonym), who resided with a former foster family in the South East of Ireland between 1989 and 2009.

The Farrelly Commission wrote to my predecessor as Minister for Health (Simon Harris, T.D.) to request a ten-week preliminary extension until Friday, 24th July 2020, to allow it to identify the time needed to complete its Phase 1 Final Report. Minister Harris granted the extension. He made this decision following discussion with his colleague, the Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Disabilities, Finian McGrath and his Cabinet colleagues.

The Commission's costs to date are €5,077,654.82.

Ministerial Responsibilities

663. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a copy of the Departmental briefings received by him and each Minister of State in his Department upon taking up each individual role; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14805/20]

871. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if he will publish the Departmental briefing paper on his role, remits and powers afforded to him upon appointment to the Cabinet. [14527/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 663 and 871 together.

I intend to publish the briefing document I received on my Department's website shortly.

Maternity Services

664. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the re-opening of maternity classes, including breastfeeding and antenatal classes, in Cork University Maternity Hospital; his views on the effects postponements and cancellations of such classes is having on pregnant women in preparing for the birth of their child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13720/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the queries raised by the Deputy relate to service issues, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply to you directly.

Health Services

665. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the re-opening of services and support for persons suffering with dementia; when guidelines will be issued regarding the reintroduction of such services and supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13723/20]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

666. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been denied an appointment with the locum pain consultant at Our Lady’s Children’s Hospital, Crumlin. [13734/20]

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 Waiting Lists

667. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number and age category of persons waiting for orthopaedic surgeries in UHK; the length of time they have been waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13746/20]

669. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for cataract removal in University Hospital Kerry by age category and the length of time they have been waiting for their procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13755/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 667 and 669 together.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to pause all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity with effect from the end March 2020. 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 National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) and in accordance with the World Health Organisation, and the National Action Plan. The decision to delay appointments and admissions is not undertaken lightly and when such a decision is made, it is based on the safe delivery of care to all patients.

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, NPHET agreed that its recommendation of 27 March, in regard to the pausing of all non-essential health services should be replaced, in relation to acute care, with a recommendation that delivery of acute care be determined by appropriate clinical and operational decision making. Application of the essential risk mitigating steps set out in the guidance developed under the auspices of the NPHET Expert Advisory group will have operational implications, which will impact on throughput.

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>).

To ensure services are re-introduced in a safe, clinically-aligned and prioritised way, the HSE launched its Strategic Framework for ‘Service Continuity in a Covid Environment’ on 24 June. Its implementation will ensure service resumption is done in an integrated way. This will involve a phased approach to ensure community services are strengthened. The Framework will also consolidate new ways of working and build on international knowledge. The HSE is currently developing a Service Continuity Roadmap for the resumption of services across the health system.

The data requested regarding orthopaedic surgeries in UHK is outlined in the following table. In relation to the requested information concerning the number of persons waiting for cataract removal in University Hospital Kerry by age category and the length of time they have been waiting for their procedure, the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) have advised my Department that there are currently no IPDC waiters for Cataract surgery in UHK.

*Due to the small volume of patients waiting in certain time-bands and age profiles, to preserve patient confidentiality, when the number of patients is <5, these have been included within the broader ‘Small Volume timebands’ & ‘Small Volume Age Profile’ cohorts.

| | Small Volume Time Bands | 0-3 Months | 3-6 Months | 6-9 Months | 9-12 Months | Grand Total |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Univer- sity Hospi- tal Kerry | | | | | | |
| Ortho- paedics | | | | | | |
| 16-35 | | | 8 | | | 8 |
| 36-65 | | 36 | 48 | 29 | 11 | 124 |
| 66+ | | 22 | 57 | 24 | 8 | 111 |
| Small Volume Age Profile | 13 | | | | | 13 |
| Grand Total | 13 | 58 | 113 | 53 | 19 | 256 |

Medicinal Products

668. **Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health when funding and approval for the immunotherapy drug Osimertinib will become available for persons with lung cancer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13747/20]

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 licensed 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 can confirm that the HSE has approved the application for reimbursement of Osimertinib (Tagrisso) for non small cell lung cancer, the specific recommendation is for second-line use for the treatment of adult patients with locally advanced or metastatic EGFR T790M mutation-positive non small cell lung cancer.

Reimbursement will commence from the 1st July 2020.

Question No. 669 answered with Question No. 667.

Dental Services

670. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding dental care (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13757/20]

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

671. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for X-rays and MRIs in hospitals (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13761/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The HSE advise that a pilot project commenced in 2016 by the HSE Acute Hospitals Division to progress the collection of national radiology waiting list data. The project has been supported by the Radiology Clinical Care Programme and has involved key stakeholders across the system including the National Integrated Medical Imaging System (NIMIS) Team, Hospital Groups, and the support of the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) for data collection and data management expertise

The NTPF has advised my Department that they do not currently record the personal data of any of the patients on the Diagnostics waiting list as the purpose of this aggregate data is to provide a National Level overview of the number of patients waiting for modalities of CT, MR

and US. This report is not intended to be used for the active management of hospital diagnostics waiting lists- local reports and mechanisms should continue to be used for the management of diagnostics waiting lists at hospital level. For this reason, the NTPF are not able to identify the age category of patients on the Diagnostics waiting list.

The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the document attached, which sets out waiting list data for Quarter 1 2020 for CT, MRI and Ultrasound. The HSE advises that, at present, the X-ray scans requested by the Deputy are not yet captured as part of this project. In relation to the requested x-ray information, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

The information that is currently being collected is presently being tested and validated at hospital, hospital group and national level and as such should not be used/reported without the context of the caveats set out below:

- Data is subject to inclusions and exclusions which are documented in the Data Profile Document. This document is available from Acute Operations and has been circulated to all Hospital Groups.

- Data contains urgent, routine and surveillance/planned activity which is currently not broken down in detail, as such this includes surveillance/planned activity which may not be exceeding planned date.

- Data is still undergoing validation at Hospital and Hospital Group level.

- Data does not take into account local nuances at site level (Site profile developed to support understanding of same).

- The purpose of this aggregate data is to provide a National Level overview of the number of patients waiting for modalities of CT, MRI and Ultrasound.

- This report is not intended to be used for the active management of hospital diagnostics waiting list, local reports and mechanisms should continue to be used for the management of diagnostics waiting lists at hospital level.

In Q1 2020, there were a total of 190,373 patients reported on the waiting list from all sites for CT, MRI and Ultrasound, representing all outpatients waiting, urgent, semi urgent, routine and planned/surveillance (where diagnostic access is planned at particular time intervals).

Hospital Waiting Lists

672. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of children suffering with scoliosis awaiting a procedure (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13762/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Improving access to scheduled care 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 had advised my Department that they continue to develop sustainable solutions to reduce waiting times for children attending their 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. In addition, CHI has also advised my Department that a General Orthopaedic Surgeon, based at CHI Crumlin and Tallaght sites, is due to commence in Q3, 2020. This post is for general orthopaedic and trauma surgery, to support waiting list activity, and will further support waiting times for children for general orthopaedic outpatient appointments, including scoliosis.

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.

Covid-19 Pandemic

673. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the deaths that have occurred due to Covid-19 by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13769/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The COVID-19 data hub features national statistics, information and data about COVID-19 in Ireland. It is available at <https://covid19ireland-geohive.hub.arcgis.com/>. The data available on the site is based on official figures provided by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) and the Health Service Executive (HSE). Datasets, charts and maps are updated on an on-going basis and in line with newly published data. This site is built using the GeoHive platform, Ireland's Geospatial Data Hub.

I would also direct the Deputy to the CSO website for access to a range of data relating to Covid-19 including the numbers of diagnosed cases and mortality data. This is available on the CSO Covid-19 Information Hub at

<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-covid19/covid-19informationhub/>

and, in particular, at

<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/br/b-cdc/covid-19deathsandcasesseries6/>.

It should be noted that, in Ireland, data are collected on COVID-19 related mortality for both lab confirmed and probable cases, in line with recommendations from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control in both hospitals and the community. We committed from the outset to collect the most extensive data possible in order that the information could inform and guide the public health actions necessary to respond to the very serious threat posed by COVID-19. It should also be noted that the collection of mortality data in Ireland exceeds that of many other countries in the world.

The NPHE and my Department will continue to consider all available evidence and the experience and learning from other countries as we try to keep the level of transmission of the virus as low as possible while also balancing the need for continuing restrictions with the social and economic benefits arising from the easing of restrictions in the coming period.

National Lottery Funding

674. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health the amount made available by his Department to organisations through national lottery funding in 2010; the amount that will be made available to organisations through national lottery funding in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13775/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): My Department administered a National Lottery Discretionary Fund up to and including 2016 from which once-off grants were paid to community and voluntary organisations providing a range of health related services. My Department no longer operates a National Lottery Fund.

Details for National Lottery funding from my Department from 2008 - 2016 can be found at <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/af1133-department-of-health-lottery-funding-2008-2016/>

The HSE operates a similar scheme and continues to provide grants to health agencies and other organisations from National Lottery Funds. Details of the scheme are available at:

<https://www2.hse.ie/services/national-lottery-grants/national-lottery-grants.html>

National Lottery Funding

675. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health the amount made available by the HSE to organisations through national lottery funding in 2010; the amount that will be made available by the HSE to organisations through national lottery funding in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13776/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a matter for the Health Service Executive I have asked them to respond to you directly on this matter.

Covid-19 Pandemic

676. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if a directive can be issued to private nursing homes to allow visiting outside normal working hours and also to allow another visitor, for example, a daughter-in-law or granddaughter when the nominated visitor is unable to visit due to their work commitments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13778/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Nursing home providers are ultimately responsible for the safe care of their residents.

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 NPHET 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.

Hospital Appointments Status

677. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be issued with an appointment with the chiropractor in Merlin Park Hospital, Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing them with an appointment in view of the urgency of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13780/20]

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

678. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider relaxing the 50 persons restriction for churches that are able to accommodate more persons while maintaining the 2 m social distance in view of the fact many churches are quite large and can comfortably accommodate more; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13781/20]

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 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.

As the Deputy will be aware, religious buildings and places of worship may now be reopened, in line with public health guidelines. The Government previously 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.

Covid-19 Guidance has also been developed for religious services. The new Government's Cabinet Committee on Ireland's Covid-19 response has reviewed the guidance, which states that an assessment should be carried out for each premises to determine how many can attend within the requirements of social distancing.

The Cabinet Committee decided that where the size of the premises allows for a capacity of greater than 50 this may be permitted only where:

- Social distancing guidelines are adhered to
- The premises can be subdivided into distinct sections (cordoned or marked appropriately) of not more than 50 persons in each section
- There is a minimum of 4m between sections
- Each section having its own entrance/exit route
- There are separate arrangements for elements of the service involving close contact, e.g. the distribution of Holy Communion
- Strictly no movement of people between sections before, during or after the service
- The premises is well-ventilated.

Account must also be taken regarding the risk of congregation by people outside before and after any services, having regard to outdoor overall limits on mass gatherings and arrangements for staggered exiting after ceremonies

The use of face coverings is strongly recommended for such indoor settings.

Vaccination Programme

679. Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor asked the Minister for Health the status of the schools vaccine programme; if students who would ordinarily have received vaccinations but did not due to Covid-19 will receive their vaccines in the autumn roll-out of vaccinations na-

tionwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13793/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The HSE National Immunisation Office is responsible for managing vaccine procurement and distribution, and developing training and communication materials for the public and health professionals.

As the question raised by the Deputy is a matter for the National Immunisation Office, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Staff

680. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a HSE post (details supplied) was withdrawn after it had been advertised and assigned; if the post will be reinstated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13805/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

National Children's Hospital

681. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the date on which construction will commence at the national children's hospital; the reason for the delay in the recommencement of construction activity on site; the cost of the closure of the site due to Covid-19; if there are penalties in the context of costs accruing as a result of closure of the site; the reason for the continued closure of the site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13816/20]

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.

Neuro-Rehabilitation Services

682. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if urgent care will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13822/20]

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

683. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the steps taken and steps planned in respect of each Roscommon mental health services report recommendation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13826/20]

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 Staff

684. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 160 of 26 June 2019, if a person (details supplied) was in receipt of a yearly increment; if the HSE refused to accept their resignation in November 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13842/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

685. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for surgery for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [13856/20]

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 Tests

686. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of HSE and private home support staff who were tested for Covid-19 by county; the number that remain to be tested by county in tabular form in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13866/20]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

687. **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. [13872/20]

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.

Water Supply

688. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a matter (details supplied); and the measures he will take to address same. [13874/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Health Service Executive is re-

sponsible for the management of the public healthcare property estate, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

Medical Internships

689. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health his plans to allow medical students to undertake one month summer placements in hospitals in 2020. [13876/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

690. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13877/20]

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.

Disability Services Provision

691. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 516 of 16 June 2020, if he will address the concerns raised in correspondence by

the parent of a service user (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13886/20]

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.

Home Help Service

692. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Health his plans to deal with the waiting lists for home support hours in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13892/20]

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.

Disability Services Provision

693. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when services (details supplied) will be reopening after its closure due to Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13894/20]

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

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

Disability Services Provision

694. **Deputy Darren O’Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when a detailed roadmap for services for persons with disabilities will be published to give service users and their families clarity on the resumption of normal services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13895/20]

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.

Health Services Funding

695. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for a review to be completed for funding for a care centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13902/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The NHSS, commonly referred to as *Fair Deal*, is a system of financial support for people who require long-term residential care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

In 2020, the NHSS saw a further investment in its budget, to bring it to €1.07bn for the year. This significant investment will provide ongoing long-term residential care over the course of

2020 ensuring that the Scheme continues to deliver affordable and accessible nursing home care for our citizens with long-term care needs.

Separately, as part of package of support measures for nursing homes, my Department established a COVID-19 Temporary Assistance Payment Scheme (TAPS), which opened for applications on 17th April 2020. The core concept of the scheme is that the State will provide additional funding to those nursing homes that require it, to contribute towards costs associated with COVID-19 preparedness, mitigation and outbreak management. The scheme was originally devised to operate for a 3-month period to the end of June, however I recently approved a 3-month extension to the scheme.

The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) has been designated by the Minister for Health pursuant to Section 40 of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009 as a body authorised to negotiate with proprietors of non-HSE registered nursing homes to reach agreement in relation to the maximum price(s) that can be charged for the provision of long-term residential care services to NHSS residents.

As part of this function, the NTPF will enter into “Approved Nursing Home Agreements” with registered private and voluntary nursing homes to record the maximum price(s) that have been negotiated. Where, notwithstanding the best efforts of both parties, agreement is not reached through negotiation, the nursing home may elect by agreement, to enter a review process. The details of this process are set out on NTPF’s website www.ntpf.ie

It will be appreciated that particulars of all such negotiations and reviews are a matter between the nursing home and the NTPF. Accordingly the NTPF does not discuss publicly the details of negotiations with individual nursing homes.

The NTPF has statutory independence in the performance of its function and negotiates with a nursing home on an individual basis. As Minister for Health I do not have any role in this regard, I understand however, that engagement through the established mechanisms is ongoing.

HSE Properties

696. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health his plans for an old HSE building (details supplied) now that the new primary care centre in Bray, County Wicklow, is fully constructed and occupied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13903/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): 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.

Medical Cards

697. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when the budget 2020 over-70s medical card income thresholds will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13905/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): On 25th 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 and over. The Bill was published on July 1st, 2020 and arrangements are now being made for its

passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Disability Services Provision

698. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a long-term placement will be provided urgently through a service to a person (details supplied); if home supports will be provided immediately in view of the fact they cannot be cared for at home and they are a danger to themselves and others; and if the required intervention will be expedited. [13908/20]

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 Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Neuro-Rehabilitation Services

699. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the urgent need for biannual access to neurologists for persons with Parkinson's disease, more nurse specialists and referrals of all patients with the disease to services such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy and dietetics; and if he will address the current situation regarding access to these services. [13912/20]

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.

Addiction Treatment Services

700. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the number of addiction counsellors employed by the HSE by county in the Saolta group area; the number of vacancies that exist in those counties for addiction counsellors; when those vacancies will be filled; the level of qualification required for such a role; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13914/20]

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.

Addiction Treatment Services

701. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the wait times for an appointment with an addiction counsellor by county within the Saolta group; the number of persons on each list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13915/20]

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 Funding

702. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be provided to Roscommon University Hospital to furnish and equip the shell and core unit which is idle since built in 2016 to enable the hospital to open a surgical ward which would alleviate waiting lists throughout the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13917/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Saolta University Health Care Group advise that a meeting is to be scheduled in the coming weeks involving Roscommon University Hospital, HSE Estates Department and themselves to discuss a proposal for a project along these lines. A formal submission for capital funding has not been made in this regard.

Hospital Appointments Status

703. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [13919/20]

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.

Question No. 704 withdrawn.

Covid-19 Pandemic

705. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if a reply will issue to correspondence from a person (details supplied) regarding the reopening of betting shops; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13924/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy will appreciate my Department receives a significant amount of correspondence, however, I can assure the Deputy that a reply will issue on the matter raised in the question.

As the Deputy is aware, 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/>.

I wish to clarify to the Deputy that bookmakers are included in these measures and may re-open subject to the Phase 3 specific requirements. In recommencing all remaining commercial activities, business owners and organisations are advised to carry out a risk assessment of the nature of their business, service or activity, the particular risks associated and how they could mitigate those risks for their customers, staff and the wider public, as appropriate. 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.

Information and Communications Technology

706. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding information technology equipment in the health service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13925/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Department of Health, has increased capital investment in ICT from €55 million in 2017 to €95 million in 2020 with a further planned increase to €120 million in 2021. This is intended to support reform of the health service by facilitating the deployment of more clinical and operational systems and implementation of key eHealth initiatives. Investment in underlying technical infrastructure specifically has benefited from this increased level of investment. Whilst there is clearly further work to be done, that work is ongoing and significant progress has been made to date. Indeed, without this commitment, the health service would not have been able to respond to the recent pandemic in the way that it did. By way of simple illustrations, over the past 5 years the HSE has had a rolling programme in place to replace every desktop and laptop computer in the health system, has replaced or upgraded WAN and LAN networks, replaced phone systems on major (and many smaller) sites, has virtualised its server infrastructure, deployed a new national data centre and increased storage capacity and performance on all sites. Wireless LAN is available in 33 out of the 49 voluntary and statutory hospitals, with a national enterprise procurement at

planning stage. Whilst not all sites can be deployed at the same time, there are existing procurement frameworks in place so that hospitals and non-acute sites can have needs assessed. These frameworks facilitate the development of technical specifications for WiFi deployments, so that they can be submitted for capital funding and procurement. The investment in this area is ongoing and the programme is supported by the Department of Health.

In relation to multi-disciplinary conferences, teleconferencing and telehealth, one of the features of Covid-19 has been the significantly increased adoption of video as a means of communicating with each other during the pandemic. The health system has seen particular benefits with the adoption of this technology as we seek to enable social distancing, keep patients, clinicians and healthcare workers safe. The HSE has deployed multiple technologies at scale and at pace. Microsoft Teams has been deployed for staff, Attend Anywhere has been made available for clinical settings such as outpatient departments, and GPs have been able to avail of multiple choices.

In relation to the funding of computers through CME, HSE IT security policies are very specific in relation to connection of devices such as laptops that are not owned and managed by the health service, to the health network. The preferred arrangement is that if a laptop is required, this be funded, deployed and managed through local IT operations. Laptops deployed in this way will support remote working and multi-disciplinary team working.

Hospital Appointments Status

707. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health when gynaecology appointments at Cork University Hospital, which were cancelled as a result of Covid-19, will recommence. [13931/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy may be aware, in late March, the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) recommended that all non-essential health services should be paused to protect and maximise the delivery of essential time-critical care during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, on 5 May last the NPHE replaced its previous recommendation with a new recommendation that, going forward, the delivery of acute care should be determined by appropriate clinical and operational decision making.

As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Abortion Services Provision

708. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure there is a full and independent investigation into the alleged illegal abortion that took place in the National Maternity Hospital in March 2019 (details supplied); the reason the medical reports for the abortions that took place in the National Maternity Hospital in March 2019 are still termed as draft; if he will meet with the family in question; and if the breaches of the Health (Regulation of the Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 that occurred in March 2019 will be included in his report on abortion services on 30 June 2020. [13933/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): It is important that an independent external review be established to examine the facts of what occurred in this case, to provide clarity and answers to the family concerned, and to identify and address any patient safety risks emerging such that any patient safety learning for the Hospital and wider maternity services can be

implemented without delay. I, and my Department, are conscious of the impact of this patient safety incident on the family concerned.

The NMH has proposed to commission a review process comprised of a panel of experts which is independent and external to the Hospital to carry out the review process. I understand that the Hospital is engaging with the family to address their concerns with regard to the review process. I hope that the family's concerns can be addressed in order that this independent external review process can now commence without further delay.

The matter of medical reports is an operational matter and I have referred this query for direct response.

Pursuant to section 20 of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, the Minister for Health is obliged to prepare a report on notifications received by him in the immediately preceding year and to cause copies of the report to be laid before each House of the Oireachtas.

The notifications are recorded on the form entitled "Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 (Notifications) Regulations 2018" (Statutory Instrument No. 597 of 2018). The following information is included in the form:

- Medical Council registration number of the medical practitioner who carried out the termination of pregnancy;
- The section of the Act under which the termination was carried out, i.e., section 9, 10, 11 or 12;
- Medical Council registration number(s) of the medical practitioner(s) who made the certification concerned;
- The county of residence, or place of residence (where the woman resides outside of the State) of the woman concerned;
- The date on which the termination of pregnancy was carried out.

The legislation does not provide for any further information to be included in the report on notifications.

Primary Medical Certificates

709. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a primary medical certificate was issued to a person (details supplied); the date on which they were notified of the decision; the number of times the case was reviewed; the outcome of each; the dates they were notified of changes to the decision regarding the certificate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13935/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products

710. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) can

be subscribed the treatment patisiran or gene silencer on compassionate grounds. [13938/20]

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. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or function in relation to the reimbursement of medicines. In addition, Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 precludes me from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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 licensed 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 Patisiran (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 patisiran (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.

National Children's Hospital

711. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the reason construction work has halted on the new national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13940/20]

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.

Health Services Staff

712. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the introduction of advanced and extended practice for medical scientists; the meetings he has had with the representative bodies (details supplied) on the subject; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13942/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): My officials recently met with representatives from the Medical Laboratory Scientists Association and the Academy of Clinical Science and Laboratory Medicine. A range of issues were discussed at this meeting including the potential for an advanced practice role for medical scientists.

A detailed examination of the proposal, including the detail of the costs, regulation and training requirements, would be required before any decision could be made.

Home Help Service

713. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if additional home help will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13943/20]

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

714. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the closures of mental health facilities by county in the past 20 years; and the amount returned from mental health budgets by county to the HSE since 2010. [13944/20]

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 Staff

715. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Health the full facts regarding the Be on Call for Ireland campaign launched by the HSE; the number of trained healthcare professionals who responded across each discipline; the number that actually returned home; the locations they were deployed to; the number across each of those disciplines that remain in service; the number in each discipline that have been and will be retained and permanently employed in the health service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13946/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Care of the Elderly

716. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to open day care centres (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13961/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Community services such as day care play an important role in enabling older people 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.

Covid-19 Pandemic

717. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health when he expects nursing homes to start accepting new residents; when he expects hospitals to commence easing their visiting restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13962/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Nursing home providers are ultimately responsible for admissions to their homes and to further assist nursing homes the Health Protection Surveillance Centre has developed substantial public health guidance. An extensive body of guidance and support tools are available on the HPSC website. Guidance on resident transfers is addressed in the “Interim Public Health, Infection Prevention & Control Guidelines on the Prevention and Management of COVID-19 Cases and Outbreaks in Residential Care Facilities (Version 5 19 June 2020).” Appendix H, page 54 provides guidance on Admissions, Transfers to and Discharges from Residential Care Facilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic. This guidance sets out the measures that should be adopted in relation to admissions to residential facilities.

Hospital Appointments Status

718. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive a date for an operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13967/20]

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

719. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment to attend for physiotherapy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13968/20]

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.

720. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a CORU application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13970/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a matter relating to an application for registration with CORU, it has been referred to CORU for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Provision

721. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the status of the resumption of adult disability day services; the date on which services will recommence; if all those that were availing of them will be able to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13972/20]

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.

Abortion Services Provision

722. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of abortions carried out here in 2019; the provision of the legislation which each of these abortions were carried out under; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13976/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The first Annual Report on the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas as required under section 20 of the Act, on 30 June 2020. The report covers the period from 1 January 2019 until 31 December 2019.

The Annual Report shows that in total 6666 medical procedures were carried out under the Act in 2019. Twenty-one (21) procedures were carried out due to a risk to life or health under the grounds set out in section 9 of the Act; three (3) due to a risk to life or health in an emergency situation under section 10; one hundred (100) due to a condition likely to lead to the death of the foetus; and six thousand five hundred and forty-two (6542) in early pregnancy under the grounds set out in section 12 of the Act.

Hospital Appointments Status

723. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive a date to be assessed by a respiratory consultant at University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13981/20]

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.

Vaccination Programme

724. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if residents of nursing homes were given the option of availing of the ‘flu vaccine in 2019; his plans on same for 2020; if his Department or another health agency under his remit issued advice in this regard to nursing homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13995/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The seasonal influenza vaccine is available free of charge to those most at risk of developing serious complications from influenza infection. These ‘at-risk’ groups include all people aged 65 years and older and residents of long-stay residential facilities, including nursing homes.

Vaccines are supplied by the HSE to GPs, retail pharmacies and occupational health departments, as well as community nursing homes and hospitals. Influenza vaccine is administered to residents of nursing homes by their GP or the medical officer in the nursing home.

The HSE’s National Immunisation Office (NIO) prepares for influenza season, annually, by communicating with GPs and pharmacists and other healthcare workers, including services for older people, and voluntary organisations representing older people and those affected by long-term medical conditions. Information materials are disseminated about the season’s influenza vaccine and the importance of vaccinating all those who are at-risk, particularly people aged 65 years and older and residents of long-stay residential facilities, including nursing homes. At the start and during each influenza season, a media campaign is run to encourage people to get the vaccine.

The Health Protection Surveillance Centre of the HSE publishes a report of Influenza Vaccine uptake in Acute Hospitals and Long-term/Residential Care Facilities in Ireland for each influenza season. The report for the 2018/2019 influenza season, which is the most recent report available, is available on the HPSC website at the following link:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/influenza/seasonalinfluenza/influenzaandresidentsoflongtermcarefacilities/Seasonal%20Influenza%20Vaccine%20Uptake-2018-2019.pdf>

Influenza vaccine uptake for long stay residents of long-term care facilities included in the report was 89%, exceeding the World Health Organization target of 75% for at-risk groups.

Covid-19 Pandemic

725. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if his Department will approve visiting guidance for nursing homes; the name of the organisation that is drawing up the guidelines; the title of the person managing the process; the reason there was no response to HIQA when this issue was queried after two weeks or more; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13996/20]

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 NPHET 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 HPSC'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.

Primary Medical Certificates

726. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a primary medical certificate was issued to a person (details supplied); the date on which they were notified of the decision; the number of times their case was reviewed; the outcome of each review; the dates on which they were notified of a change of decision regarding the certificate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13999/20]

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 supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for investigation and direct reply to the Deputy.

Dental Services

727. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health if all public orthodontic services will reopen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14000/20]

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.

Medicinal Products

728. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the availability of Spinraza to children with spinal muscular atrophy type I, II or III on an exceptional and individualised basis; his plans to facilitate broader provision of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14012/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

On 11 June 2019, the HSE Leadership Team approved access to the drug Nusinersen (Spinraza) for children with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Type I, II or III on an exceptional and individualised basis.

The HSE decision process in relation to Spinraza involved a full Health Technology Assessment followed by detailed consideration by the HSE expert groups on new drug therapies, including the Technology Review Group for Rare Diseases and the Drugs Committee. Evidence of the clinical effectiveness of this new drug therapy was also reviewed.

The recommendation is to approve access for children with genetically confirmed SMA Type I, II or III, in accordance with the controlled access criteria recommended by the Rare Diseases Technology Review Committee. The rare diseases committee recommendation was clearly targeted at the youngest and most severely affected SMA patients, and this group is the clear priority for the HSE. The actual patient assessment and approval process will be the means for determining access on an individual case by case basis.

To date, the total number of patients deemed eligible to receive Spinraza is thirty five. Children's Health Ireland (CHI) has confirmed that 18 patients are currently receiving Spinraza. Due to Covid-19, a number of patients who were due to commence treatment have been put on hold.

Individual applications for each patient are prioritised based on clinical need and a treatment plan and a date for administering the drug is agreed with their treating clinician.

The actual delivery of this drug to approved patients in a safe and sustainable way requires very specific and quite complex service arrangements to be put in place in CHI across all sites.

CHI has confirmed that in order to support the SMA service arrangements, a clinical nurse specialist has been appointed who will liaise with families and is the first point of contact for care for patients. A physiotherapist has also been appointed to support these patients ongoing care.

CHI is in continuous engagement process with families regarding their child's individual plan for the administration of Spinraza.

Dental Services

729. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for orthodontic work in County Galway by waiting periods of zero to six months

and one to two, three to four, four to five and over five years, respectively in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14016/20]

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.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

730. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the reason teenagers are being left to stand outside while waiting to be seen in the CAMHS unit at Merlin Park Hospital, Galway; if a temporary structure could be put in place to help facilitate socially distanced queuing that is less exposed; the protocol in place for persons left waiting at the unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14019/20]

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.

Programme for Government

731. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the costings carried out on the Programme for Government; and if he will provide documents on those costings. [14032/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): My Department was not involved in any costings carried out in relation to the Programme for Government.

Hospital Services

732. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if there is a dedicated dementia unit in St. Brendan's, Loughrea, County Galway; if so, if the unit is accepting new patients; if not, when it will be accepting new patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14040/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): 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 Services

733. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the position of a person (details supplied) on the waiting list for St. Brendan's, Loughrea, County Galway; the length of time they will be waiting to be admitted; if they can be admitted to the dementia unit at St. Brendan's as a matter of urgency due to a diagnosis of severe dementia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14041/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): 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.

Consultancy Contracts

734. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the external consultancy organisation or provider which delivered diversity and inclusion training within his Department from 2018 to date; the costs associated with such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14057/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): My Department went to tender in July 2019 for the provision of Unconscious Bias Awareness training for staff in my Department. The successful tenderer was MASF consulting. Training was delivered in October and November 2019 and covered diversity and inclusion, equality legislation and unconscious bias awareness. The cost of this training was €7,499.

Table of Costs – 2018 to date

| Training Provider | Total Cost |
|-------------------|------------|
| MASF Consulting | €7,499 |

Departmental Legal Costs

735. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the expenditure his Department incurred in respect of external legal fees in each of the years from 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14074/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Department of Health's external legal costs for 2016 - 2020 (1 Jan-30 Jun) are set out in the table below:

| | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 (1 Jan-30 Jun) |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Department of Health external legal costs | €807,111.04 | €160,585.94 | €627,401.81 | €655,186.18 | €273,406.46 |

Covid-19 Pandemic

736. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide advice or information to persons (details supplied) that are being denied the possibility to visit their family members in a nursing home in a safe, secure and socially distant manner in view of the fact they are residents in the home and have not received visitors for over four months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14086/20]

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 (NPHE) 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 (HPSC). The guidance which is published and available on the HPSC'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.

Healthcare Policy

737. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Health the status of his implementation of all aspects of the Sláintecare plan. [14101/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Sláintecare is the ten-year all-party Oireachtas policy setting out the vision to deliver a healthcare system for the population of Ireland. Sláintecare is about delivering a health and social care service that meets the needs of our population and attracts and retains the very best healthcare professionals, managers and staff. The plan is to deliver a universal health service that offers the right care, in the right place, at the right time, by the right team with a priority focus on keeping people well, developing primary and community services within a national policy context, and ensuring we have the right hospital capacity for the needs of our citizens.

Key recommendations of the Oireachtas Sláintecare report were to set up a Programme Implementation Office to oversee and enable the implementation of Sláintecare, to develop a detailed implementation plan for the reform programme and devise a detailed implementation programme project plan for each year of the plan, identifying key milestones which can be monitored across sectors. Following the publication of the all-party Oireachtas Sláintecare report, the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy was agreed by Government in August 2018 setting out an initial set of key actions for a three-year period. The Sláintecare Executive Director was appointed in September 2018, a small team was recruited from within the public sector to form the Sláintecare Programme Implementation Office during late 2018 and early 2019.

A detailed Action Plan for 2019 was developed for implementation, based on the Implementation Strategy and was published on the 13 March 2019. This 2019 Sláintecare Action Plan set out detailed timeframes for 138 projects that were to be progressed in 2019, as the first full year in the implementation of the Sláintecare vision, and firmly established a programmatic approach to the delivery of the Sláintecare strategy.

A progress report on the implementation of the 2019 Sláintecare Action Plan was approved by the Government in April 2020. Of the 138 projects for the period up to December 2019, 112 were on track, 24 have been progressed with minor challenges, and 2 with significant challenge. This work was carried out by many stakeholders, including from the Department of Health, the HSE, the voluntary and community bodies and key partners. It represents a concerted effort to deliver on the all-party vision and provided a strong foundation for moving forward into 2020, and beyond. During 2019, a series of important Sláintecare reform Government decisions were made, including the agreement:

1. on the geographies for the six new regional health areas which is a first major step towards restructuring our health services in line with recommendation in the Oireachtas Committee report, which is informing the development of a detailed business case for consideration by Government;

2. to support the findings of the Independent Review Group established to examine private activity in public hospitals with the decision and announcement that all future consultant appointments, from mid-2020, will be to the new Sláintecare Consultant contract for public only work;

3. on revised GP contractual arrangements in April 2019, which will see a €210 million investment (40% increase) in General Practice over the next four years of which €80 million will be available for the management of chronic diseases, like diabetes and COPD, through family doctors. This is expected to benefit more than 400,000 patients;

4. on the strengthening of the HSE with the formal appointment of the Health Service Executive (HSE) Board in June 2019 and the introduction of a new HSE Chief Executive Officer.

The 2019 Action Plan report setting out the progress against all the planned 138 projects can be found on the Department of Health website (link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4c7594-delivering-slaintecare/#slaintecare-action-plan-year-end-report-2019>).

The experience of the first full year of implementation of Sláintecare (2019) informed Sláintecare's ongoing approach. The 2020 Action Plan was drafted by the Sláintecare Programme Implementation Office through the Sláintecare/HSE Joint Action Programme governance, and the Department of Health's business planning process, in anticipation of a submission to the Minister and the incoming Government following the general election of February 8th, 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in major disruptions to routine health services. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a singular and urgent focus on one priority, a highly focussed health and social care workforce, clear public messaging, societal engagement and real-time decision-making that facilitated rapid change and implementation. As has been noted in several quarters, many of the initiatives and changed ways of working that have been successfully and rapidly implemented over the past three months in response to the pandemic have been wholly aligned with the spirit of the Oireachtas Sláintecare Report. The implementation of Sláintecare now operates within a different context, but the principles of Sláintecare are even more relevant at this time.

Key programmes that have progressed during the first half of 2020 include developing a specification for the three elective hospitals in Dublin, Cork and Galway, to be procured as part of the National Development Plan, as well as determining the roll out of the Sláintecare Community Healthcare Networks and Specialist Hubs, to be staffed and geographically dispersed over one quarter of the country during 2021, with a view to covering the whole country by 2023. The draft Programme for Government was published on June 15th, 2020. It reaffirms the commitment to the implementation of Sláintecare and pledges to accelerate the process. A revised Sláintecare Action Plan 2020 – 2021 is being developed factoring in the learnings from COVID-19, the new context within which the health system operates and the agreed Programme for Government.

Health Services Reform

738. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to continue with the regionalisation of the HSE into separate health boards. [14102/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): A clear governance and accountability framework was identified as a key building block of Sláintecare by the Committee on the Future of Healthcare. As part of its recommendations in this area, the Committee called for the HSE to become a more strategic and patient-focused 'national centre' carrying out national level func-

tions, and the establishment of regional bodies with responsibility for the planning and delivery of integrated care at a regional level.

The new Programme for Government, *Our Shared Future*, recommits to this core Sláintecare recommendation, stating “Enhanced governance and accountability in the health service is a key component of Sláintecare reform. The HSE Board is now in place and we must now bring forward detailed proposals on the six new regional health areas to deliver services for patients locally that are safe, high quality and fairly distributed.”

Work was underway in my Department and with the HSE to develop detailed proposals on Regional Health Areas but understandably this work was paused as a result of COVID-19. This programme of work will be given further consideration in the coming weeks to take account of the Programme for Government commitment and any new considerations relating to COVID-19.

It will be important that there is significant engagement with all key stakeholders across the health and social care sector to ensure that any structural changes do not unduly cause disruption and loss of focus on service delivery. This will be even more important now given the challenges facing the health service as a result of COVID-19.

Medical Aids and Appliances

739. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE universal guidelines on bras, prostheses and wigs will be published; the funding to be allocated for the implementation of the guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14103/20]

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.

Misuse of Drugs

740. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Health the additional supports in place for communities affected by the increasing intimidation from drug dealers that has coincided with the significant increase in drugs seizures in County Tipperary; if a plan is in place to provide increased addiction treatment services in line with the increased Garda resources; and his views on the lack of co-ordination between the policing and addiction services sides of drug policy. [14106/20]

741. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Health the measures he has taken to develop a more comprehensive approach to tackling the drug problem at a community level in view of the fact this necessitates close work between the Department of Justice and his Department; and the structures in place and the resources available to communities in this regard. [14107/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 740 and 741 together.

Strengthening the resilience of, and building the capacity of communities to respond to the drug problem is a key objective of the national Drugs Strategy ‘*Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery*’. The strategy is underpinned by an integrated whole of Government approach to resolving the drug problem based on a partnership approach between the statutory, community and voluntary sectors.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces play a key role in assessing the extent and nature of the drug problem in local communities. They ensure that a coordinated partnership approach is taken across all sectors to address substance misuse based on identified needs and priorities in their areas including drug related intimidation and addiction. Memberships of the Task Forces include representatives from An Garda Síochána, the Community and Voluntary Sector as well as other key stakeholders. Mechanisms such as Local Policing Forums also help to build important relationships with communities.

There are a number of initiatives underway to deliver on the commitment in Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery to strengthen the effectiveness of the drug-related intimidation reporting programme in communities.

The National Drug-Related Intimidation Reporting Programme which was developed by the National Family Support Network and An Garda Síochána, provides a framework to allow reporting of an incident of intimidation to a nominated inspector.

An Garda Síochána and the National Family Support Network have concluded separate evaluations of the drug-related intimidation reporting programme and jointly agreed a number of actions to strengthen the programme, including external promotion of the programme through the media, external contacts and various forums.

In 2019 the Department provided additional funding of €1 million for the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy. Under this funding the Department has approved €190,000 over three years for the Drug Related Intimidation & Violence Engagement Project (DRIVE Project) which will support Drug and Alcohol Task Forces, Projects and the HSE to address the issue of Drug Related Intimidation at local and regional level.

Funding of up to €190,000 over three years has also been approved for the National Family Support Network to develop a national awareness campaign on the drug-related violence and intimidation reporting programme.

Families and communities affected by drug use need to have appropriate, accessible and timely services available to help them cope with the problems they are facing. It is important that we get the message out there that help is available, and that families and communities know where to go for help.

Vaccination Programme

742. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health if the possibility of allowing pharmacists to administer the 'flu vaccine in the homes of persons will be examined. [14113/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): An expansion to the seasonal influenza vaccine programme is planned for winter 2020/2021. Under the expansion, the influenza vaccine is to be made available without charge to all children aged between 2 and 12 years inclusive, and to all of those in the HSE-defined at-risk groups aged from 6 months to 69 inclusive. All persons aged over 70 already have access to the vaccine without charges.

Work is currently underway to develop plans to operationalise this policy. The possibility of pharmacists being enabled to administer vaccinations outside of a Retail Pharmacy Business is being examined as part of process.

General Practitioner Services

743. **Deputy Frankie Feighan** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the HSE to revisit the Drumshanbo health centre in order to reassess the capacity of the building and the need in the locality for expansion of the general practitioner service to a five-day service in order to cater for patient demand in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14120/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Primary Care Centres

744. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Health when he envisages diagnostic equipment will be installed in the primary care centre in Tuam, County Galway, in view of the fact his predecessor allocated a sum of €770,000 for the installation of such facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14121/20]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

745. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [14122/20]

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 chal-

lenging 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

746. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for surgery in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Navan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14125/20]

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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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.

Medical Cards

747. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure persons (details supplied) are issued with their over-70s medical card which has expired; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14128/20]

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

Medical Cards

748. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health when the income limits for over-70s medical cards will be reviewed in accordance with the decision in budget 2020. [14134/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): On 25th 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 and over. The Bill was published on July 1st, 2020 and arrangements are now being made for its passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

749. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the status of PPE provision and financial support for the homecare sector in view of the importance of the service to older persons in general but also in particular in further view of the severe implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for older persons; his plans for the same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14144/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Standard PPE will continue to be the responsibility of private providers for non-COVID-19 clients. However, HSE will provide appropriate additional PPE supplies to Home Support Providers in relation to clients confirmed to have COVID-19 on the clear understanding that the individual service provider will deliver appropriate Infection Protection and Control training to its staff.

However as this is a service matter I have referred this matter to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services Staff

750. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the HSE pay policy for the homecare sector. [14145/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Public Sector Stability Agreement is the mechanism which provides for public service pay policy as well as the terms and conditions of public sector employment.

All public health sector employees are paid in line with Department of Health Consolidated Salary Scales, and this document can be publicly viewed online at this website

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/resources/hr-circulars/1-january-2020-consolidated-pay-scales-final-corrected-version-003-.pdf>

The salary scale for Health Care Support Assistants (formerly known as Home Helps) can be found on Page 27 of this document.

Medicinal Products

751. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine the standard treatment plan and drug use for those suffering with stage III melanoma; if he will authorise the use of nivolumab and pembrolizumab for this condition in the public system in view of the fact it is currently the authorised treatment for this condition in the private health system; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [14146/20]

784. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if patients diagnosed with melanoma in the public health system here are only offered immunotherapy when in stage IV of the illness; the reason such treatment is not offered at stage III in view of the fact that half of patients at this stage advance to the next; his views on whether more lives would be saved if persons were offered such treatment earlier; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that adjuvant immunotherapy nivolumab, pembrolizumab and targeted therapy are available to some with private health insurance here but the public health service is not funding the medications; his further views on whether this is consistent with the goals of the National Cancer Strategy; and his plans to improve stage III melanoma treatments. [14210/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 751 and 784 together.

The HSE's National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) advise that Nivolumab and Pembrolizumab are licensed by the European Medicines Agency as monotherapy for the treatment of advanced melanoma in adults and are approved by the HSE for reimbursement in public hospitals. A Health Technology Assessment has been completed that looks at the use of these drugs as monotherapy for the adjuvant treatment of adults with Stage III melanoma and the approval process for the reimbursement of these drugs is ongoing.

The HSE has a standard assessment process in place for the approval of the reimbursement of new drugs and new indications for existing drugs. This process is intended to arrive at decisions on the funding of drugs that are clinically appropriate, fair, consistent and sustainable. The reimbursement process is underpinned by the Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines (2016) and the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

Before a medicine is licensed for use in the European Union, and before it can be marketed for sale in the EU, it must receive a market authorisation from the European Medicines Agency. Once drugs are licensed, the company may apply for HSE reimbursement approval using the standard process.

The Department of Health, along with the NCCP and the wider HSE, work together in advancing the process of securing such drugs at affordable cost once the European Medicines Agency (EMA) has approved them for clinical use.

Finally, my Department cannot comment on the business decisions taken by private health insurers with regard to the medicines covered under their schemes.

Hospital Appointments Status

752. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if urgent spinal surgery will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); if urgent HALO traction treatment can be accommodated as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14149/20]

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 sched-

uled 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.

Disability Services Provision

753. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Health when adult day services for persons with disabilities will reopen in view of the fact the HSE framework for the resumption of adult disability day services offers no clarity on the reopening of services; and the procedures his Department has put in place to ensure persons with disabilities and carers are not left behind as the country reopens. [14151/20]

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 have completed the above strands of work, which will inform the timeline for the phased re-opening of day services. It is expected that a the HSE will issue guidance in the coming days on the resumption of services. 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.

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

Covid-19 Pandemic

754. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the guidance for those aged 70 years of age or over, in particular when those within this age category can return to work. [14154/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy is no doubt aware, those over 70 and the extremely medically vulnerable are at a very high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and are advised to follow cocooning measures in order to keep themselves safe. However, it is important that people who are cocooning feel empowered to exercise their own judgement regarding the extent to which they consider the cocooning guidance is appropriate to their individual circumstances.

For people in very high risk groups, such as the over 70s, who wish to visit others, receive visitors in their home, attend shops, and engage in other activities, it is recommended that they (and their visitors) maintain strict hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, continue to adhere to the physical distancing guidance of 2 metres, avoid touching surfaces and clean surfaces touched by visitors, and ideally use face coverings when attending the shops or other busy public areas.

Those in high risk groups who are planning to travel within and outside their region should acquaint themselves with the level of transmission of the virus in the relevant area, and consider

how best to protect themselves. The latest statistics can be found on the COVID-19 Data Hub: <https://covid19ireland-geohive.hub.arcgis.com/>

I would like to draw the Deputy's attention to the "Return to Work Safely Protocol - COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers" which was published on 9 May, 2020. It provides clear guidance to employers and to workers on the measures that must be taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. The Protocol was developed through the cooperation of the Health and Safety Authority, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the HSE and my Department. This 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 the standard set of measures to provide protection against the threat of COVID-19.

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is tasked with providing advice and support to employers and employees on what and how COVID-19 measures are applied in the workplace. If you would like any further guidance on the Protocol, the HSA Helpline can be contacted at 1890 289 389 or wcu@hsa.ie.

Further information on high risk groups and practical guidance for those cocooning is available from the Government and the HSE at the following links:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/923825-guidance-on-cocooning-to-protect-people-over-70-years-and-those-extr/>

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/cocooning.html>

Health Services Staff

755. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant vacancies across the public health service; and his plans to recruit consultants to fill these vacancies. [14155/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Health Services Staff

756. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to award public health doctors the same status as hospital consultants and deliver an increase in their remuneration. [14156/20]

824. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of negotiations regarding public health consultant contracts. [14326/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 756 and 824 together.

My Department in conjunction with the HSE, and having engaged with key stakeholders, was in the process of finalising a new framework for public health prior to the onset of COVID-19. This body of work was to reflect the recommendations of the report reviewing the specialty undertaken by Crowe Horwath published in December 2018, and also the vision outlined for the specialty in Sláintecare and in the Report of Dr Scally on the National Screening Service

(‘CervicalCheck’).

Prior to the issue of COVID-19 arising, it was envisaged that the finalisation of the design of the new service delivery model would be completed in the second half of 2020. Work on the model is now being resumed. It will be refined and validated having regard to COVID-19 and a strategic workforce plan developed and aligned to the new model.

Engagement with the IMO on the twin issues of consultant status and remuneration for public health specialists has been ongoing since January 2019 in tandem with the broader body of work. The Department and the HSE have indicated their support for consultant status in this engagement.

It is my intention that public health specialists will be awarded consultant status under the new framework and that their remuneration will be increased accordingly in return for significant structural and organisational reform within the Specialty.

It is noted that the FEMPI Acts currently prohibit pay increases for serving public servants and that this legislation will require amendment to enable pay increases for public health consultants and also serving ‘new entrant consultants’ taking up the Slaintecare ‘public only’ consultant contract.

General Practitioner Services

757. Deputy Louise O’Reilly asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners who started on a general practitioner training scheme in 2019; the number of places that can be catered for on the training scheme; if the number of training places will be increased in 2020; and if so, the number to which. [14157/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): 192 medical graduates entered the GP training programme in 2019. The number entering the programme has increased steadily in recent years from 120 in 2009. Capacity for training places will be further increased this year with 217 places made available.

It is intended that the transfer of responsibility for training General Practitioners from the HSE to the Irish College of General Practitioners will take place in 2020, pending the resolution of certain outstanding issues, and that this will allow for a further expansion in the number of training places in future years.

Health Services Funding

758. Deputy Louise O’Reilly asked the Minister for Health the level of public investment in healthcare per patient; and the way in which this compares with the European Union average. [14158/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The OECD’s System of Health Accounts (SHA) enables international comparison of Healthcare expenditure (HCE) by tracking all HCE in a country over a defined period of time. HCE is presented in relation to each country’s economy, measured as a share of GDP, or to its population, measured as per capita health spending. The OECD applies a purchasing power parity (PPP) adjustment to countries’ HCE, reflecting relative prices/costs across countries. This provides for a comparable measure of the volume of services supplied per capita across countries. The measure is expressed in US dollars. Furthermore, the OECD classify HCE according to the financing of healthcare which allows

for more detailed analyses. The classifications of healthcare financing sources include ‘public financing’ which is defined as Government and compulsory contributory healthcare financing schemes. Reviewing the SHA public healthcare expenditure for 2019, Ireland’s expenditure per capita was US\$ PPP 3,919. This puts Ireland in 9th place compared to the rest of EU countries. The EU27 average public healthcare expenditure in 2019 was US\$ PPP 2,872 per capita.

This data is publicly available at <https://stats.oecd.org/>.

It is important to note that 2019 is the latest OECD SHA data available, and therefore does not account for the impact of COVID -19 on HCE across OECD countries. It is also important to note, that the OECD cautions about comparability limitations in relation to the SHA. Challenges in achieving cross-country comparability of HCE arise particularly from the differing approaches taken by countries to organising and accounting for their social care systems. As part of my Department’s Joint Research Programme in Healthcare Reform with the Economic and Social Research Institute, a paper is currently being prepared for publication which will examine in detail how Irish HCE compares internationally with the aim of distinguishing the effects on comparisons of healthcare prices and volumes, accounting issues and health system characteristics.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

National Children’s Hospital

759. Deputy Louise O’Reilly asked the Minister for Health the reason work has stopped on the national children’s hospital; if there are legal proceedings under way regarding the project; the estimated cost to the State of such legal proceedings; the number of days lost due to legal proceedings; and the cost to the State per day of delays to the project. [14159/20]

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.

The proceedings currently before the Commercial Court are not related to the closure of the site on 31 March, 2020 but to the validity of the instruction given by the NPHDB to begin the Phase B above ground construction works in January 2019. As this matter is now before the Courts it would be inappropriate to comment further at this time.

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

760. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Health the current advice regarding meetings (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14161/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Guidelines in relation to the meetings of Local Authorities as described in the Deputy's question are not matters within the remit of my Department. Public health advice in operation at a point in time is available on the Government website at <http://www.gov.ie/>

I would like to draw the Deputy's attention to the "Return to Work Safely Protocol - COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers" which was published on 9 May, 2020. It provides clear guidance to employers and to workers on the measures that must be taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. The Protocol was developed through the cooperation of the Health and Safety Authority, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the HSE and my Department. 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 the standard set of measures to provide protection against the threat of COVID-19.

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is tasked with providing advice and support to employers and employees on what and how COVID-19 measures are applied in the workplace. If you would like any further guidance on the Protocol, the HSA Helpline can be contacted at 1890 289 389 or wcu@hsa.ie.

Hospital Facilities

761. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Health the details of the 2019 bed capacity programme, which previously included plans for ten additional beds in Mayo University Hospital; when the hospital will bring this extra capacity into operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14163/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Saolta Hospital Group has advised that Mayo University Hospital have proposals for a mobile Acute Medical Assessment Unit on the site which would release 8 beds for inpatient use. They also envisage freeing up 2 further beds through an internal upgrade. These proposals will be considered in the context of priorities in the region and available resources.

Emergency Departments

762. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the Mayo University Hospital emergency department development; if the steering group provided the requested information to the HSE on its application to ensure its inclusion in the HSE capital plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14164/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): My Department and the Health Service Executive are currently engaged in a process to develop the draft HSE Capital Plan for 2020. The HSE Capital Plan will determine the projects that can progress in 2020 and beyond having regard to the total available capital funding and the relevant priority of each project. All Health capital projects, currently at various stages of development, such as the project at Mayo University Hospital, are included as part of this process.

In developing its Capital Plan for 2020 and future years, the HSE must consider a range of issues including, the expenditure that is contractually committed, the HSE's annual requirement in relation to meeting risks associated with clinical equipment, ambulances and healthcare infrastructure.

Once the HSE has finalised its Capital Plan for 2020, it will then be submitted to me for consideration.

Medical Cards

763. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health when the national medical card unit is to be advised that the new thresholds for medical card eligibility as announced in budget 2020 are to come into effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14171/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): On 25th 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 and over. The Bill was published on July 1st, 2020 and arrangements are now being made for its passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Health Services Funding

764. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if funding provided to a person (details supplied) can be transferred to a person who would provide similar services in the home of the person as offered to them in a location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14172/20]

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.

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

765. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health his plans to conduct an inquiry into the rate of Covid-19 cases seen in nursing homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14176/20]

767. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health his plans to conduct an inquiry into the rate of Covid-19 cases seen in nursing homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14187/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 765 and 767 together.

During the response to COVID-19, Nursing homes continue to be regulated by HIQA, who under the Health Act 2007 have the legal authority to examine the operation of any facility under their remit. Any individual cases of concern should be brought to the attention of HIQA and the relevant HSE Safeguarding and Protection Team

In addition, a series of enhanced measures have been agreed by NPHET for long-term resi-

dential care settings and these are currently being implemented by the HSE, HIQA and service providers. They include measure to support facilities which have outbreaks of COVID-19, measures aimed at stopping the transmission of the virus and support the provision of PPE to and screening of staff. All of these measures and actions are aimed at supporting the protection and provision of safe care of the residents of long-term care facilities.

On foot of a National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) recommendation, on 23 May a COVID-19 Expert Panel on Nursing Homes was established, to examine the complex issues surrounding the management of COVID-19 among this particularly vulnerable cohort.

The purpose of the Panel is to examine the national and international responses to the COVID-19 crisis, and to examine the emerging best practice. Its main objective is to provide immediate real-time learnings and recommendations in light of the expected ongoing impact of COVID-19 over the next 12-18 months. COVID-19 is a new disease, which can present atypically in the frail elderly, and new evidence and best practice in its management are constantly emerging. I expect the Expert Panel to submit their final report to me later this month.

Medicinal Products

766. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on matters raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) in respect of the availability of drugs for the treatment of cancer for private and public patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14177/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

In line with the 2013 Act and the national framework agreed with industry, a company must submit an application to the HSE to have a new medicine added to the reimbursement list.

Reimbursement is for licensed indications which have been granted market authorisation by the European Medicines Agency or the Health Products Regulatory Authority.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

The HSE at all times ensures that the systems that it has in place are designed to provide equitable access to all medicines across all therapeutic areas, cancer and non-cancer, from the resources provided to it.

In 2019 and 2020, the Vhi decided to extend cover to a number of new cancer medicines. The decision by the Vhi applies only to private care to private Vhi patients in private hospitals. It has no impact on the availability and use of medicines in public hospitals, where there is no distinction between public and private patients.

A number of the medicines, or indications (which includes pembrolizumab and nivolumab),

which the Vhi has now decided to cover, are in process with the HSE with a view to making them available in the public hospital system.

I am advised by the HSE that it has received pricing and reimbursement applications for the indications listed below:

- Nivolumab (Opdivo®) as monotherapy is indicated for the adjuvant treatment of adults with melanoma with involvement of lymph nodes or metastatic disease who have undergone complete resection.

- Pembrolizumab (Keytruda®) as monotherapy is indicated for the adjuvant treatment of adults with Stage III melanoma and lymph node involvement who have undergone complete resection.

The HSE has confirmed that health technology assessments have been completed by the NCPE for both these indications. These applications for reimbursement are now being assessed by the HSE in line with the 2013 Health Act.

Question No. 767 answered with Question No. 765.

Hospital Equipment

768. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of CT scanners per million population; and the way in which this compares internationally with other countries, for example, South Korea, Iceland and Denmark. [14188/20]

769. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the purchase date of each CT scanner in hospitals here; and the sell-by date of each scanner. [14189/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 768 and 769 together.

As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare services and infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

Hospital Equipment

770. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of CT scanners per million of the population; the medically indicated number Ireland should have to deliver productive efficiency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14190/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Health Services Staff

771. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to allow staff recruitment processes to be devolved to local and hospital level. [14191/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond to the

Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospital Staff

772. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the average recruitment time for a nurse to a public hospital in 2019. [14192/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Nursing Staff

773. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the average recruitment time for a doctor to a public hospital in 2019. [14193/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Hospital Staff

774. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the average radiographer recruitment time for a doctor to a public hospital in 2019. [14194/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to the average recruitment time for a radiographer to a public hospital as clarified by the Deputy.

National Children's Hospital

775. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the policy of his predecessor will be pursued to allow the building of private treatment rooms in the new national children's hospital. [14195/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Programme for Government commits to finalising the new Slaintecare consultant contract and to legislating for public-only work in public hospitals.

Currently, as part of the Common Contract for Consultants negotiated in 2008, many consultants holding specific contracts are entitled to engage in private outpatient practice outside of their public commitment. The 2008 Common Contract obliges the employer to provide facilities on the hospital campus for outpatient private practice and the provision of such facilities off-campus, on an interim basis, pending provision of on-campus facilities. Private clinics are currently located on the grounds of each the existing three children's hospitals. The new children's hospital is obliged to provide such facilities for consultants holding these contracts.

Accordingly, while the vast majority of services in the new children's hospital will be public services, within the new hospital an area has been planned which carries the designation of "private clinic". The private outpatient clinic at the new children's hospital represents circa 0.25% of the clinical space within the new children's hospital. There are a total of 129 outpatient clini-

cal exam rooms primarily accessed off the main concourse on the ground and lower ground floor of the new children's hospital, each of which are identical in design and fit out. There are 8 clinical exam rooms in the private clinic.

Ultimately, the proposal is for consultants to pay a fee for use of private rooms and other operational costs. The proposed level of fee has not been determined yet.

It is important to recognise that the capacity being planned for the new children's hospital is national capacity based upon the assessment of healthcare needs and future demographic developments. Accordingly, these clinic rooms will be required to meet the estimated demand for paediatric outpatient and inpatient services, whether publicly or privately provided.

Covid-19 Pandemic

776. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated average theatre, operation and treatment time that will be lost per 12 hour period due to the need to clean theatres and suites after each procedure and treatment to ensure adherence to Covid-19 infection control measures. [14196/20]

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.

Health Services Funding

777. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the resources that will be made available to increase capacity in the public health sector for access to diagnostics and the urgent recommencement of cancer screening programmes and access to time critical reviews for patients on surgical waiting lists. [14197/20]

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.

Health Services Funding

778. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the resources that have been assigned to build the capacity required to tackle the outpatient waiting lists for routine diagnostics, for example, cardiology and radiological scans. [14198/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The HSE advises that a pilot project commenced in 2016 by the HSE Acute Hospitals Division to progress the collection of national radiology waiting list data. The project has been supported by the Radiology Clinical Care Programme and has involved key stakeholders across the system including the National Integrated Medical Imaging System (NIMIS) Team, Hospital Groups, and the support of the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) for data collection and data management expertise.

At present, the pilot project collects data relating to CT, MRI and Ultrasound. In Q1 2020, there were a total of 190,373 patients reported on the waiting list from all sites, this represents all outpatients waiting, urgent, semi urgent, routine and planned/surveillance (where diagnostic access is planned at particular time intervals).

In terms of medium-term planning for additional diagnostic capacity, the National Development Plan states that, new dedicated ambulatory elective only hospital facilities will be introduced in Dublin, Galway and Cork. As per the Development plan, these facilities will provide high volume, low complexity procedures on a day and outpatient basis, together with a range of ambulatory diagnostic services.

As part of the wider Sláintecare implementation, the Elective Hospitals Oversight Group, established by the Department of Health, is currently developing a high-level facilities spatial brief and order of magnitude costs which details the elective clustering of appropriate activities for each of the three facilities in Dublin, Cork and Galway. This will also include an output and facility specification, based on efficient and effective service delivery, which will include diagnostic procedures. This is due to be completed in the Autumn of 2020.

Health Services Funding

779. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health if the necessary recruitment and investment will be increased for hospital consultants and healthcare science staff required to boost capacity in diagnostic services in view of the reduced capacity of HSE diagnostic pathways. [14199/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Programme for Government recognises that significant additional capacity is required in the context of responding to COVID-19. It also recognises that, in addition, even before its impact, additional capacity would be required to provide access to quality services and to meet the needs of our growing population.

Work is ongoing in the Department and in the HSE to quantify what the public health sectors workforce requirements will be going forward across all services, including capacity requirements to ensure sufficient diagnostic services. The provision of diagnostic services is a key platform of Sláintecare and will be a priority in the months and years ahead.

Medical Aids and Appliances

780. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health if medical grade masks will be supplied to persons with serious health issues. [14200/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): 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.

Based on current advice there are no plans to supply face coverings.

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 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 under way.

Cancer Services

781. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the plans in place to reduce the delays in emergency endoscopy and colonoscopy tests for those showing symptoms of colon cancer. [14201/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the issue raised is a service delivery matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services

782. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the funding that has been made available to mental health services for additional costs incurred to date due to the Covid-19 crisis; the additional funding being made available for mental health services to return to providing services; the proportion of the overall additional HSE spend on Covid-19 for mental health; his views on whether mental health services will achieve a balanced budget in 2020 by absorbing the additional costs associated with Covid-19; the reason St. James's Hospital has not yet implemented the national clinical programme for self-harm in view of the fact that the homeless are a particularly vulnerable group; and if the HSE will reinstate the funding which was withdrawn at the end of 2019 for the multidisciplinary mental health team for the homeless in south central areas of Dublin in view of the expected post-Covid-19 mental health wave. [14202/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Home Help Service

783. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if measures will be put in place to maintain financial support for the homecare sector in view of the fact the latest HSE pay policy came to an end on 31 May 2020. [14203/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Standard PPE will continue to be the responsibility of private providers for non-COVID-19 clients. However, HSE will provide appropriate additional PPE supplies to Home Support Providers in relation to clients confirmed to have COVID-19 on the clear understanding that the individual service provider will deliver appropriate Infection Protection and Control training to its staff. As the Deputy's question is an operational matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Question No. 784 answered with Question No. 751.

Hospital Appointments Status

785. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to expedite overdue spinal surgery for a child (details supplied). [14211/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to pause all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity with effect from the end March 2020. 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 National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) and in accordance with the World Health Organisation, and the National Action Plan. The decision to delay appointments and admissions is not undertaken lightly and when such a decision is made, it is based on the safe delivery of care to all patients.

On 5 May 2020, NPHE agreed that its recommendation of 27 March, in regard to the pausing of all non-urgent 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. Children's Health Ireland (CHI) is now re-establishing services on an incremental basis.

To ensure services are re-introduced in a safe, clinically-aligned and prioritised way, the HSE launched its Strategic Framework for 'Service Continuity in a Covid Environment' on 24 June. Its implementation will ensure service resumption is done in an integrated way. This will involve a phased approach to ensure community services are strengthened. The Framework will also consolidate new ways of working and build on international knowledge. The HSE is currently developing a Service Continuity Roadmap for the resumption of services across the health system.

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.

My Department has been made aware of the specific patient query raised and has been advised by CHI that they are in direct contact with the family of the patient concerned.

Hospital Appointments Status

786. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14218/20]

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.

Medical Cards

787. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health when the increased thresholds for the over-70s announced in budget 2020 will come into effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14219/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): On 25th 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 and over. The Bill was published on July 1st, 2020 and arrangements are now being made for its passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Dental Services

788. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health when children's dental services will be restored to St. Mary's Hospital, Thurles, County Tipperary, after being relocated to Nenagh Hospital, Nenagh, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14224/20]

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.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

789. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 549 to 561, inclusive, and 674 to 677, inclusive, of 11 June 2019, the reason the persons involved that acted in contravention of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 were not called to account under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016, the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and the Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Nurses and Midwives 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14225/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The questions referred to relate to the details, and the handling of, a protected disclosure submitted to my Department in September 2014, raising matters of concern within the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI). As part of his comprehensive response on 11 June, 2019, my predecessor, Minister Harris, noted that two reports had been commissioned by the Board of the NMBI. Crowe Horwath was engaged to carry out an Organisational Review and BDO was engaged to carry out a review of Remuneration and Contract Management of Non-Permanent Employees. The relevant reports were submitted in late 2015 with recommendations that were accepted in full by the Board. Minister Harris further noted that, in view of the reports commissioned, the findings of same, and the steps taken by the NMBI to implement the recommendations of the reports, he was satisfied that significant action has been taken on foot of the complaints made. These complaints were an important input to the enhancement of governance in the NMBI.

The Deputy's current question to me focuses on three areas. Firstly, in relation to the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies which was introduced in August 2016. This Code is not designed to provide specific accountability mechanisms in relation to individuals. Instead, it gives a framework for good governance practice and it is the responsibility of the body itself to comply with the Code. The role of the supervising Department is to monitor such compliance using the available mechanisms to obtain the necessary assurances. Secondly, the impact of certain conduct on the health and well-being of staff within the NMBI was one of the issues which had been raised. While the initial complaint did not characterise the matters as falling within the provisions of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005, health and welfare issues were dealt with in the subsequent review under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014. Thirdly, I note that complaints under the Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Nurses and Midwives can be made to the NMBI by members of the public, patients, relatives of patients, employers, other healthcare staff or the Board of the NMBI if they have a concern about the behaviour, conduct, practice or health of a registered nurse or a registered midwife.

In dealing with the matters raised, the Department ensured that a proper investigation was carried out and that any issues which had arisen were rectified and measures put in place to

prevent a reoccurrence.

Covid-19 Pandemic

790. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an urgent investigation will be conducted into the alleged neglect of nursing home residents during the Covid-19 restrictions; if specific direction was given to nursing homes on the way in which the additional funding allocated to nursing homes was to be spent; and if such funding was for additional PPE. [14227/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Since 2009 the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, is the statutory independent regulator in place for the nursing home sector, whether a HSE managed or a private nursing home. The Authority, established under the Health Act 2007, has significant and wide-ranging powers up to and including withdrawing the registration of a nursing home facility, which means that it can no longer operate as a service provider.

This responsibility is underpinned by a comprehensive quality framework comprising of Registration Regulations, Care and Welfare Regulations and National Quality Standards.

HIQA in discharging its duties determines, through examination of all information available to it, including site inspections, whether a nursing homes meets the regulations in order to achieve and maintain its registration status.

Should a nursing home be deemed to be non-compliant with the Regulations and the National Quality Standards, it may either fail to achieve or lose its registration status. In addition, the Chief Inspector has wide discretion in deciding whether to impose conditions of Registration on nursing homes.

During the response to COVID-19, Nursing homes continue to be regulated by HIQA, who under the Health Act 2007 have the legal authority to examine the operation of any facility under their remit.

Any individual cases of concern should be brought to the attention of HIQA and the relevant HSE Safeguarding and Protection Team.

In relation to the COVID-19 Temporary Assistance Payment Scheme for Nursing Homes, where a nursing home applies for an assistance payment through the Scheme, the nursing home may only claim for those additional allowable costs, as set out in the Scheme details. Additional Costs are costs incurred by the Nursing Home which would not have been incurred were it not for the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Allowable Costs are costs that may be included in an application for support under the Scheme. The nursing home must submit a Statement of Additional Allowable Costs in support of an application to the Scheme and, therefore, vouch that all amounts claimed are in relation to those allowable costs arising as a result of the impact of COVID-19.

Applications to the Scheme are made to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) in the first instance where an assessment of the application is carried out to determine the payment amount in accordance with the Scheme Rules and subsequently advises the HSE of the proposed payment amount for each Nursing Home. The HSE undertakes a final validation and makes a decision on the application.

The NTPF and/or the HSE will carry out formal audits of claims made retrospectively on a risk and/or sample basis - they will be supported in this work by professional auditors. It will be

necessary for the Nursing Home to be able to provide vouched evidence of COVID-19 expenditure as any expenditure that is not vouched will be recoverable.

In some cases, where an outbreak has been experienced and a claim is made under the outbreak assistance component of the Scheme, the claim requires independently certified verification.

Covid-19 Pandemic

791. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if direction will be given to nursing homes on when residents are allowed to leave the nursing home for day visits. [14228/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): It is recognised that the impact of COVID-19 on society in general and particularly older people living in nursing homes 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 well-being 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 staff at the person's nursing homes, 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.

Hospital Appointments Status

792. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health when an operation will take place for a person (details supplied). [14239/20]

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.

Abortion Services Provision

793. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the amount paid to general practitioners for the provision of termination of pregnancy services in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14240/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The first Annual Report on the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, which was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 30 June, shows that during the period 1 January to 31 December 2019, 6,542 medical procedures were carried out in early pregnancy under the grounds set out in section 12 of the Act.

Payments to General Practitioners for the provision of termination of pregnancy services are made through the HSE's Primary Care Reimbursement Service. I have therefore, asked the HSE to provide the information requested directly to the Deputy.

Abortion Services Provision

794. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the measures and supports in place to reduce the number of abortions from the recorded 6,666 abortions that took place in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14241/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter I have referred the Deputy's question to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to her.

Health Services Staff

795. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the number of posts vacant in CHO2; the number of vacant posts in the Saolta Hospital Group; the breakdown of the vacant posts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14250/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Covid-19 Pandemic

796. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health when the Covid-19 national guidelines will be published to enable the reopening of day services including Alzheimer's day services in HSE community healthcare west; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14252/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy will be aware, day care and other community services play an important role in supporting 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 from the Covid-19 experience to date, 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.

Against this background, the HSE has recently published a strategic framework document, outlining its overall approach and phased resumption of services, taking into account the COVID-19 environment in which services will need to work. It will affect how services are delivered, as well as service capacity. It is envisaged that the framework will guide hospitals and community services, including day services, in developing their own local individual plans, on how services can resume, in the months ahead.

Medical Qualifications

797. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if his Department will review the fact that the counselling doctorate offered by Trinity College Dublin and fully recognised and accredited by an organisation (details supplied) does not provide payment to students unlike the doctorate in clinical psychology which is offered by the five main Irish universities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14257/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Home Help Service

798. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health if a pay agreement has been reached between the HSE and an organisation (details supplied) to continue providing financial support for the supply of PPE to the private homecare sector in view of the fact that the initial agreement expired on 31 May 2020. [14261/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Standard PPE will continue to be the responsibility of private providers for non-COVID-19 clients. However, HSE will provide appropriate additional PPE supplies to Home Support Providers in relation to clients confirmed to have COVID-19 on the clear understanding that the individual service provider will deliver appropriate Infection Protection and Control training to its staff.

However as this is a service matter I have referred this matter to the HSE for direct reply.

HSE Properties

799. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health if consideration has been given to utilising the Sarsfield Court Hospital site in Glanmire, County Cork, for the new acute hospital in Cork included in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 [14268/20]

800. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health if consideration has been given to utilising the Our Lady's Hospital, Guarranabraher, site for the new acute hospital in Cork included in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 [14269/20]

807. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health if community groups will be engaged with in consultation prior to a decision on the location of the proposed acute hospital in County Cork included in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 [14276/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 799, 800 and 807 together.

As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

Hospital Waiting Lists

801. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for elective surgery with addresses in north central areas of Cork. [14270/20]

802. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for elective surgery in each hospital in County Cork. [14271/20]

803. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for elective surgery in Cork University Hospital. [14272/20]

805. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for elective surgery nationally. [14274/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 801 to 803, inclusive, and 805 together.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to pause all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity with effect from the end March 2020. 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 National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) and in accordance with World Health Organisation guidelines, and the National Action Plan.

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>).

To ensure services are re-introduced in a safe, clinically-aligned and prioritised way, the HSE launched its Strategic Framework for 'Service Continuity in a Covid Environment' on 24 June. Its implementation will ensure service resumption is done in an integrated way. This will involve a phased approach to ensure community services are strengthened. The Framework will also consolidate new ways of working and build on international knowledge. The HSE is currently developing a Service Continuity Roadmap for the resumption of services across the health system.

As the system continues to deliver Covid-19 and non-Covid 19 care side-by-side over a more prolonged period, my Department and the HSE will continue to work closely together to protect essential non-Covid 19 acute care and progress the provision of more routine non Covid-19 care.

The number of patients nationally waiting for an Inpatient/Daycase procedure as of end of May 2020 is 86,946. The data requested concerning Cork hospital waiting lists is outlined in the attached documents. National waiting list data is available on the NTPF website, and is available by hospital site as well as specialty (<https://www.ntpf.ie/home/nwld.htm>.)

In relation to the requested information concerning the number of persons waiting for elective surgery with addresses in north central areas of Cork, the NTPF have advised my Department that area of residence coding cannot differentiate between North/South Cork. However, they have provided this information by city/county.

Total Waiters for Elective IPDC Surgery with an Area of Residence in County Cork as at 28/5/2020

| Date | Area of Residence | Number Total |
|------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 28/05/2020 | Cork (County) | 5234 |
| 28/05/2020 | Cork (City) | 2450 |

| Inpatient & Daycase Waiting Lists for Hospitals in County Cork | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|-------------|
| | 0-3 Mths | 3-6 Mths | 6-9 Mths | 9-12 Mths | 12-15 Mths | 15-18 Mths | 18-24 Mths | 24-36 Mths | 36-48 Mths | 48+ Mths | Grand Total |
| Bantry Hospital | 106 | 113 | 43 | 20 | 3 | | | | | | 285 |
| Cork University Hospital | 435 | 448 | 222 | 91 | 50 | 36 | 45 | 43 | 24 | 2 | 1396 |
| CUMH | 122 | 184 | 120 | 84 | 86 | 62 | 65 | 39 | 16 | | 778 |
| Mallow General Hospital | 135 | 56 | 23 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 1 | | | | 229 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|---|------|
| Mercy Uni- versity Hospi- tal | 377 | 317 | 138 | 84 | 61 | 36 | 48 | 36 | 13 | 3 | 1113 |
| SIVUH | 950 | 996 | 409 | 118 | 82 | 43 | 51 | 29 | 1 | 1 | 2680 |

Hospital Waiting Lists

804. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for elective surgery in the Bon Secours public hospital, Cork. [14273/20]

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 made 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 were treated as public patients and their treatment was 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.

The Department of Health does not have a role in the operational functions of private hospitals and as such cannot provide information relating to the waiting list of the Bon Secours Hospital, Cork.

Question No. 805 answered with Question No. 801.

HSE National Service Plan

806. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health if the proposed bed capacity of the elective hospital in County Cork included in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 has been published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14275/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The National Development Plan stated that, “New dedicated ambulatory elective only hospital facilities will be introduced in Dublin, Galway and Cork. These facilities will provide high volume, low complexity procedures on a day and outpatient basis, together with a range of ambulatory diagnostic services. The high volume of demand for such services in these major urban centres is sufficient to justify the construction of dedicated ambulatory centres.”

The Elective Hospitals Oversight Group is currently developing a high-level facilities spatial brief and order of magnitude costs which details the elective clustering of appropriate activities for each of the three facilities in Dublin, Cork and Galway. This will also include an output and facility specification, based on efficient and effective service delivery. This is due to be complete in the Autumn of 2020.

This work is still ongoing and no publications have been made at this stage.

Question No. 807 answered with Question No. 799.

HSE National Service Plan

808. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health if community groups will be engaged with in consultation prior to a decision on the location of the proposed elective hospital in County Cork included in the National Development Plan 2018-2027. [14277/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The National Development Plan 2018-2027 outlines that new dedicated ambulatory/elective-only hospital facilities will be delivered in Dublin, Cork and Galway to tackle waiting lists for scheduled care procedures.

This work is being directed through Sláintecare by the Elective Hospitals Oversight Group, and draws upon international evidence as well as best practice within an Irish context.

The group has ascertained the likely demand for elective/ambulatory care on a national basis with a focus on Dublin, Cork and Galway. The next phase, which will be completed in the Autumn, will be to develop a high-level facilities spatial brief and order of magnitude costs which details the elective clustering of appropriate activities for each of the three facilities in Dublin, Cork and Galway. This will also include an output and facility specification, based on efficient and effective service delivery.

This stage will also involve engagement with stakeholders and service providers.

Emergency Departments

809. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health the planned emergency department bed capacity for the new proposed acute hospital in County Cork included in the National Development Plan 2018-2027. [14278/20]

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

Covid-19 Pandemic

810. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the reason the national emergency co-ordination group was not used during Covid-19; the reason for the preference for the NPHE in view of the fact that when the National Emergency Coordination Group was formed pandemics were included in its terms of reference; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14279/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) structure is a long-standing mechanism utilised over many years to steer health service responses to public health emergencies as required by Ireland's obligations under the World Health Organization's International Health Regulations.

These Regulations require State parties to establish multidisciplinary/multisectoral teams to respond to events that may constitute a public health emergency of international concern. This

necessitates flexibility in the composition of these national teams in order that they can appropriately respond to major public health emergencies.

As the Deputy is aware, the NPHEC for COVID-19 is accountable to me as Minister for Health and is made up of senior public officials of the Department of Health and a number of relevant State Agencies, in addition to highly qualified subject matter experts from disciplines such as virology, infectious diseases, intensive care etc. who are among the leading practitioners in their fields in this country.

The NPHEC can add to its membership on the basis of the additional expertise or support it identifies as being required so as to ensure that it is in the best possible position to provide the advice and recommendations for consideration by the Minister for Health and the Government. This flexibility in approach to selection is necessary for a group such as this in the context of an international public health crisis of the kind we are currently experiencing due to the pandemic, and give effect to Ireland's obligations to the WHO.

A wide range of documentation related to NPHEC, including as regards the governance process under which operates, has been published to date and it is intended to continue this process to ensure that the process by which the NPHEC's recommendations have been reached is as transparent as possible.

In addition, the Government established a Cabinet Subcommittee, chaired by the Taoiseach, to assess the social and economic impacts of the potential spread of COVID-19. The work of the Cabinet Subcommittee includes addressing the impacts, mitigation measure and contingencies for cross-sectoral issues which arise in areas beyond the health service, building on the effective public health work undertaken to date. A whole of government approach to the coronavirus response requires cohesive decision-making, a partnership approach, expert public health advice and clarity of communications. The Cabinet Subcommittee is supported by a Senior Officials Group and a dedicated Crisis Communications Group which coordinates a whole-of-Government communications response.

Covid-19 Pandemic

811. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Health the number of investigations being conducted by the HSE regarding Covid-19 related deaths in nursing homes: the locations of the nursing homes that are being examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14283/20]

812. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Health his plans to conduct an investigation of Covid-19 related deaths at a nursing home (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14284/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 811 and 812 together.

Since 2009 the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, is the statutory independent regulator in place for the nursing home sector, whether a HSE managed or a private nursing home. The Authority, established under the Health Act 2007, has significant and wide-ranging powers up to and including withdrawing the registration of a nursing home facility, which means that it can no longer operate as a service provider.

This responsibility is underpinned by a comprehensive quality framework comprising of Registration Regulations, Care and Welfare Regulations and National Quality Standards.

HIQA in discharging its duties determines, through examination of all information available to it, including site inspections, whether a nursing home meets the regulations in order to achieve and maintain its registration status.

Should a nursing home be deemed to be non-compliant with the Regulations and the National Quality Standards, it may either fail to achieve or lose its registration status. In addition, the Chief Inspector has wide discretion in deciding whether to impose conditions of Registration on nursing homes. Any individual cases of concern should be brought to the attention of HIQA and the relevant HSE Safeguarding and Protection Team.

During the response to COVID-19, Nursing homes continue to be regulated by HIQA, who under the Health Act 2007 have the legal authority to examine the operation of any facility under their remit. Any individual cases of concern should be brought to the attention of HIQA and the relevant HSE Safeguarding and Protection Team

In addition, a series of enhanced measures have been agreed by NPHE for long-term residential care settings and these are currently being implemented by the HSE, HIQA and service providers. They include measure to support facilities which have outbreaks of COVID-19, measures aimed at stopping the transmission of the virus and support the provision of PPE to and screening of staff.

All of these measures and actions are aimed at supporting the protection and provision of safe care of the residents of long-term care facilities

On foot of a National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) recommendation, on 23 May a COVID-19 Expert Panel on Nursing Homes was established, to examine the complex issues surrounding the management of COVID-19 among this particularly vulnerable cohort.

The purpose of the Panel is to examine the national and international responses to the COVID-19 crisis, and to examine the emerging best practice. Its main objective is to provide immediate real-time learnings and recommendations in light of the expected ongoing impact of COVID-19 over the next 12-18 months. COVID-19 is a new disease, which can present atypically in the frail elderly, and new evidence and best practice in its management are constantly emerging. I expect the Expert Panel to submit their final report to me later this month.

General Practitioner Services

813. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health when ShannonDoc services will reopen at St. Mary's Hospital, Thurles, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14287/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

814. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the progress within the Saolta Group to progress the development of the acute stroke unit at Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14298/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Saolta University Health Care Group

has advised that staff have been recruited in line with the funding allocation for the development of a Stroke Unit at Letterkenny University Hospital.

While the designation of the Stroke Unit has been impacted by COVID-19 requirements, the Hospital Group confirms that it is intended to implement the Stroke Unit designation in September 2020.

Mental Health Services

815. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health his plans to progress the implementation of eating disorder teams in CHOs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14299/20]

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 Staff

816. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the number of applicants signed up for the Be On Call for Ireland initiative; the number of applicants deployed in CHO1 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14300/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Maternity Services

817. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who availed of each antenatal and maternity clinic in County Donegal in each of the years 2018, 2019 and to date in 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14301/20]

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 Support Services

818. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14307/20]

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.

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

Medicinal Products

819. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of the licensing of patisiran for the effective treatment of nerve damage in view of the circumstances of a person (details supplied) and in further view of fact the drug is licensed in the UK and Northern Ireland. [14314/20]

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 licensed 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 Patisiran (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 patisiran (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.

Covid-19 Pandemic

820. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the costs incurred by the HSE during the Covid-19 pandemic (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14319/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the costs incurred by the Health Service Executive (HSE) during the Covid-19 pandemic are a matter for the HSE, I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy.

Covid-19 Pandemic

821. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if procurement procedures are being followed for all Covid-19 projects and expenditure; the way in which capital expenditure projects are being prioritised; the areas from which the funding for such projects is coming

from; the spend on all Covid-19 infrastructure projects; the infrastructure projects by county being carried out to respond to Covid-19; the cost of each project to date; the estimated total cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14320/20]

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.

Disability Services Provision

822. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when full disability services will resume in County Tipperary for both adult and child disability services; the reason for the delay; the services that have resumed; the supports in place for those with special needs who are regressing as a result of closure of all services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14321/20]

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.

Health Services Provision

823. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the plans that will be put in place to deal with cancelled surgeries and the provision of services for children with scoliosis (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14324/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Improving access to scheduled care 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.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to pause all non-urgent elective scheduled care activity with effect from the end March 2020. 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 National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) and in accordance with World Health Organisation guidelines, and the National Action Plan. The decision to delay appointments and admissions is not undertaken lightly and when such a decision is made, it is based on the safe delivery of care to all patients.

On 5 May 2020, NPHE agreed that its recommendation of 27 March, in regard to the pausing of all non-urgent 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. CHI is now re-establishing services on an incremental basis.

To ensure services are re-introduced in a safe, clinically-aligned and prioritised way, the HSE launched its Strategic Framework for 'Service Continuity in a Covid Environment' on 24 June. Its implementation will ensure service resumption is done in an integrated way. This will involve a phased approach to ensure community services are strengthened. The Framework will also consolidate new ways of working and build on international knowledge. The HSE is currently developing a Service Continuity Roadmap for the resumption of services across the health system.

My Department continues to engage with both CHI and the HSE in relation to paediatric scoliosis services. In this context, CHI has advised my Department that a General Orthopaedic Surgeon, based at CHI Crumlin and Tallaght sites, is due to commence in Q3, 2020. This post is for general orthopaedic and trauma surgery, to support waiting list activity, and will further support waiting times for children for general orthopaedic outpatient appointments., including scoliosis.

In relation to the particular queries raised regarding the cancellation of surgeries and capacity challenges, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Question No. 824 answered with Question No. 756.

Disability Services Provision

825. Deputy Patricia Ryan asked the Minister for Health the timeline for the reopening of adult day services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14340/20]

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 have completed the above strands of work, which will inform the timeline for the phased re-opening of day services. It is expected that a the HSE will issue guidance in the coming days on the re-opening of services. 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.

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

Hospital Data

826. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Health the data from maternity and other hospitals relating to a reduction in the number of preterm births to date in 2020 relative to the equivalent period in previous years; if this has possible significant implications for maternal and neonatal health and related health advice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14349/20]

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

827. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health further to the release of confirmed Covid-19 cases by electoral division up to 12 June 2020, when he will release updated data by electoral division on the number of Covid-19 cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14355/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The COVID-19 data hub features national statistics, information and data about COVID-19 in Ireland including electoral division data and is available at <https://covid19ireland-geohive.hub.arcgis.com/>. The data available on the site is based on official figures provided by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) and the Health Service Executive (HSE). This site is built using the GeoHive platform, Ireland’s Geospatial Data Hub.

All datasets, charts and maps are updated on an on-going basis and in line with newly

published data. Data in relation to COVID-19 confirmed cases at electoral division level are updated on a regular basis. However, the Deputy should note that when the rates of confirmed cases are as low as they have been in the last number of weeks, care is required to ensure patient confidentiality is preserved and that no potential identification of individual patients arises. In these circumstances, the data relating to confirmed cases by electoral division is not updated on as frequent a basis as the other data on the Data Hub. The Deputy may wish to note that a range of other data is provided by the CSO including alternative information relating to electoral divisions. This is available on the CSO Covid-19 Information Hub at <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-covid19/covid-19informationhub/> and, in particular, at <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/br/b-cdc/covid-19deathsandcasesseries6/>

Covid-19 Pandemic

828. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of procedures, treatments and surgeries carried out under the Covid-19 private hospital deal by hospital in tabular form. [14357/20]

829. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the breakdown of the average bed occupancy of hospitals over the course of the Covid-19 private hospital deal by hospital in tabular form. [14358/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 828 and 829 together.

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 29, 12,301 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 51,194 day-case procedures took place in private hospitals, as well as 80,644 diagnostic appointments and 49,3337 outpatient appointments. Utilisation rates show that as of June 29 2020, 49% of private inpatient beds were in use, up from 43% at the start of May

In relation to the data requested regarding the breakdown of the average bed occupancy of hospitals over the course of the Covid-19 private hospital deal by hospital, and the breakdown of activity by private hospital, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Equipment

830. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the number of MRI scanners in St. James's, Mater, Beaumont, Tallaght and St. Vincent's hospitals respectively; the average number of scans carried out during the week from Monday to Friday; and the average number of scans carried out at weekends. [14366/20]

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

831. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health the persons required to quarantine upon arrival here; the way in which quarantine is being managed and monitored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14386/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): At present, the government advises against non-essential travel overseas.

Passengers arriving to Ireland are legally required to complete a COVID-19 Passenger Locator Form. The information provided on the form may be used to assist with contact tracing in the event that there is a suspected or confirmed case on board a flight or ferry.

Passengers arriving to Ireland from overseas are advised in the interest of public health to self-isolate for 14 days.

HIV-AIDS Programmes

832. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health the counties in which PrEP, pre exposure prophylaxis, is available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14387/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter I have referred the Deputy's question to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to him.

Mental Health Services

833. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the long-term plans for a unit (details supplied) following the expenditure of €700,000 on upgrade works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14390/20]

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

834. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed national guidelines governing the reopening of services for persons with disabilities in day and respite settings during the Covid-19 pandemic; when these guidelines will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14394/20]

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 have completed the above strands of work, which will inform the timeline for the phased re-opening of day services. It is expected that a the HSE will issue guidance in the coming days on the resumption of services. 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.

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

With regard to respite services, the HSE have issued a number of guidelines which should be considered by service providers. Respite house locations should be evaluated retrospectively

to ascertain the current need for isolation units, and should be reinstated with the caveat that in the event that a suspected or confirmed case presents that the location reverts to an isolation unit and alternative models of service delivery are offered to respite service users. Services must ensure that they are compliant with HIQA regulations and guidance on Governance and Service Management.

Social distancing guidelines should be implemented and a review of capacity per location should be ascertained. Infection Prevention and Control guidelines must be implemented, as per residential support facilities, to include the use of masks by staff in the event that social distancing cannot be achieved. Temperature checks should be undertaken for service-users and staff.

Transport of individuals should be done in a co-ordinated manner which may include a rotation system in order to satisfy Public Health guidelines.

A risk assessment of the individual should be undertaken prior to admission to respite services, as follows:

An individual who is going into respite should complete a self-declaration form that they have not had a temperature or been in close contact with a person who was known to be COVID-19 positive for the previous 14 days; and, their temperature should be taken prior to admission. If the individual has a temperature they should be advised to self-isolate as per Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) guidelines.

The individual should be monitored throughout the respite stay for signs of COVID-19, and if they begin to show signs of COVID-19 symptoms they should be isolated for 14 days.

Information and Communications Technology

835. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when suitable IT equipment and systems will be installed at a location (details supplied) to properly access records and allow the services to support CAMHS Wexford function efficiently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14403/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Progressing the eHealth and ICT agenda is driven by the Government eHealth strategy An eHealth Strategy for Ireland and the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy, working with the HSE's Office of the Chief Information Officer (OoCIO). The OoCIO delivers ICT services and support throughout the HSE, facilitating integration within and across community services, hospitals and other specialised care providers.

A key enabler of eHealth under Sláintecare is the delivery of a modern, efficient digital workplace to enable health service professionals to provide the best care and for support staff to work efficiently. This work involves identifying and prioritizing sites for improved digital connectivity and progressing the development of clinical ICT systems, to provide the required infrastructure to support effective clinical decision making.

As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

836. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when his Department and the HSE will provide a waiting area for parents and children attending CAMHS at a location (de-

tails supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14404/20]

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

837. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will commence an orthodontic treatment plan with the dental and orthodontic services in Waterford Regional Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14405/20]

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 Screening Programmes

838. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of work of the National Screening Advisory Committee; when recommendations on the expansion of newborn screening are expected to be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14410/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC) was established in 2019 and has held two meetings to date. The Committee's role is to undertake an independent assessment of the evidence for screening for a particular condition against internationally accepted criteria and make recommendations accordingly.

Professor Niall O’Higgins was appointed as Chair of the NSAC in 2019 and was asked that the Committee prioritise an examination of the approaches for the expansion of the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme (‘heelprick test’) and work in that regard has been progressed by the Committee. It is most likely that over the course of the next 5 years we are likely to see an incremental expansion of the bloodspot programme that will screen for new conditions.

The next meeting is scheduled to take place on 17 July 2020 where the Committee will consider (1) the addition of ADA-SCID to the blood spot screening programme and (2) a change in the screening pathway of the Diabetic Retina Screen programme.

Any future potential changes to the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme will be incorporated as part of the Committee’s work programme. Updates in relation to the work of the Committee will be posted on the NSAC website available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/nsac/>

Covid-19 Pandemic

839. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if NPHET has made contingencies to implement localised lockdowns in the event of a localised cluster or outbreak; if so, the level of coordination taking place between NPHET and local authorities to develop local preparedness for such an event; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14411/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): In the context of the continuing reopening of society and the economy as provided for in the various phases of the Revised Roadmap for Reopening Ireland, the NPHET has now commenced work on the development of further public health advice to provide for a more nuanced approach to the ongoing future management of the pandemic, which takes into account the evolving epidemiological situation both here and internationally, the understanding gleaned from Ireland’s experience of this disease to date and emerging evidence with regard to factors impacting transmission and control of this disease. This work is also taking into account the possibility of providing for more targeted interventions in the event of a resurgence in the level of Covid-19 than have been undertaken up to now.

Health Research Board

840. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 515 of 23 June 2020, if he is considering amending the health research regulations for the processing of personal data in emergency care situations; if so, if a commercial company retains ownership of a person’s personal data until such a time as the person concerned has the capacity to give or refuse such consent; and if regulations are in place to prevent private companies using or transmitting this personal data until consent is obtained in these circumstances [14413/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): It is my intention to amend the Health Research Regulations with regard to emergency care intervention in line with the answer given by the previous Minister for Health to Parliamentary Question No. 515 of 23 June 2020. The amendment has been the subject of consultation with the Data Protection Commission and those working in the emergency care area.

Data protection law does not deal with ownership of personal data. The General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Health Research Regulations are con-

cerned with data controllers -including joint data controllers- who determines the purposes and means of the processing of personal data.

The Health Research Regulations apply with equal force to public bodies and private sector commercial entities. The intended amendment in emergency care situations is limited, qualified and specific. It will make clear that it applies only in exceptional circumstances, where the principal purpose of the processing or further processing of the personal data by a controller is necessary for the provision of health care to an individual and to protect the vital interests of the individual, and where the individual is, by reason of his or her physical or mental incapacity, incapable of giving consent at that time.

In that very defined situation, the personal data may also be processed by the controller for a related health research purpose, where that health research has been approved by a research ethics committee.

In those circumstances, the requirement for explicit consent under the Health Research Regulations is not removed or waived but deferred until such time as the individual concerned has the capacity to give or refuse such consent and the hospital will be explicitly required to inform the individual as soon as practicable that the personal data is being processed for research. I intend to also ensure that the amendment will require the individual to be told of any persons that the data controller has shared his or her personal data with.

This amendment brings emergency care research in Ireland in line with the prevailing ethical and regulatory practices internationally and will provide consistency and clarity for all involved.

It is important to note that under GDPR and data protection law generally that the same rules and principles apply to the private commercial companies as apply to public bodies. When it comes to health research, the reality is that much health research in the EU, including Ireland, is collaborative between hospitals, academic institutions and industry. That collaboration is important as each partner brings a distinct value added to the research. All of them must comply with all legal requirements including data protection requirements and where they do not meet their data protection obligations it is a matter for the Data Protection Commission.

Health Research Board

841. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 516 of 23 June 2020, the measures his Department is taking to safeguard the rights and interests of data subjects and to create a robust governance structure in line with general data protection regulation, particularly in cases in which access to data will be determined by a commercial entity; and the instruments in place to grant data subjects their right to information and access with regard to their personal data. [14414/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The General Data Protection Regulation sets out the principles governing the processing of personal data, the obligations on data controllers and data processors in relation to their processing of personal data and the rights of data subjects in relation to their personal data, including rights to information about the processing of their personal data and access to it. The Data Protection Act 2018 gave further effect to those principles, obligations and rights. In the area of processing personal data for health research, the previous Minister for Health made Regulations setting out suitable and specific safeguards for data subjects in relation to such processing.

Data controllers, whether they are public bodies or private commercial companies, must

meet their obligations which includes ensuring that individuals can exercise their data protection rights.

Compliance with data protection law is a matter for the Data Protection Commission and any specific concerns with compliance in respect of any aspect or any data controller should be brought to the attention of the Commission.

Data Protection

842. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the person responsible for the implementation of an opt-out publicity campaign (details supplied); and the person overseeing the campaign to ensure that conditions are met. [14415/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The persons responsible for the implementation of the opt-out publicity campaign are the joint data controllers in the study.

The Health Research Regulations provide that the Health Research Consent Declaration Committee may revoke a declaration where it is satisfied that the conditions imposed by it are not being met.

Data Protection

843. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his plans to review the involvement of a company (details supplied) in State-funded genomic research, in the absence of rigorous data protection structures, in view of the lack of public engagement on this matter and concerns over the compliance of the company with general data protection regulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14416/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): There is already in place in Ireland a rigorous and statutory data protection structure for the protection of personal data processed for health research purposes.

The provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation apply. They require that: the principles in Article 5 are adhered to, a legal basis in Article 6 applies, a condition in Article 9 is met and that suitable and specific safeguards to protect the data subject are in place.

Section 36 of the Data Protection Act gives further effect to those suitable and specific safeguards. The section allows for them to be identified and specified by the Minister for Health and, after consultation with the Data Protection Commission and the Minister for Justice and Equality, to be made mandatory in statutory Regulations. That is what the Health Research Regulations 2018 do very clearly. The Regulations put in place an extensive governance structure that complements and supplements the provisions in GDPR.

Compliance with data protection law (for public and private bodies) is a matter for the Data Protection Commission. It is not for me, as Minister for Health, to determine whether a particular data controller is in compliance with its data protection requirements. If there are specific concerns with compliance they should be brought to the attention of the Commission.

Programme for Government

844. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the intended role of the national genetics and genomics medicine network as committed to in the programme for Government. [14417/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): An independent review of the laboratory and clinical genetic services was commissioned by the HSE and undertaken by Professor Dian Donnai and Bill Newman. The report, which was submitted in May 2014 to the HSE made 20 recommendations, one of which was the establishment of a National Genetic and Genomic Medicine Network (NGGMN). The Report of the National Genetic and Genomic Medicine Network Strategy Group (2016) (the Smith Report) reviewed the Donnai and Newman Report and made recommendations for the next steps, with respect to clinical and laboratory genetics & genomics for the country.

The establishment of a National Genetic & Genomic Medicine Network (NGGMN) will bring together all parties within the field of genomic medicine (and associated research). The NGGMN will build the effective governance arrangements that recognise the interdependence between corporate, financial and clinical governance across the service and integrate them to deliver high quality, safe and reliable healthcare. The NGGMN will operate on hub and spoke basis with dedicated outreach clinics.

Funding has been provided for the recruitment of a number of posts to begin the work of establishing the Network and recruitment is currently underway. These posts include a Director of the Network, which will be an academic appointment jointly with UCD and Trinity College Dublin, a Clinical Laboratory Director and a General Manager.

As part of its 2020 work programme, the Department is considering the role of genetics and genomic medicine within the Irish healthcare system, as well as reflecting on alternative approaches taken in other jurisdictions to advancing their national genomic medicine strategies. During February, a background paper was developed for consideration by the Management Board and prior to the Covid-19 crisis, a brief statement of intent was being prepared setting out the principles and objectives of a public genomic medicine service. This will facilitate engagement with national and international stakeholders with an interest in the establishment of a publicly funded genetics and genomics programme.

General Practitioner Services

845. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will address the discriminatory insurance policy offered by a company (details supplied) which forbids general practitioners from providing healthcare during and after pregnancy to a person who plans to have a homebirth; if he will engage with the insurance provider to rectify this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14418/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Maternity and Infant Care Scheme provides an agreed programme of care to expectant mothers ordinarily resident in Ireland. This combined medical service is provided by the family GP and a hospital obstetrician and includes a schedule of alternating examinations at the GP's practice and a maternity unit/hospital, as well as two post-natal visits to the GP.

The State indemnifies enterprises on behalf of the Minister for Health under the Clinical Indemnity Scheme (CIS) when national policy confirms that this should be provided. This includes Community Midwives who have an SLA with the HSE for the provision of home births. In the case of GPs, they are private practitioners and to date services provided by them and by

GP practice nurses are not covered by the CIS. Instead, as private practitioners, GPs receive professional indemnity from private medical indemnity providers. As this is an arrangement between two private parties, the medical indemnity cover provided is a matter for GPs and their private insurers.

The National Maternity Strategy aims to ensure that appropriate care pathways are in place in order that mothers, babies and families get the right care, at the right time, by the right team and in the right place. The Strategy makes it clear that women should be offered a choice regarding their preferred pathway of care, in line with their clinical needs and best practice, including in regard to the birth setting. Further discussions need to take place with relevant parties to agree national policy on the role of GPs in relation to home births, in the context of the National Maternity Strategy.

Covid-19 Pandemic

846. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health if the Covid-19 tracking app will work on a smartphone that has Bluetooth turned on and can access Wi-Fi at home but does not have access to a phone network or to internet 3G, 4G and so on over a phone network. [14420/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Covid-19 tracing app will work even if the smartphone does not have access to the 3G or 4G network.

1. The phones only require Bluetooth capability (to have the app installed and be running the most recent operating systems) to be able to detect each other (2 metre, 15 minute rule).

2. The phones only require wireless connectivity to be able to download the anonymous keys required for the phone to determine whether the user has been in contact with someone who has been confirmed as Covid positive, and to create an alert.

3. When a person is confirmed as Covid positive, they will ordinarily be sent a one time password (OTP) via text so they can upload their encrypted keys. If the user does not have access to the 3G or 4G, HSE contact tracing operations will need to provide them with a code over the phone. This is a little more complicated than if they were able to receive a text, but still means the app is usable in the absence of access to 3G or 4G.

Health Services Provision

847. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when paediatric physiotherapy services will resume in a Dungloe Community Hospital, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14422/20]

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.

Addiction Treatment Services

848. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the status of the Dublin north-east inner city initiative addiction unit and associated staff hires. [14432/20]

849. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the breakdown of the HSE CHO9 full year budget for addiction services as of 1 January 2020; and if CHO9 has reallocated €700,000 from the Dublin north-east inner city initiative addiction services 2020 budget line to provide for an overspend in homeless related services. [14440/20]

850. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of residential addiction related stabilisation, step-down and recovery beds in HSE CHO9 in tabular form. [14441/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 848 to 850, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters, they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Funding

851. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if he will reverse the 1% cut to disability services for 2020. [14442/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy will be aware, the Government has agreed to allocate substantial additional funding to the Health Vote to meet the costs associated with the implementation of the measures outlined in the National Action Plan in response to COVID-19.

Within this context, the HSE has put in place a structured governance process through which Section 39 bodies experiencing financial difficulties due to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency can seek financial and non-financial supports, in order to ensure continuity of essential services. I am also advised that the HSE has given Section 38 and Section 39 providers of disability services and supports assurance that budget allocations confirmed to each provider via the relevant Community Healthcare organisation, will remain in place to year end, subject to co-operation with the HSE and compliance with the relevant Service Arrangements.

The HSE and all of the providers it funds are expected to continually review their cost structures to ensure the best use of resources and a focus on the use of these resources for client care to the greatest extent possible. The very significant additional financial resources provided to disability services over the last year, together with the achievement of relatively modest efficiency savings, form part of the financing of the increased service levels set out in the National Service Plan 2020.

It was intended that these efficiencies would be achieved in 2020 through the application of a 1% efficiency target to existing budgets across all service areas. However, the delivery of the 1% efficiency target in the disability sector is considered problematic given the significant pressures on the sector in the context of COVID-19.

Covid-19 Pandemic

852. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if there is a difference in the advice given to social care residential homes and settings, specifically those residential care settings for elderly persons and nursing homes versus residential care settings for persons with a disability; the nature of the differences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14446/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy will be aware, people living in long-term residential care (LTRC) 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 adverse 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.

Advice from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) focused on all LTRC settings and its recommended actions are relevant for all residential care services - whether services for older people, for people with a disability or mental health care residential settings.

LTRC settings are people's homes as well as places where health and social care are provided. It is recognised that the impact of COVID-19 on society in general and especially those living in LTRCs has been considerable. The introduction of physical distancing, restricted contact with family and loved ones and other measures have changed the usual dynamic of social interaction for residents of these settings.

During these times there has been a particular emphasis on retaining a holistic view of the well-being 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, NPHE has advised that the gradual reintroduction of usual activities should commence, while taking public health precautions. 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>

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to further details of guidance and advice provided to LTRCs.

HSE Data

853. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of mystery shopper inspections carried out under the Public Health (Sunbeds) Act 2014 at the end of June 2020. [14450/20]

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.

Hospital Staff

854. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of full-time laboratory scientists employed at Connolly hospital. [14451/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

855. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive an appointment for elective eye surgery at University Hospital Limerick following a previous cancelled appointment in March 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14453/20]

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

856. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive an appointment for elective surgery at University Hospital Limerick following the cancellation of an appointment for 6 July 2020 with no rescheduled date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14456/20]

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

857. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Health in the context of Covid-19 relating to the recent guidelines requiring patients to quarantine before surgeries, if this includes elective and emergency c-sections in maternity hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14465/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply to you directly.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

858. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Health the recruitment plans in place to address the staffing crisis in child psychology teams; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14471/20]

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

859. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Health if advice was provided to health-care workers and-or patients that they should not use commercial launderettes or dry cleaners during any stage of the Covid-19 pandemic; the scientific basis of such advice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14473/20]

860. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Health if Covid-19 specific advice, guidance or standards were provided to commercial launderettes or dry cleaners; if so, if he will

provide copy of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14474/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 859 and 860 together.

My Department did not issue advice to healthcare workers or patients as to the use or otherwise of commercial launderettes or dry cleaners over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic nor am I aware of any such advice having been issued by the HSE. I have referred the Deputy's question on this matter to the HSE for their response and direct reply.

Furthermore, I have no function with regard to issuing specific advice or guidance to commercial launderettes or drycleaners. Specific guidance in relation to a business activity in a particular sector of the economy is a matter for the Government Department with responsibility for that sector.

A range of information was provided by the Health Service Executive and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre as guidance for the effective suppression of the spread of COVID-19 disease in various environments. The first two document links below refer to Public Health Information Booklets and provide advice in relation to laundering clothes.

The third document, "Acute Hospital Infection Prevention and Control Precautions for Possible or Confirmed COVID-19 in a Pandemic Setting" provides guidance and information on infection prevention and control procedures to manage COVID-19 in the acute healthcare setting including hand hygiene when handling laundry along with the safe management of linen.

The final link below will direct you to all COVID-19 guidance documents for healthcare and non-healthcare settings.

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/covid-19-information-booklet.pdf>

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/covid-19-information-booklet.pdf>

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/Infection%20Prevention%20and%20Control%20Precautions%20for%20Acute%20Settings%20-COVID-19.pdf>

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/>

Disability Services Provision

861. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health when Lisadell day services, Mullingar, County Westmeath will reopen for day care services for those that, due to profound disability, urgently require this reopening; the activities which may not return; if a reduced amount of attending hours is envisaged upon reopening; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14480/20]

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 soon, 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

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.

862. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health when day care services will reopen; when each day care service in counties Longford and Westmeath will reopen; when restrictions will be implemented to ensure adherence to health; the activities which may not return; if a reduced amount of attending hours is envisaged upon reopening; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14483/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Community services such as day care play an important role in enabling older people 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. As the Deputy's question is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Facilities

863. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if a project (details supplied) will be advanced to the next stage in view of the urgent need to provide much needed additional accommodation at this healthcare facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14495/20]

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.

Health Services Provision

864. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Health if the district nurse service in Maynooth, County Kildare, will be returning to the Maynooth health centre in the Covid-19 reopening arrangements; his plans to upgrade the building in which the centre is housed to bring its infrastructural standards into line with the excellence of the medical service offered there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14507/20]

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.

Covid-19 Pandemic

865. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Health if pulmonary rehabilitation will be widely and readily available for patients whose pulmonary health is affected by Covid-19; if there are the facilities, technology and personnel available to make this therapy and resource widely available to patients both in hospitals and the community setting in view of the high rate of respiratory disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14509/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the issue raised is a service delivery matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy.

Covid-19 Pandemic

866. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he has considered issuing guidelines to nursing homes to ease visitor restrictions when there are no active cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14511/20]

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

867. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in respect of the promised roadmap for the reopening of non-Covid-19 health services in view of growing waiting lists for services; the number of occasions on which the board of the HSE considered this plan; and when he expects to publish it. [14512/20]

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.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to the further details sought on the Plan.

Covid-19 Pandemic

868. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health when he expects to publish a green list of countries to and from which it is deemed safe to travel; the actions which will be taken in respect of countries deemed unsafe; and if these actions will require legislation. [14513/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Close consideration is being given by Government to policy in relation to overseas travel, including to additional measures being put in place at airports and ports to strengthen existing arrangements.

The Government continues to review the methodology and approach to be used in connection with the instituting of reciprocal unimpeded travel arrangements with countries of a broadly similar or better epidemiological profile than our own, and an announcement will be made in due course when this work is complete.

Covid-19 Pandemic

869. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to give effect to his agreement in Dáil Éireann on 30 June 2020 that all data held by his Department in respect of Covid-19 should be open source; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14514/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Since the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) met for the first time, a commitment was given to collect and publish as much relevant data as possible while ensuring individual patient confidentiality was maintained at all times. While the nature and scale of the Covid-19 pandemic has been unprecedented, the collection of timely and comprehensive data has underpinned the efforts of the public health response to COVID-19 and has been instrumental in developing the health service response to Covid-19 and to the advice provided by NPHE and the Department of Health to assist Government decision-making in the wider response to Covid-19 in Ireland.

Aggregated data are published on an ongoing basis on my Department's website, on the Health Protection Surveillance Centre website and on the HSE website. The Central Statistics office (CSO) also makes available a range of data through regular publications on its COVID-19 Information hub, detailing the changing state of aspects of Ireland's economy and society since the COVID-19 outbreak. The CSO has also provided the infrastructure for researcher access to data to allow further analysis through the provision of researcher Microdata files.

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/>. Data is also published on the open data portal at <https://data.gov.ie/>. This provides data in a machine readable format, updated on a daily basis and follows the Government guidelines on making data more widely available in open free and reusable formats.

It should be noted that due to the nature of the disease transmission and the clustered effects

of the disease, many of the cases occur in relatively small communities where identification of individual patients could be an issue if appropriate measures are not taken to protect individual identities and their locations. The data published to date has been aggregated with this consideration in mind while also ensuring that data is made available in a timely and comprehensive manner to inform the Department and wider Government response but also to ensure the public are kept informed to the greatest extent possible.

There is also ongoing collaboration between my Department, the HPSC, HSE, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, the CSO, Ordnance Survey Ireland and many other institutions and agencies to improve the data collected and the availability of it on an ongoing basis. I would like to assure the Deputy of my Department's ongoing commitment to publish as much Covid-19 data on an ongoing basis as is practicable, relevant and appropriate.

Departmental Correspondence

870. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health when this Deputy will receive a response to correspondence (details supplied). [14515/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I would like to thank the Deputy for her correspondence and can confirm a reply has issued.

I would like to reassure the Deputy that the Department made immediate contact with the HSE on the matter raised and also have brought it to the attention of the Chief Inspector, HIQA.

I fully agree with the Deputy that communication with residents and family members is of the utmost important and I understand that the HSE has stressed to the nursing home operator the importance of them keeping residents and families up to date in relation to the situation within the nursing home.

Senior officials from my Department are engaging with the HSE on an ongoing basis in relation to the COVID-19 response in respect of nursing homes.

Question No. 871 answered with Question No. 663.

Covid-19 Pandemic

872. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the details of the recommendations regarding incoming and outgoing foreign travel in the context of Covid-19; the details of testing and tracing regimes at airports for those coming into the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14558/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Government position is clear: avoid non-essential travel overseas.

Passengers arriving to Ireland are legally required to complete a COVID-19 Passenger Locator Form. The information provided on the form may be used to assist with contact tracing in the event that there is a suspected or confirmed case on board a flight or ferry.

Passengers arriving to Ireland from overseas are advised in the interest of public health to self-isolate for 14 days.

There is ongoing and close Government consideration to putting in place possible additional

measures, including at points of entry into the country, in addition to the measures already in place.

Health Services Staff

873. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that nurses and midwives who were awarded a pay rise after the industrial action of spring 2019 are now in receipt of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14559/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

I am committed to the full implementation of the Nursing Agreement.

HSE Agency Staff

874. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the details of the agreement between his Department and a recruitment company (details supplied) and other recruitment agencies with regard to the Be On Call for Ireland initiative; the fee paid to the agency; the number of persons who were recruited; the nature of the contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14560/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Be on Call for Ireland is a HSE initiative, and on that basis, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on the matter.

Midwifery Services

875. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruitment of 40 additional clinical midwife specialists in mental health. [14579/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Question No. 876 withdrawn.

