

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].

Questions Nos. 1 to 12, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 13 to 26, inclusive, resubmitted.

Cabinet Committees

27. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on Covid-19 will next meet. [41653/20]

The Taoiseach: The Cabinet Committee on COVID-19 meets as required. It last met on 26th November. A date has not yet been set for the next meeting of the Cabinet Committee.

Cabinet Committees

28. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on health will next meet. [41654/20]

The Taoiseach: The next meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Health is scheduled to take place on Monday, 14 December.

Cabinet Committees

29. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on economic recovery and Investment will next meet. [41655/20]

The Taoiseach: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Investment first met on the 8 July. It has met on a total of eight occasions, most recently on 4 December. The next meeting has not yet been scheduled.

Departmental Bodies Data

30. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Taoiseach the bodies under the aegis of his Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42487/20]

The Taoiseach: National Economic and Social Council

The National Economic and Social Council is an independent statutory agency operating under the aegis of my Department.

The Terms of Reference and composition of the NESC are set out in legislation - the National Economic and Social Development Act, 2006, and in the National Economic and Social Council (Alteration of Composition) Order, 2010.

I appoint all members to the Council under this legislation which provides for nominations from

- five sectors (business and employer interests, ICTU, farming and agricultural interests, community and voluntary sector, environmental sector);

- public servants;

- independent members.

Each of the five sectors nominates three representatives to the Council.

A further six members are public servants, mainly Secretaries General, and must include a representative of my Department and the Department of Finance. The Secretary General of my Department is the Chair of the Council and an Assistant Secretary of my Department is the Deputy Chair.

There are also seven independent members on the Council.

Of the seven independent appointees, two were previous members who were re-appointed, one was appointed from the Department of the Taoiseach and four were appointed following an assessment process conducted by the Public Appointments Service in line with the *Guidelines for appointments to State Boards*.

Central Statistics Office

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) is an independent Office under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach. The National Statistics Board (NSB) was established under the National Statistics Act 1993 to guide the strategic direction of the Central Statistics Office.

The National Statistics Board, as set out under Section 18 of the National Statistics Act 1993, has eight members - two are nominees of the Taoiseach, three are nominations by organisations representative of users of national statistics, two are Assistant Secretary grade or higher in the Department of the Taoiseach and Department of Finance, and the Director General of the CSO is a member in an ex officio capacity.

In the case of those members who are nominees of the Taoiseach or of organisations representative of users of national statistics, all vacancies are publically advertised through Public Appointments Service and stateboards.ie and appointments are made in line with the *Guidelines for appointments to State Board*

Departmental Bodies Data

31. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the bodies under the aegis of his Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42476/20]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Details of the State Boards that fall under the remit of my Department, including details on board appointments and board vacancies, are available on the StateBoards.ie website. The information requested by the Deputy in regard to the current composition of these boards, disaggregated by appointments through PAS or Ministerial appointment, is set out below.

As the Deputy will be aware, individuals may be nominated for appointment by various organisations arising from terms in the relevant legislation regarding the Body concerned, and accordingly Ministerial board appointments are not in all cases made at my discretion.

The process for selection of Ministerial appointees to boards of Agencies is managed by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) in accordance with the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Deputy will also be aware that as Minister I am responsible for the final appointment of any representative that goes through a PAS process.

Agency	Number of Board Members	Appointments through PAS	Ministerial appointments	Nominated for appointment by the Minister
EI	12	5	5*	2
HSA	12	5	1*	6
IDA	12	8	3*	1
IAASA	9	2	0	7
NSAI	12	8	1*	3
PIAB	10	3	1	6
SFI	12	6	4*	2
WRC	9	7	1	1

*This number includes the Departmental representative

Air Quality

32. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the way in which his Department and other State agencies plan to address the poor EPA air quality statistics in Ennis, County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42237/20]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Weather conditions are a major factor in “spikes” in levels of emissions at this time of year. Calm and foggy conditions, together with domestic burning of solid fuel can lead to a build-up of air pollutants far greater than those normally experienced. These events also serve to demonstrate how the choices we make in heating our homes can have a significant bearing on the quality of the air in the communities in which we live. It is important that where low smoke zones have been established, such as Ennis, that there are adequate measures in place to ensure regulatory compliance. Responsibility for ensuring such compliance rest with local authorities under Section 10 of the Air Pollution Act (Marketing, Sale, Distribution and Burning of Specified Fuels) Regulations 2012 (S.I. 326 of 2012). My Department has commenced discussions with the Local Authority sector to develop a regional approach to air quality enforcement. The intention is to establish dedicated resources within regional lead authorities to provide co-ordination, expertise and advice to support effective and consistent implementation of air quality legislation across the country.

Ireland has a network of 84 monitoring stations which measure levels of air pollutants across the state. The provision of improved data from this network has highlighted the extent to which

solid fuels, such as turf, peat and wet wood, as well as bituminous coal, contribute to the emissions in our air and this must be taken into consideration in the development of new measures to regulate to a broader extent the use of solid fuels in the residential sector.

The first step in this process will be the launch of a solid fuel public consultation which will be published alongside the Clean Air Strategy early next year. The consultation will seek views on new measures to regulate the use of all solid fuels in the residential sector, while the Clean Air Strategy will set out a comprehensive cross Government programme of policies and measures that will tackle all sources of air pollution, including those from the transport, agriculture and residential sectors.

Environmental Policy

33. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if his Department will be extending a ban on smoky coal to the entire country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42238/20]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Programme for Government commits to extend the Smoky Coal Ban to new towns and over the term of Government to move towards a full nationwide ban. I have already delivered on the first part of that commitment by creating 13 new Low Smoke Zones with effect from 1 September this year and the ban now applies in all towns with populations in excess of 10,000 people.

The next step in the process will be a public consultation to assess views on the development of legislation to regulate to a broader extent the use of solid fuels in the residential sector. This is being done with a view to a national transition to lower polluting fuels for residential heating and will:

- Assess the merits of a national approach to regulating solid fuel;
- Determine which solid fuels should be regulated;
- Consider how these fuels should be regulated;
- Set out an appropriate timeline for the implementation of any new regulations.

The consultation will be launched alongside Ireland's first Clean Air Strategy early next year and the responses received will inform the decisions to be made regarding the implementation and enforcement of a nationwide extension.

National Broadband Plan

34. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will address a matter regarding the provision of broadband at a location (details supplied). [42246/20]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Question refers to a premises which is located in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER 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 Novem-

ber last with National Broadband Ireland (NBI). 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 is underway. The NBP network will offer users a high speed broadband service with a minimum download speed of 500Mbps from the outset. This represents an increase from the 150Mbps committed to under the Contract. The deployment plan forecasts premises passed in all counties within the first 2 years and over 90% of premises in the State having access to high speed broadband within the next four years. Further details are available on specific areas within County Kildare through the NBI website which provides a facility for any premises within the intervention area to register their interest in being provided with deployment updates through its website www.nbi.ie. Individuals who register with this facility will receive regular updates on progress by NBI on delivering the network and specific updates related to their own premises as works commence. I am advised by NBI that, as of 3 December 2020, over 139,000 premises across all counties have been surveyed which is ahead of the full year survey target of 120,000 that had been projected by the company. Surveys have been completed in the following areas across Co Kildare, Killashee, Oughterard, Naas Rural, Rathmore, Kill, Killeel, Carnalway, Giltown, Ballymore Eustace, Bodenstown, Naas Urban, Newtown and Donaghcumper. The next step is for NBI to develop network designs to deliver the new fibre to the home network to these premises, followed by pre build and build works. I am advised that NBI intend to have completed surveys at this location in early 2021 and the indicative target for the commencement of network build at this location is late 2021. Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are a key element of the NBP providing high speed broadband in every county in advance of the roll out of the fibre to the home network. As of 3 December, 217 sites have been installed by NBI and the high speed broadband service will be switched on in these locations through service provider contracts managed by the Department of Rural and Community Affairs for publicly available sites and by the Department of Education and Skills for schools. 59 publicly accessible BCPs across the country are now live. BCPs locations due for installation in Kildare include Backgate Lodge, Kilkee Demesne, Castledermot and Crookstown Further Education and Training Centre. Bigstone Community Hall is now fully connected with public WiFi and Lullymore Heritage Park is installed and waiting connectivity. Further details can be found at <https://nbi.ie/bcp-locations/>. Rathmore National School and St Davids National School in Co Kildare will be connected for educational access as part of this initiative by the end of the year. My Department continues to work with the Department of Education and Skills to prioritise other schools with no high speed broadband, within the intervention area for connection over the term of the NBP.

National Broadband Plan

35. Deputy James Lawless asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the status of the provision of broadband to houses in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42248/20]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) State led Intervention will be delivered by National Broadband Ireland (NBI) under a contract signed in November 2019 to roll out a high speed and future proofed broadband network within the Intervention Area which covers 1.1 million people living and working in the over 544,000 premises, including almost 100,000 businesses and farms along with 695 schools. In County Cork, there are 273,548 premises of which 79,424 (29 %) are in the intervention area for the National Broadband Plan and 194,124 (71%) are in the commercial area where commercial operators are or have committed to providing high

speed broadband. The NBP deployment plan forecasts premises passed in all counties within the first 2 years and over 90% of premises in the State having access to high speed broadband within the next four years. I am advised by NBI that, as of 3 December 2020, over 139,000 premises across all counties have been surveyed which is ahead of the full year survey target of 120,000 that had been projected by the company. Of this figure, over 16,000 premises have been surveyed to date in Cork including in the areas of Carrigaline and Midelton, and network designs completed to deliver the new Fibre to the Home (FTTH) network there.

Surveying is the first step towards delivering the new fibre network and involves physically walking the routes and documenting images, notes and measurements of the poles, cables and underground ducts in each area. This informs design solutions for provision of the fibre network to each and every premises in the surveyed area and leads to detailed designs. The detailed designs are then used to initiate the 'make ready' project with Open eir for the area, where Open eir ensure any poles and ducts being reused are fit for purpose and the make ready of other required infrastructure. This step also informs decisions on equipment ordering. Survey data is also needed to initiate pre-works which pave the way for the deploying of fibre. Pre-works involve construction of new duct routes, erection of poles, building chambers, and tree trimming. On completion of these pre-works, the main construction works can commence. This involves deploying fibre overhead on poles and in underground ducts, splicing of fibre, and unblocking of ducts. Once the main construction works are completed and the appropriate level of testing has been undertaken, the fibre network can be commissioned and end users can order their connection.

The first fibre to the home connections are expected shortly in Carrigaline and will be subject to technical testing and validation prior to a wider release of the area. I am advised that from early 2021 retailers will be able to resell the service and householders in these areas will be able to order high speed broadband provided via the NBI network.

Further details are available on specific areas within Cork through the NBI website which provides a facility for any premises within the intervention area to register their interest in being provided with deployment updates through its website www.nbi.ie. Individuals who register with this facility will receive regular updates on progress by NBI on delivering the network and specific updates related to their own premises when works are due to commence. I am aware that concerns have been raised regarding the level of information available on the deployment of the NBI network and I am advised that NBI is working to provide more detail on its website, with a rolling update on network build plans. Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are a key element of the NBP providing high speed broadband in every county in advance of the roll out of the fibre to the home network. As of 3 December 2020, 217 publicly accessible BCP sites have been installed by NBI, with 59 already connected to high speed broadband service. The remaining locations will be connected through service provider contracts managed by the Department of Rural and Community Development in the coming months. In Cork, BCPs at Ballindangan Community Centre, Aghabullogue Community Centre, Castletownkenneigh Community Centre, Lissavard Community Centre, Whitechurch Community Centre and T.O. Park Labbamollaga Community Facility have been connected. Further BCPs at Bere Island Heritage Centre, Laharn Heritage Centre and Ballydaly Community Hall have had infrastructure installed by NBI and will be connected in the coming weeks. Some 58 schools throughout Ireland have now had infrastructure installed by NBI, with 22 schools already connected to high speed broadband. In Cork, a number of schools including Clogagh and Ballycroneen National School Schools will be connected as part of this initiative. My Department continues to work with Department of Education and Skills to prioritise the remaining schools to be connected over the term of the NBP. Further details can be found at <https://nbi.ie/bcp-locations/>.

Post Office Network

36. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his views on whether the existing post office network is viable; and his plans to increase State funding to the service or to engage with representatives from the sector to discuss their ongoing concerns. [42284/20]

37. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the status of the implementation of an action plan to ensure the sustainability of the existing post office network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42285/20]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 36 and 37 together.

I am aware of the importance of maintaining a post office network in our society. However I also know that the serious decline in mail volumes and the impact of Covid-19 on footfall through post offices has had a severe impact on the postal network and the revenue being generated for postmasters. I have met with representatives of the Irish Postmasters Union (IPU) on a number of occasions to discuss the matters raised in the Grant Thornton report which was commissioned by the IPU.

A lot of work has been done over the past few years to develop the network and this has had a positive effect for both postmasters and customers. This momentum needs to be maintained and if An Post, the postmasters and Government work together we can ensure that the network can emerge as a central hub for a wide variety of valuable community-focused services.

Government believes An Post has untapped potential to do more and make a further significant contribution across many areas of public, business and community life in Ireland. What we are doing now is working with An Post to investigate the scope to channel additional services through the network. As with any business the post office needs to develop commercial strategies to enable it to grow and maintain its relevance for its users. All options will be considered fully and efforts will be redoubled to give effect to our commitment to ensuring a sustainable and viable post office network.

In the circumstances, there are no proposals to introduce a Government funded subsidy for the post office network.

Waste Management

38. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the steps he will take to address the robbery of catalytic converters from hybrid cars using his powers over waste regulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42390/20]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):
Issues concerning the theft and handling of stolen property are matters for the Minister for Justice. Under the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act 2001, maximum sentences of 10 years are provided for the offences of theft and handling of stolen property and 5 years for the possession of stolen property. While regulation of the scrap metal industry, including second hand car parts, is not a matter within the remit of my Department, the regulation of waste activities is, of course, relevant to the industry. In order to improve traceability of waste received and to counter the trade in stolen metal, an amendment to the Waste Management (Facility Permit

and Registration) Regulations was introduced in 2014 to require the following at all permitted facilities receiving/purchasing waste: the production of proof of identity and current address for the person supplying the material, records to be kept of the registration number and waste collection permit number of the delivery vehicle, records to be kept describing the materials, time and date of sale, weight and amount paid, and the provision of a signed statement by the person supplying the material indicating that they are the lawful owner. Local authorities continue to undertake inspections to ensure compliance with these regulations and these inspections were included in the National Waste Enforcement Priorities for 2020. In addition, officials from my Department continue to participate in the National Metal Theft Forum, which was established in 2012 by An Garda Síochána, to bring together State stakeholders, including local authorities and the Department of Justice, and industry representatives in order to improve information sharing and to develop a metal theft prevention and crime reduction plan.

Warmer Homes Scheme

39. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will provide data on the better energy warmer homes scheme administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland; the average waiting times per county from when an application is made to the scheme and when an SEAI engineer approves the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42391/20]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme is funded by my Department and administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). The scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty. To date over 142,000 homes have received free upgrades under the scheme, leaving the occupants better able to afford to heat their homes to an adequate level. Budget 2021 provides €109 million in capital funding to support lower income households to retrofit their homes with €100 million of this funding allocated to the Warmer Homes Scheme. There are currently over 7,000 homes on the Warmer Homes Scheme work programme. This includes homes that are: currently undergoing works; have been allocated to contractors for works; have completed an initial home survey and are awaiting allocation to a contractor, or are awaiting the initial survey of their home. Eligible homes are allocated on a first come, first served basis, and the average time between application and allocation to a contractor is now 22 months. The wait time is a result of strong demand for what is an extremely popular scheme. The work programme was also negatively impacted by Covid-19, particularly between March and June when the scheme was fully paused in line with Government guidelines. The SEAI does not compile the information requested on waiting times on a county by county basis.

In addition to the increased budget, capacity by the industry to deliver more activity has also increased due to a new, broader contractor panel to provide works which commenced last month. Recommendations on the implementation of changes to the scheme to better target those most in need will also be finalised shortly.

Electricity Grid

40. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if his attention has been drawn by Eirgrid of the level of capital investment required to improve the grid system over the period to 2030 given the fact that in scenarios in Eirgrid's document, Tomorrow's Energy, it identifies grid investment as either high or very high across

the country; the way in which this level of investment is being provided for; the level of detail available to his Department from Eirgrid regarding the exact locations in which this investment is required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42469/20]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) is responsible for the oversight of the costs associated with the national electricity grid. Part of this remit is to determine the appropriate level of funding that the electricity network system operators, EirGrid and ESB Networks, require in order to efficiently deliver on the strategic objectives while safely operating the system. This is conducted through the Price Review process in five yearly intervals. There will be two price reviews over the decade to 2030, one of which will be decided on by CRU in the coming weeks. The costs for grid investment covered by regulatory price reviews are borne by electricity consumers and not funded through the Exchequer. The strategic objectives for the price review out to 2025 are: facilitating a secure low carbon future, transforming the role of the distribution system operator (ESB Networks), increasing efficiency and protecting customers and ensuring security of supply.

The CRU as part of its oversight has issued a draft determination for funding over the next five years to the end of 2025 (PR5 - Price Review 5) and this determination can be found on the CRU website. It indicates a spend of €6.78 billion. This is a draft decision and the final determination is expected in the coming weeks.

This price review covers up to 2025 only and thus does not fully factor in all the requirements of the Government's Climate Action Plan or Programme for Government, including substantive electrification of heat and transport commitments and the delivery of at least 70% renewable electricity by 2030. The System Operators are assessing what the potential costs are for the grid to deliver on such commitments.

EirGrid publishes a variety of reports, some on an annual basis, such as the Transmission Development Plan, the Transmission Forecast Statement and the Generation Capacity Statement, all of which provide detailed analysis of grid development needs and projects.

Departmental Bodies Data

41. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the bodies under the aegis of his Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or Ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42477/20]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The information sought by the Deputy is set out in the attached table.

[Board Memberships]

The table also indicates where a Ministerial appointment has followed a process conducted by the Public Appointments Service, or selection by a nominating body.

Further information is also available at: www.stateboards.ie

Bus Services

42. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport the number of diesel, electric and hydrogen powered buses currently in use in Ireland; the average cost of purchasing each type of bus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42224/20]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure, including the provision of the national PSO bus fleet.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Road Network

43. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport if lighting will be installed at Coolanga Cross, Clonoulty, County Tipperary (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42282/20]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Under Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993 to 2015, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads, including public lighting, is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority.

In this context, policy and decisions in relation to new installations and extensions to public lighting schemes beyond urban speed limits is a matter for the relevant local authority.

Driver Licences

44. **Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Transport if provision is being made for a resident in Ireland with a UK or Northern Ireland driver licence needing to exchange it without a public services card to do so; if provision will be made in advance of the deadline for submission of 10 December 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42293/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): After the transition period (transition period ends 31 December 2020), the UK will no longer be a Member State and so a UK driving licence will not be recognised here. Since 2019, holders of UK licences resident in Ireland have been encouraged to exchange their UK licences for an Irish one before this date.

A person wishing to exchange a UK driving licence for an Irish licence, who cannot avail of the online application system, can book an appointment at a National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) centre through the NDLS website. All applications for a driving licence must be made through the NDLS and must be booked in advance as it is not possible to facilitate any walk-ins due to the social distancing requirements and in the interest of protecting the staff and customers. Anyone looking for an urgent appointment can contact the NDLS Customer Service at 0761 087880 however they currently deal with up to 1,000 calls daily so delays are to be expected.

Legislation exists to allow for the recognition of foreign driving licences for exchange pur-

poses in the Road Traffic Acts. Following the transition period, the potential then exists for arrangements to be made under those Acts and Ireland will be pursuing this option. This may take a little time to complete as it involves a formal agreement and legislation here in Ireland, as well as corresponding steps by the UK.

Fishing Industry

45. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Transport the number of inspections carried out by the marine service office into Irish-registered fishing vessels in 2019 and to date in 2020; the number of these inspections that were unannounced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42317/20]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Marine Survey Office (MSO) of my Department has in place a programme of survey and inspection

for fishing vessels which includes both unannounced and announced inspections. In 2019, the MSO carried out inspections of 152 fishing vessels, with 40 of this number being unannounced inspections. So far during 2020, 56 such inspections have been completed, of which 10 have been unannounced.

Bus Services

46. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport if the current BusConnects process is compliant with the Kazakhstan advice in relation to the Aarhus Convention (details supplied). [42375/20]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure, including the BusConnects programme.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Brexit Preparations

47. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport further to Parliamentary Question No. 22 of 12 November 2020, if he will provide a copy of the traffic management group's no-deal contingency plan as referenced to in the reply. [42395/20]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Details of the Traffic Management Contingency Plan have now been made available on Gov.ie.

It is important to note that no matter what happens in the ongoing Brexit negotiations, there will be major changes in how we do business with the UK from January 1st.

This traffic management plan, which is the result of close collaboration by many different agencies, is designed to deal with any congestion that may arise due to increased level of checks at Dublin Port and to minimise the impact on the Port tunnel, nearby motorways and the rest of

the city.

The ultimate aim of the traffic management plan is to ensure that there is minimal disruption to the flow of movement in Dublin Port and surrounding city, which can only be achieved if all stakeholders undertake to prepare to the best of their ability.

Covid-19 Pandemic

48. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Transport if travel advice will be updated in line with the European Centre of Disease Control updated travel advice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42400/20]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Government decision of October 2020 has delivered on the commitment in the Plan for Living with Covid-19 in adopting the EU “traffic light” approach to international travel, details of which are published on Gov.ie. Ireland has previously incorporated the guidance in the EASA/ECDC Aviation Health Safety Protocol within the protocols for passenger travel by air and sea in light of Covid-19, published in July 2020 by the Department of Transport, and updated in October 2020.

On the 2 December the European Centre for Disease Control and European Aviation Safety Agency jointly published Guidelines for COVID-19 testing and quarantine of air travellers – an Addendum to the Aviation Health Safety Protocol. The Addendum provides information to assist the health authorities to make informed decisions on the best possible measures for international travel.

Subject to ongoing review by the HSE, NEPHT and Government a negative result from a Covid-19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test is the only test result that means the passenger is not expected to follow advice to restrict movements. While agreed Covid-19 measures are kept under review, and in the lead up to a challenging Christmas season for all, there are currently no plans to make changes to the current implementation framework around the “traffic light” system.

Aviation Industry

49. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Transport when a new chief executive for a company (details supplied) will be appointed; the process underway to select a replacement for a person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42410/20]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I would like to thank the Deputy for his question. In my reply which follows, I am surmising that the Deputy is referring to the position of Chairperson of the Board of Shannon Group, (a position previously held by Ms. Rose Hynes) as opposed to a replacement of Shannon Group’s Chief Executive Officer.

The position of Chairperson of Shannon Group Board was advertised by the Public Appointments Service and the closing date for receipt of applications was 14 October last. An Assessment Panel has been convened by PAS to consider the applications received. I expect to receive a shortlist of the most suitably qualified candidates shortly and I hope to be in a position to appoint a new Chairperson to Shannon Group in the coming weeks .

Taxi Licences

50. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Transport if the waiver for the SPSV licence renewal is in operation for those currently in the process of applying for renewal of their licences; if the fee to renew a licence for a person (details supplied) will be waived; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42411/20]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The National Transport Authority (NTA), the statutory regulator, has since the start of the pandemic taken action to reduce the operating costs for small public service vehicle (SPSV) operators. It has extended vehicle age limits and waived late renewal fees though to March 2021. Furthermore, my Department will provide funding to the NTA to enable it to waive its standard SPSV (vehicle) licence renewal fees in 2021. Arrangements for SPSV driver licences, which are issued by An Garda Síochána, are unchanged.

Road Safety

51. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Transport the additional resources that will be provided to local authorities in County Longford to ensure that there are adequate road safety measures in place including footpaths for children walking to a school (details supplied) given the specific reference to physical activity amongst children in the programme for Government. [42446/20]

52. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Transport the steps taken to date to facilitate safer walking to schools given the commitment in the programme for Government for an ambitious road safety strategy. [42448/20]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 51 and 52 together.

The Deputy is aware that significant additional financial resources have been available to local authorities since the establishment of the Government as evidenced by the July Stimulus measures, the additional allocations made available under Budget 2021 and the establishment of a new active travel fund as part of those Budgetary allocations which will be managed by the National Transport Authority (NTA) and is specifically targeted at those local authorities, such as Longford, that traditionally have not had access to dedicated active travel funding.

In addition to these additional allocations of funding, there is also work underway in relation to the development of new strategies / programmes and of particular relevance in this respect is the new Road Safety Strategy and the proposed Safe Routes to School Programme.

The Road Safety Authority is now well advanced with work on the new Road Safety Strategy. In line with commitments in the Programme for Government, it will particularly target the needs of vulnerable road users, including pedestrians, whether walking to school or otherwise. I look forward to the completion of this Strategy, which will run from 2021 to 2030 and provide us with a basis to make a safer environment for all, and particularly for those who choose healthy and non-polluting forms of travel.

In relation to Safe Routes to School, the Deputy is aware of the commitment in the Programme for Government to establish such a programme and I know Minister of State Naughton has been meeting with relevant stakeholders as we look to progress that commitment and develop the Programme.

All of this activity sits within the broader Programme for Government and its commitment to allocate €1.8bn toward active travel over the lifetime of the Government. I recognise that

a complementary aspect to this increased expenditure is ensuring that local authorities are adequately resourced in terms of their institutional capacity to deliver this increased ambition and proposals are under consideration in that regard in line with the Programme for Government commitment in relation to same.

Departmental Bodies Data

53. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport the bodies under the aegis of his Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42489/20]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Since 2014, all vacancies/positions on State boards are advertised openly on the State Boards portal www.stateboards.ie operated by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). Appointments are made based on specific and detailed criteria determined by the relevant Minister as necessary for the effective performance of the relevant role, and are processed by way of a transparent assessment system designed and implemented by PAS.

Information relating to board appointments for agencies under my Department's remit and the basis of that appointment is available here on stateboards.ie and here on my Department's website.

Electric Vehicles

54. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport if e-scooter legislation will be progressed before Christmas 2020. [42495/20]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I intend to bring forward the relevant provisions to amend primary legislation in relation to e-scooters and other Powered Personal Transport devices (PPTs) when the Oireachtas is considering the Road Traffic (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill early in the coming Oireachtas session, in accordance with the Programme for Government. Minister Troy will, I know, share the Government's immediate priority ensuring that we are equipped with any necessary legislation, primary or secondary, to deal with Brexit and its consequences, as well as to deal with the ongoing COVID emergency. While I hoped to bring the Bill to Government before the end of this year for approval to publish, these pressing challenges must take priority.

The task of adapting our extensive body of road traffic legislation to accommodate PPTs involves identifying and developing appropriate amendments to primary legislation across a range of complex areas. The work must be carried out in such a way that it does not undermine the overall framework of Road Traffic Law or Road Safety in general. My officials are currently working on drafting the necessary changes to primary legislation. Subject to satisfactory resolution of the necessary issues, I intend to bring forward amendments to the relevant enabling primary legislation when the Road Traffic (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill is before the Oireachtas.

Experience overseas has shown that a change of regime may have consequences for road safety, the management of roads and footpaths, the movement of traffic, public transport and goods, public health and the environment. These are all factors which must be taken into consideration when legislating.

Until new legislation is in place, the use of electric scooters will remain illegal on public roads and in public places. However, they may be used on private land with the permission of the landowner.

Aviation Industry

55. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties customers are experiencing cashing refund cheques from an aviation company (details supplied); the recourse available to these customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42504/20]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): This issue has only very recently come to attention, and it has been confirmed by the Commission for Aviation Regulation (CAR) - which is our national enforcement body under Regulation (EC) 261 of 2004 - that a number of consumers have been effected. Under the Regulation, which provides for the payment of refunds to air passengers in certain circumstances, payments can be made in the form of cash, electronic bank transfer, bank order, bank cheque or - with the signed agreement of the passenger - travel vouchers and/or other services. If an airline refunds by one of the methods listed it has legally discharged its duty under the Regulation.

The CAR has advised that any passengers who are experiencing difficulties cashing these cheques to bring the issue to the airline's attention in the first instance. CAR has advised that it understands that airlines are cooperating in providing an alternative payment method where possible. It is a matter, nonetheless, that I will ensure is followed up on should it persist.

Covid-19 Pandemic

56. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance if he will respond to correspondence received (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42202/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that my officials and I have engaged and will continue to engage extensively with the Banking and Payments Federation (BPFI) and the banks directly in relation to supports for personal and business customers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Officials in the Department are alert to issues raised directly by the public and these inform the Department's ongoing engagement process and policy formation.

The Wage Subsidy Schemes are some of the main tools with which we are protecting the income of employees who otherwise would not be working and it is hoped that it will be a major boost in saving the businesses for which they work. However, whilst I acknowledges the seriousness of the issue you have raised and its impact on those affected, I cannot mandate how temporary payments received under the Wage Subsidy Schemes are treated in lending sustainability evaluations by regulators and lenders.

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

Furthermore, as Minister for Finance, I cannot mandate or overrule the internal risk assess-

ment 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. The Relationship Framework for PTSB, the bank referred to in correspondence supplied by the Deputy, can be found here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/5c6ad6-ptsb-relationship-framework-april-2015/>

Notwithstanding this, officials in the Department contacted the bank for a general comment, on a no-name basis, on how they are managing the matter you have raised and were advised of the following:

“We have a duty of care to our customers to ensure that any lending is affordable for them. In accordance with consumer protection requirements, we are facilitating mortgage-approved customers on the EWSS in drawing down their loans subject to their employers providing assurance on the sustainability of their income when the EWSS comes to an end. We are also processing approval in principle applications from customers in receipt of the PUP and we are not excluding any sectors from applying for a loan. We are doing everything we can to support our customers at this difficult time and are working with them on a case by case basis to assess their individual situations.”

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

57. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42249/20]

58. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter regarding the Covid restrictions support scheme for a business (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42250/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 57 and 58 together.

The CRSS is a targeted support for businesses significantly impacted by restrictions introduced by the Government under public health Regulations to combat the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. It applies to businesses who, under the specific terms of the regulations, are required to prohibit or significantly restrict members of the public from accessing their business premises, with the result that the business is required to temporarily close or to operate at significantly reduced levels. Support provided under CRSS is intended to enable businesses to meet normal fixed costs associated with their business premises such as rent, insurance, utilities and so on, during the period which they are subject to such restrictions.

Domestic travel restrictions or social distancing measures are not the level of restrictions to which the CRSS refers. To be eligible to make a claim under CRSS, the applicable restrictions should require the business to either prohibit, or significantly restrict, customers from accessing the business premises in which the relevant business activity is carried on.

There has been an easing of restrictions on businesses, with a phased move to Level 3 restrictions nationally from 1 December, with some restrictions easing from 4 December and 18 December respectively. From 4 December, bars, cafes and restaurants which serve substantial

meals prepared onsite are allowed to open for indoor dining. A substantial meal is defined in the current public health regulations as a meal which might be expected to be served as main meal/ main course at lunch or dinner and for which it would be reasonable to charge a sum that is not less than €9. The meal must also be substantially prepared on the premises in a “food preparation area”. A food preparation area is defined as an indoor part of a premises which is structurally adapted and used for the purpose of preparing food for consumption by customers on or off the premises. It does not include a tent, caravan, vehicle, storage container or other temporary structure.

A pub serving substantial meals, which are prepared in a food preparation area located in the pub premises rather than ordered in from another business, was allowed to reopen on 4 December and, from that date, ceased to qualify for CRSS. However, the pub would be eligible to claim an additional week’s support under CRSS (referred to as a ‘restart week’) to assist it in meeting the costs of reopening.

Any business that can reopen without having to prohibit or significantly restrict access to their business premises, but chooses not to reopen, will not be eligible to claim under CRSS.

Pubs that do not serve substantial meals that are prepared in a food preparation area located in the premises are not allowed to reopen and, therefore, remain eligible to claim under CRSS.

If a pub is prohibited from opening under the current public health regulations because it does not meet the criteria in relation to serving substantial meals then, I understand that it is Revenue’s view that the pub continues to qualify for CRSS. This is regardless of whether the particular pub had put in place arrangements with a food supplier to provide meals to customers at the pub in order to open in the past. Under the current regulations, to be allowed to open, a pub must serve substantial meals that are ‘substantially prepared’ onsite in a food preparation area – serving meals that have been prepared elsewhere does not qualify. If a particular pub does not meet the criteria to open then it should qualify for CRSS (where the other criteria are met).

On 4 December, I announced an additional seasonal support for businesses who cannot reopen through December. Payable for a period of three weeks beginning 21 December, the additional support will provide up to double the amount of the weekly CRSS support payment due subject to the statutory maximum payment of €5,000 per week.

The CRSS is an additional measure for businesses in a region subject to significant Covid-19 restrictions. Businesses who do not qualify under this scheme may be entitled to support under various measures put in place by Government, including existing supports available under the COVID Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) and the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) and the range of measures announced as part of Budget 2021 to support particular sectors including Tourism and live entertainment. They may also be eligible to warehouse VAT and PAYE (Employer) debts and also excess payments received by employers under the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme, and the balance of Income Tax for 2019 and Preliminary Tax for 2020 for self-assessed taxpayers if applicable.

Brexit Preparations

59. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance the arrangements being put in place to ensure that all sectors of society which are insured by UK and Gibraltar insurance providers will continue to offer cover beyond their current period of insurance, particularly as it relates to the bloodstock industry, leisure, hospitality and professional indemnity sectors in

view of Brexit negotiations. [42281/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, it is important to note that neither I, nor the Central Bank of Ireland, can intervene in the provision or pricing of insurance products or have the power to direct insurance companies to provide cover to specific individuals or businesses, including in the bloodstock industry, leisure, hospitality and professional indemnity sectors. 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 companies as to how they price their policies or what terms and conditions apply.

With regard to the points made in relation to the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, as the Deputy will be aware, at the end of the ‘transition period’, the UK (including Gibraltar) will be a third country and will no longer be part of the EU Single Market, including for financial services. UK/Gibraltar insurance undertakings will therefore lose their right to conduct business in Ireland by way of Freedom of Establishment (FoE) and Freedom to provide Services (FoS) under the EU regulatory framework, also known as ‘passporting’ rights. This is a consequence of the withdrawal of the UK from the EU.

As part of the extensive preparations for the end of the transition period, European and domestic regulatory authorities, including the Central Bank of Ireland, have instructed relevant UK/Gibraltar firms to make and implement contingency plans to ensure that they can continue to provide services to their EU customers post-Brexit. I understand from the Central Bank that a significant majority of these undertakings have implemented such contingency plans in advance of the end of the transition period. Therefore, these insurers should be able to continue to offer insurance business to Irish customers following the end of the transition period.

Furthermore, notwithstanding the level of contingency planning, there has been a concern that a small number of insurance undertakings and distributors will either not have completed such measures by the end of the transition period, or have made a decision not to implement them at all due to the administration and cost involved. Accordingly, the Government has dealt with this through the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Bill 2020, which is currently being considered by the Oireachtas. Part 10 of this legislation will allow any UK/Gibraltar-authorized insurance entity to continue the administration of both life and non-life insurance policies written before the end of the transition period. This ‘run-off’ regime will apply for a period of fifteen years from the date of the end of the transition period, and be subject to a review by the Central Bank in year twelve. It should be noted that, under this regime, no new policies or renewals are allowed to be written by UK/Gibraltar-authorized insurers unless they receive authorisation from an EU/EEA member state.

Finally, with less than four weeks left until the end of the transition period, I would urge all insurance providers who provide services to Irish consumers to finalise their readiness and contingency plans and take necessary actions in accordance with the relevant European Commission guidance. I would also urge any consumer who have concerns about their insurance policy to contact their insurance provider, who should be able to provide them with details of arrangements to ensure continuity of service. This includes whether the consumer can amend policies, or how the company will pay claims associated with policies, written prior to the end of the transition period.

Tax Code

60. Deputy Eoghan Murphy asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider amending

the parental gift tax exemption in order that the limit is placed on the recipient rather than that the benefactor given that children of single parents can only receive half the tax free amount of those with two parents. [42374/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT) is the overall title for both gift and inheritance tax. The tax is charged on the amount gifted to, or inherited by, the beneficiary of the gift or inheritance. CAT at a rate of 33% applies on the excess over the tax-free threshold.

There are three separate Group thresholds based on the relationship of the beneficiary to the donor.

Group A threshold (currently €335,000) applies where the beneficiary is a child of the donor. This includes adopted children, step children and some foster children.

Group B threshold (currently €32,500) applies where the beneficiary is a brother, sister, niece, nephew, or lineal ancestor or lineal descendant of the donor.

Group C threshold (currently €16,250) applies in all other cases.

A fundamental principle of the Capital Acquisitions Tax regime is that inheritance or gift tax is levied on the beneficiary and that the level of taxation is determined according to their relationship with the donor.

It is not the case that children of single parents can only receive half the tax free amount of those with two parents. A beneficiary will have access to the Group A threshold of €335,000 for all gifts and inheritances received from donors within that group. This applies regardless of whether the gift or inheritance comes from a single parent, or from multiple “Group A” donors. The value of gifts and inheritances received from all donors in Group A are aggregated together and the amount over the Group A tax-free threshold (currently €335,000) will be subject to CAT, currently at a rate of 33%.

Departmental Bodies Data

61. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Finance the bodies under the aegis of his Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42478/20]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There are 8 State Boards under the aegis of my Department. These are the Central Bank Commission, the Credit Union Restructuring Board, the Financial Services and Pension Ombudsman, Home Building Finance Ireland, the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, the National Asset Management Agency, the National Treasury Management Agency and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland.

In addition, there are 9 bodies also under the aegis of my Department that are not classified as State Boards. These are the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Credit Review Office, the Credit Union Advisory Committee, the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, the Investor Compensation Company DAC, Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners and the Tax Appeals Commission.

Appointments to State Boards are made in accordance with the Guidelines on Appointments

to State Boards published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in 2014. The Public Appointments Service provides a process to identify top quality people for consideration by Ministers for appointment to State Boards. In this regard, I would refer the Deputy to the website www.stateboards.ie.

Details of appointments to the State Boards under the aegis of my Department are in the table below.

State Board	Board Composition	PAS Appointments	Ministerial Appointments
Central Bank Commission	Governor and 9 Commission Members (incl. 4 ex-officio members). To note: The Governor is appointed by the President of Ireland on the advice of the Government.	4	2
Credit Union Restructuring Board	The Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo) has been wound down since 2017 when all Board members resigned. While awaiting finalisation of legislation to formally dissolve ReBo, a caretaker board is in place consisting of 2 Department of Finance officials and a Central Bank existing nominee.		
Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman	Chair and 6 Ordinary Board Members	7	0
Home Building Finance Ireland	Chair and 6 Ordinary Board Members (including 3 ex-officio members)	4	3 ex-officio
Irish Fiscal Advisory Council	Chair and 4 Ordinary Board Members	4 (Currently 3 board members, vacancy being filled through PAS process)	1
National Asset Management Agency (NAMA)	Chair and 6 Ordinary Board Members (incl. 2 ex-officio members)(currently 2 vacancies)	3(the 2 existing vacancies will be filled via a current PAS process)	4
National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA)	Chair and 8 Members (incl. 3 ex-officio members)	3	6 (incl 3 ex officio)
Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland	Chair and 8 Members (incl. 1 ex-officio member)	7	2 (incl 1 ex officio)

Flood Prevention Measures

62. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there is a written or informal agreement between Cork City Council councillors or the executive and the OPW in respect of the Morrison's Island public realm project and related flood defence works. [42256/20]

68. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if preparatory or design phase works on the Morrison's Island public realm project and related flood defence works went through a tender process that was fully open to new applicants. [42262/20]

69. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the current and previous contractual relationship that exist between the Office of Public Works and the specialist consultants and architects involved in preparing method statements and technical drawings for the planning application for the Morrison's Island flood works project. [42263/20]

70. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there is a written or informal agreement between Cork City Council councillors or the executive and the OPW in respect of any future flood defence works in Cork city. [42264/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 62, 68, 69 and 70 together.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) and Cork City Council have worked closely and collaboratively since the commencement of the Lower Lee Flood Relief Scheme in 2013. Both organisations, along with Cork County Council, are represented on the project Steering Committee, which was formed at the inception of the project. While this Steering Committee provides the formal arrangement for cooperation between the OPW and Cork City Council, as well as other parties involved in the Project, the development of a formal agreement is to be progressed and put in place before the Lower Lee Flood Relief Scheme is Confirmed under the Arterial Drainage Acts.

During the course of the development of the Flood Relief Scheme, the City Council commenced the Morrison's Island Public Realm and Flood Defence Project. This project is aimed at bringing a comprehensive regeneration of this historic area through extensive public realm improvements that includes some flood defence elements.

The wider Lower Lee Flood Relief Scheme already had a strong focus on public realm and conservation, and the design team has built up relevant skillsets in these areas for the Cork City area. Given this, and the proposal to implement some flood defence elements into the Morrison's Island Project, the Steering Group considered that it would be an appropriate, cost-effective and expeditious approach for the same design team to lead on the design of Cork City Council's Morrison's Island Public Realm Project, including the preparation of method statements and technical drawings. OPW supported this arrangement and a Collateral Warranty was put in place between the three parties. A formal agreement on the proportionate funding of the project will be finalised once the project budgeting is complete.

Flood Prevention Measures

63. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a value for money review of flood defence works at Morrison's Island has been undertaken; and if so, if the review has been published. [42257/20]

64. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a value for money review been undertaken on Cork city flood defences versus a tidal barrier project with current construction costs and estimated flood risk for 2019-2020. [42258/20]

65. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if value for money reviews were carried out of the use of demountable flood technology temporary and non-temporary for the Cork area; and if so, if the reviews have been published. [42259/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 63, 64 and 65 together.

Every flood relief scheme designed, developed and/or funded by the OPW is subject to an economic appraisal. The assessment of alternative options for any proposed scheme examines a range of concept options for all schemes, and a robust multi-criteria analysis is used to inform the selection of the final preferred option.

The option chosen must represent value for money, as well as being technically feasible and environmentally sustainable. The use of demountable flood technology in the Lower Lee Flood Relief Scheme, as with all elements of the scheme design, forms part of the final Cost Benefit Analysis of the scheme. These demountable elements have been the subject of cost estimates considered in the Cost Benefit Analysis, as indeed are the costs of the flood defences ultimately included in the Morrison's Island Public Realm and Flood Defence Project.

Arising from the public response to the scheme exhibition, significant additional elements to the scheme design have been introduced to address public concerns. The final cost estimate will be reviewed prior to confirmation of the scheme in line with the public spending code. The Cost Benefit Analysis from the earlier public consultation stage, is available to view on the project website, <https://www.floodinfo.ie/frs/en/lower-lee/home/>.

The Lower Lee FRS ‘Supplementary Report on Option of Tidal Barrier’ outlines cost estimates for a tidal barrier. This report, which identifies that a tidal barrage is not cost beneficial, was published in December 2017 and is also available to view on the project website.

Flood Prevention Measures

66. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW has undertaken a study on nature-based solutions for flooding in the Shannon basin region; and if so, if the review has been published. [42260/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): Under the Shannon Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) study an assessment was undertaken of the potential for the storage of floodwaters from the Shannon River in the Bord na Móna cutover bogs. However, it was determined that these would provide insufficient storage to provide any substantial benefits given the volumes of water involved when the Shannon is in flood.

The potential for water retention is also considered at the community-level when assessing options for a flood relief scheme. For example, the proposals in the Flood Risk Management Plans for Athlone and Shannon Town published on www.floodinfo.ie do include storage as part of the potential solution for managing fluvial flooding.

In terms of the delivery of the Flood Risk Management Plans, the Office of Public Works will work with the Environment Protection Agency, Local Authorities and other agencies during the project-level assessments of physical works and more broadly at a catchment-level to identify any measures, such as natural water retention measures, that can have benefits for the Water Framework Directive, flood risk management and biodiversity objectives. Such measures will be included as part of the development of schemes where feasible and where potential benefits exist.

In addition, the OPW is co-funding with the EPA a major research project entitled ‘SLOW-WATERS’ to examine the effectiveness of soft engineering measures in agricultural lands, and is also funding another research project to examine the ecosystem services of Ireland's forests for flood protection and water quality, with a view to better understanding the effectiveness of such measures and develop pilot sites in Ireland. The OPW also provided funding to the Inishowen Rivers Trust in Donegal to investigate the use of such measures to reduce flood risk and provide co-benefits.

The OPW is co-chairing with the EPA the Working Group on Natural Water Retention Measures that is intended to identify approaches that could be used to develop integrated catchment management measures to provide benefits to multiple sectors, such as biodiversity, water quality, sediment control, as well as for flood risk reduction. This working Group involves stakeholders from a broad spectrum of sectors

Flood Prevention Measures

67. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW has undertaken a review of the Bandon flood works project in respect of the impact on the locality in terms of tourism, biodiversity and public amenity; and if so, if the review has been published. [42261/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): As an integral part of the development of the Bandon flood defence scheme, the Office of Public Works commissioned an extensive Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which was produced at the time of the Public Exhibition of the scheme in 2012.

The study examined the likely direct and indirect impacts of the scheme on human beings, flora and fauna, geology and soils, water, air and noise, landscape, cultural heritage, material assets and their interrelationships, and set out specific mitigation measures to offset and reduce potential environmental and natural impacts. The full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is available on the project website at <http://bandonfrs.ie>. Following detailed design of the scheme, OPW commissioned an addendum to the EIS to assess further possible impacts under the same headings and provided further mitigation measures.

Prior to the Confirmation of the Scheme by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), DPER commissioned an independent review of the EIS to fulfil the requirements of the relevant Environmental Regulations (European Union (Environmental Impact Assessment) Arterial Drainage Regulations 2012). The Scheme was confirmed on the 4th of April 2016 subject to Conditions based on expert recommendations from the independent review, which included the introduction of a Schedule of Environmental Commitments based on the substantial mitigation and monitoring measures as proposed in the EIS and associated documents. OPW has not initiated any further review of the Bandon flood works project in respect of its impacts. However, throughout the construction phase of the Scheme, and following its substantial completion in October of this year, the measures contained in the Schedule of Environmental Commitments have been implemented.

OPW recognises that the construction of any flood relief scheme is likely to have temporary adverse effects. OPW believes that the nett benefit for the town of now having effective flood defences in places outweighs the mitigated short term impacts.

Over many years, Bandon has been badly affected by periodic severe flood events that greatly adversely affected the economic and general well-being of the town. Although it will take time for the river and its environs to recover fully from the impacts, the town's economic and social prosperity is considered to be enhanced due to having the threat of periodic flooding greatly diminished - to the 1 in 100-year flood event standard of flood protection. In addition, scheme elements such as improvements to Bandon Bridge, the construction of a new pedestrian footbridge and other public realm enhancements have improved the fabric of the town and allow for greater enjoyment of the town for its citizens and for visitors to Bandon.

Questions Nos. 68 to 70, inclusive, answered with Question No. 62.

Flood Prevention Measures

71. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the contract between the OPW and a company (details supplied) in Cork city in respect of the original contract value related to public realm and flood defences and current estimates for work. [42265/20]

73. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the

status of the contract between the OPW and a company (details supplied) in Cork city in respect of the original contract value related to public realm and flood defences and current estimates for work. [42267/20]

74. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the contract between the OPW and a company (details supplied) in Cork city in respect of the original contract value related to public realm and flood defences and current estimates for work. [42268/20]

75. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the contract between the OPW and a company (details supplied) in Cork city in respect of the original contract value related to public realm and flood defences and current estimates for work. [42269/20]

76. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the contract between the OPW and a company (details supplied) in Cork city in respect of the original contract value related to public realm and flood defences and current estimates for work. [42270/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 71 and 73 to 76, inclusive, together.

The Office of Public Works (OPW), in conjunction with Cork City Council, is currently developing the Lower Lee Flood Relief Scheme (LLFRS). The OPW appointed Arup Consulting Engineers (Design consultants), and Ryan Hanley in association with MKOS (Environmental consultants), following open tender competitions in 2013, to develop the scheme and bring it through all stages to full implementation.

Both procurements were undertaken using the Public Works Contract (PWC) Forms of Tender and Standard Conditions of Engagement. The scope of the tendered work was defined on the known requirements at tender stage, but also included the undertaking of detailed specific investigations. As is usual in these types of projects, these investigations highlighted the need for further analysis and input in respect of hydrology, hydraulic modelling, public consultations and environmental assessments. While it is acknowledged that overall expenditure will exceed the initial tender sums, such additions to the tender sum are necessary and do not render the contract materially different. It would be neither feasible nor cost effective to re-tender services once a given increase in additional work is reached, as this would cause inordinate delay, inconsistency in design evolution and unsustainable cost inefficiencies, including possible cost duplications arising. Given the nature of flood relief schemes generally, and this one in particular, the continuity and the evolving understanding of the environmental and technical detail is critical to the success and viability of this complex project.

There is no direct contractual relationship between OPW and the Paul Hogarth Company or Alastair Coey with respect to the LLFRS as both are sub consultants to the main design consultants.

Flood Prevention Measures

72. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of contracts related to Cork flood defence works that have been run through a restricted and or invited tender process. [42266/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Pat-

rick O'Donovan): Since the commencement of the Lower Lee Flood Relief Scheme, the Office of Public Works (OPW) has procured all its contracts through open competitions, with the exception of a minor competition for a Road Safety Audit, which was procured by seeking quotations from four companies, as this was well below the threshold limit for open competition.

Questions Nos. 73 to 76, inclusive, answered with Question No. 71.

Public Expenditure Policy

77. Deputy Paul Kehoe asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a Department is able to roll over any part of its budget that is not spent during the year to the following year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42380/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): Section 91 of the Finance Act, 2004 makes statutory provision for capital carryover of unspent capital expenditure allocations by way of deferred surrender.

Government Departments are permitted to carryover up to 10% of their capital expenditure allocations into the following year. Carryover figures are included in the Appropriation Act at Vote level in the year from which carryover is taking place.

The carryover amounts by subhead are shown separately in Part I and Part II of the Revised Estimates Volume (REV) for the year into which the carryover is being provided. The Dáil also approves the carryover as part of its approval of the REV.

To allow for spending of the capital carryover amounts in the following year I, as Minister for Public Expenditure & Reform am also required to make an Order no later than 31 March of that following year determining the capital carryover amounts by subhead, consistent with the amounts included in the Appropriation Act.

Dáil approval of the draft Ministerial Order is required before the Order can be made. Once the order is made, the carryover amounts become a first charge against the subheads specified. If the carryover sums are not spent in the year of carryover, they must be surrendered to the Central Fund.

Flood Relief Schemes

78. Deputy Sorca Clarke asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the contribution request for €40,000 by Westmeath County Council to the OPW in June 2020 was facilitated; and if so, when the payment was made. [42458/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): Westmeath County Council (WCC) working in conjunction with the Office of Public Works (OPW) is advancing works to deal with the flooding issues in Athlone. WCC is the Contracting Authority and the OPW is funding the costs of the flood relief works for the town, in addition to undertaking the construction works using its own direct labour.

The OPW received a letter dated 12th June 2020 from Westmeath County Council requesting an additional contribution of €40,000 relating to the Athlone Flood Alleviation Scheme, and discussions between the OPW and officials in Westmeath County Council are ongoing on this matter.

Departmental Bodies Data

79. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the bodies under the aegis of his Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or inisterial appointments in tabular form. [42484/20]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): As set out in tabular format below, two Statutory Offices under the aegis of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform have advisory boards. Details regarding the composition, membership and appointment of these boards is set out in the legislation which established both bodies.

The Department also provides grant funding to the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA). Neither organisation is a State Body, however both organisations adhere to the provisions of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

Organisation	Total Board Members	Appointed by the Minister following a PAS Selection Process
National Shared Services Office	9 (including the CEO as an ex-officio member)	2
Public Appointments Service	9 (including the CEO as an ex-officio member)	3
Office of Public Works	N/A	
State Laboratory	N/A	
Office of the Ombudsman (including the Office of the Information Commissioner, the Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Information, the Standards in Public Office Commission and the Commission for Public Service Appointments)	N/A	
Office of the Regulator of the National Lottery	N/A	
Special EU Programmes Body	N/A	

Grant Funded Organisations

Organisation	Total Board Members	Appointed by Minister following PAS Selection Process
Institute of Public Administration	14	0**The IPA has a 14 member representative Board, and no members are appointed by the Minister. As set out in the Articles of Association governing the Institute, nominations are sought from different bodies and sectors of the public service every two years).
Economic and Social Research Institute	N/A	

Covid-19 Pandemic

80. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the level of Covid-19 restrictions at which she expects indoor sports to resume for children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42402/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers): Individual indoor training may take place for children under the current Level 3 of the Government's Framework for Restrictive Measures. Sport Ireland guidance on individual indoor training can be found on its website at: <https://www.sportireland.ie/covid19/individual-and-indoor-training>. No group training or exercise classes are permitted. No matches or other sporting events can take place indoors or outdoors, with the exception of professional, elite and approved inter-county Gaelic games, which should all take place behind

closed doors.

While indoor sport for children is currently restricted on public health grounds, I am committed to ensuring its earliest possible safe resumption. Engagement with the sport sector is ongoing in that regard. I have recently written to all National Governing Bodies, seeking written submissions and all available evidence and data for the purposes of informing the development of tailored proposals and approaches for future mitigation measures. It is my objective that such submissions would enable the Government to review and potentially adapt the suite of public health measures currently applying to sport and exercise activities.

Covid-19 Pandemic

81. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if wedding music can be allowed under the current restrictions (details supplied); if she will provide clarity on same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42205/20]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): In line with the recent decision of the Government in regard to restrictions applying at present under Level 3, no live or loud music is permitted at indoor events – including at wedding receptions. Accordingly, performances by wedding bands at receptions are not currently permitted.

Each level of the Plan for Living with Covid-19 contains a “basket” of measures which are intended, collectively, to contribute to lowering risk of transmission in alignment with the risk level at that time. The risk level at this time has meant that some activities have not been allowed such as live music at weddings.

Further guidance on weddings is available in the Fáilte Ireland’s published operational Guidelines for Re-Opening Hotels & Guesthouses (page 40) which is available on their website <https://covid19.failteireland.ie/operational-guidelines/hotel-guesthouses/>

Broadcasting Sector

82. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the status of the report of the review of the children’s commercial communications code that was submitted by the BAI; when the report will be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42239/20]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): Section 45 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 sets out the requirement for a review of the effectiveness Children’s Commercial Communications Code by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland every 4 years and the submission of this review to the Minister.

The current code has been in existence since 2005, and has been updated on two occasions since then. The code regulates broadcast commercial communications activity aimed at children and covers matters including advertising, sponsorship and product placement.

The review of the Children’s Commercial Communications Code has been formally submitted to the Department by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and the report will be laid shortly before the Houses of the Oireachtas in line with the provisions set out in section 45(4) of the Broadcasting Act 2009.

Sports Funding

83. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if help and support will be provided to a sports club (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42254/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers): On 2 November, I announced details of an €85 million funding package for the Irish sport sector, which has been significantly impacted by the various COVID-19 restrictions imposed since March 2020.

The funding, which is being allocated by Sport Ireland, will address the existential threat to National Governing Bodies and their club networks, allowing sports organisations to offset significant losses incurred in recent months and add a semblance of certainty to planning for 2021. The significant investment will reach all levels of the sport sector with National Governing Bodies, Local Sports Partnerships and thousands of grassroots clubs across Ireland set to benefit.

The funding package includes COVID-19 funding of €70 million, which will provide support for the three main field sports organisations (the FAI, GAA and IRFU), a Resilience Fund to support the National Governing Bodies of Sport, a Sports Club Resilience Fund to support clubs, and a Sports Restart and Renewal Fund.

The funding is being invested through grant schemes with Sport Ireland's recognised funding partners, including the National Governing Bodies of Sport, Local Sports Partnerships and other funded sporting organisations. Sport Ireland will not provide funding directly to sports clubs, this funding will be accessed through programmes established by each of the National Governing Bodies in receipt of funding. It is expected that the National Governing Bodies will publish details of funding allocated to clubs under these programmes in due course.

A breakdown of the amounts allocated by Sport Ireland under each of the schemes is available on Sport Ireland's website at the following link: <https://www.sportireland.ie/news/eu85-million-provides-timely-boost-to-irish-sport-sector>

Under the Sports Restart and Renewal Fund, over €1.9 million was allocated to 1,637 clubs throughout the country as part of small grant schemes operated by Local Sports Partnerships. These schemes provide an additional mechanism to support community groups and clubs who may not be affiliated to a national organisation or recognised National Governing Body but provide a vital local service.

I am informed by Sport Ireland that the club mentioned by the Deputy received a grant of €640 through a small grant scheme operated by the relevant Local Sports Partnership.

Departmental Bodies Data

84. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the bodies under the aegis of her Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or Ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42488/20]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): As Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media I have responsibility for appointments to State Boards for State Agencies under the aegis of my Department.

Appointments to State boards are made via a process managed by the Public Appointments Service (PAS), who operates a dedicated website, www.stateboards.ie, through which it advertises such vacancies. Since this process was put in place in 2014, it has consistently been used by my Department to identify suitably qualified members of the public who are interested in serving on boards under my remit.

There are a number of specific exceptions to these arrangements including the appointment of members to a Board on the nomination of a third party organisation such as a local authority and ex officio appointments. Appointments to boards of North/South bodies are also exempt from this process and are made by the North South Ministerial Council, on the basis of 50:50 nominations from each jurisdiction. In addition, there are a number of appointments made by the Government, on my nomination, having regard to the advice of the Joint Oireachtas Committee (JOC), these are the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), RTÉ and TG4.

A table is attached detailing an overview and answer to the question you raised including the appointment processes to which I refer above.

[Board Members]

Social and Affordable Housing

85. Deputy Pa Daly asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when the net income limits for social housing will be updated in line with inflation given that the last date published was 2 June 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42372/20]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): Applications for social housing support are assessed by the relevant local authority, in accordance with the eligibility and need criteria set down in section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, as amended.

The 2011 Regulations prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy. The 2011 Regulations do not provide local authorities with any discretion to exceed the limits that apply to their administrative areas.

Under the Household Means Policy, which applies in all local authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, PRSI, Universal Social Charge and Pension-Related Deductions within the meaning of Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009. The Policy provides for a range of income disregards, and local authorities also have discretion to decide to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once-off in nature.

The income bands are expressed in terms of a maximum net income threshold for a single-person household, with an allowance of 5% for each additional adult household member, subject to a maximum allowance under this category of 10%; and 2.5% for each child, subject to a maximum allowance under this category of 10%.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household’s basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. It is important to note that the limits introduced at that time also reflected a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to

the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn, both promoting sustainable communities and also providing a degree of future-proofing.

Given the cost to the State of providing social housing, it is considered prudent and fair to direct resources to those most in need of social housing support. The current income eligibility requirements generally achieve this, providing for a fair and equitable system of identifying those households facing the greatest challenge in meeting their accommodation needs from their own resources.

However, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports in each local authority area is underway. The review will also have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

Illness Benefit

86. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the reason illness benefit is classed as a temporary payment for the purposes of social housing assessment. [42463/20]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Applications for social housing support are assessed by the relevant local authority, in accordance with the eligibility and need criteria set down in section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, as amended.

The 2011 Regulations prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy which is available at the following link <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/other/social-housing-support-household-means-policy>.

Under the Household Means Policy, which applies in all local authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, PRSI, Universal Social Charge and Pension-Related Deductions within the meaning of Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009. With the exception of specific payments as outlined in the Policy as being disregarded, all income from social insurance and social assistance payments, allowances and benefits, is assessable. However, local authorities have discretion to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once-off in nature.

Departmental Bodies Data

87. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the bodies under the aegis of his Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42482/20]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): In the overwhelming majority of cases, according to the governing statutes of the State bodies in question, I as Minister appoint the members of the Boards of the State bodies under the aegis of my Department. However, the selection processes in respect of suitable candidates for

Board membership differ considerably, from campaigns conducted by the Public Appointments Service, where a choice of suitable candidates may be presented to me as Minister, to single nominations from statutory nominators, as well as a variety of other selection processes.

The following table captures this information in respect of all the State bodies under the aegis of my Department.

Name of State Body	No. of Board Appointments Through Public Appointments Service Selection Process	No. of Board Appointments Through Other Selection Processes
An Bord Pleanála	0	9
An Fóram Uisce (the Water Forum)	Not Applicable – No Board	Not Applicable – No Board
Docklands Oversight and Consultative Forum	0	22
Ervia	6	3
Gas Networks Ireland	0	5
Heritage Council	10	0
Housing Finance Agency	5	6
Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency	2	7
Irish Water	0	5
Land Development Agency	0	9
Local Government Management Agency	0	10
National Oversight and Audit Commission	4	3
National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee	0	12
Office of the Planning Regulator	Not Applicable – No Board	Not Applicable – No Board
Ordnance Survey Ireland	8	0
Property Registration Authority	7	4
Pyrite Resolution Board	5	0
Residential Tenancies Board	10	0
Valuation Office	Not Applicable – No Board	Not Applicable – No Board
Valuation Tribunal	Not Applicable - No Board	Not Applicable - No Board
Water Advisory Body	2	3
Waterways Ireland	Not Applicable – No Board	Not Applicable – No Board

Human Rights

88. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that An Garda Síochána is engaged in an EU research project called ROXANNE which is working in collaboration with the Israeli Ministry of Public Security which is guilty of human rights abuses on a grand scale and that such a collaboration, co-operation and association undermines the ethos of Ireland as an upholder of human rights and defender of rights especially given its human rights record of abuse of prisoners, brutal killings, the torture and imprisonment of children and that the ministry itself is located in an illegal settlement in occupied territory contrary to Ireland's international policy and the EU's Euro-Med and Neighbourhood agreements. [42253/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): I understand that Project ROXANNE is an EU-funded collaborative research and innovation project under the European Union Horizon 2020 programme. The involvement of An Garda Síochána is an operational matter for the Garda Commissioner.

The participation of Israel in the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme is governed by a 2014 agreement between the EU and Israel that makes Israel subject to the relevant EU legislation establishing Horizon 2020 and its implementing rules. Article 6 of the agreement

states that the agreement does not apply to the territory occupied by Israel in 1967. Ongoing implementation and oversight of the Horizon 2020 agreement with Israel is a matter principally for the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Horizon 2020 regulations stipulate that research and innovation activities must comply with ethical principles and relevant EU and international legislation, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and the European Convention on Human Rights. Several mechanisms are in place at the level of programme implementation to ensure compliance.

The human rights situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory is a priority for Ireland and we takes every opportunity to raise human rights concerns with all appropriate interlocutors. We will continue to work with EU partners to promote coherent and effective EU action to push for an end to settlement expansion and a lasting and peaceful two-state solution.

Overseas Development Aid

89. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that an organisation (details supplied) had been placed under statutory investigation and were so when awarded funding of €280,000 in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42320/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Colm Brophy): The organisation in question was awarded a one-year grant of €250,000 under the 2018 Civil Society Fund for their project to improve access to early childcare and education and protection in Ethiopia. As far as my Department is aware, the organisation was not under statutory investigation at the time of the grant award. The Charities Regulatory Authority appointed investigators to carry out a statutory investigation into the organisation on 8 May 2020.

During the course of project implementation, the Department became aware of governance concerns with the organisation. In response, the Department took the decision first to freeze the grant - as was confirmed publicly at the time. Following the Department's review of the matter with the organisation in question, the Department was satisfied that the small portion of the grant which had been disbursed to the country of operation before the decision to freeze the grant had been spent appropriately. The Department then requested the return of the unspent balance of the grant. The remaining funds in the grant were returned in December 2019. The organisation is no longer a partner of Ireland's development aid programme.

Irish Aid

90. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to general concerns regarding State funding of charities for which individual child sponsorship is their major operational activity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42321/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Colm Brophy): Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) partners of the Department of Foreign Affairs, funded through 'Irish Aid', the Government's official development cooperation programme are expected to comply with the Charities Regulatory Authority Governance Code and guidance. They are also expected to promote best practice in the delivery of aid and in this regard must also be signatories to, and ensure compliance with, the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages.

My Department places particular emphasis on the well being of beneficiaries. For example, the largest Irish Aid CSO funding scheme requires NGO partners to maintain policies and procedures to keep safe, and prevent harm to, any children or vulnerable adults. They must ensure that such policies and procedures are implemented effectively, that regular training is provided, and that implementation is monitored and reviewed. They are also expected to inform the Department of any breakdown in safeguarding systems.

Charity fundraising activities are not supported by Irish Aid: advertisement campaigns, public relations, marketing and child sponsorship are ineligible for support.

Northern Ireland

91. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his plans for the establishment of a fund for victims and survivors of events of the troubles in Ireland similar to that established in Northern Ireland as the victim's payment scheme. [42378/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government has always sought to acknowledge and address the legitimate needs and expectations of victims' families and survivors of Troubles-related attacks in this jurisdiction.

We are deeply conscious of the enduring suffering and hardship that survivors of Troubles-related violence bear, both North and South, and indeed in Britain and Europe.

The Government established a Remembrance Commission in 2003, to administer a Scheme of Assistance and remembrance for victims of the Northern Ireland conflict, and their families, in this jurisdiction. The Commission continued in this work until 2008.

In administering the scheme, the Remembrance Commission, which operated independently of Government, funded Acknowledgement payments, Economic Hardship payments, Displacement payments and Medical payments for victims' families and those who were seriously injured in Troubles-related incidents in this jurisdiction.

Acknowledgement payments were paid to 309 applicants in respect of 109 victims killed in Troubles-related incidents in the South.

Over the lifetime of the Commission from 2003 to 2008, €3.87 million in funding was made available to individual victims and survivors of the Troubles, resident in this jurisdiction to acknowledge their suffering, and to address economic hardship and certain medical expenses.

Funding for certain ongoing medical needs was also provided for those injured in Troubles-related attacks in this jurisdiction, and following the conclusion of the Commission, this continues to be provided through the Department of Justice and Equality.

The Minister for Justice has responsibility for Victims' issues and will certainly consider and respond to representations from people in the jurisdiction who want to raise views with her on this issue. It is essential that the voices of victims and survivors are heard, and the Government is committed to addressing the legacy of the past, taking into account the many ways that it impacts on our society as a whole and the path toward deeper reconciliation and peace.

Northern Ireland

92. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the status of the inde-

pendent commission on information retrieval and the establishment of the body for which legislation was introduced four years ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42379/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government is committed to the full implementation of the Stormont House Agreement, which was collectively agreed by the two Governments and the political parties in Northern Ireland after extensive talks.

The framework of the Stormont House Agreement provided for a set of institutions to deal comprehensively and fairly with the legacy of the Troubles, and this framework included an Independent Commission on Information Retrieval (ICIR) for truth recovery, to be available to victims and survivors across the UK and Ireland.

The objective of the ICIR will be to enable victims and survivors to seek and privately receive information about the Troubles-related deaths of their next of kin.

The Irish and UK Governments concluded an agreement on the establishment of the ICIR in October 2015. As set out in that agreement, the Commission will consist of five members; an Independent Chairperson of international standing, appointed by the two Governments, one Commissioner each appointed by the Irish and UK Government, and two Commissioners appointed jointly by Northern Ireland's First Minister and deputy First Minister.

The ICIR agreement was signed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in October 2015 and laid before the Oireachtas in January 2016. The Independent Commission can only be formally established once the necessary legislation has been enacted in both jurisdictions and the two Governments have notified each other of completion of all other domestic legal procedures required to bring the agreement into force.

I have engaged extensively with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on these issues, and we remain in ongoing contact to support a way forward on the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement legacy bodies, including the ICIR.

Departmental Bodies Data

93. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the bodies under the aegis of his Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42479/20]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are no bodies under the aegis of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Defence Forces

94. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Defence the reason the rate of death in service of Air Corps personnel over the past 20 years is approximately twice the rate of death of that of Naval Service personnel when the figures are adjusted for service strength; if he and or his predecessors have ever commissioned an analysis of Defence Force personnel death rates and causes of death while in a post service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42242/20]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The total deaths in service for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service for the past 20 years as of 31 October is 204, 21 and 16 respec-

tively.

The Deputy will be aware that there is ongoing litigation in relation to allegations regarding the use of certain chemicals in the Air Corps. As the matter is subject to litigation, it would be inappropriate to comment on any speculation which may impact on such litigation.

Air Corps

95. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Defence the breakdown of Air Corps personnel deaths by categories of non-accidental death and accidental death while in service for the past 20 years to date. [42243/20]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The total deaths in service for the Air Corps since 2000 as of 30 November 2020 is 21.

The Military Authorities have advised that six of those deaths relate to accidents, four of which occurred while the personnel in question were on duty. Fifteen deaths were non-accident related.

Defence Forces Data

96. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Defence the number of promotional positions waiting to be filled throughout the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42467/20]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The table below outlines the number of vacancies that exist in the PDF as at 31st October 2020. Vacancies are filled on an ongoing basis in line with promotional arrangements and, in certain cases, direct entry competitions.

It is normal, at a particular point in time, for some ranks to be oversubscribed and others to be undersubscribed. For example, whilst there are vacancies at the rank of Captain there are currently substantially more Lieutenants than are provided for in the establishment.

Vacancies as at 31/10/2020

Rank	Vacancies
Comdt	9
Capt	106
Sgt Maj	2
CS	9
CQMS	2
Sgt	271
Cpl	347

Departmental Bodies Data

97. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Defence the bodies under the aegis of his Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42474/20]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The only State body currently under the aegis of the Department of Defence is the Army Pensions Board. The Army Pensions Board is an independent statutory body, established under the Army Pensions Act 1927, and is based in St. Bricin's Military Hospital in Dublin.

The Act specifies that the Board shall consist of a chairman and two ordinary members. The two ordinary members must be qualified medical practitioners of whom one must be an officer of the Army Medical Corps. The chairman and the non military ordinary member are appointed by the Minister for Defence with the concurrence of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform through the Public Appointments Service. The Army Medical Corps ordinary member is appointed by the Minister for Defence on the recommendation of the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces.

Pension Provisions

98. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education when a person (details supplied) is entitled to claim their pension; the amount available to them in their pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42165/20]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I am happy to confirm that the person to whom the Deputy refers is entitled to pension benefits from the Department of Education from the date of their 60th birthday. These benefits are payable upon application.

Officials from the Pension Unit of my department have made contact with the person concerned and have issued to them, by post, a statement of benefits to which they are entitled, including the pension amount, along with an application form for retirement benefits.

The benefits due will be paid with effect from the person's 60th birthday, upon receipt of the completed application form to the Pension Unit of my Department.

School Facilities

99. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the number of primary schools that have a kitchen by county in tabular form. [42166/20]

100. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the number of post-primary schools that have a kitchen by county in tabular form. [42167/20]

101. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the number of special schools that have a kitchen by county in tabular form. [42168/20]

102. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the number of schools that have a kitchen by county in tabular form. [42170/20]

103. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the percentage of primary schools that have a kitchen. [42171/20]

104. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the percentage of post-primary schools that have a kitchen. [42172/20]

105. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the percentage of special schools that have a kitchen. [42173/20]

106. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the number of primary schools that have a canteen by county in tabular form. [42175/20]

107. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the number of post-primary schools that have a canteen by county in tabular form. [42176/20]

108. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the number of special schools that have a canteen by county in tabular form. [42177/20]

109. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the number of schools that have a canteen by county in tabular form. [42179/20]

110. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the percentage of primary schools that have a canteen. [42180/20]

111. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the percentage of post-primary schools that have a canteen. [42181/20]

112. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the percentage of special schools that have a canteen. [42182/20]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 99 to 112, inclusive, together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not hold details of schools with kitchens and/or canteens, or those without such facilities.

My Department has in place detailed design guidelines for primary and post-primary schools. These guidelines, which are available on my Department's web-site, currently provide for a standard range of servery and eating facilities in the design of new and refurbished schools.

In Primary schools, a servery of 8.0m² in area is provided. At Post Primary level a kitchenette, 25m² in area, is provided off the General Purpose/Dining Area. These facilities are not intended to be full commercial type kitchens where food is prepared or cooked.

Special Educational Needs

113. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education the reason there are no national standardisation of procedures or governance in relation to the treatment of special needs children in schools; if there are inspectors dedicated to inspecting special needs services in schools; the reason her Department is not in a position to recommend programmes in cases in which it has been recommended that an IT device is best suited to teach a particular child; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42234/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the board of management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school in accordance with the Education Act, 1998 and has responsibility for operating the school efficiently and effectively. In line with the Act, the principal teacher is responsible for the day to day management of the school including the guidance and direction of teachers and other staff.

In relation to the inspection of schools, the core elements of the work of the Inspectorate are the evaluation of the work of teachers, schools and centres for education, and the supply of advice and support in relation to educational provision. To fulfil that function, the Inspectorate

uses a range of inspection models to evaluate schools and other learning settings.

These range from one-day, unannounced incidental inspections, to more intensive whole-school evaluations and inspections that follow-through on how schools have implemented recommendations made in previous inspection reports.

The Inspectorate has developed inspection models for special educational needs at primary (SEN-P) and at post-primary (SEN-PP) levels. Inspectors engage in a comprehensive programme of training prior to conducting these inspections. They also engage in a programme of continuous professional development in the area of special educational needs. The focus of the SEN inspections is on the outcomes for pupils with special educational needs in schools and on the extent to which schools use the resources it receives to improve outcomes for pupils with special educational needs.

In relation to the provision of assistive technology support, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports, including assistive technology. SENOs make recommendations to my Department where assistive technology is required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in making such recommendations, as set out in Circular 0010/2013.

In order to qualify for equipment under the assistive technology scheme, a child must have been diagnosed with a physical or communicative disability and must also have a recommendation in a professional assessment that the equipment is essential in order to allow the child to access the curriculum. It must also be clear that the existing I.T. equipment in the school is insufficient to meet the child's needs.

All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. It is open to parents to contact SENOs directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available at: www.ncse.ie/seno-contact-list"

School Accommodation

114. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Education the status of an application for accommodation for a school (details supplied). [42244/20]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I can confirm to the Deputy that an application for temporary accommodation was received from the school today 9th December. The application will be assessed and a decision will be conveyed to the school when the assessment process has been completed.

Schools Building Projects

115. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education if a school (details supplied) will be included in the next tender bundle for its building project; if the required documentation is being prepared; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42273/20]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I wish to advise the Deputy that a tender process is ongoing for the establishment of a new framework of contractors for delivery of a bundle of design and build projects which is expected to be completed in Quarter 1 of 2021. This school building project will be included in a subsequent bundle of projects, to be tendered to the new framework when established, which is expected to be Quarter 2 of 2021.

Tender documents are currently in preparation.

Special Educational Needs Staff

116. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Education if her attention has been drawn to the ongoing problem with resourcing of special needs assistants at a school (details supplied); her plans to resolve this problem; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42276/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The NCSE has responsibility for planning and coordinating school supports for children with special educational needs including the allocation of SNAs and reviews. The Department does not have a role in making individual school determinations. Accordingly, the question has been referred to the NCSE for direct reply.

The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme is designed to provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. Such support is provided in order to facilitate the attendance of those pupils at school and also to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the pupils concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource. The deployment of SNAs within schools is a matter for the individual Principal/Board of Management of the school. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated.

It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

Schools were notified of the arrangements for the allocation of SNA support in respect of students in mainstream classes for the current school year. The arrangements include the following provisions:

- 2019/20 mainstream class SNA allocations were frozen, from the date of issue of Circular 0030/2020, and have automatically rolled over into the current school year. This means that no school received an allocation less than that which they have on the date of issue of the Circular and existing SNAs currently in standard SNA posts were allowed to continue in these posts for the current school year in the normal way.

- A diagnosis of a disability, or a psychological or other professional report, was not 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 would 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, are dealt with by way of the exceptional review process.

The exceptional review process for mainstream allocations is available to schools throughout the current school year.

Detailed information on the NCSE exceptional review process is published on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie.

A school can appeal the outcome of an exceptional review and details of how to do this are here <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GuidanceSchoolAppealing-Exceptional-Review-outcome.docx>

The NCSE have advised that an initial exceptional review has been processed for the school. A further exceptional review application was submitted by the school and is currently being processed.

Special Educational Needs

117. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Education the reason for the cutting of SNA hours for a child (details supplied); and if the matter will be examined and resolved to ensure that proper supports are provided for them. [42277/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The NCSE has responsibility for planning and coordinating school supports for children with special educational needs including the allocation of SNAs and reviews. The Department does not have a role in making individual school determinations. Accordingly, the question has been referred to the NCSE for direct reply.

The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme is designed to provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. Such support is provided in order to facilitate the attendance of those pupils at school and also to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the pupils concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource. The deployment of SNAs within schools is a matter for the individual Principal/Board of Management of the school. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated.

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- A diagnosis of a disability, or a psychological or other professional report, was not 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 would 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, are dealt with by way of the exceptional review process.

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A school can appeal the outcome of an exceptional review and details of how to do this are here <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GuidanceSchoolAppealing-Exceptional-Review-outcome.docx>

The NCSE have advised that an initial exceptional review for the school has been processed this school year. A further exceptional review application was submitted by the school and is currently being processed.

Schools Building Projects

118. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Education the status of and the time-frame for the planning and start of the new school campus for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42279/20]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The building project referred to by the Deputy is being delivered under my Department's Design and Build Programme.

I am pleased to advise the Deputy that planning permission has been secured for the project.

My Department is currently in the process of establishing a Framework of Design and Build Contractors to which Design and Build projects can be tendered. Once this framework is established, it is intended that this project will be tendered as soon as possible thereafter.

In the interim, my Department and its Project Management team are liaising with a third party developer to establish a joint programme for the construction of the required road network to service the site. This is a condition of the planning permission and both my Department and the third party developer will be liaising with Cork County Council over the coming months with regard to satisfying those planning conditions. It is envisaged that the construction of the required roads and the construction of the schools will be progressed in tandem.

The school authorities will be kept informed as the project progresses.

Road Safety

119. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Education the additional resources that will be provided to local authorities to ensure that there are adequate road safety measures in place including footpaths for children walking to a school (details supplied) in County Longford given the specific reference to physical activity amongst children in the programme for Government. [42447/20]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The issue of road safety measures in the road network outside the area of vested school sites such as road signage, traffic calming measures, car parking and pedestrian facilities are the responsibility of the relevant Local Authority. Local Authorities have the power to decide on road safety measures outside schools to ensure that measures are in place to protect the safety of local school children.

School Facilities

120. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education if she will review correspondence (details supplied); if her attention has been drawn to the issue; her plans to protect this facility; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42470/20]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has recently been made aware of the proposal by the school authority in question. My Department is considering same and will be communicating with the school authority shortly. In such cases local consultation, which includes the consideration of parents, is necessary and will form part of the final assessment process.

Departmental Bodies Data

121. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Education the bodies under the aegis of her Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42475/20]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Details of the bodies under the aegis and the composition of the respective State Boards that fall under the remit of my Department are available in the attached table. The details are also available on my Department's website at the following link;

<https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Agencies/Details-of-Membership-of-State-Boards/>

As the Deputy will be aware, individuals may be nominated for appointment by various organisations arising from the terms in the relevant legislation regarding the Body concerned.

[Board Members]

Food Poverty

122. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education if schools will be permitted

to use funds from the social inclusion unit to supply families in poverty with food during the Christmas 2020 period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42523/20]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The School Meals Programme is operated by the Department of Social Protection and provides funding towards provision of food services for disadvantaged school child through two schemes;

- The statutory Urban School Meals Scheme for primary schools is operated by Local Authorities and part-financed by the DSP.

- The non-statutory School Meals Local Projects Scheme (SMLPS) provides funding directly from the DSP to primary schools, secondary schools and local groups and voluntary organisations which operate their own school meals projects.

The objective of the programme 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. Research shows the value of the provision of adequate and nutritious meals for a child's health, learning, attention and educational achievement. The programme is an important component of policies to encourage school attendance and extra educational achievement. The school meals programme does not in general operate during school holidays.

In light of the nationwide school closure due to Covid-19 precautionary measures, the Government announced on March 26th that the school meals programme would continue, thus schools made arrangements for continued provision of school meals during the school closure period.

As an exceptional measure, since schools had been closed and given the prevailing circumstances at the time, the Department of Social Protection subsequently permitted schools to maintain the service during the Easter and summer holidays in 2020 if they wished to do so, using the funding provided by that Department under the School Meals Programme. Schools have re-opened since the end of August and the school meals programme has been operating as normal in schools.

Any decision in relation to extending the provision over the Christmas school holiday period in 2020 is a matter for the Department of Social Protection.

State Examinations

123. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education if her attention has been drawn to disruptions in learning for students particularly final year students in post-primary schools due to teacher and student absences; the way in which this is being factored into plans for State examinations in 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42524/20]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): My Department is acutely aware of the disruption that was caused to students as a result of school closures resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

My Department published a suite of helpful guidance for the safe and sustainable operation of schools after they re-opened. Each school is required to have a COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe operation through the prevention, early detection and control of COVID-19 in line with public health advice. This guidance is focused on the practical steps schools must take to minimise the risk of transmission of infection.

The Health Protection Surveillance Centre and HSE has published guidance in relation to the return to school for at risk groups. The advice confirms that for the vast majority of children, can return to school and it is important for the overall health and wellbeing for children to attend school. This is consistent with public health advice internationally. The guidance is available at the following link.

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/education-guidance/HSE%20advice%20on%20return%20to%20school.pdf>

My Department has published guidance to support schools in making adapted education provision for pupils/students with an underlying medical condition who cannot return to school because they are medically certified as being at very high risk to COVID-19.

The guidance for primary schools on supporting such pupils is available via the following link: <https://assets.gov.ie/85746/9ff54b35-352e-4cdb-b93b-68a25ac7c619.pdf>

The guidance for post-primary schools on supporting such students is available via the following link <https://assets.gov.ie/86732/17f3cc49-72ad-4986-98fc-51037d93369e.pdf>

The guidance provides that supports will be provided for these pupils/students through designated teachers from within the staffing resources of the school. Schools have discretion to manage and redistribute their teaching support resources in order to best meet the learning needs of their pupils/students, including pupils/students at ‘very high risk’ to COVID-19. Facilitating engagement with and among pupils is essential to their learning experience and maintaining their social and emotional development.

Teachers can facilitate this through online interaction, providing feedback on work completed, organising project work that pupils can complete as part of a group and providing learning experiences based on pair work and group work. Early and ongoing two-way communication between the pupil’s school, class teacher, designated teacher where relevant, and the home will be essential to supporting the pupils’ engagement with their learning and their continuous connection with their classmates and school community.

Overall responsibility for ensuring that pupils/students who are at very high risk to COVID-19 receive appropriate support to engage adequately with learning remains with the school in which they are enrolled.

My Department has also published guidance in respect of the COVID -19 operational supports for Primary and Post Primary schools to fully and safely reopen in a sustainable way while minimising risk associated with COVID-19. This is available at www.gov.ie/backtoschool

The operational supports include funding of approx. €84.7 million so that schools can employ replacement teachers, SNAs and administrative staff. There is additional funding of €41.2 million, for substitution in primary schools. This will provide more certainty on the availability of substitutes for primary schools and cover substitutions that are not covered by existing schemes. The Supply Panel Scheme has been expanded nationwide and over 300 posts have been allocated to provide substitute cover through these panels. The purpose of supply panels is to support schools to manage the sick leave and other absences by having a supply of teachers to meet substitution needs when required. Schools will continue to be able to access substitute teachers through the normal process, particularly if they are not connected to a supply panel.

On 21 August, I announced a series of changes that would be made to assessment arrangements for both Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate examinations for 2021. This announcement was accompanied by a published document detailing these changes, Assessment Arrangements for Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate Examinations 2021, and forms part of the Roadmap

for the Full Return to School.

These arrangements are designed to take account of the disrupted learning experienced by students during the 2019/20 school year and to factor in for some further possible loss of learning time in the 2020/21 school year as a contingency measure. As the loss of learning through school closures will have affected students' engagement with their course of study in different ways, the adjustments put in place will play to students' strengths by leaving intact the familiar overall structure of the examinations, while incorporating additional choice. The adjustments were arrived at through discussions between my Department, the State Examinations Commission (SEC), the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and key stakeholders.

As schools have significant autonomy in determining how to sequence and pace learning for students in their schools, no centrally prescribed adjustment of the curriculum and courses of study would have been effective for students taking the certificate examinations in 2021. Consequently, the most appropriate way to reflect and take account of the challenges for students that have occurred in 2019/20 and may occur in 2020/21 was to incorporate adjustments to the certificate examinations in 2021.

These changes to the national assessment arrangements were made with due regard for the principles of equity, fairness and integrity, as these principles apply to assessment and examinations and refer to student to-student, subject-to-subject, and year-to-year comparisons over time. The changes provide reassurance to students, their parents/guardians, teachers and schools.

Further clarification on the assessment arrangements for 2021 for certain subjects will issue shortly.

It is my firm intention to operate the conventional 2021 state examinations, with appropriate contingency built in, in line with prevailing public health advice. This is shared by the SEC, which has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

The SEC has valuable learning from the experience of running the 2020 November examinations, notwithstanding that the numbers taking these examinations is significantly lower than the number due to sit examinations in 2021. The measures relating to COVID-19 that have been put in place for the November examinations will be considered as part of the planning for examinations in 2021.

The SEC has commenced its contingency planning for the 2021 examinations, recognising that a flexible and agile approach is necessary in light of the continuing fast-moving environment linked to COVID-19. It is not intended that there would be any change to the length of the written examinations. Project briefs for relevant subjects have issued earlier than usual and practical coursework will be submitted two weeks earlier than normal as a contingency measure. Teachers are being encouraged to plan and undertake these projects as early as possible in the programme of study. These changes to the Leaving Certificate assessment arrangements for 2021 are designed to provide reassurance to students, their parents/guardians, teachers and schools.

In addition, an advisory group of key stakeholders, which advised on altered arrangements for the 2020 state examinations, was reconvened on 25 November in an online meeting to perform a similar role in respect of the 2021 examinations. The advisory group includes representatives of students, parents, teachers, school leadership and management bodies, the SEC, the NCCA and the Department, including the National Educational Psychological Service. Repre-

sentatives from the Higher Education Authority and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science are also represented on the advisory group to ensure liaison with the third level sector.

Other documents published by my Department to support the return to school include Guidance for Practical Subjects in Post-Primary Schools and Centres for Education and Returning to school: Guidance on learning and school programmes for post primary school leaders and teachers. These documents provide guidance for teachers and schools that is specific to each practical subject area, so that students can be facilitated to actively engage with their learning. All documentation published is available on www.gov.ie/backtoschool.

School Staff

124. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education the number of teachers in primary and post-primary schools who have recorded absence from school; and the duration of the absence since the reopening of schools in tabular form. [42525/20]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The information sought by the Deputy is not readily available. Officials in my Department are collating the information and I will arrange to have it forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

Special Educational Needs

125. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education if administrative status will be granted to all primary schools operating two or more special classes. [42526/20]

126. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education the cost associated with granting administrative status to all primary schools operating two or more special classes. [42527/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 125 and 126 together.

Special class provision in mainstream primary and post primary schools is a central element of the continuum of education provision in place to support children with special educational needs. This continuum extends from fulltime placement in mainstream classes and special classes through to full time enrolment in special schools with a number of options in between.

My Department supports this continuum through a range of dedicated supports in line with the needs of the child. These supports include the provision of teachers, special needs assistants and psychological support from the National Psychological Service. In addition, there are specialist supports provided by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) including extensive professional development programmes for principals and teachers and advice for schools, parents and families.

The overall aim of the continuum is to ensure that every child is supported in the journey of realising their potential through education in an inclusive and caring school environment.

I am keenly aware of the huge contribution made by all Principals, including teaching Principals, in supporting this continuum.

Currently, the allocation of an administrative principal to a school is on the basis of a school's

enrolment on the previous 30th September, as set out in Appendix B of the staffing schedule. The enrolment required for the appointment of an administrative principal is currently 176, 143 and 116 in ordinary schools, DEIS Band 2 schools and DEIS Band 1 schools respectively. Where schools are operating 2 or more Autism Special Classes, the required enrolment for the allocation of an administrative principal is reduced to 113 for ordinary and DEIS Band 2 schools and 81 in DEIS Band 1 schools.

There are no plans to change these arrangements at this time.

As part of the additional funding to schools this year, €10.2m has been allocated specifically to support Principals and Deputy Principals who undertake teaching duties in primary schools. This funding will provide each teaching principal with a minimum of one release day per week, and release days for Deputy Principals in those schools that have an existing administrative principal for this school year. More than 1,700 primary schools with teaching principals have benefitted from the increase in release days.

Teaching Principals in schools with special classes are allocated a further 4 release days, in addition to the 37 allocated to each school with a teaching principal.

There are arrangements in place for schools to cluster their principal release days into a full-time post which will assist teaching principals to more effectively plan their release days for the benefit of the school.

School Meals Programme

127. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of primary schools that provide school meals by county in tabular form. [42184/20]

128. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of post-primary schools that provide school meals by county in tabular form. [42185/20]

129. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of special schools that provide school meals by county in tabular form. [42186/20]

130. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of alternative education settings including Youthreach and related schemes that provide school meals by county in tabular form. [42187/20]

131. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of schools that provide school meals by county in tabular form. [42188/20]

132. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the percentage of primary schools that provide school meals. [42189/20]

133. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the percentage of post-primary schools that provide school meals. [42190/20]

134. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the percentage of special schools that provide school meals. [42191/20]

135. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the percentage of alternative education settings including Youthreach and related schemes that provide school meals. [42192/20]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 127 to 135, inclusive, together.

The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to some 1,557 schools and organisations benefitting 227,000 children. The objective of the programme 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.

In recent years entry to the school meals programme has been confined to DEIS schools in addition to schools identified by Department of Education and Skills as having levels of concentrated disadvantage that would benefit from access to the 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 programme. Participation in the scheme is entirely voluntary with the onus being on the individual eligible schools to make an application. Schools and organisations must reapply for funding in advance of each school year and are required to submit detailed records at the end of the school year. Funding is based on a rate of payment per meal, per child, per day.

The number of schools, primary schools, post-primary schools, special schools and alternative education settings that provide school meals by county in tabular form is in table 1 of the attached Tabular Statement.

The percentage of primary schools, post-primary schools, special schools and alternative education settings that provide school meals in tabular form is in table 2 of the attached Tabular Statement.

Table 1 – Number providing School Meals by County

	Primary Schools	Post-Primary Schools	Special Schools	Alternative Education Settings	Number of Schools
Carlow	19	6	2	5	32
Cavan	13	3	1	11	28
Clare	20	6	2	6	34
Cork	54	26	10	27	117
Donegal	122	20	2	9	153
Dublin	189	77	17	80	363
Galway	48	13	5	4	70
Kerry	37	8	3	11	59
Kildare	14	7	1	2	24
Kilkenny	7	6	4	5	22
Laois	13	2	2	1	18
Leitrim	12	1	0	3	16
Limerick	26	10	3	12	51
Longford	11	7	1	2	21
Louth	15	10	1	5	31
Mayo	75	17	4	1	97
Meath	11	5	2	1	19
Monaghan	16	6	0	9	31
Offaly	20	5	1	1	27
Roscommon	21	5	1	5	32
Sligo	22	5	2	2	31

	Primary Schools	Post-Primary Schools	Special Schools	Alternative Education Settings	Number of Schools
Tipperary	31	11	3	9	54
Waterford	14	6	2	9	31
Westmeath	13	6	3	4	26
Wexford	34	11	2	8	55
Wicklow	11	4	2	2	19

Table 2 – Percentage providing School Meals

	Total Number	Number providing School Meals	% Providing School Meals
Primary Schools	3105	868	27.95%
Post-Primary Schools	722	283	39.20%
Special Schools	134	76	56.72%
Alternative Education Settings	Not available*	234	Not Available

* The total number of these types of organisations is not held.

School Meals Programme

136. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of primary schools that provide hot school meals by county in tabular form. [42193/20]

137. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of post-primary schools that provide hot school meals by county in tabular form. [42194/20]

138. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of special schools that provide hot school meals by county in tabular form. [42195/20]

139. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of alternative education settings including Youthreach and related schemes that provide hot school meals by count, in tabular form. [42196/20]

140. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of schools that provide hot school meals by county in tabular form. [42197/20]

141. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the percentage of primary schools that provide hot school meals. [42198/20]

142. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the percentage of post-primary schools that provide hot school meals. [42199/20]

143. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the percentage of special schools that provide hot school meals. [42200/20]

144. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Social Protection the percentage of alternative education settings including Youthreach and related schemes that provide hot meals. [42201/20]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 to 144, inclusive, together.

The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to some 1,557 schools and organisations benefitting 227,000 children. The objective of the programme 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 compo-

nent of policies to encourage school attendance and extra educational achievement.

Funding is based on a rate of payment per meal, per child, per day. Up until 2019, a hot meal was only provided through a dinner club which was primarily offered in schools with onsite cooking facilities.

As part of Budget 2019, funding was provided for a pilot scheme from September 2019, providing hot school meals in primary schools at a cost of €1m for 2019 and €2.5m in 2020. The pilot involved 37 schools benefitting 6,744 students for the 2019/2020 academic year and was aimed primarily at schools with no onsite cooking facilities.

Budget 2020 provided an additional €4 million in funding to extend the hot meals for children currently receiving the cold lunch option, which would allow my department to extend the hot meals to an additional 35,000 children. A decision was made to delay the extension of the hot meals to January 2021 because of the closure of schools due to the Covid-19 Pandemic from 13 March 2020. In budget 2021, I have provided an additional €5.5m for this extension from January 2021 to 35,000 primary school children currently receiving the cold lunch option. Officials from my department are currently engaging with schools in relation to this measure.

A breakdown of the number of primary schools, post-primary schools, special schools, alternative education settings and schools by county is contained in table 1 in the attached tabular statement. These figures include schools that provided a dinner club and those that operated the Hot Meals Pilot in 2019/2020.

A breakdown of the percentage of primary schools, post-primary schools, special schools, and alternative education settings is contained in table 2 in the attached tabular statement. These figures include schools that provided a dinner club and those that operated the hot school meals pilot in 2019/2020.

Table 1 – Number providing Hot Dinners and Hot School Meals

County	Primary Schools	Post-Primary Schools	Special schools	Alternative Education Settings	Total Hot Dinners and Hot Meals
Carlow	3	1	0	3	7
Cavan	1	1	1	2	5
Clare	2	0	2	3	7
Cork	4	7	0	9	20
Donegal	5	14	1	1	21
Dublin	17	24	4	43	88
Galway	3	8	2	2	15
Kerry	3	1	1	5	10
Kildare	3	3	1	1	8
Kilkenny	1	4	1	2	8
Laois	2	2	2	0	6
Leitrim	1	0	0	0	1
Limerick	4	4	1	3	12
Longford	1	5	1	2	9
Louth	3	2	1	4	10
Mayo	3	6	4	0	13
Meath	1	3	1	1	6
Monaghan	1	5	0	6	12
Offaly	1	2	1	0	4
Roscommon	1	1	2	3	7
Sligo	4	4	1	2	11
Tipperary	2	3	1	2	8

County	Primary Schools	Post-Primary Schools	Special schools	Alternative Education Settings	Total Hot Dinners and Hot Meals
Waterford	5	1	1	3	10
Westmeath	1	2	0	3	6
Wexford	1	1	1	2	5
Wicklow	2	0	0	0	2
Total:	75	104	30	102	311

Table 2 – Percentage providing Hot Dinner or Hot School Meal

	Total Number	Number providing School Meals	% Providing School Meals
Primary Schools	3105	75	2.42%
Post-Primary Schools	722	104	14.4%
Special Schools	134	30	22.39%
Alternative Education Settings	Not available*	102	Not Available

* The total number of these types of organisations is not held.

Community Employment Schemes

145. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will address the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42296/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Joe O'Brien): The Community Employment (CE) Scheme 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.

A number of new conditions were introduced to the CE Scheme in July 2017 to further support progression to employment, broaden CE access to a wider range of people and to standardise the conditions relating to the length of time a CE participant can remain on a CE scheme.

In general CE placements for new entrants aged between 21 and 55 years are for one year. CE participants who are working towards a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) major award can seek to extend their participation on CE by up to two years to enable them to reach the required standard of qualification.

In either scenario, a maximum of three consecutive year's participation on CE is permissible. A person may re-qualify for CE after a twelve month break once they satisfy the qualifying conditions. An overall lifetime limit of six years applies to all CE participants (seven years for those on a disability payment).

The person concerned completed three years on CE in April 2020. During his time on CE he studied for a QQI Major award. He will be supported on cessation of CE by the Activation Service in my Department to complete the one remaining module to attain this qualification.

His CE employment was extended due my Departments response to the pandemic. It was further extended during the recent Level 5 restrictions. Funding for this participant will cease on 15/1/2021. .

The priority for my Department is to ensure that all employment and activation programmes have the best outcomes for participants. Places on these work programmes will continue to be made available to support those who are long term unemployed and furthest removed from the

labour market, while maintaining the role of CE as an active labour market programme.

I am fully committed to the future of CE and will continue to support and improve CE for the benefit of the CE participants and the valuable contribution being made to local communities.

Social Insurance

146. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an issue in relation to voluntary contributions (details supplied) will be examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42218/20]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The voluntary contributions scheme is intended to facilitate former employees or former self-employed persons who are no longer subject to compulsory social insurance, to pay contributions directly to my Department on a voluntary basis, in order to protect their State pension (contributory), widows, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory) pension and guardian's payment (contributory) entitlements. The voluntary contributions scheme is not intended to cover short-term benefits such as illness or jobseeker's benefits nor are voluntary contributions reckonable for eligibility for invalidity pension.

To reflect the limited coverage afforded by the voluntary contributions scheme, the associated contribution charges are significantly lower than those applicable to compulsory social insurance which provides cover for short-term benefits such as jobseeker's benefit. For example, a combined employee/employer contribution of up to 15.05% of an employee's reckonable earnings is paid in respect of an employee which covers the employee for the full range of social insurance benefits. In contrast, the voluntary contribution charge is 6.6% of the preceding year's income of a former compulsory insured employee, subject to a minimum annual charge of €500.

The significant charge variance reflects the difference in the social insurance benefits covered by compulsory social insurance and voluntary social insurance. Any extension in the benefits covered by the voluntary contributions scheme would be a substantial change to the nature and scope of the scheme and would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations. Any such development would also necessitate consideration of a commensurate increase in the contribution charge.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance

147. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on a carer's allowance review for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42219/20]

Minister for 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.

I can confirm that my Department received an application for CA from the person concerned on 5 October 2020.

The evidence submitted by the person concerned was examined and the Deciding Officer decided that, although the person concerned was providing a certain amount of care, the level involved did not amount to full-time care.

In addition, the person concerned was taking part in a Community Employment (CE) Scheme. Section 247 of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005, as amended, prohibits a person engaged in a CE Scheme from claiming CA or Carer's Benefit (CARB).

Therefore, on 17 October 2020 the application was disallowed.

On 27 October 2020 additional evidence was submitted, this included a letter of cessation from the CE Scheme provider.

This evidence was examined and resulted in CA being awarded to the person concerned.

The first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 10 December 2020. Arrears of allowance due from 29 October 2020 to 09 December 2020 will also issue.

The person concerned was notified on 4 December 2020 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment

148. **Deputy Joe Flaherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection if consideration will be given to amending the pandemic unemployment payment scheme by way of a compensatory payment for publicans nationwide over 66 years of age (details supplied). [42236/20]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Pandemic Unemployment Payment is a statutory support payable to people between the ages of 18 and 66 which is consistent with other social protection schemes payable to people of working age who have lost their employment.

People aged 66 years and over are provided for through the contributory State pension or the non-contributory State means tested pension.

A person aged over 66 who is in employment may retain their State pension and employment income.

If a person does not have the required number of contributions to receive the maximum rate of State pension contributory they may qualify for an increased rate of State non-contributory pension, depending on their circumstances. People receiving the non-contributory State pension who also have employment income may have their pension payment increased if they lose their employment income due to the pandemic or if their employment income is reduced.

People aged 66 and over may also be entitled to ancillary supports which include free travel, fuel allowance, household benefits package for gas or electricity costs and living alone allowance. The fuel allowance and living alone allowance were both increased in Budget 2021 to €28.00 and €19.00 per week respectively

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.

My colleague the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment has provided for a range

of supports for businesses affected by Covid-19, including pubs, bars and nightclubs. Further information is available at the website at www.dbei.ie

I trust that this clarifies the position.

Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment

149. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) aged over 66 who has had their employment impacted by Covid-19, had been making PRSI contributions while in employment and was also in receipt of a contributory widow's pension is excluded from being eligible to apply for the pandemic unemployment payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42319/20]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) is a statutory scheme payable to people aged between 18 and 66 years of age. This is consistent with other social protection schemes payable to people of working age who have lost their employment. It also reflects the fact that people aged 66 or over do not pay any social insurance contributions.

It would appear that the person concerned has paid PRSI contributions while over the age of 66. These are refundable. To apply for a refund, a person can apply online at:

<https://services.mywelfare.ie/en/topics/statements-and-refunds/prsi-refund/>

This person's employer should also adjust their returns to reflect this.

People aged 66 and over may also be entitled to a range of ancillary supports which include free travel, fuel allowance, household benefits package for gas or electricity costs and living alone allowance.

Any person who is experiencing financial hardship may also access assistance under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme, including Exceptional and Urgent Needs Payments. Information on the supports available under this scheme is available at www.gov.ie.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

150. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection if workers who returned to work on 27 November 2020 after having received the pandemic unemployment payment for the past 17 weeks will be entitled to the Christmas bonus (details supplied). [42392/20]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): This year, the Christmas Bonus will be paid to over 1.6 million eligible customers in the week beginning 7th December 2020 at an estimated cost of €389 million. The respective figures in 2019 were 1.2 million customers and €279 million.

On an exceptional basis this year, the Christmas Bonus will also be paid to recipients of the PUP provided they have been in receipt of the payment - continuously or otherwise - for at least 4 months (17 weeks) since March. Any person in receipt of the PUP for any one day of the period Friday 27th November to Thursday 3rd December will receive the Christmas Bonus payment provided they also meet the 17 week requirement.

It is estimated that approximately 284,000 people or 82% of those receiving payment of the PUP this week will receive the Christmas Bonus, totalling almost €84 million. In addition, the Bonus payment will also be made to recipients of Jobseeker's Benefit/Allowance who have been in receipt of a jobseeker payment for at least 4 months and are in payment on the day the Christmas Bonus is paid. In previous years, recipients of jobseeker payments for less than 15 months did not qualify for a Christmas Bonus. Nearly 55,000 individuals will benefit from this decision at an estimated cost of almost €12 million.

I was very pleased to obtain the approval of Government for these payments. There are many individuals and families who have lost their job or business as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and have been out of work for several months now. The Bonus will help to ease the financial burden on them at this very difficult time.

For administrative and legal reasons, the Bonus payment has always been paid by reference to a specific week, and this is the standard practice across all social welfare schemes. Any change to that practice would have to be considered in the overall policy, administrative and budgetary context.

I hope that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

151. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total amount paid to Turas Nua and Seetec for the operation of the JobPath scheme in each year for the period 2015 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42393/20]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): JobPath service providers are paid on the basis of performance and with the exception of the initial registration fee, payments are made only when a client has achieved sustained employment. The overall cost of JobPath will be determined by the number of people who participate in the programme and the number who get sustainable jobs.

The Department does not publish the individual payments to the JobPath companies as these are commercially sensitive. The total paid to the JobPath providers from 2015 to date is €247.9m.

The annual total expenditure on JobPath is as follows:

2015 - €1.2m;

2016 - €25.2m;

2017 - €57.4m;

2018 - €71.7m

2019 - €58.6m

2020 - €33.8m (to date)

Total - €247.9m

JobPath Programme

152. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the annual staff turnover rate within Turas Nua and Seetec from 2015 to date; if she will address concerns that the annual turnover rate in both companies is exceptionally high; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42394/20]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There are a number of key features which enable my Department to monitor all aspects of the JobPath providers' performance and ensure contract compliance. To date no concerns have been raised in regard to exceptionally high staff turnover rates.

Inspections are a key component of how my Department monitors compliance with the service level agreement and the contract generally, including staffing levels. The inspections will be conducted for the duration of the JobPath contract. The terms and conditions of employment and staff recruitment and retention policies remain the responsibility of the contractors.

Findings from inspections have on occasion identified staff changes in particular offices in both Turas Nua and Seetec. This would have been noted in particular in 2019 at a time of historically high employment levels with the consequence that the skills of personal advisers were in high demand in the Irish labour market.

Any issues noted in inspection reports, including staffing matters are brought to the attention of the contractor who must submit a response setting out the corrective actions taken to the satisfaction of the Department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Non-Contributory)

153. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the correspondence a person (details supplied) sent in response to questions in relation to a non-contributory pension on 30 September 2020 reaffirmed the previous data available; if the person should have had a reasonable expectation to have a decision on their backpay at that point; and if the Minister can advise what new information if any prompted the new series of questions raised in correspondence of 24 November 2020. [42407/20]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The state pension non-contributory entitlement of the person concerned is currently being reviewed by a Deciding Officer. On 30 September 2020, a request for information issued to the person concerned requesting documentation which was outstanding on that date. The requested documentation was required by the Deciding Officer in their consideration of a possible period of backdated pension entitlement for the person concerned.

Following examination by the Deciding Officer of certain financial statements provided, an explanation of specific financial transactions was sought on 24 November 2020 by the Deciding Officer, before they can accurately determine the means of the person concerned during the relevant period, which in turn will determine their possible pension entitlement.

On receipt, the information received will be examined by the Deciding Officer, who will respond to the person concerned without delay.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance

154. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a fuel allowance for person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42417/20]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The person concerned was awarded disability allowance (DA) from 12 February 2020. They were also awarded an increase for a qualified adult allowance (IQA) and free fuel allowance (FF) from that date.

FF allowance is a means tested payment, payable to people who either live alone or only with certain other qualified people. It is a household payment and as such the entire household must satisfy the criteria

Based on the information provided to the Department, the person concerned no longer qualifies for FF from 9 September 2020 as their household now includes people who are not in a qualifying category.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment

155. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of appeals by county that were upheld regarding the payment level of the pandemic unemployment payment in tabular form. [42460/20]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that 256 appeals in relation to the pandemic unemployment payment have been registered to date. The first such appeal was registered on 5 October 2020. 254 of these registered appeals are with the Department for the Deciding Officer submission which is required as part of the appeal process. The remaining two appeals have been closed (one was withdrawn and one was cancelled as it had been registered in error). Therefore, no appeal decisions have been made to date in respect of the pandemic unemployment payment.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Schemes Data

156. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a comprehensive list of the payments that are classified as temporary. [42462/20]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): It is understood from the Deputy that the context for her question is the treatment of “temporary” social protection payments by local authorities for the purposes of, but not exclusively for, eligibility for Social Housing Support.

There are a very wide range of payments in the social welfare code, covering social insur-

ance and means-tested payments. Some payments have a finite duration, such as Illness Benefit which is paid for a maximum of 2 years, while other payments can be paid for an undefined period once the recipient continues to satisfy the qualifying criteria for the scheme - for example, Invalidity Pension.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, a number of additional schemes have been introduced to provide income support. These include the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) and the enhanced COVID Illness Benefit.

It is, however, a matter for the local authorities in question to determine what payments they regard as temporary for the purposes of accessing supports provided by them. Full details of payments provided by the Department are available on www.gov.ie/dsp

Departmental Bodies Data

157. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Social Protection the bodies under the aegis of her Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or Ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42486/20]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The statutory bodies operating under the aegis of my Department are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority, the Pensions Council and the Social Welfare Tribunal.

Details relating to these Boards, as requested by the Deputy, are outlined in the tables below:

CITIZENS INFORMATION BOARD

Name of Board Member	Term of appointment	Basis of appointment
Ms. Ita Mangan (Chairperson)	12/06/2015 – 11/12/2020	Exemption - Section 9.1.4 of the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards, Nov 2014
Dr. Joanne McCarthy	15/06/2016 - 14/06/2021	PAS Process
Mr. Cearbhall O Meadhra	15/06/2016 - 14/06/2021	PAS Process
Mr. John Saunders	15/06/2016 - 14/06/2021	PAS Process
Mr. Niall Mulligan	15/06/2016 - 14/06/2021	PAS Process
Ms. Tina Leonard	15/06/2016 - 14/06/2021	PAS Process
Mr. Ian Power	15/06/2016 - 14/06/2021	PAS Process
Ms. Mary Higgins	15/06/2016 - 14/06/2021	PAS Process
Ms. Mary Doyle	27/04/2019 - 26/04/2024	PAS Process
Mr. James Clarke	05/09/2016 - 04/09/2021	Exemption - Section 9.1.8 of the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards, Nov 2014. Nominated by the Money Advice and Budgeting Services
Mr. Tim Duggan	12/06/2012 - 31/08/2022	Section 9.4 (a) of Comhairle Act 2000 (as amended) - Ex officio: Department of Social Protection
Ms. Nicola Walshe	13/03/2017-04/11/2022	Section 9.4 (c) of Comhairle Act 2000 (as amended): Member of CIB staff

There are currently three (3) vacancies on the board of CIB. Arrangements are underway for the filling of these vacancies.

PENSIONS AUTHORITY

Name of Board Member	Term of appointment	Basis of appointment
Mr. David Begg (Chair)	13/01/16 – 12/01/26	Ministerial appointment*
Mr. Michael J McGrath (Department of Finance)	17/02/20 – 06/03/24	Ministerial appointment**

* Ministerial appointment

** Ex-officio member

There is currently one (1) vacancy on the Board of the Pensions Authority.

PENSIONS COUNCIL

Name of Board Member	Term of appointment	Basis of appointment
Mr. Jim Murray (Chair)	03/02/15 – 02/07/21	Ministerial appointment*
Ms. Roma Burke	03/02/15 – 02/02/25	Ministerial appointment***
Ms. Deirdre Cummins	10/06/19 – 09/06/24	Ministerial appointment***
Mr. Eoin Dormer	03/02/20 – 02/02/25	Ministerial appointment**
Ms. Kirstie Flynn	03/02/15 – 02/07/21	Ministerial appointment***
Mr. Stephen Gillick	03/02/20 – 02/02/25	Ministerial appointment***
Mr. Brenden Kennedy	03/02/15 – 02/02/25	Ministerial appointment**
Mr. Munro O'Dwyer	03/02/20 – 02/02/25	Ministerial appointment***
Mr. Tim O'Hanrahan	10/06/19 – 09/06/24	Ministerial appointment**
Ms. Joanne Roche	10/06/19 – 09/06/24	Ministerial appointment***
Ms. Roshin Sen	03/02/20 – 02/02/25	Ministerial appointment**

* Ministerial appointment

** Ex-officio member

*** Ministerial appointment following selection from PAS shortlist

SOCIAL WELFARE TRIBUNAL

Name of Board Member	Term of appointment	Basis of Appointment
Mr. Colin Walker (Chair)	05/10/2018 - 04/10/2021	Ministerial appointment
Ms. Fiona Higgins	05/10/2018 - 04/10/2021	Ministerial appointment on recommendation of IBEC
Mr. Don O'Higgins	05/10/2018 - 04/10/2021	Ministerial appointment on recommendation of IBEC
Mr. Frank Vaughan	05/10/2018 - 04/10/2021	Ministerial appointment on recommendation of ICTU
Ms. Chris Rowland	05/10/2018 - 04/10/2021	Ministerial appointment on recommendation of ICTU

Personal Public Service Numbers

158. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will address a matter regarding the case of persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42494/20]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I can confirm that my Department has allocated Personal Public Service Numbers (PPSNs) to the individuals referred to by the Deputy. Letters issued to the solicitor concerned on 8th and 7th December 2020 respectively with details of the PPSNs.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Legislative Measures

159. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the status of the progression of the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill 2019; when he expects it to be taken at report stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42255/20]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic

O’Gorman): The Government is committed to addressing gender inequality in the workplace and the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill 2019 is an important tool in ensuring transparency on the gender pay gap. The aim of the Bill is to require employers over a certain size to publish gender pay gap information. The Bill provides that the Minister shall make regulations requiring employers to publish information relating to the pay of their employees for the purpose of showing whether there are differences in the pay of male and female employees and, if so, the scale of such differences.

As indicated at Committee Stage, the Government is considering amendments to a number of aspects of the Bill. Draft amendments will be brought to the Government for approval in the near future.

Domestic Violence

160. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if he will review the current funding programme on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42294/20]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The response to Domestic, Sexual Violence and Gender-based Violence (DSGBV) is a cross Departmental and multi-agency issue. Policy is coordinated by the Department of Justice. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has statutory responsibility under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 for the care and protection of victims of DSGBV.

I am pleased that my Department has been able to allocate additional funding of €4.7 million to Tusla to support DSGBV services across the country in 2021. A total of €30 million will be made available by DCEDIY to Tusla to fund DSGBV services. This includes a €2.7 million increase in core funding, bringing core service provision to €28 million, with an additional €2 million of one-off contingency funding being made available to help services cope with the on-going effects of COVID-19. This increase in funding reflects my personal commitment on this issue. I am hopeful that these additional resources will enable services to continue their valuable supports for victims and their families at a very vulnerable time in their lives.

It is important to note that not all funding to this sector issues via my Department. The Department of Justice allocates funding to combat domestic, sexual and gender-based violence and support victims of crime, including victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. Many voluntary organisations in the DSGBV sector have also received capital funding via the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), which is administered by local authorities on behalf of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

While funding will be crucial to our success, it is imperative that we have the right structures in place to respond as effectively as possible to DSGBV. Under the Programme for Government, we have committed to undertaking an audit of responsibility for DSGBV across Departments and State agencies. The procurement process to secure the expertise to conduct this audit is under way, in conjunction with my colleague the Minister for Justice. We expect that the audit will be completed early next year, and the Government will act on the basis of that audit.

Workplace Relations Commission

161. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth his plans to make the necessary funding available for the implementation of the

Workplace Relations Commission's agreement of August 2019 between a union (details supplied) and city and county childcare committees. [42466/20]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): Officials of my Department are currently reviewing the Workplace Relations Commission's consideration of the pay rates of the managers of the City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs).

The CCCs are one of the key support mechanisms of my Department, and I want to acknowledge the important role they play in providing vital support and guidance to early learning and care and school age childcare providers, and to parents. CCCs act as the local agent of my Department in the coordination and delivery of the national early education and childcare programmes and the implementation of Government policy at a local level, and in facilitating and supporting the development of quality, accessible ELC and SAC services for the overall benefit of children and their parents.

In 2005 the Minister for Finance sanctioned the rates payable to CCC managers as comparable to the rates applicable in the Local Authorities for Grade 6. Officials from my Department have been engaging with representatives from the CCCs, including both manager and Board of Management representatives, and their union representatives, in relation to a proposal for a review of the grading of CCC managers.

Officials from my Department will continue to engage with all parties on this matter as appropriate. It is important to note in this regard that although my Department provides annual funding to the CCCs in respect of all areas of expenditure, including salaries, it is not the employer of CCC staff, and the staff are not public sector employees. Officials have discussed this issue with employer representatives in the last week, and I understand that they intend to make a submission to the Department shortly.

Early Childhood Care and Education

162. **Deputy Joe Flaherty** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if the access and inclusion model scheme will be revised in order that ECCE providers have the option to apply for an underage exemption in the cases of children that require it (details supplied). [42226/20]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (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.

A child must have reached 2 years and 8 months of age on or prior to 31 August of the relevant programme year to be eligible for the September start date and a child cannot turn 5 years and 6 months of age during the course of the ECCE programme year.

As ECCE is a pre-school programme it is not appropriate to open it to children who have not yet reached the minimum age.

The National Childcare Scheme provides both universal and targeted supports to parents to children from the age of 6 months, with supports based on parental income. For more information on the NCS, parents can contact the NCS Parent Support Centre on 01 906 8530 or visit www.ncs.gov.ie

Adoption Services

163. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the status of the work being done by Tusla to process certificates of eligibility for adoption applications and administer necessary training specifically the application made by persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42245/20]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): As the subject matter of the Deputy’s question relates to an operational matter for Tusla, I have referred the matter to them for a direct reply.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

164. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes’ report is 3,000 or 4,000 pages in length; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42247/20]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The Final Report submitted to me by the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters is just under 3,000 pages long. Previous references to the length of the Report were given on the basis of preliminary indications by the Commission while it was finalising the Report. At that time, I had not been given sight of the Report, and I was relaying the high level figure which had been provided to me by the Commission to give some sense of the scale of the report.

As I announced on the 3 December, I am advancing arrangements to seek Government approval to publish the Final Report of the Commission of Investigation during the week of 11 January next.

For the avoidance of any doubt, the Report that will be published in January is the full Report as submitted to me by the Commission on 30 October. It will not been edited, altered or redacted in any way.

Youth Services

165. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth his plans to support scouting from the recent budget allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42274/20]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): I have secured an additional €5 million in current funding for youth services nationally as part of Budget 2021. This additional funding will be allocated to youth services in the coming year to support the delivery of universal and targeted youth services nationwide. My officials are currently working on the apportionment of these funds in the context of the publication of the Revised Estimates Volume. As such, I am not in a position as yet to provide a detailed breakdown of these allocations.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

166. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integra-

tion and Youth if he had regard to the strategic housing development planning application on the former Bessborough estate in Cork; if his attention has been drawn to the findings of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes' fifth interim report which found that the burial place of more than 800 children to be unknown (details supplied); and if such a finding gives rise to a concern that any successful application for planning could hinder any future findings in respect of the existence of burial sites on the proposed development on the land at Bessborough. [42280/20]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): I know that this is a deeply personal and sensitive issue for the former residents of the former Bessborough Mother and Baby Home, their family members and supporters. I have previously spoken with survivor representatives about their concerns and expectations for the future of this site. I have further engaged with them since news of the planning applications was highlighted to me and will continue to do so. I share the concerns of survivor groups about the proposed development.

The investigation of burial arrangements where deaths occurred in Mother and Baby Homes was a key focus of the terms of reference for the statutory Commission of Investigation. We know from the Commission's Fifth Interim Report, which was published in April 2019, that it has dedicated significant time and effort to advancing its investigations into the burial arrangements of the children who died while resident in Bessborough.

Notably, the Commission reported at that time that it had seen no physical or documentary evidence of systematic burials within the grounds of Bessborough, but considered it highly likely that burials took place there. The Commission did not consider it feasible to excavate the 60 acres involved. There was also uncertainty as to whether children who died may be buried at a recognised graveyard but in respect of which records could not be located. The Commission asked for public assistance in furthering its investigation into these matters and indicated that it would include any further information in its Final Report.

I received the Commission's Final Report on 30 October. It is my intention to publish the Report in the week of 11 January 2021.

It is important to be clear that the consideration of any development application in respect of these lands is a matter for Cork City Council as the relevant Local Authority, or for An Bord Pleanála where the application is a Strategic Housing Development. I do not have any statutory powers or responsibilities in relation to relevant considerations under the Planning and Development Acts.

However, there is scope for the Council, or An Bord Pleanála, to consider archaeological and heritage concerns in the context of any proposal or application for redevelopment of a site, following on from submissions made which may raise such concerns. In addition, the planning process includes a specific focus on public consultation and it appears that campaigners are continuing to raise their concerns directly with the relevant authorities.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

167. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth his plans to ratify the optional protocol as part of ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42404/20]

170. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integra-

tion and Youth when it is expected to ratify the optional protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42521/20]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): I propose to take Questions Nos. 167 and 170 together.

The Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international treaty that establishes two procedures aimed at strengthening the implementation and monitoring of the Convention. The first is an individual communications procedure allowing individuals to bring petitions to the Committee claiming breaches of their rights; the second is an inquiry procedure giving the Committee authority to undertake inquiries of grave or systematic violations of the Convention.

The Programme for Government reiterates the commitment to ratify the Optional Protocol after the first reporting cycle. The Government priorities remain focused on addressing the remaining legislative measures to be taken to give full effect to the Convention.

The National Disability Inclusion Strategy is the key framework for policy and action to address the needs of people with disabilities. Through its actions, the strategy supports effective progress in delivering on the obligations set out in the Convention.

Child and Family Agency

168. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the authority by which Tusla can compel attendance at medical, psychological or intervention therapies. [42464/20]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): Tusla, The Child and Family Agency, cannot compel parents to bring children to medical, psychological or intervention therapies.

Where, under the Child Care Act 1991, a court makes a supervision order in respect of a child, it may give such directions as it sees fit as to the care of the child, which may require the parents of the child or a person acting in loco parentis to cause him to attend for medical or psychiatric examination, treatment or assessment at a hospital, clinic or other place specified by the court.

Where a Care Order is in place, Tusla can give consent to any necessary medical or psychiatric examination, treatment or assessment with respect to the child.

Departmental Bodies Data

169. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the bodies under the aegis of his Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42473/20]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): My Department is currently collating the information requested and a reply will issue directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Question No. 170 answered with Question No. 167.

Further and Higher Education

171. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of alternative education settings including Youthreach and related schemes that have a kitchen by county in tabular form. [42169/20]

172. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the percentage of alternative education settings including Youthreach and related schemes that have a kitchen. [42174/20]

173. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of alternative education settings including Youthreach and related schemes that have a canteen by county in tabular form. [42178/20]

174. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the percentage of alternative education settings including Youthreach and related schemes that have a canteen. [42183/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): I propose to take Questions Nos. 171 to 174, inclusive, together.

The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Institutes of Technology

175. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the reason second and fourth year examinations are being planned in Letterkenny IT (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42220/20]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): Higher education institutions are autonomous bodies and as such are academically independent and are entitled to regulate their own academic affairs and administrative processes. Therefore responsibility for examinations and assessments rests ultimately with each individual institution.

The national co-ordination group for tertiary education, which includes representatives from my Department and third level institutions, is meeting regularly to discuss key issues in the tertiary sector including issues around examinations and assessments.

In providing guidance for higher education providers to return to learning safely for the 2020/21 academic year, my Department published a three-pillar guidance framework, consistent with public health requirements. This included an adaptation framework to assist institutions to continuously adapt to meet the challenges posed by this pandemic.

Though HEIs are planning for a phased and incremental increase in face to face learning on campus for some priority groups in Semester 2, for the remainder of this semester on campus activity is prioritised for essential learning and activities including mandatory skills, practical, mandatory training and assessment. Further and higher education institutions should continue

to deliver the majority of their classes online. Given the scale and diversity within third-level provision, higher and further education institutions will be equipped to determine in which circumstances onsite presence is required.

My Department has been informed by LYIT that nursing students are assessed in accordance with the NMBI approved course schedule and curriculum. This includes facilitation of pre-Christmas examinations for Year 2 and Year 4 student nurses in advance of clinical placement commencing 28 December (for Year 4) and 4 January (for Year 2) respectively. Both these student year cohorts are going on clinical practice placements and starting internships (Year 4). Each cohort of students will have one examination online and this can be completed remotely, off campus with the remaining two written examinations over two days, to ensure that those travelling will only require one overnight stay. Any students who have any mitigating or extenuating circumstances will be afforded the opportunity to defer without disadvantage or prejudice to Autumn 2021 and to progress on clinical practice placements as planned. Special accommodation has been arranged for any student who has requested or indicated any such mitigating or extenuating circumstances.

My Department has been further informed by LYIT that written examinations were scheduled in line with curriculum module assessments as they could not be scheduled after clinical placements commenced in January 2021. Students will then be in different HSE Clinical settings through Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim. Therefore, it would not be in accordance with best practice or NPHET guidelines to request students to return for assessments once placement commenced. Furthermore, this cohort of Year 4 student nurses will be paid employees of the HSE as intern nurses from January to August 2021 and unable to attend for examination during their internship.

LYIT is confident that written assessment can proceed adhering to HSE and NPHET guidelines respecting social distancing and examination regulations and guidelines. The examinations will be conducted in a controlled setting adhering to strict guidelines.

Student Grant Scheme

176. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the reason a postgraduate student (details supplied) who is a long-term recipient of a Department of Social Protection payment is not eligible for the special rate of student grant; if the matter will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42292/20]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service, which was set up at the behest of Oireachtas members, complements the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter. Enquiries may be emailed direct to graduate Special Rate of at oireachtas@susi.ie. Staff in SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

With regard to the specific application, I have been advised by my officials that the application of the student in question has recently been reviewed by SUSI and I can confirm the applicant has now been awarded the Postgraduate Special Rate of grant. A new award letter confirming the rate awarded will be sent to the applicant shortly.

Third Level Staff

177. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science further to Parliamentary Question No. 118 of 2 December 2020, if he will provide clarification regarding his policy in relation to university teaching assistants being separated into two separate roles which are paid different hourly wages but are required to do the same work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42386/20]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): The matters referred to by the Deputy are employment issues for the Dublin City University, rather than Departmental policy matters, as the University has autonomy with regard to its HR function.

The terms of employment for employees of universities are a matter for the employing institutions and HR policies vary in line with the size, structure, culture and work of an institution, which will be reflected in the HR strategies and approaches applied.

Where issues such as this arise, individual employees, in Higher Education Institutions, with queries on employment matters should be directed to their employer and union where appropriate. I would very much encourage the use of the structures available either with the employer or with the Department to address matters relating to industrial relations or terms and conditions, which include fora for unions representing a wide range of staff.

Nursing Education

178. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of student nurses and midwives from each county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42396/20]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is responsible for collecting, analysing and disseminating student and graduate data from all HEA-funded higher education institutions.

Data below is for 2018/2019 Republic of Ireland enrolments in bachelor nursing training courses by course year. Data in relation to enrolments in the 2019/2020 academic year is currently being returned by institutions to the HEA for collation and audit. This process has been delayed due to the impact of COVID-19. The data will be published on the HEA's website: www.heai.ie when available.

2018/19 ROI enrolments in bachelor nursing training courses by course year

[Table]

179. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he will request SUSI to specifically deal with the issue of estrangement in Article 21(3)(b) of the student grant scheme 2020 to more accurately reflect the reality for many families. [42465/20]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): The decision on eligibility for student grant applications is a matter for the centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland).

For student grant purposes, students are categorised according to their circumstances either as students dependent on parents or a legal guardian, or as independent mature students.

A student may be assessed as an independent student (i.e. assessed without reference to parental income and address) if he/she has attained the age of 23 on the 1st of January of the year of first entry to an approved course, and is not ordinarily resident with his/her parents from the previous 1st October. Otherwise, he/she would be assessed as a dependent student, i.e. assessed with reference to parental income and address.

The assessment of a case of estrangement is carefully considered but the current position is, only in exceptional cases, where compelling evidence of estrangement from parents/guardians is provided,

can candidates who are under 23 be assessed without reference to their parents/guardians income or address.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board.

In relation to the Student Grant and in line with the Programme for Government, I recently announced plans to review the SUSI scheme. It is intended that the Review will commence before the end of 2020, and will report in Summer 2021. Stakeholders will be consulted as part of the Review process, and it is intended that the future direction of the SUSI scheme will be guided by the outcome of the Review.

I would invite the Deputy to write to me with any further detail of individual cases or issues of concern which may be known to her so that I could have my officials examine them.

Departmental Bodies Data

180. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the bodies under the aegis of his Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42480/20]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): Details of the bodies under the aegis including the criteria for appointments to each Board that falls under the remit of my Department are available in the attached table. The details are also available on the Department of Education's website at the following link;

<https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Agencies/Details-of-Membership-of-State-Boards/>

As the Deputy will be aware, individuals may be nominated for appointment by various organisations arising from the terms in the relevant legislation regarding the Body concerned and accordingly board appointments, made by me, are not in all cases made at my discretion.

In line with the guidelines for appointments to State Boards, which can be viewed on the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's website www.per.gov.ie the process for filling vacancies on State Boards under the aegis of the Department, is now normally managed by the Public Appointments Service (PAS), whereby applications are made through the dedicated website www.Stateboards.ie. An assessment process is undertaken by PAS leading to the creation of a list of candidates suitable for appointments to Boards.

[Table]

Covid-19 Pandemic

181. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Justice if she will report on the steps being taken to ensure family contact for prisoners continues during all levels of the Covid-19 plan. [42286/20]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): At the outset I would like to take this opportunity to commend the management and staff of Irish Prison Service (IPS) for the assured and safe management of our prisons during this pandemic.

The Deputy will be aware that the IPS has put in place a range of measures to protect our prison population from Covid-19. Prisoners are a recognised vulnerable group for a number of reasons and an outbreak of Covid-19 in a prison could have potentially devastating consequences.

I understand that every effort has been made by the IPS to continue physical visits during this pandemic however, following Government and NPHET advice it was necessary to suspend physical visits to prisons, firstly in March and more recently in October. The Service is acutely aware of the need for prisoners to maintain contact with their families and in that regard a new video visit system was introduced which has allowed families to continue to support those in custody during this time.

All prisoners are entitled to one 20 minute video visit per week to nominated family and friends. The feedback from prisoners has been very positive as the visit allows people to connect with their families in their homes. The feedback from families has also been positive as it allows families to continue to support prisoners without having to make long journeys to prison to avail of a visit. The IPS introduced a support line to provide information to families on how to connect to the video visit and assist with any connection difficulties.

A number of other initiatives include:

- Useful guides and videos, in a number of languages, and these are available on the Prison Service website.
- New methods for the electronic transfer of money making it much easier for families to provide monies to family members for Tuck shops.
- Additional phone calls to allow prisoners to keep in contact with loved ones, with an additional daily phone call to all those in custody during the Christmas period.

I recognise that physical visits are hugely important to prisoners and their families and I am pleased to advise that the IPS has announced that arrangements have been made to allow all those in custody to book a physical family visit between the 16th December and the 6th of January.

Each prisoner will be entitled to one physical visit during the period, which will be 15 minutes in duration. In order to ensure that visits are conducted as safely as possible, visits will be limited to two people of which one may be a child. The risk posed by Covid-19 still remains therefore in order to prevent the potential spread of infection all visits will be behind clear screens and visitors and prisoners will be required to wear a face mask at all times. No physical contact between prisoners and family members will be permitted.

The normal security screening procedures will be in place however, all visitors will also be subject to the Covid-19 screening procedure including having their temperature taken. Visitors are asked not to attend the prison if they have any Covid-19 symptoms, have been in contact with a person who has gone for testing for the virus or is a confirmed case and have to yet to be cleared by a doctor, or have been abroad in the preceding 14 days.

Human Rights

182. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Justice if her attention has been drawn to concerns recently reported by the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. [42287/20]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): I welcome the recent publication of the report from the Council of Europe Committee on the Prevention of Torture (CPT), together with the responses returned by Ireland in respect of the issues raised by the Committee.

This report is perhaps the most positive account on Ireland since the process began in 1987 in that it recognises the progress which has been made on long standing issues such as health care and overcrowding in prisons. However, I fully accept that there are still a number of important long standing issues which need more work to be resolved and I understand this is where the focus must be.

One area highlighted by the Committee for immediate attention is how the complex needs of people with mental health difficulties who come into contact with the criminal justice system are provided for. The whole area of how criminal justice and public health, especially mental health, intersect and how to best provide the most appropriate service is a priority for the Government.

It's priority status is acknowledged in the Programme for Government in that it commits to establishing a high-level cross-departmental / cross-agency taskforce to consider the mental health and addiction challenges of those imprisoned, and primary care support on release. I met with my colleague the Minister for Health in September to lay the foundations for advancing work on this commitment. Collaboration with the Department of Health on the development of Terms of Reference and structure for the establishment of the Task Force is now at an advanced stage and work is now underway to identify a Chair and put in place other administrative details.

A range of other matters have also been raised by the Committee in the report and I am pleased to say that a significant amount of work is underway to address the concerns raised.

The IPS will be implementing a new prisoner complaints system before the end of 2020

which, when bedded down, will include an oversight role for the Ombudsman.

In relation to the use of Close Supervision Cells and Safety Observation Cells, the IPS has already commenced, in conjunction with officials working on the development of penal policy in my Department, a review of the Prison Rules taking account of the most recently published Council of Europe European Prison Rules which includes the operation, management and governance of these cells.

On the issue of overcrowding, the Deputy may wish to note that my Department is undertaking a number of actions regarding the consideration of the greater use of alternatives to imprisonment. The DG of the IPS is committed to ensuring that any person committed to custody is, in so far as possible, provided with a permanent bed in a prison cell. A Prison Population Management Plan was developed in 2019 to maximise capacity, increase the use of open centres and the use of back door strategies including structured temporary release.

The Prison Service's Capital Strategy 2016-2021 outlines plans for the complete replacement of the outdated accommodation in Limerick and Portlaoise prisons as well as improvements across a number of other prisons. On completion of these projects, "slopping out" will be completely eliminated across the prisons estate.

The Prison Service is committed to ensuring that the use of force by staff is restricted to situations or circumstances where it is deemed reasonable and necessary and that a number of safeguards are in place to ensure staff operate within the necessary procedures and rules. I understand that staff regularly receive updated training on de-escalation and the use of physical force as part of their annual training.

I am pleased to say that we have committed in the programme for Government to ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) before the end of 2021. In that regard, a single National Preventative Mechanism for the Justice Sector will be introduced and a General Scheme of the Places of Detention Bill is being drafted with a view to securing Government approval in early 2021.

Finally, I would like to reassure the Deputy that while there is unlikely to be quick fix solutions to some of the issues highlighted by the CPT, we will continue to work intensively together to ensure all people get the care and support they need from our system.

Domestic Violence Policy

183. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Justice if she will review the current national strategy on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence programmes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42294/20]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The response to Domestic, Sexual Violence and Gender-based Violence (DSGBV) is a cross Departmental and multi-agency issue. Policy is coordinated by the Department of Justice. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has statutory responsibility under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 for the care and protection of victims of DSGBV.

I am pleased that my Department has been able to allocate additional funding of €4.7 million to Tusla to support DSGBV services across the country in 2021. A total of €30 million will be made available by DCEDIY to Tusla to fund DSGBV services. This includes a €2.7 million increase in core funding, bringing core service provision to €28 million, with an additional €2 million of one-off contingency funding being made available to help services cope with the on-

going effects of COVID-19. This increase in funding reflects my personal commitment on this issue. I am hopeful that these additional resources will enable services to continue their valuable supports for victims and their families at a very vulnerable time in their lives.

It is important to note that not all funding to this sector issues via my Department. The Department of Justice allocates funding to combat domestic, sexual and gender-based violence and support victims of crime, including victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. Many voluntary organisations in the DSGBV sector have also received capital funding via the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), which is administered by local authorities on behalf of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

While funding will be crucial to our success, it is imperative that we have the right structures in place to respond as effectively as possible to DSGBV. Under the Programme for Government, we have committed to undertaking an audit of responsibility for DSGBV across Departments and State agencies. The procurement process to secure the expertise to conduct this audit is under way, in conjunction with my colleague the Minister for Justice. We expect that the audit will be completed early next year, and the Government will act on the basis of that audit.

Domestic Violence Policy

184. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice further to Parliamentary Question No. 174 of 24 November 2020, the reason there are no intervention programmes for females; her views on whether the failure to provide such programmes for women in need of the service is discriminatory in view of the fact that it is nearly impossible to access such supports elsewhere; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42295/20]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Deputy may be aware that my Department has agreed with the Central Statistics Office that it will conduct a major National Sexual Violence Prevalence Study, which will look in detail at the experience of women and men victims of sexual violence and abuse in Ireland, with repeat large scale surveys every decade. This will be a key element in ensuring that we develop an informed understanding of domestic and sexual violence that takes into account the range and indices of the types of violence and abuse that occur; including where females are perpetrators.

The overwhelming majority of sexual offences are committed by males and that is why the perpetrator programmes currently funded by the Department concentrate on male offenders, but if applications are made to my Department to fund female perpetrator programmes, they will certainly be considered.

To ensure we have the right framework in place that will enable the Government to respond effectively and comprehensively to these matters, the Programme for Government commitment to conduct an audit of how responsibility for Domestic, Sexual and Gender based Violence (DSGBV) is segmented across different government agencies will be undertaken by an external consultant with meaningful involvement from relevant NGOs and service providers, as well as input from Departments and agencies.

The terms of reference for the audit have been finalised, and very shortly the Department will commence a procurement process to engage an independent person to undertake the audit. It is intended that the audit will be completed within 3 months of commissioning.

State Pardons

185. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Justice the process by which a person can seek to have a historical conviction overturned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42459/20]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): I understand that the Deputy is enquiring about the process of a granting a Presidential pardon for historical convictions.

Given the rarity and the importance of the awarding of a Presidential Pardon, as well as the importance of obtaining an unbiased expert opinion, where an initial consideration of a case by officials in the Department of Justice forms the view was that there was a potential miscarriage of justice in the conviction, it has been previous practice to engage an external expert to give an opinion on the case in question.

As Minister, I then consider the independent expert opinion on any individual and make a decision on whether or not to advise Cabinet that the President should be advised to award a Presidential Pardon, pursuant to Article 13.6.

It is then a matter for the President to decide, following advice from Government, as to whether to grant the pardon, as that power lies solely with the President.

Departmental Bodies Data

186. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Justice the bodies under the aegis of her Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42483/20]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): The information requested by the Deputy in respect of the composition of board memberships of the bodies under the aegis of my department is set out below in tabular format.

[Table]

Family Reunification

187. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice if the time-frame for applicants who have been granted refugee status to be notified of the decision of her Department to their request for family reunification visas can be reduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42492/20]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): My Department recognises the critical importance of beneficiaries of international protection being reunited with their family members as soon as possible.

Family reunification visa applications are processed by the Immigration Service of my Department on an expedited basis where they are accompanied by the family reunification grant letter.

Such applications are typically processed within 2-3 weeks of being received by the Dublin Office with all the appropriate supporting documentation. This timeframe has not always been possible to achieve this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions in

relation to visa processing.

However, I can confirm to the Deputy that, at present, these visa applications are being processed within the 2-3 week timeframe.

Garda Deployment

188. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice if additional resources will be provided in 2021 for An Garda Síochána in the Border region in view of the unique policing demands in Garda divisions in the region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42519/20]

189. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice if adequate resources will be provided for Garda divisions in the Border region in view of the unique policing demands in Border areas such as counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42520/20]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 188 and 189 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, under the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for generally controlling, managing, administering and carrying on the business of An Garda Síochána.

An Garda Síochána has been allocated an unprecedented budget of €1.952 billion for 2021. The significant level of funding provided over recent years is enabling sustained, ongoing recruitment of Garda members and staff. As a result, there are now some 14,600 Garda members and over 3,000 Garda staff nationwide.

Budget 2021 will allow for the recruitment of up to 620 new Gardaí and an extra 500 Garda staff. The Budget allocation also provides for an increase in supervisory ranks at Sergeant and Inspector level.

More Garda recruits and more Garda staff means extra members of the service on the front-line and in specialist units battling organised crime groups, supporting victims, and keeping people safe.

Insofar as the Cavan/Monaghan Division, which services a large part of the border region, is concerned, I am pleased to that that there were 384 Garda members of all ranks in the Division as of the end of October 2020. This represents over a 14% increase in Garda numbers since the end of 2017 in the Division, demonstrating An Garda Síochána's commitment to the communities along the Border.

Covid-19 Pandemic

190. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if Covid-19 restrictions for weddings will remain constant in relation to specifics, for example, music and dancing at the various levels (details supplied). [42376/20]

194. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the public health rationale for the reason wedding bands had previously been allowed under level 3 restrictions but are not allowed currently under level 3 restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[42206/20]

225. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Health if consideration has been given to allowing live music at weddings under level 3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42403/20]

244. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will review correspondence (details supplied); his plans to review the matters raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42497/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 190, 194, 225 and 244 together.

Ireland is now at level 3 of the Government's medium-term Plan *Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19*, which sets out Ireland's approach to managing and living with COVID-19 in a range of areas over a period of 6 – 9 months.

The Plan aims to allow society and businesses to operate as normally as possible, while protecting our key priorities of supporting and maintaining health and social care services, keeping education and childcare services open and protecting the most vulnerable members of our communities.

The various limits at all levels in the Government's Plan are all designed to reduce the number of households mixing with each other and cut down the virus's chances of spreading into more homes. It seeks to balance the risks of different types of gatherings against the desire to allow normal activities to proceed in so far as possible.

As I'm sure you can appreciate, COVID-19 spreads when individuals and groups come into close contact with one another, enabling the virus to move from one person to another. COVID-19 is infectious in a person with no symptoms, or for the period of time before they develop symptoms. In certain settings, such as weddings, higher noise levels due to music, can force people into close proximity, requiring them to raise their voices or shout to communicate thus increasing the risk of spreading virus to others. Dancing is not permitted given the close contact involved. Such activities present a higher risk of transmission of Covid-19.

Details of the public health measures in place for weddings at level 3 can be found at:- <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ad569-level-3/>

Guidance for religious services can be found at:- <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7ba40-guidance-for-religious-services/>

You may also wish to note that Fáilte Ireland has provided guidelines for the hospitality industry which includes guidance on weddings and is available at: - <https://failtecdn.azureedge.net/failteireland/Guidelines-for-Re-opening-Hotels-and-Guesthouses.pdf>

Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

191. **Deputy Richard O'Donoghue** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the restoration of salary cuts made in 2008 to section 39 workers in the remaining 250 organisations that have been affected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42387/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): An agreement reached at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) in October 2018 provided for pay restoration in relation to 50 pilot organisations in the first instance. Pay restoration for these bodies commenced in April

2019 with further payments due in October 2020 and October 2021 as appropriate.

The agreement recognised that some of the remaining Section 39 organisations were also likely to have pay restoration issues and a process to address these issues commenced in 2019 under the auspices of the WRC. Despite the engagement which took place, it has not yet been possible to reach agreement.

The HSE are currently costing this next phase of pay restoration and are expected to complete the exercise shortly. Funding options are currently being explored and engagement will take place with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Health sector management remain committed to the process.

Disability Services Provision

192. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a personal assistance service for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42406/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): The area of disability services is a priority area for this Government. To support people with a disability, significant resources have been invested by the health sector in disability services, and the Government has ensured that an additional €100 million is being provided for new disability measures next year under Budget 2021. These measures will include an additional 80,000 personal assistant hours. The 2020 national service plan details that the HSE is seeking to deliver 1.67m hours of Personal Assistant Hours to over 2,550 people.

The Government is working to ensure that People with Disabilities be allowed to live an independent life of their own choosing, the same as any other person, and this is consistent with the disability reform policy - “transforming lives”.

The HSE provides a range of assisted living services including Personal Assistant (PA) services to support individuals to maximise their capacity to live full and independent lives.

Personal Assistance Services are accessed through an application process or through referrals from public health nurses or other community based staff. Individual’s needs are evaluated against the criteria for prioritisation for the particular services and then decisions are made in relation to the allocation of resources.

Resource allocation is determined by the needs of the individual, compliance with prioritisation criteria, and the level of resources available. It is important to note that the level of service delivered is varied to ensure that each client’s needs are reflected. Therefore there is no average agreed number of PA hours per person. PA and Home Support Services are provided either directly by the HSE or through a range of voluntary service providers. The majority of specialised disability provision (80%) is delivered through non-statutory sector service providers.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Disability Services Provision

193. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health his future plans including projected time-frames for a more comprehensive provision of personal assistants for persons with

disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42522/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): The area of disability services is a priority area for this Government. To support people with a disability, significant resources have been invested by the health sector in disability services, and the Government has ensured that an additional €100 million is being provided for new disability measures next year under Budget 2021. These measures will include an additional 80,000 personal assistant hours. The 2020 national service plan details that the HSE is seeking to deliver 1.67m hours of Personal Assistant Hours to over 2,550 people.

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As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Question No. 194 answered with Question No. 190.

Medicinal Products

195. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if medication (details supplied) will be made available for patients through the HSE as this treatment has been available for some years in Northern Ireland through the NHS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42221/20]

202. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the status of his work to ensure accessibility to the drug dupilumab for persons suffering with severe atopic eczema; and if he will reimburse patients who have had to incur personal costs to access the drug. [42275/20]

241. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health the status of the assessment for approval process of dupilumab; when this will be completed; if he will consider prioritisation of completion of this assessment given the impact this could potentially have on the lives of persons with eczema; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42471/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 195, 202 and 241 together.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medi-

cines under the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In line with the 2013 Health Act and the national framework agreed with industry, a company must submit an application to the HSE to have a new medicine added to the reimbursement list.

Reimbursement is for licenced indications which have been granted market authorisation by the European Medicines Agency or the Health Products Regulatory Authority.

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 HSE has advised that it has received pricing and reimbursement applications for two indications of Dupilumab (Dupixent®):

- For the treatment of moderate-to-severe atopic dermatitis in adult patients who are candidates for systemic therapy.
- For the treatment of moderate-to-severe atopic dermatitis in adolescents 12 years and older who are candidates for systemic therapy.

The HSE received an application for pricing / reimbursement of Dupilumab in November 2017 from the manufacturer for the treatment of moderate-to-severe atopic dermatitis in adult patients who are candidates for systemic therapy. The HSE commissioned a full HTA on 29 November 2017 as per agreed processes. This assessment was completed on 12 December 2019 with the NCPE recommending that Dupilumab be considered for reimbursement if cost-effectiveness could be improved relative to existing treatments.

Subsequently, the HSE received an application for the pricing / reimbursement of Dupilumab on 13 December 2019 for the treatment of moderate-to-severe atopic dermatitis in adolescents 12 years and older who are candidates for systemic therapy.

The HSE commissioned the rapid review process on the 17 December 2019. Following receipt of a rapid review dossier, the NCPE advised the HSE on the 17 January 2020 that a HTA was not recommended and that Dupilumab not be considered for reimbursement for this indication at the submitted price.

The HSE engaged in commercial negotiations with the company in February 2020 regarding both the adult and adolescent populations.

The final HTA report concerning Dupilumab was reviewed by the HSE Drugs Group, along with the outputs of commercial negotiations, and the patient group submission received during the HTA process. The HSE Drugs Group considered all the evidence and gave a recommendation to the HSE Executive Management Team (EMT) not to support reimbursement of Dupilumab for the treatment of moderate-to-severe atopic dermatitis in both adults and adolescents 12 years and older who are candidates for systemic therapy.

The HSE has confirmed that the applicant company was issued with notice of the proposed decision of the HSE EMT not to support reimbursement on 21 August 2020. On 18 September 2020, the applicant company submitted representations with respect to this application.

The HSE reviewed these representations, as is required in such circumstances under the

2013 Act, and has engaged in a meeting in November 2020 with the applicant company to discuss the submission. The HSE advises that Dupilumab will be included on the agenda for the December HSE Drugs Group meeting at which the two applications and the submitted representations will be considered.

Dupilumab remains under consideration with the HSE and a final decision will be made in line with the 2013 Health Act.

Covid-19 Pandemic

196. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will include community first responders' volunteers as with frontline workers as a priority for the Covid-19 vaccine when it rolls out. [42225/20]

(Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy sets out a provisional priority list of groups for vaccination once a safe and effective vaccine(s) has received authorisation from the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

The Strategy was developed by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) and Department of Health, endorsed by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), and approved by Government on 8 December 2020.

The Allocation Framework was developed to consider how to prioritise different groups. It is based on (1) ethical principles and (2) epidemiological considerations, and takes account of the current and evolving understanding of distinctive characteristics of COVID-19 disease, its modes of transmission, the groups and individuals most susceptible to infection and the characteristics of the candidate vaccines. The primary aim of the allocation strategy is focus on the prevention of sickness and mortality, and to preserve the health of people, by prioritising those at highest risk.

The Strategy is a further component to the State's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and will evolve and adapt with more detailed information on the vaccines and their effectiveness.

With the benefit of the Vaccine Allocation Strategy approved by Government, the HSE, in conjunction with immunisation experts, is evaluating the further stratification and sequencing of cohorts for vaccination.

Further information on the Strategy can be found at:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/39038-provisional-vaccine-allocation-groups/>

Health Services

197. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health when the Sligo scheme for cataract treatment will be rolled out to the rest of the country; the time-frame for same given that it was committed to in the Programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42233/20]

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

Pharmaceutical Sector

198. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) in relation to a pharmacy becoming a supplier for the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42251/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the HSE has responsibility for this matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this issue.

General Practitioner Services

199. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health the way in which social prescribing is delivered for those presenting to general practitioners with no acute mental health problems such as anxiety and depression; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42252/20]

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

Eating Disorders

200. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health the options available for adults with anorexia to receive inpatient treatment; and the way in which they avail of same. [42271/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): 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

201. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health if Covid-19 restrictions will be reduced for couples who are expecting a baby as at present the partners may be allowed to attend for an hour during the pre-delivery but not for birth [42272/20]

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

Question No. 202 answered with Question No. 195.

Hospital Appointments Status

203. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a procedure will be expedited for a person (details supplied) who is waiting for a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42278/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): It is recognised that waiting times for scheduled appointments and procedures have been impacted as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to defer most scheduled care activity in March, April, and May of this year. This was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for Covid-19 related activity and time-critical essential work. This decision was in line with the advice issued by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) in accordance with the advice of the World Health Organisation.

Patient safety remains at the centre of all hospital activity and elective care scheduling. To ensure services are provided in a safe, clinically-aligned and prioritised way, hospitals are following HSE clinical guidelines and protocols.

The HSE continues to optimise productivity through alternative work practices such the use of alternative settings including private hospitals, community facilities and alternative outpatient settings.

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 is a standardised approach used by the HSE to manage scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures. It sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists and was developed in 2014 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.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

General Practitioner Services

204. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners that were registered in Cork in 2015; and the number currently registered. [42283/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Sports Organisations

205. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health the number or sports organisations that have received mental health training by sport, club and gender by year to date 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42288/20]

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

Hospital Facilities

206. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health when the next phase of a unit (details supplied) is opening; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42291/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): A 23-bed Intermediate Care Unit in Monaghan Hospital is planned as part of Winter Plan 2020 to provide step down beds for Cavan Hospital patients. As you point out, 5 of these beds have opened and the RCSI Hospital Group advise that the other 18 will open on a phased basis in the coming months.

Hospital Staff

207. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the overall number of consultancy posts currently vacant or unfilled at the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42298/20]

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

Hospital Staff

208. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacant or unfilled consultancy posts for each of the seven clinical sites within the Dublin Regional Hospital Group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42299/20]

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.

Disabilities Assessments

209. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting time of children for full assessment in the nine CHO areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42316/20]

210. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of complaints from parents in relation to assessment of need waiting times that were received by the HSE per CHO area in 2019 and to date in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42318/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 209 and 210 together.

The Programme for Government, *Our Shared Future*, recognises the need to improve services for both children and adults with disabilities through better implementation and by working together across Government in a better way.

The Government commits to prioritising early diagnosis and access to services for children and ensuring that the most effective interventions are provided for each child, to guarantee the best outcomes.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Ophthalmology Services

211. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the number of applicants and amount of funding provided to the community ophthalmic services scheme in 2019; the same details to date in 2020; and the average amount of reimbursement provided per applicant in each year. [42323/20]

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

Vaccination Programme

212. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if specific plans for a vaccination database have been made; and if so, if the database will be centralised and easily updated by general practitioners, hospitals, pharmacists and other relevant groups. [42373/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service Implementation matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Medical Cards

213. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the reason medical card holders must pay for access to MRI scans; if he will address concerns that this disproportionately impacts persons on low incomes who may then avoid or be unable to seek urgently needed treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42377/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that all persons ordinarily resident in the country are eligible, subject to certain charges, to public in-patient hospital services including consultant services.

All persons, irrespective of illness or condition, accessing public in-patient (including day case) services in a public hospital are liable for the statutory in-patient daily charge of €80 up to a maximum of €800 in any period of 12 consecutive months, subject to a number of exemptions, including where a person is a medical cardholder.

Medical cardholders are also exempt from the only outpatient charge that applies in public hospitals which is the €100 Emergency Department charge.

Health Services Staff

214. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the details of the eight different public health regions across the country; the number of staff in each region; the grades of these staff; the details of vacancies; the grade of each vacancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42381/20]

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

HSE Staff

215. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if a lead public health clinician is employed by the HSE; if not, if the position will be filled; the reason for not filling same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42382/20]

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.

Vaccination Programme

216. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if there is a vaccination database in Ireland; if so, the vaccines it covers; the department of the HSE responsible for this database; if this database will be used for the Covid-19 vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42383/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Government is committed to the timely implementation of a COVID-19 immunisation programme, as soon as one or more vaccines in the EU portfolio are approved for use. In this regard a High-Level Taskforce was established to support and oversee the development and implementation of the programme.

The Taskforce is supporting my Department and the HSE in developing national COVID-19 vaccination strategy and implementation plan which it is due to be submitted by Friday, 11 December. I will then bring the plan to Government for consideration and subject to the outcome of this discussion, it is the intention that the Vaccination Strategy and Implementation Plan will be published.

As part of the implementation planning, the HSE is currently arranging for an ICT system to be put in place to deal with the uniqueness of a vaccination plan of this scale.

Covid-19 Pandemic

217. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the Limerick contact tracing centre is run; the persons in charge of the centre; the credentials of the persons; if they are employees of the HSE; the details of the clinical lead; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42384/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

HSE Staff

218. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the person that is the clinical lead for the Health Protection Surveillance Centre; the responsibilities of the body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42385/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Dental Services

219. **Deputy Richard O'Donoghue** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the failure to publish a report on orthodontics by persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42388/20]

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

Dental Services

220. **Deputy Richard O'Donoghue** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on orthodontic appointments and anticipated wait times for 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42389/20]

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

Autism Support Services

221. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the last occasion by date and medium by which the HSE was in contact with each school in County Tipperary with ASD units in tabular form. [42397/20]

222. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the breakdown by date of the last visit by HSE personnel to each school in County Tipperary with an ASD unit in tabular form. [42398/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 221 and 222 together.

The Programme for Government, *Our Shared Future*, recognises the need to improve services for both children and adults with disabilities through better implementation and by working together across Government in a better way.

The Government commits to prioritising early diagnosis and access to services for children and ensuring that the most effective interventions are provided for each child, to guarantee the best outcomes.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Covid-19 Pandemic

223. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Health if cystic fibrosis patients will be given priority access to a Covid-19 vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42399/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy sets out a provisional priority list of groups for vaccination once a safe and effective vaccine(s) has received authorisation from the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

The Strategy was developed by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC)

and Department of Health, endorsed by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), and approved by Government on 8 December 2020.

The Allocation Framework was developed to consider how to prioritise different groups. It is based on (1) ethical principles and (2) epidemiological considerations, and takes account of the current and evolving understanding of distinctive characteristics of COVID-19 disease, its modes of transmission, the groups and individuals most susceptible to infection and the characteristics of the candidate vaccines. The primary aim of the allocation strategy is focus on the prevention of sickness and mortality, and to preserve the health of people, by prioritising those at highest risk.

The Strategy is a further component to the State's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and will evolve and adapt with more detailed information on the vaccines and their effectiveness.

Further information on the Strategy can be found at:

www.gov.ie/en/publication/39038-provisional-vaccine-allocation-groups/.

Covid-19 Pandemic

224. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Health if consideration has been given to making the wearing of face coverings compulsory in gyms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42401/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As I am sure the Deputy can appreciate, the evidence relating to Covid-19, and the decisions necessary to protect everybody living in Ireland from its effects is constantly evolving. The public health advice relating to Covid-19, including for face coverings, is kept under continuing review by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), by my Department and by the Government. The measures in place and the public health advice have been adapted to the changing circumstances and this will continue to be the case for the foreseeable future.

As the Deputy is no doubt aware, a person, without reasonable excuse, must wear a face covering when using public transport, in retail outlets, shops and shopping centres, in other indoor spaces such as libraries, cinemas and cinema complexes, theatres, concert halls, bingo halls, museums, businesses carrying out cosmetic nail care or nail styling, hair care or hair styling, tattoo and piercing services, travel agents and tour operators, laundries and dry cleaners and licensed bookmakers. Face coverings are also recommended in situations where physical distancing may not be possible, in crowded workplaces, places of worship and in busy or crowded outdoor spaces where there is significant congregation. Additionally, facemasks should be worn in restaurants and cafes (including pubs that serve food and hotel restaurants).

Wearing of face coverings is also recommended in the following circumstances, by people visiting the homes of those who are over 70 years of age or who are medically vulnerable by people who are being visited in their homes by those who are over 70 years of age who are medically vulnerable and if you are travelling in a vehicle with someone you don't live with.

The relevant regulations in relation to face coverings are outlined below and can be viewed at <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/1f150-view-statutory-instruments-related-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

- Health Act 1947 (Section 31A – Temporary Restrictions) (Covid19) (Face Coverings on Public Transport) Regulations 2020 (S.I. No. 512/2020)

- Health Act 1947 (Section 31A – Temporary Restrictions) (Covid19) (Face Coverings in certain premises and businesses) Regulations 2020 (S.I No. 511/2020)

- Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (COVID-19) (Face Coverings in Small Public Service Vehicles and Certain Premises) Regulations 2020 S.I. (No. 569 of 2020)

- Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (COVID-19) (Face Coverings in Certain Premises and Businesses) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 (S.I. No. 571 of 2020)

The current face covering advice is available at

- <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/face-masks-disposable-gloves.html>.

- <http://www.gov.ie/facecoverings>.

Question No. 225 answered with Question No. 190.

Health Services Staff

226. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the number of approved consultant psychiatric posts by speciality; the number filled on a temporary basis; the number filled by doctors not on the specialist register; the number unfilled, vacant or unmatched; the location of these unfilled, vacant or unmatched posts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42405/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy with the data sought as soon as possible.

Health Services Staff

227. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider waiving the annual registration fee for doctors, nurses and other frontline staff who have been so important during the effort to protect communities from Covid-19. [42408/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy will be aware, there are six statutory health and social care professions regulators in Ireland - the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland; the Medical Council; the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland; the Dental Council; the Health and Social Care Professionals Council, and the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council. Funded through the annual retention fee paid by registrants and other sources, these independent regulators are responsible for the regulation of the relevant professions and carry out these statutory obligations to protect the public and to promote high standards in the relevant professions. Under the respective legislation I as Minister have no powers to waive fees.

Vaccination Programme

228. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the flu vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42409/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): 1.95 million doses of influenza vaccine,

including 1.35 million doses of the Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (QIV) for administration to all persons in an at-risk group and 600,000 doses of the Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine (LAIV) for all children aged from 2 to 12 years old inclusive, have been made available for the current influenza vaccination programme. The amount of vaccine made available for this winter is almost double the amount of vaccine administered last winter.

Over 1.33 million of the 1.35 million doses of flu vaccine available this winter have been distributed to GPs, pharmacists and other vaccination sites. Deliveries are continuing and stock is expected to be depleted by the end of the year. In addition, over 460,000 doses of the LAIV for administration to children aged from 2 to 12 have been distributed.

Notwithstanding the large increase in available vaccine this year, the full supply of QIV may be used, representing an increase of 35% in uptake over last year. At that stage, sufficient stock will have been delivered for an uptake in excess of 80% in the targeted groups.

Given the demand on the international market for influenza vaccine, it is not likely to be possible to procure additional supply. As a consequence, from the fourth round of deliveries which started on 23 October, GPs and pharmacists have been asked that of remaining patients in at-risk groups, priority should be given to the over-65s and healthcare workers with direct patient contact, in line with WHO advice.

As of 3rd December, over 1.1 million claims for reimbursement from GPs and pharmacists for the administration of influenza vaccines have been received by PCERS.

The significant increase in uptake among those in the at-risk groups, combined with the addition of vaccination for children aged from 2 to 12, will help reduce the impact of influenza on the community and the health system.

Disability Services Provision

229. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the HSE to reverse its decision to discontinue full reimbursements for the cost of eye tests and glasses for children with Down's syndrome; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that over 50% of children with Down's syndrome will require glasses during their lives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42412/20]

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

Ophthalmology Services

230. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Health the reason a child (details supplied) of eight years of age with Down's syndrome has been on a waiting list to see an ophthalmologist since before their first birthday; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42413/20]

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

Covid-19 Pandemic

231. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the spatial criteria for the separation of Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 in paediatric emergency departments; and the recommendations regarding meeting the criteria. [42449/20]

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

Covid-19 Pandemic

232. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the number of public hospitals that do not have spatial capacity in their emergency departments to meet the criteria regarding the separation of Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 patients. [42450/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Covid-19 Pandemic

233. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the protocol for identifying alternative locations in circumstances in which a public hospital does not have the spatial capacity in its emergency department regarding the separation of Covid and non-Covid. [42451/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Patient Transport

234. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the support and resources that will be provided regarding patient transport to and from each setting in circumstances in which a public hospital is considering moving an outpatient department to a facility that is not on site. [42452/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Hospital Services

235. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the contract length for temporary circumstances in which a public hospital is considering moving an outpatient department to a private hospital facility on a temporary basis. [42453/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Health Services

236. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the outstanding issues regarding

St. Mary's health campus, Mullingar, County Westmeath obtaining a fire certification; and the expected timeline for the certification. [42454/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Health Services

237. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the current timeline for the St. Mary's health campus, Mullingar, County Westmeath becoming fully operational as a reablement and rehabilitation integrated and intermediate care facility. [42455/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Hospital Facilities

238. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the number of public hospitals currently considering moving a department to a private hospital facility. [42456/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Medical Cards

239. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the grounds on which the HSE can continually reassign a medical card holder to different general practitioners after a period of six months. [42457/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Under the General Medical Service contract, the HSE may assign an eligible person, a person who holds a medical card or GP visit card, to a GP's panel where that person has unsuccessfully applied to at least three GMS GPs in their local area, or fewer if there are fewer GPs in the area. Assignments are reviewed on request from the GP concerned after a period of six months from the date of assignment.

After a period of six months from the date an eligible person has been assigned to a GP, a GP may request the HSE to arrange for the discontinuance of that person's inclusion on their panel, giving the reason in confidence where requested. The HSE will notify the person accordingly and supply them with information to enable them to apply for inclusion in the list of another GP. After one month, if the person is not listed with another GP, the HSE shall assign them to another GP unless there are substantial grounds for not doing so. This process is conducted in regular consultation with the IMO.

Separately, the HSE may assign an eligible person to another GP where their GP is resigning or otherwise terminating their GMS contract. In addition, where an eligible person wishes to change their GP themselves, they may make a request for transfer to the HSE.

An eligible person who wishes to change GP or is having an issue regarding their assignment to a GP, should contact the HSE National Medical Card Unit or their Local Health Office.

Health Services

240. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health when the Mullingar resource centre will be reopening in its original location. [42461/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): 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 this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Question No. 241 answered with Question No. 195.

Departmental Bodies Data

242. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Health the bodies under the aegis of his Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42481/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The nomination and appointment process for boards of the 19 bodies (listed below) under the aegis of my Department is set out in the legislation of each body.

In line with Government Decision S180/20/10/1617 of 2014 and Guidelines set out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform relating to the advertising for expressions of interest in vacancies on State Boards, my Department in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service currently advertises for board vacancies as they arise, where I, as Minister for Health, have nominating rights under relevant legislation. I also appoint members on the nomination of various bodies, again in accordance with the relevant legislation. I have not appointed any members to a board of an aegis body outside this process.

I do not appoint members to the board of the Food Safety Promotion Board (SafeFood) as members are appointed by the North South Ministerial Council.

The Central Bank of Ireland (CBI) assesses all nominations for membership of the board of the VHI under its own independent fitness and probity regime before appointments to the VHI board can be made. I have appointed members to the board of the VHI having followed the CBI process.

Body under the aegis of the Department of Health	Current membership (7 Dec 2020)	Number of current members appointed by Minister on nomination by other body/Minister	Number of current members appointed by Minister following a Public Appointment Service campaign	Nominated and appointed by Minister(outside of PAS/other body)
Dental Council	4	0	4	
Food Safety Authority of Ireland	8	1	7	
Food Safety Promotion Board - SafeFood * North-South Ministerial Council appoints Members	10*			

Questions - Written Answers

Body under the aegis of the Department of Health	Current membership (7 Dec 2020)	Number of current members appointed by Minister on nomination by other body/Minister	Number of current members appointed by Minister following a Public Appointment Service campaign	Nominated and appointed by Minister(outside of PAS/other body)
Health Information and Quality Authority	8	0	7	Chairperson appointed by Minister Harris from 3 Oct 18
Health Insurance Authority	7	0	7	0
Health Products Regulatory Authority	9	0	8	1 member appointed prior to PAS from 1 Jan 2011
Health Research Board	7	0	7	
Health Service Executive	10	0	10	
Health and Social Care Professionals Council	30	12	15	3 appointed by Minister Reilly
Irish Blood Transfusion Service	12	1	10	1 member appointed by Minister Harris from 20 Aug 2018
Medical Council	23	20	3	
Mental Health Commission	11	9	2	
National Cancer Registry Board	7	0	2	5 members appointed in 2013/2014 by Minister Reilly
National Paediatric Hospital Development Board	8	4	2	1 member appointed outside of PAS prior to 2014. Chair appointed by Minister Harris 06/02/2019
National Treatment Purchase Fund Board	8	0	8	
Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland	13	12	1	
Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland Council	21	12	9	
Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council	10	7	3	
VHI Healthcare ** All appointments are subject to approval by the Central Bank.	10**	0	4	Commercial State Body. 3 non-PAS executive Directors. 3 non-exec members first appointed prior to April 2015

Vaccination Programme

243. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to engaging retired healthcare professionals in the vaccine rollout programme. [42491/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Government is committed to the roll-out of a Covid-19 vaccination programme as soon as suitable products have been authorised and supplies are available.

A High-Level Taskforce has recently been established to support and oversee the development and implementation of the programme. The Taskforce is working on a national COVID-19 vaccination strategy and implementation plan and plans to submit this shortly. It will consider the workforce the HSE will require for this programme.

Question No. 244 answered with Question No. 190.

Hospital Appointments Status

245. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be scheduled for an appointment. [42503/20]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): It is recognised that waiting times for scheduled appointments and procedures have been impacted as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the HSE had to take measures to defer most scheduled care activity in March, April, and May of this year. This was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for Covid-19 related activity and time-critical essential work. This decision was in line with the advice issued by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) in accordance with the advice of the World Health Organisation.

Patient safety remains at the centre of all hospital activity and elective care scheduling. To ensure services are provided in a safe, clinically-aligned and prioritised way, hospitals are following HSE clinical guidelines and protocols.

The HSE continues to optimise productivity through alternative work practices such the use of alternative settings including private hospitals, community facilities and alternative outpatient settings.

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 is a standardised approach used by the HSE to manage scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures. It sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists and was developed in 2014 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.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Forestry Sector

246. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding forestry licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42203/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I fully recognise the impact the current forestry licencing delays are having on the sector at the moment. It is my immediate priority to resolve the issues which have led to this backlog and to issue licences in the volume needed for this important sector to continue to contribute to our rural economy.

I am fully aware of the importance of the sector and the number of jobs it supports in nurseries, harvesting, transportation and processing. I know that it has significant potential for income generation on farms, for the creation of rural jobs, and for the provision of woodlands for public enjoyment. It also has a key role to play in meeting our national climate change and biodiversity

objectives.

My Department receives forestry applications and issues new licences every week. There are currently around 4,700 licences on hand for processing. Some 2,000 licence applications require ecology input and, on which, a backlog has developed. The remaining 2,700 licence applications do not generally experience the same delays as the first group. By way of context on our output, we have issued 2,393 licences this year to date. Some 633 of these licences have issued since the introduction of the new Forestry legislation at the beginning of October and I am confident that this positive trend will continue.

Our overall approach to tackling this is subject to continuous improvement and review with the aim of increasing the output of these licences on a weekly basis. Adequate and appropriate resources are key. At the beginning of the year, there were just two ecologists working on ecology files but this figure is now sixteen. Additional forestry inspectors have also been hired to support this work. This delivered increased output in October and November compared to other months this year. In relation to felling, the licences issued so far this year represents over 4 million cubic meters of timber.

We also implemented significant changes to the functioning of the Forestry Appeals Committee (FAC) and acted quickly to propose and implement the Forestry (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act. I have significantly resourced the FAC and four appeals committees are now set up and hearing appeals. This is an increase from one Committee that was previously in existence. Since putting these additional resources in place, the FAC has held 61 hearings and has 42 hearings scheduled for December. This is significantly reforming how the FAC does its business and will result in a more fit-for-purpose, environmentally sensitive and sustainable forestry licensing process which serves all stakeholders.

While there is still has some considerable way to go, I am encouraged by this progress and intend to sustain and build on this output of licences issued each week. To this end, my Department will recruit additional ecologists and support staff in the New Year.

It is a key priority of mine and my Department to ease the pressure on the sector as soon as possible.

Forestry Sector

247. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the planning grant to cover new environmental reports in forestry will come into effect as set out in the Mackinnon report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42204/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The introduction of an environment report supported by a planning grant is one of the 22 ‘Ways Forward’ included in the Mackinnon Review of the afforestation approval process.

Minister of State Hackett has recently appointed Ms. Jo O’Hara, who led the implementation of a similar review of Scottish forestry, to advise on an Implementation Plan for the Mackinnon report. We expect her recommendations to be delivered by end-February 2021.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

248. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for the TAMS grant for a bulk tank by a person (details supplied); and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [42322/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The person named submitted an application under the Dairy Equipment Scheme and approval issued dated 4th July 2019. This approval was valid for a 12 month period. The 12 month time-frame for the completion of investments and submission of a claim for payment was therefore required by 4th July 2020.

A claim for payment was submitted 2nd November 2020, more than 12 weeks after the expiry of the approval. In accordance with the Terms and Conditions of the scheme, late submissions of claims are subject to a 1% penalty per week up to 12 weeks and 100% penalty thereafter. The claim was therefore subject to a 100% penalty.

A penalty notification issued to the applicant on 9th November 2020 and the details of the option to request a review of this decision were set out in this letter.

Departmental Bodies Data

249. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the bodies under the aegis of his Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42472/20]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The composition of the Boards of the twelve State Bodies under the aegis of my Department is provided below.

The Deputy should be aware that the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine appoints all the Board Members. However, six Boards have positions reserved for representatives of specific stakeholders and, thus, are not filled through the Public Appointments Service (PAS)/State Boards process.

The Board of Horse Racing Ireland includes 11 nominees from relevant groups including regulatory bodies; the National Milk Agency includes eight nominees from consumer, producer and retailer groups (with the chair appointed by the Minister); the Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board includes six nominees from relevant areas such as engineering, business, producers and environment concerns (with the chair appointed by Government); and, the Boards of Coillte and Teagasc each have a position reserved for a Workers' Representative.

Finally, three senior officials from my Department sit on the Boards of Bord Bia, Teagasc and the Veterinary Council of Ireland. I am satisfied that the current mix of appointments using PAS and nominees of relevant stakeholders provides a good mix of expertise necessary to achieving the aims of each of these State Bodies.

State Body	Appointments through Public Appointments Service (PAS)	Appointments by the Minister without PAS process
Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board	0	7
Bord Bia	8	6
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	5	1
Rásaíocht Con Éireann	7	0
Coillte	5	3
Horse Racing Ireland	3	11
Irish National Stud	0	7

State Body	Appointments through Public Appointments Service (PAS)	Appointments by the Minister without PAS process
Marine Institute	4	1
National Milk Agency	0	9
Sea Fisheries Protection Authority	2	0
Teagasc	3	8
Veterinary Council of Ireland	13	6

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

250. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development further to Parliamentary Question No. 1580 of 3 November 2020, the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42415/20]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien): Further to Parliamentary Question No. 1580 of 3 November 2020, the Deputy will be aware that my Department understands the challenges facing community and voluntary organisations and is committed to working closely with the sector in managing through these, recognising that it will require a whole of Government approach.

The Community and Voluntary Sector Covid-19 Stability Fund was 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. The criteria of the scheme stated that any grants awarded would be dependent on the need identified and organisations approved for funding were prioritised on that basis.

My Department received 1,060 applications during the application periods. To date, funding of €31m has been allocated to close to 600 organisations. This funding is now supporting the delivery of many critical front line services in every part of the country. A full list of successful applicants is available here <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/3957e-covid-19-stability-fund-successful-applicants/>

Unsuccessful applicants were offered an opportunity to appeal and I can confirm that the organisation in question has engaged in that process. I can also confirm that a decision, in relation to that appeal, has been communicated to the organisation.

Departmental Bodies Data

251. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the bodies under the aegis of her Department; and the composition of their respective board memberships, disaggregated by appointments through the Public Appointments Service or ministerial appointments in tabular form. [42485/20]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There are four bodies under the aegis of my Department: The Charities Regulator, Water Safety Ireland, the Western Development Commission and Pobal. The table below provides the information requested by the Deputy.

Agency	PAS Appointment	Ministerial Appointment	Other
Charities Regulator	12	0	0
Water Safety Ireland	6	1	6

9 December 2020

Agency	PAS Appointment	Ministerial Appointment	Other
Western Development Commission	12	0	0
Pobal	12	3	0